THE HEIRESS OF DENSLEY WOLD

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By Florence Warden

"The murderer turned, and with one wild leap in the air, fell, a crushed and mangled mass, dead on the stone beneath."

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

Massey St. Quintin, a wealthy young Englishman, sees a beautiful young woman named Miss Densley at Cowes, and, by a carefully designed accident, manages to meet her. He finds that she lives with her uncle and aunt, M. and Mme. Leblanc, who are just then in France, and gets an invitation to their house, near London.

In spite of the objections of his friend, James Ince, a lawyer in whom he confides, and who declares the girl is an adventuress, St. Quintin visits her and finds her relatives charming people. But just as he leaves the house he hears a muffled cry of "Murder!" and returns.

M. Leblanc convinces him that there is no one in the room whence the sound seemed to proceed, but later he learns that a London solicitor has mysteriously disappeared, being last seen in the neighborhood of the Frenchman's home.

Then St. Quintin takes Ince to the Leblancs', and, in spite of the opposition of his host, obtains a promise of marriage from Miss Densley. Ince can find no fault with the people, but on leaving learns that one of their footmen is an ex-convict. The fellow is forced to admit that the Leblancs are "crooked," but St. Quintin remains loyal to Miss Densley. Several days afterward they go to the Leblanc home, and Ince makes a discovery that completely unnerves him while scouting around the house. The two men are afterward received by M. Leblanc, but see nothing suspicious. On leaving, however, Ince tells his friend he is certain he saw a dead man's hand in a laboratory which M. Leblanc had fitted up, ostensibly for scientific experiments. Furthermore, they find that another suitor of Miss Densley's has advanced M. Leblanc £3000. And to complicate matters, the Frenchman asks a similar loan from St. Quintin.

Concealing the request from Ince St. Quintin resolves to advance the money and goes to Densley Wold, 300 miles from London, with M. Leblanc, to inspect the property, which was to be security for the loan. Miss Densley and Mme. Leblanc were to have accompanied them, but fail to appear.

Feeling that he has been tricked, St. Quintin resolves to return to London, but before he has an opportunity to get away, he is introduced to a Mr. Williams, whom M. Leblanc has represented as his co-guardian in the care of Miss Densley's estate. His efforts to get away are in vain, and he realizes that he is in a desperate predicament. He further finds that M. Leblanc has thrown some mysterious chests into a pool, and, while investigating, is discovered by Leblanc and Williams. They take him to the deserted mansion at Densley Wold and knock him senseless by a blow on the head.

Ince, meantime, misses his friend and takes steps to aid him.

(CONCLUDED FROM LAST

CHAPTER XXIV—(Continued)

HELD the trembling girl out of the cottage, made Saunders hide among the bushes, with orders to prevent any attempt at escape on the part of either of the men if he could, but in any case to be sure to note the companion of Monsieur Leblanc, so as to be able to identify him later.

Then he and the unhappy little "heiress" started for the nearest gap in the ruinous wall.

"I've been here before, you know," she whispered, "and they told me all this place was mine. I'm glad it isn't, though. It's gloomy, dreadful."

She talked intermittently, her voice getting more tremulous every moment, as they drew near the great, gaunt, deserted mansion.

Then they stopped and looked at it, blank at the broken windows gleaming in the faint moonlight, at the straggling bushes, the ragged trees pressing their branches against the stained masonry.

And then James Ince suddenly raised the primitive lantern which he had borrowed from Miss Grey.

And as they stood, and he flashed the light of the lantern to and fro, they heard a faint moan from inside the building.

"Massey!" shrieked the girl, as she made a dash for the nearest of the broken windows, and climbing to the sill forced her way in, smashing the glass away with her gloved hands until she had made a passage through for her slim figure.

James Ince followed more cautiously, and together they hunted, calling as they went, their voices echoing strangely in the empty rooms, until they came to the great dining room, where St. Quintin lay, in a pool of blood, in the middle of the floor.

The girl did not scream. She uttered a long moan as she rushed forward and raised the poor, bruised body in her arms.

"Thank God, he's alive, he's alive!" she whispered, as she pressed her lips upon his forehead, which was disfigured with horrible stains.

But St. Quintin, if he heard her, did not understand. He had been lying limp and motionless when they came in. But the sound of their voices roused him, and he opened dull eyes to say in a hoarse whisper:

"The pond, the pond! Search the pond! You are murderers, both of you! I'll have the pond dragged tomorrow!"

The girl burst into tears.

"He doesn't know us!" she said. "They've driven him mad, mad! Oh, Massey, Massey, my darling, don't you know me? Don't you remember me? You must, you must!"

James Ince had to drop down his own tears as he looked at the piteous sight and knew that his friend had indeed lost his senses.

Kneeling on the floor, he examined St. Quintin's body, and ascertained that beyond a frightful injury to the head which had bled profusely, he appeared to have sustained little bodily injury.

"Have you got the plunk," he asked the girl, "to stay with him, all by yourself, while I bring a doctor? I want you not to be alarmed. This may pass off. I say it may. Let him keep quiet. Don't try to rouse him. I'll make him as comfortable as I can with my coat. Keep his head low, and just wait and watch patiently till I come back."

She was tender, submissive, wise enough to restrain her misery and to do as she was told. Ince undid his friend's collar, placed him on his back on the outspread overcoat, and left him with his sad little nurse.

He had another and a more arduous task before him. Returning to the cottage at a rapid pace, he found, as he had expected, that Monsieur Leblanc's fly had arrived and that the two men had already entered the little house. He heard the front door shut as he came up. Saunders sprang up from the bushes as he went quickly up into the little garden.

"Mr. Ince, sir, I can't do it. I can't do it. You mustn't look for me to help you!" cried he, as the barrister ran up the path.

"Why not?"

"Because I've never rounded on a pal and I can't begin now."

"A pal, eh? Who's the pal?"

The man was silent.

James Ince looked round, and then beckoned to the driver of the fly. The man was a sturdy young Yorkshireman, thick-set and muscular. He climbed down off his box and came up to the garden gate.

"Do you want to earn a ten-pound note?" asked Ince, quietly.

The man grinned.

"Go and fetch help—a couple of men—as many as you can get from the Inn or anywhere. And tell the man who would be of the least use to us to run and bring a doctor straight up to the big house in the park. There's a man lying wounded there, half-murdered by the two scoundrels you drove here from Doncaster."

"Right, sir," said the man.

And he was away before Saunders could do more than make a faint attempt to enter the cottage.

"Stand back," said James Ince, sternly.

He himself was standing by the little porch, waiting. He guessed that the rascals inside would by this time have got wind of the fact that they were besieged.

There was no retreat by the back way, Miss Grey having bolted her kitchen door and so cut off the staircase. There was nothing for the besieged to do, therefore, but to get out by the window of the room in which they were now locked, or burst their way through the locked door into the passage and thence out by the front door or through the window of the second little front room.

He was not long in suspense as to the way they would choose.

There was a rattle and a crash, and Monsieur Leblanc, slim and small, had flung open the little window and jumped out. Saunders was standing ready, with folded arms.

"Seize him!" cried Ince.

And Saunders was about to obey when a tall and burly figure leaped out through the open window after his companion.

It was Mr. Williams, without his overcoat, and considerably lighter and slimmer in consequence.

James Ince started forward. The other man kept his face turned away, and Saunders at once dropped Monsieur Leblanc at a sign from him, and the Frenchman and his fellow-prisoner sprang down the bank together.

Just as Mr. Williams had reached the fly and was climbing on to the box to take the reins in his hands, the young barrister caught a glimpse of his face in the moonlight, and cried aloud:

"By Jove, it's Gurney, the forger!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE words were scarcely out of James Ince's mouth when the fly started off at a rapid pace, not in the direction of Doncaster, but away across the moor.

Mr. Williams proved an expert whip, and was getting every ounce out of the old horse, while Monsieur Leblanc, cowering down inside the hood, contused himself to Providence and the driving of his colleague on the box.

Ince did not waste any time in trying to overtake the rascals, but at once turning to Saunders, who was standing, sheepish and guilty, but with a stubborn look on his face, not many yards away from him, he said:

"So you're in with these rogues after all?"

Saunders shook his head and replied sullenly:

"No, I'm not. I hadn't a notion as Mr. Williams, whom I heard tell of when I was at Briar Lodge, was Bob Gurney. Bob should have told me, and then I'd have cut my tongue out sooner than have set you on the track of him."

James Ince smiled grimly.

"In the interests of justice it was just as well he didn't," he said. "You've done me a good turn by putting me on the track of the scoundrels, and you may make your mind easy, for they would have been caught before long this time, and if they haven't committed murder yet they will to do it."

"Murder!" echoed Saunders, hoarsely.

"Yes. Mr. St. Quintin is lying more dead than alive in the big house over there, and I'm going to see whether the doctor's arrived yet. But I've got something else to see to first. In the meantime you may as well go to the house, too. You've got a strapping pair of arms, and you may be of use in carrying the poor fellow."

Saunders turned rather reluctantly in the direction pointed out, and James Ince went quickly along the road to the spot where he had left the fly which brought him from Doncaster. Giving the driver a note which he hurriedly pencilled on a leaf from his pocketbook, he directed him to take it as quickly as he could to Doncaster police station, and waiting to see the fly start at a rapid pace, he then returned to the deserted mansion, where he had left his wounded friend.

The doctor had by this time arrived and done his best for St. Quintin, who had now sunk into a state of stupor. With the help of the stalwart Saunders, the wounded man was carried from the house, across the park and to the Red Lion, where a room had been prepared for him.

"He will want the most careful nursing," said the doctor.

And a soft voice at his elbow answered him.

"I'll do just whatever you tell me, and I shall never leave him for a moment."

"And what she can't do I will," chimed in Ince. "If this young lady and I can't nave him together, doctor, nobody could. We'd both give our lives for him; wouldn't we?"

The girl bowed her head in silence, her lip quivering and her eyes looking very large and dark.

"Well," said the doctor, gently, "there will be three of us then, for I'll stay here till the morning, and by that time we shall probably know how the case is likely to go on."

The doubt suggested was a terrible shock to the girl, who bore it bravely, however, and did not give way to sobs or even tears.

The night was an anxious one, but toward morning there was a slight change in the condition of the patient, and as the doctor and Dorcas were still watching, James Ince, on the advice of the former, to whom he had confided that he had a heavy day's work before him, retired for a short rest.

As he expected, a police inspector from Doncaster called to see him at a very early hour, and to him James Ince narrated, as far as he could, the facts of the previous day's crime and attempted crime.

Already, in his pencilled note to the police, he had given broad details, not only of the crimes committed by Leblanc and his accomplice, but of their personal appearance. "Mr. Williams," under his real name of "Robert Gurney," was already well known to the agents of the law, having served more than one term of imprisonment for forgery and embezzlement. James Ince was able to state in which direction they had started, but the police officer was able to carry this information still further. Already his subordinates had been on the track of the two rogues, but, though they had found the fly—some miles away from Densley and not far from a railway station, the horse tired out and showing signs of excessive punishment, and the vehicle covered with dirt and dust—the criminals themselves had disappeared. No doubt we entertained of their having taken the train that had stopped at the station that morning, though inquiries had not yet succeeded in tracking them.

In the meantime, however, James Ince had more work for the police. He related the circumstances of their finding his friend in the empty mansion, and the words he had uttered about the pond.

The inspector agreed with him in thinking they might form a valuable clue to some of the doings of the rascals who had assaulted him, and it was decided to drag the pond that very morning.

Leaving St. Quintin, therefore, to the care of his devoted nurse, James Ince went with the inspector to the park, and, finding the pond without difficulty, noted at once that in one corner of it the water was muddy, as had recently been disturbed.

Of course, a small knot of idlers had followed the two men through the various gaps in the park wall, and now stood at a little distance, wondering what was going to happen.

It was a cold autumn day, and the mist clung about the trees of the park and hung in a thin veil over the slimy, evil-smelling water. The old mansion, not far away, looked unspeakably desolate with the fresh damage done to its lower windows in the doings of the previous night, and the leaves which had been shaken from the creepers lay in heaps under the walls.

James Ince was seized with a feeling of sickness and horror as he looked about him and thought that the mystery which he felt sure they were about to unravel had perhaps been the cause of the insanity or death of his dearest friend. He felt convinced, beyond all doubt, that there really was a secret hidden beneath their feet, which would give the clue to the assault on St. Quintin.

Meanwhile the inspector was probing beneath the surface of weed and slime, and before long his stick touched something that he knew must be a box.

"There's something hidden in the water," he said in a low voice to Ince. "We'd better get these yokels to give us a hand in getting it out."

He called some of the idlers to the edge of the pond, and finding among them one or two sturdy enough to venture into the slimy depths, sent for a pitchfork and such other implements as seemed the most likely to be of service in dragging the concealed box to the shore.

There was a short space of intense suspense as the first man to venture into the pond announced that he had got something. He was armed with a hayrake, with which he tugged at the unseen object below the green and black water.

"I've moved it, sir; it's coming, but it's mighty heavy!" was his comment as he succeeded in dragging to the bank which sloped the most something square and solid and of great weight. Here it was seized by half a dozen hands, and soon there lay upon the bank under the trees a square, shabby old portmanteau, stout and strong, well corded and strapped and locked, and without any indication of its owner. There was not even a luggage-label on any of its four sides, or any card or lettering whatever.

The dull eyes of the rustics began to gleam with cupidity and the love of sensation when they crowded round the prize, whispering to each other that it was full of gold "most like," and jewels "to make your mouth water," and already it had got abroad that there were two criminals connected with the outrage upon the young gentleman, that they had got away, and that they were suspected of more than one crime.

In the imaginations of the villagers these crimes now took shape, and they pictured to themselves the two criminals escaping from the justice that they feared was on their heels down in the south, "Lunnon-way," coming up here together, engaging a cottage, and stealing out at night as Miss Grey had already admitted they had done, with luggage for the Red Lion which never reached that hostelry.

Surely, the villagers thought, the two men were burglars, who, fresh from a series of exciting and clever robberies, had come away with their booty and dropped it in this deserted pond in the neglected park, hoping to leave it safely hidden there until they should find means of coming to fetch it away.

Eager for unearned gain, the men asked themselves how much of the hoard of diamonds and gold, rubies and emeralds and suchlike would fall to their share if they made themselves actively useful in recovering the stolen treasure. Surely a handsome reward was in store for them! And so they crowded round the inspector and Ince, both of whom were very grave and silent, and by no means as jubilant concerning the find as the group around them.

The inspector, indeed, had had certain words whispered in his ear by James Ince which made him anxious to get rid of his too-eager assistants, who were pressing round in the hope of seeing the portmanteau forced open there and then.

Their disappointment was great when he declared that there was no need to open the portmanteau, as they knew what was in it. And the villagers were exchanging discontented murmurs, expressive of baffled curiosity, when the tall young man who had fished out the prize called out that he had come upon something else. There was a rush to the edge of the pond again, and with a little more trouble a second box was got out, this being of a different shape, long instead of square, but with the same remarkable absence of label or name.

Curiosity grew stronger, but still neither the inspector nor James Ince made any attempt to open either of the trunks. The crowd, growing sweatruck with suspense and a vague uneasiness, waited and watched, impatient and eager, while successive dabbings brought up another and yet another prize, until in the end two portmanteaus and two wooden boxes, all securely fastened, all heavy, all mysterious in their impenetrability, stood in a line upon the brink of the pond.

Then, repeated searchings having failed to bring up any further treasure, the crowd, exasperated and dismayed, were informed that it was not proposed to open the boxes then; that they were to be conveyed to the Doncaster police station just as they were.

By this time, owing to arrangements which had been made quietly by Ince while the search was going on, a covered cart had been brought from the village to the nearest gap in the park wall, and under the direction of the inspector, and watched by James Ince, the steadiest of the men assembled, round were allowed to transport the mysterious boxes one by one to the cart, in which they were all deposited within a few minutes. All remarked upon the weight of the boxes, and grumbled at not being allowed to see the jewels and gold they contained.

When the task was accomplished James Ince and the inspector got into the cart and the driver whipped up the horse and started for Doncaster, followed for some distance by a wondering and whispering crowd.

For already rumors had begun to circulate to the effect that the contents of the boxes might not prove to be untold treasure, after all.

The journey was made quickly and without much conversation between the inspector and James Ince, who had given all the information he could, and who now awaited the result of their investigations with sickening anxiety.

At Doncaster police station the boxes and portmanteaus were taken out and examined and then opened in the presence of the chief constable.

The first to be dealt with was an oblong portmanteau, which, on being opened, proved to contain a tin box wedged in between shavings and rolls of crumpled newspaper, now sodden and wet.

The tin box was locked, and was forced open in its turn, and inside a layer of drab-colored hard substance met their eyes.

The inspector exchanged glances with James Ince, and they nodded in grave affirmation of the doubts already expressed by the latter.

A hammer was now employed to break up the hard cement of which they had by this time discovered the substance in the box to consist. Under repeated blows it gave way, and then the horrible discovery anticipated by the onlookers was made.

Inside the box, cased in Portland cement, which had hardened to stone round it, was a portion of a human body.

The ghastly process had to be gone through three more times, with the same result, until it became practically certain, by the time the divisional surgeon had made his examination of the whole of the contents of the boxes, that the body of a man, dismembered and cased in cement, was contained in the four.

The head was there, although an attempt had been made to mutilate the features. But it was possible to ascertain certain particulars concerning the height, build, and, of shoulder, color of hair and size of the skull, which enabled James Ince to verify his own suggestion, that the victim was that of the unfortunate Harold Burdock, the missing solicitor.

A telegram to London brought down by the next train a near relation of the murdered man, who was able to identify, practically without any doubt, the head, which was small and of unusual shape, as that of Burdock; and that evening a warrant was issued for the arrest of Alphonse Leblanc on the charge of murder.

CHAPTER XXVI

JUSTICE was to overtake the rascal who had played so vile and so bold a game for his own enrichment at the expense of the dupe whom the beauty of poor Dorcas Lane had attracted to his net.

But it was not at the hands of the police that he met his reward. They searched the country far and wide, and succeeded in catching Gurney, alias "Mr. Williams," just as he was running safely to earth in one of the lowest parts of London.

But Leblanc evaded all pursuit for several days, and was found at last, starved and bedraggled, hiding in a ditch on the borders of a field not many miles from Doncaster. Fear and exposure, want and cold, had reduced him to a mere shuddering, quivering thing, gaunt, haggard and wretched beyond belief. At the first sound of the yells and execrations which were raised by the party of men and boys who unearthed him, and who recognized at once in the wretch before them the vile murderer who was being advertised for all over the country, he uttered a wild shriek, and dashing out of his hiding-place, ran for his life, lame, limping, panting, his eyes glaring, his tongue protruding, a horrible, sickening sight, straight for the stone quarry where he had hidden himself the day before.

He meant to creep again into a nook he had found there, concealed among thorns and briars, where he had lain securely for two nights.

But the crowd, yelling and hooting, pursuing and shouting, gained upon him, so that he knew he could never reach the corner which was his goal.

One moment he stood irresolute. Then, summoning all his strength, as the foremost man in pursuit came within a few yards, brandishing a stick and red with rage, the murderer turned and made straight for the quarry's edge and with one wild leap into the air, fell, a crushed and mangled mass, dead on the stone beneath.

"Mr. Williams" was thus left to take his trial alone. But there was no evidence to connect him with the actual murder of Harold Burdock; and though a good case might have been made out against him as an accessory after the fact, it was thought wiser to put him on his trial for conspiracy to defraud.

In support of the case for the prosecution a most valuable witness now came forward, in the person of the governess, Miss Stanley, who, however much she might be suspected of having known a little more than she professed to have done, was now a useful ally in unmasking the plots by which the Leblancs had gained large sums of money at the expense of their victims.

There was some doubt, indeed, whether she would not have held her tongue discreetly, if Madame Leblanc had not treated her shabbily at the last moment, and, instead of taking her to Paris as she had promised to do, cut her adrift with scant ceremony, and, as Miss Stanley declared, without paying her salary.

However this might be, her evidence was of signal use in getting up a case against Madame Leblanc, who was betrayed without delay and lodged at Holloway, and "Mr. Williams," alias Gurney, whom she identified at once as the person who posed as the co-guardian of "Miss Densley," the heiress whose beauty and whose money were so artfully used as a bait for numerous suitors, all of whom had to contribute handsomely, in one way or another, to the Leblanc exchequer.

Little by little the whole vile scheme came to light, and it was known that this was not the first time that the Leblancs, by exploiting an innocent girl as a supposed "heiress," had reaped a rich harvest from avaricious or enamored suitors.

The first case had been that of a French girl, and it was in France that they had successfully pursued their plan of luring wealthy men to be husbands, until circumstances made France too hot to hold them, when they dropped their prey, and fled to New York for a time and then recommenced operations on the same plan in England.

On the second occasion it was upon the unfortunate Dorcas Lane that Madame Leblanc set her evil eye. She found it easy to deceive, not only the ignorant girl herself, but the simple-minded old gentleman, with whom she lived, and the more or less undiscerning religious and philanthropic set in which she moved.

The rest was easy. Being used to their fraudulent profession, they knew how to set about it, and began by taking a handsomely furnished house at Briar Heath, to which they could invite their victims. These they obtained in various ways, some through cleverly worded advertisements, both in English and French papers, some by placing poor, ignorant Dorcas, in charge of her governess or her supposed aunt, in places where she would be seen and admired by men of wealth or position, as she was one of the stay at Cowes during which St. Quintin had seen and been attracted by her.

The victims were managed in various ways, some being induced to advance loans on mortgage, some to supply jewelry which the "husbands" never saw. Sometimes the victims discovered something and were tiresome and difficult to manage. And although only one of these, the unfortunate Harold Burdock, was known to have been murdered by Leblanc, it was felt to be a matter of doubt whether this was really the first of his victims to be put out of the way.

As for the manner of Burdock's death, nothing was ever positively known. But it was conjectured, after a minute examination of Briar Lodge, that the solicitor, who was a very small man, was set upon and strangled by Leblanc in the study in the front of the house, that his dying cries reached the ears of St. Quintin, but that Leblanc removed the body into the back room and pulled the big desk up in the window to hide the traces of his crime, before he allowed St. Quintin to enter the room.

As to the property at Densley Wold, that did certainly belong to a Miss Densley as the Leblancs had taken pains to ascertain before laying their plans. But the Miss Densley in question, instead of being a lovely girl, was a lunatic, who had to be kept under restraint, and who was not likely to come forward to interfere with their schemes. The Leblancs, therefore, had found it easy to impose upon those of the villagers with whom they came in contact during their short stay at Densley, by assuring them that the pretty girl of whom they were in charge was the next heir of the property, which would be hers on the death of her insane relation. Captain Darnall had been quite satisfied with what they showed him of the property, which they declared to be that of their "niece," and Dorcas herself had been taken in without the least difficulty.

The shamefaced Monsieur Marbeau was forced to come forward to bear witness to the extent to which he had been victimized, under pretense that he was the husband chosen by her guardians for the lovely heiress. Captain Darnall, to his great annoyance, had also to appear in the character of dupe. Two or three others were induced to come forward, and lastly St. Quintin, still weak and ill from the effects of the blow which had been dealt him by one of the murderous ruffians, whom he believed to have been Leblanc, stood up in the witness box to testify that he had been induced to offer to lend Leblanc £5,000 to pay off that sum advanced by Captain Darnall.

"I took my check-book with me," he went on, "but I would not advance the money until I had seen the lady whom I knew as Miss Densley. For though I knew she was ignorant of all the schemes of those people who called themselves her relations, I knew also that they were not at all innocent, and that I must be on my guard with them, and so I wished to take her as well as myself out of their clutches."

This speech, uttered very simply and manfully, produced a strong effect in court, since it is only too common to find it difficult to feel sympathy with any of the personages in a criminal case.

The straightforward way in which he gave his evidence, the steadiness with which he made it known that he had determined to marry the girl he loved, no matter what her surroundings were or what the difficulties might be which he would have to surmount, created a strong impression, not only in his favor, but in that of the girl herself.

She, poor child, was by no means such a good witness as he was.

Overwhelmed with shame at the position in which she had been put, conscious that the case with which she had been deceived must seem incredible to many, she answered badly, with hesitation and reluctance, scarcely raised her voice above a whisper, and made such a pitiful exhibition of nervousness and distress that only her beauty saved her from general condemnation as an artful and designing creature.

For indeed she felt conscious that her situation was a shameful one, and she could not but feel that part of the disgrace, if not of the guilt, of the murder of the unhappy Burdock lay upon her most innocent shoulders. So she stammered and grew red, answered quickly when she ought to have been careful and slowly when she ought to have been frank, so that she ended by having the men on her side, indeed, but at the cost of losing the suffrages of the women.

As for the accused man, Gurney or Williams, he was proved to have posed as the second guardian of the heiress and to have shared the plunder obtained by the more daring Leblanc. St. Quintin's check-book having been found upon him, it was rightly conjectured that, being an expert forger, he had intended to ransack the young man's portmanteau for specimens of his handwriting, and then to draw checks in favor of himself and his fellow-rogue, forging St. Quintin's signature to each.

And it was easy to believe that, but for the act of James Ince in snatching away the coat containing the check-book, and thus forcing the two rascals to come back to Densley in search of it, they would, after calling at the Doncaster Hotel for St. Quintin's luggage, have taken the train to London, and perhaps have succeeded in cashing some checks and in getting away from England before there was time to raise a hue and cry.

Both the scoundrels had recognised that they had reached the end of their tether, and but for the inconsiderate curiosity of St. Quintin in watching them at the pond, they might have succeeded in leaving their ghastly secret undiscovered for a long time, and have avoided the necessity of the assault which had nearly cost St. Quintin his life.

Gurney strenuously asserted that he had been no party to injuring St. Quintin, and St. Quintin himself was inclined to think that this was true. It was in Leblanc's face that he had seen the murderous expression which made him believe that his last hour was come, and he had a dim and hazy fancy that the second rascal had interfered to save him from anything worse than abandonment in the deserted mansion.

The trial resulted in the conviction of both Madame Leblanc and Gurney on the charge of conspiracy to defraud, and the woman was sentenced to seven years' penal servitude and the man to fourteen.

When the case was over, Dorcas Lane disappeared, and St. Quintin, who guessed where she had gone to, found her, broken down and broken-hearted, in the shabby little house where Mrs. Mortimer had given her shelter before the days of her short but terrible reign as the heiress of Densley Wold.

She repulsed St. Quintin, told him she never wished to see him again, behaved with fierce pride, sent him away, grave and disconsolate, and then cried her eyes out with misery at what she felt that she was bound to do.

She could not let him mate with such an outcast as Fate had made of her.

Mrs Mortimer, however, would not sit down tamely under the unmerited shame which had been put upon her protegee. She wrote to Sir William Lane, appealing to his generosity to take some pity upon a girl, a near relation of his, who was prevented by her sad position from marrying a man of good birth and handsome fortune, who loved her and who was loved by her.

To this came such an answer as filled both the ladies with indignation.

Sir William regretted that, having regard to the scandalous position in which his grand-niece had placed herself, in making herself the talk of London in connection with a gang of swindlers and murderers, he could not do as much for her as he would have been glad to do in other circumstances. However, if Mrs Mortimer would assure him, on her word of honor, that in spite of appearances, Dorcas was really quite blameless in the matter, he would reconsider his decision, and would perhaps later be able to allow her to pay him a visit, which would rehabilitate her in the eyes of the world.

To this letter Mrs. Mortimer replied that Dorcas had indeed been unlucky in not having the judgment and intellect of her male relations to assist her, in which case she would, no doubt, have seen through the machinations of the people who, as it was, had made her so easy a victim. As to his possible invitation, she said she would leave Dorcas to accept it or refuse it as she pleased.

And then there was an interval during which neither the baronet nor his grand-niece heard anything from the other.

But one day, about a month later, Sir William Lane got a letter in a small, fine handwriting which he did not know, and on opening it he found it to contain these words:

"Dear Sir William—I daresay you will not remember me, though my father was an old friend of your father's and though I used sometimes to come to your house on a visit when I was at Eton. I write on behalf of your grand-niece, Dorcas, my wife, to say that she regrets being unable to avail herself at present of your most kind and warm-hearted invitation to Greys Court. But if you will come and see us at Hawks Castle, where we shall be, if all goes well, in March, when we return from the Riviera, where we are spending our honeymoon, we shall both be delighted to welcome you as long as you may care to stay.

Yours very truly,

"MASSEY ST. QUINTIN."

THE END.