JOHN ARTHUR'S WARD;

OR THE DETETIVE'S DAUGHTER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"A Woman's Crime," "The Missing Diamond," Etc., Etc.

"The woman smiled triumphantly, but made no other answer.

"Well, what next? I am really becoming interested in your career."

"Sorry I can't gratify your curiosity. My career has been a very pleasant one—seeing the world; generally prosperous. And this brings me back to the starting point, why should you think, because I left you with good cause, ten years ago, that I must necessarily forsake, sooner or later, a husband who is kindness itself, and who leaves no wish of mine ungratified?

"First reason," checking them off on his fingers: "Because you don't love this old man, and love is the only bond that such women as you will not break."

"Thanks!" ironically, bending her head.

"Second, because a dull country house, be it ever so elegant, will not satisfy you as an abiding place. I have not forgotten your girlish taste for pomp, pageant and all manner of excitement; a taste that has doubtless become fully developed by now. Third, because you have, at this present moment, a lover whom you prefer above all others, and to whom you will flee sooner or later."

"Perhaps you can substantiate that statement," sneered Cora.

"Well, not exactly; but I know women. My dear, say what you please to me, but don't expect to be believed if you will insist upon doing the devoted wife."

"I insist upon nothing," said Cora rising, "and I have not time for many more words. Let us come to the point at once: With my life, after I left you, you have nothing to do; you know nothing of it now, and you will learn no more from me. Of you, I know this much. I know that you clung, after your fashion, to the skirts of your unfortunate wife, spending her income and making her life miserable. I know that six years ago you inherited a fortune from a distant relative. I know that from that time you utterly neglected your wife, who had been an invalid for years; and that soon after she died, heartbroken and alone."

Percy turned upon her, and scrutinized her face keenly; then coming close to her, said, meaningly: "And then I wonder that you did not come back to me."

For a moment the woman seemed confused, and off her guard. But she had not sought an interview with this man without fully reviewing her ground.

"I had ceased to care for you," she said, lifting her unflinching eyes to his face; "and I did not need your money. Come, enough of the past; you have squandered your fortune, and now you want another. You want to put yourself still more into my power by marrying a third wife—so be it; I consent."

"Not so fast. You are first to promise me to place in my hands on my marriage morn," those unpleasant little documents which you hold against me. In return for which you will receive a sum of money, the amount of said sum to be hereafter arranged. Then we go our separate ways."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then, painful as it is, I must do my duty. You are to give me your answer when I return to Bellair; no time for tricks, mind. If the answer is no, then I interview Mr. John Arthur.

"And you return?—"

"The day after to-morrow."

"Then you shall have my answer. Until then—"

She swept him a stately courtesy, which he returned with a most elaborate bow.

Without another word from either, they separated; she glided swiftly and silently toward the house, he going once more in the direction of Bellair village.

. . . . . .

How long she had slept it never afterward occurred to Miss Arthur to inquire. Something recalled her from the land of visions, and starting up in her chair she saw Celine, standing demurely before her, her face wreathed in smiles, and no signs of any uncanny adventure lingering about her.

Beholding her safe and sound Miss Arthur began to pour out upon the luckless head of Celine, the vials of wrath prepared for her benefit.

The girl listened with a face indicative of some secret source of amusement. Noting her look of evident unconcern, and the laughter she seemed vainly striving to keep under, Miss Arthur brought her tirade to an abrupt termination, and demanded to know what Miss Celine Leroque saw in her appearance that was so very ludicrous.

Whereupon Miss Celine Leroque dropped upon a hassock, at the feet of her irate mistress, and laughed outright—actually laughed unreservedly, in the presence and despite the rage of the ancient maiden!

Then observing that she was preparing another burst of wrath, the girl appeared to be struggling for composure, and vainly endeavoring to articulate something, of which Miss Arthur could only catch the name, "Mr. Percy." Thereupon she fairly bounced out of her chair, demanding to know "what on earth" Mr. Percy had to do with her maid's reprehensible conduct.

"Oh, mademoiselle, everything!" gasped Celine. "Only let me explain, and mademoiselle will laugh too. Oh, Mon dieu, Mon dieu!"

Calming herself by a violent effort, Celine told her story, and its magic dispelled the wrath of her much neglected, sorely aggrieved mistress. Such a pretty little story it was, interspersed with sly looks, knowing nods, and rippling bursts of laughter. Listened too with, first, disdainful silence; then, growing interest; last, spasmodic giggles, apropos ejaculations, and much blushing and maidenly confusion.

"You see, mademoiselle, after you had gone down, I went to my room to take just a few little stitches upon some of my poor garments, that I must wear to-morrow. I don't know how it was, but I sat on my bedside thinking, after it was done, and fell off asleep."

"Off the bed?"

"Oh! no, no, mademoiselle; off into sleep, I mean. When I awoke I was anxious to know how much time I had slept away, and came down to your apartments. You were still in the drawing-room, and I passed on to the kitchen, surprised to find that it was very late. "I will hasten," I thought, "and, can so go to the village, and telegraph my sister before my mistress zings for me; for I didn't think," with a sly look, "that you would be at liberty very early in the evening. The—what you name him?—operateur, was out, and I had to wait a little time. Coming back so late, I became afraid of the woods, and took the path along the highway. Entering at the front and coming up the avenue, I was about to pass around by the east walk to the side entrance when—" stifling a laugh.

"Well?" impatiently.

"When the front door opened and I, standing in the shadow, saw the light fall upon the face and figure of Monsieur Percy."

"Yes, go on."

"I mention this, mademoiselle, only to show you how I know so positively that it was monsieur who—oh! oh!" laughing again softly.

"Who?" with increased impatience; "who did what, girl?" eyeing her suspiciously.

Celine composed herself and continued: "Seeing monsieur, I stopped, for I did not wish him to discover me abroad so late. So I stood in the thick shade until he should have passed. He came slowly toward me and, just about four paces from my hiding-place, paused, turned and looked back at the house. I could see him going toward the upper windows, and presently I saw your shadow upon the blind as you entered your dressing-room. The light shone out from your window, too; and after looking for a while, I heard him murmur to himself: 'That must be her window; I believe I am bewitched, for I can't bear to lose its light,' and then—"

"Stop laughing, you ridiculous girl! And what then?"

"And then, mademoiselle, he began walking up and down within sight of your window—"

"Ah!" rapturously.

"Oui; and I—oh, mademoiselle, he was in the very path that I must take to approach the side entrance. And he walked and walked, and I waited and waited. Then I thought I would try getting around by the other way, and creep up carefully from the terrace. So I crept along to the other side, back of the arbor, and up the terrace, and managed to reach the entrance unseen. Mon dieu, mademoiselle, the door was locked! I was shut out! What was I to do then? I sat me down in the shadow of the portico and waited once more. After a terribly long time I could see that he was not moving up and down. I peeped cautiously, and he seemed to be departing. Then I came out stealthy as a cat, and found that he was going away, and the reason—"

"The reason?"

"Oui, mademoiselle; the light in your room had disappeared."

"Disappeared!"

"Oui, mademoiselle. Then I bethought me there might yet be a chance. I came up to the front entrance and tried the door. It was not locked. My heart leaped for joy. I blessed the carelessness of the servants, and stole cautiously in. I came to this room. All was dark; but the coals there showed me your figure in the chair. I could not mistake the graceful outlines of mademoiselle. I entered very quietly, relighted your lamp—some little breeze must have flared it out while you slept. I was looking at you, and wondering what you would say if you knew how nearly crazy with love you had driven that stately, handsome Monsieur Percy, when you awoke."

It is needless to say that, long before Celine had finished her recital, her mistress was in the best of humors. Indeed, Celine's volubly uttered, intensely flattering, highly probable recital, had an exhilarating effect upon her; so much so, that she lady found sleep now quite impossible. So poor Celine was doomed after all to build the new braids and puffs into a wonderful edifice upon the head of Miss Arthur, and to repeat over and again the sweet story of "how he loved her."

The "wee sma'" hours were beginning to lengthen once more when Celine was released from duty, and went wearily up to her room; wearily, yet with undimmed eyes, and the mischievous dimples still lurking about the corners of her mouth.

She muttered: "Bah! it is better than sleep, after all; if only the others were as easily duped as she!"

By which words, a listener might have been led to suppose that Celine Leroque had been practising deception upon some confiding individual.

CHAPTER XVII.—GATHERING CLUES.

Claire had been absent all the morning, had gone to make some call; at least had said to Olive, at breakfast, "I think I will take the ponies, Olive, and drive into the city this morning. It is nice out of doors, and I have made no calls since I came here."

Olive Girard was alone in her cosy drawing-room. She had been reading, but the book was somehow not in tune with her mind or mood. She had allowed it to fall at her feet, where it lay, half opened, while she drifted away from the present in sorrowful reverie. Lifting her eyes, she saw a cab drive away from the villa gate, and a form hurrying along the marble pathway. Springing up, Olive herself threw open the door, and clasped her arms about—Miss Arthur's French maid! who returned the caress with much enthusiasm.

"Madeline, my dear child, how glad I am to see you!"

"Even in this disguise!" laughed the girl.

"Even in blue glasses, and that horrid jacket," smiled Olive. "What an ugly thing it is. Come and take it off, ma belle; do," leading the way up the stairs.

"I come, autocrat, and I shall much enjoy getting out of this head-gear," shaking her bewigged head. Then abruptly, "Where's Claire?"

"Out for a drive and some calls," without looking back. "How surprised and glad she will be to see you. Now, come in and make a lady of yourself once more." She led the way into Madeline's room. "Are you tired, dear?"

"Not at all."

"Then come into my boudoir when you are dressed, and we will have a cosy chat while waiting for Claire."

"I won't be long," responded the girl. "I have a good many things to say to you, which had better be said before Claire comes."

"Very well; I await your ladyship," and Olive closed the door, leaving Miss Arthur's maid alone.

"I thought so," muttered she, tearing off the blue glasses; "she has gone to meet Edward Percy. Poor dupe! it is indeed time to act."

She discarded the ill-fitting jacket, flung away the ugly black wig, and, in a very few moments stood arrayed in a pretty, neatly fitting gown, glowing and lovely—Madeline Payne once more.

"I wonder if I shall see or hear of him," she whispered to herself as she crossed to Olive's boudoir. "Oh, if I could! It would be one ray of sunlight only to clasp his hand!"

Olive had been informed of all that Madeline herself knew of the doings at Bellair, at the time when the girl went down, disguised as Celine Leroque. Now, therefore, Madeline lost no time in making Olive acquainted with, at least a part of, the events that had transpired during her sojourn in the Oakley mansion, in the capacity of maid. Of Edward Percy she said not a word, for reasons of her own, wishing to keep all knowledge of him from Olive for the present.

"You see, I was just in time, Olive," she supplemented, when Mrs. Girard had expressed her astonishment at the startling revelations of the past four weeks. "I had not an hour to lose in setting my snare for these plotters. They little dream what is in store for them. Poor Kitty! I feel like a wretch when I think of the advantage I took of her, by making her poor dead body a weapon, as one might say, against a villain whom she would never have lifted a finger to injure in her life. But I could see no other way. Do you know, Olive, they are going to erect a stone over her, bearing my name?"

Olive looked up in surprise. "No! is it possible?"

"Yes, quite. I fancy John Arthur thinks he will feel more thoroughly assured of my demise, when he can see my name on a marble slab."

"Now, tell me what especial purpose brought you up to town to-day."

Madeline moved restlessly in her chair. "A medley," she said, laughing uneasily. "A woman's reason; things being quiet, I wanted recreation, and to tell you of my success thus far. Then, a detective's reason; to get from you some information bearing upon your own affairs, as connected with Lucian Davlin. Then I want to see Dr. Vaughan, in his professional capacity. But mind, Olive, not a word to him of my discoveries just yet."

"Certainly not, if you do not wish it."

And this was all the mention made by either of Clarence Vaughan.

"You see," began Madeline, after a brief silence, "Mrs. John Arthur and her quondam brother, hold occasional private interviews. As they generally prove interesting, I make it a point to be present whenever possible. Now, from some chance words dropped at different times, I have been led to think that if I were more fully informed in regard to this Percy, I might find the missing link. Indeed, I may tell you I have found a clue, just the shadow of something that, if I could develop it, might prove of wonderful value to both of us."

"Oh! if you could find out anything that would throw light upon this dark wrong they have done Philip, these men—"

"Well, Olive, I think we may hope. Now, may I begin to cross-question you?"

Olive smiled sadly. "Go on, my little lawyer."

"First, then, were you personally acquainted with this Percy?"

"No."

"You have seen him?"

"At the trial; yes."

"Describe him."

"A blonde man, handsome, some would call him, with a soft, languid voice. I did not observe further."

"Would you know him if you saw him again?"

"Certainly. His was a rather uncommon face, and then the association—"

"Just so," interrupting her; "and would he know you?"

"I think not. I was heavily veiled, by Philip's order."

"Now, try to recall all that Philip has told you of this man."

"They were college students together. Philip said that Percy was indolent and vain, and too fond of female society of any sort or grade. He made wonderful progress in such studies as he chose to apply himself to, and, had he been less of a sybarite, might have obtained high rank as a scholar. But he was erratic, full of queer conceits, and never made himself popular with either professors or students."

"Social standing not good, eh? Now, as to his finances."

Olive looked somewhat surprised at this question, but replied: "His parents were not well to do, but he was a favorite with a rich old uncle, who paid his college expenses and made him a liberal allowance. However, he fell into disgrace just before his class graduated, and his uncle cast him off. He never took his degree."

"What was the occasion of his disgrace?"

"Some scandalous affair with a mechanic's daughter; the particulars I did not learn."

"Of course not. They are of no consequence. This happened how long ago?"

Olive mused. "Philip is now thirty-three; this was twelve years ago."

"Good! Did he hear of Mr. Percy after that?"

"Yes; in less than a year, he married a wealthy woman, ten years his senior, and a widow, so it was reported. Percy, it is said, denied this marriage, and continued to live and go and come, like a bachelor. If the marriage ever occurred, it was kept, for some reason, very much under the rose. Be this as it may, Percy was always provided with money from some source. He used to gamble sometimes, but was not an habitual gamester. Philip said he was too much of a sybarite and ladies' man to be wedded to such sports."

"Yet he played with Lucian Davlin, and lost heavily?"

"True."

"Well, is this all you have to tell of Mr. Percy?"

"Not quite. About a year before the catastrophe of the hunting party, the uncle who had cared for him during his college career, died. Percy inherited his wealth, the old man, after all, making his will in favor of his graceless nephew." Olive paused for a moment, then added, "I believe that is all I can tell you of this man. I have not seen or heard of him since poor Philip was sent to prison."

Madeline sat gazing abstractedly into the grate fire, her hands clasped in her lap, working restlessly, as was their habit, when she was thinking deeply. Suddenly a sharp exclamation broke from her lips, and Olive turned towards her a look of surprised inquiry. But Madeline was clasping and unclasping her hands nervously, with eye-lashes lowered, and brow knitted in a frown.

"Olive," she said, after a long cogitation, "you have put into my hands another thread, a very valuable one. Don't ask me any questions now; I want to get my ideas in shape."

Olive's face wore an anxious look, but she had learned the lesson of patient waiting, so she quietly acquiesced, and then a long silence fell between them.

Madeline resumed the conversation, or rather recommenced it. She made no further mention of that part of the subject nearest the heart of Olive Girard. She made inquiries as to affairs and recent events at the village, talked of Claire, and finally said:

"Olive, I want you to go out with me during the day, and perhaps we had better go early. I must return to Bellair by to-morrow morning's train, you know."

"Yes; and I am sorry that you stay with us such a very short time. Where do you intend going, Madeline?"

"To a detective—that is, if you will repeat your generous offer, which I so cavalierly declined not long ago, to be my banker for an indefinite time."

"Gladly, dear child; now you are beginning to be sensible. But the detective—may I venture to inquire?" with assumed hesitation.

"You may," laughed Madeline. "And don't give me credit for all the ingenuity. True, I have racked my poor feminine brain and feminine instinct, coupled with the knowledge obtained by some keen experience with Treachery, Despair and Hate. These grim but very efficient instructors have aided me materially, simple, inexperienced girl as I was so recently—or so long ago, as it seems to me. And good old Aunt Hagar, who has been in this woful world many years—years full of vicissitudes and sharp life-lessons—is my counsellor and adviser. She aids me greatly with her shrewdness, and knowledge of the world and the folk in it. So we have discussed this point together and concluded that, in order to leave no loopholes open in our nice little net, we had better have the movements of Mr. Lucian Davlin closely watched while he is in the city."

"To discover—"

"Who he calls upon, and what manner of man he will choose to assume the role of 'physician from Europe,' etc. Without putting the full facts of the case into the hands of the officer, we will arrange to know all about the man who will help Davlin carry out their last scheme. No train shall leave the city on which he would by any possibility set out for Bellair accompanied by this sham physician, without the knowledge of our man, or men, of skill. All discoveries made are to be reported through you to Mademoiselle Celine Leroque who will receive said reports in propria personæ at the Bellair post-office. Then I must proffer a request that Doctor Vaughan will hold himself in readiness to come to Oakley, should I find it necessary to summon him, accompanied by another physician, or not, as shall be hereafter decided.

"I don't know how all this is to end, but these two steps appear to me to be in the right direction. I am ready to undertake your commissions, and act as your banker to the fullest extent of your needs."

After a few more words they decided that, as Claire did not return, and time was precious, they would order a carriage immediately, after luncheon, and pay a visit to the detective forthwith. Accordingly, half an hour earlier than usual, a light repast was served, and sparingly partaken of. Then having left a message for Miss Keith, who was momentarily expected, the two friends drove into the city.

CHAPTER XVIII.—THE HAND OF FRIENDSHIP WIELDS THE SURGEON'S KNIFE.

Returning two hours later, they found Claire impatiently waiting their arrival, radiantly beautiful, and overflowing with joy at sight of her beloved Madeline.

"You delightfully horrible girl!" she exclaimed, after greetings had been exchanged, and they had all seated themselves in the drawing room. "To think that you are growing more lovely every day, and that you go and hide all your beauty under an old fright of a wig, nasty blue spectacles and deformities of jackets! I declare, it's too bad! And then to wait on an old spinster who wears no end of false hair, and false teeth, and false—"

"Puzzled already. So much for not being a lady's maid; now I can enumerate every 'falsehood' assumed by that lady."

Then Madeline gave a ludicrous description of Miss Arthur and her peculiarities, causing even grave Olive to laugh heartily, and Claire to explain that she should watch the advertisements, and try playing ladies' maid herself.

Madeline once more recounted, in brief, the state of affairs now existing at Oakley, or as much as she had told Olive, during which recital impulsive Claire kept up a running fire of comments, indicative of surprise, indignation, disgust and very one-sided interest.

"I never heard of such a nest of vultures," she exclaimed, excitedly, when Madeline had completed her story "Why, it's worse than a chapter out of a French drama. Goodness gracious, Madeline Payne, I wish I could help you deal out justice to these wretches! Where is my fairy godmother now, that she don't come and convert me into a six-foot brother, to take some of this burden out of your little weak hands?"

"Not so weak as you may think, you little warrior. These hands," holding them up to view, "have a very strong cause, let me tell you—and you think you would like to help me?" laughing oddly.

"Wouldn't I!" with a fierce nod that made her two companions laugh again.

The afternoon was wearing away, and Madeline began to grow restless, at finding no opportunity for saying a word in private to Claire. At last fortune favored her. Olive, seeing her gardener digging about a little summer-house, which was a favorite retreat on a warm afternoon, bethought herself of a plan for adding to its comfort, by laying down certain vines, etcetera, for next season's growing. So she bade the girls note how she should have improved her arbor by another season, and hurried out to begin an argument, that from previous experience she knew would be hotly contested.

This was Madeline's opportunity. And as soon as Olive was out of hearing, she turned to Claire, saying:

"Claire, I have not told you, nor Olive, all that I have discovered. For reasons, which you will understand later, I have thought it best to make them known to you first. We must invent some excuse for absenting ourselves from the parlor for a while."

Claire looked grave and somewhat startled for an instant, but recovering her composure she said, simply: "I am at your disposal, dear."

"I think I had better go to my room and lie down," meaningly. "Tell Olive, when she comes in, that I feel fatigued, and have gone to my room to rest. Then you had better plead letters to write and follow me. Can you manage it?"

"Easily," smiled Claire. "Why, Bonnie Alleen this becomes more and more mysterious and interesting."

"Wait before you pass judgment; now I am gone"

Madeline quitted the drawing-room and sauntered leisurely up-stairs.

When Olive reappeared, Claire carried out the little programme, as arranged, and hastened to join Madeline, musing as she went:

"What could have induced that old darling to confide in stupid little me, while she leaves wise, thoughtful Olive in the dark?"

Madeline was pacing the floor when Claire entered the room. She motioned her to a chair, and pushed the bolt in the door, thus rendering intrusion impossible.

"What can you be thinking of, Madeline, with that gloomy face?" exclaimed Claire, nestling into an easy chair as she spoke.

"I am thinking, Claire," replied Madeline, gazing down at her sadly, "of the first time I ever saw your sister, and of the errand on which she came to me. How full of hope I was that morning! How radiant the day seemed, and how confident I was of happiness to come; as confident as you are to-day, Claire, darling."

There was something in Madeline's tone that sounded almost like pity, as she uttered the last words. Claire started and colored, but still was silent.

"Olive did a brave, generous deed but at that time I almost hated her for it," musingly.

"Oh, no, Madeline," interposed Claire, "you don't mean just that, I am sure. You never really hated our noble, unhappy Olive,."

"I felt very wicked, I assure you," smiling faintly. Then, abruptly: "How should you have felt, similarly placed?"

"I?" wonderingly; "mercy! I can't tell."

"Claire, think," in a tone almost of entreaty. "I want to know—I must know."

"You must know? Why, Madeline?"

"Because—because I want to find out what is in you; how strong you are."

Claire looked more and more mystified "State your case, then," she said, quietly. "I will try and analyze myself."

"Good; now, Claire Keith, suppose that you love some man very much, and you trust him without knowing why, for no other reason than that you love him. When you are happiest, because you have but just parted from your lover—"

Claire started and colored a little.

"When you are thinking of the time, not far away, when you shall not part from him any more—suppose that just then I, a friend whom you have loved, come to you and say: 'This hero of yours is false; he is a two-faced villain; he has deceived you; he is not honorable; he will betray you if he can.' What would you answer me?"

Claire lifted her head proudly. "I would make you take back every word you had uttered, or prove it beyond the shadow of a doubt!"

"And if I proved it?"

"Then I would thank you; and hate myself for having been deceived, and him for having deceived me."

"Would you grieve for him, Claire?"

Quick as thought came the answer:

"Grieve for him! No; I could no more love a liar and a villian than I could caress a viper! I tell you, Madeline, I understand your feelings when you say that you hate Lucian Davlin," shuddering.

"And you would not hate me also for rudely undeceiving you?"

"Hate my best friend; my benefactor? No!"

"I am thankful!"

"But Madeline, what does all this mean? Is this what you wanted to say to me? What can my feelings have to do with your case?"

"Claire!—Madeline's face was very sad again—"this case is our case."

"Our case?"

"Yes, ours; Olive's, yours, mine. And now I am going to test your strength."

Claire did not look very strong just then.

"You saw Edward Percy to-day."

Claire Keith sprang to her feet. "How do you know that? And what has he to do with the case?"

"I know it because we, Mr. Percy and myself, came to this city by the same train, and I could easily surmise that his business here was with you."

"Well?" haughtily.

"Ah!" sadly; "you are almost angry with me now. But listen, Claire. Are you perfectly familiar with all the facts connected with poor Philip Girard's sad disgrace?"

"I think so," coldly.

"You know that he was convicted upon the testimony of Lucian Davlin and another?"

"Yes."

"Do you recall the name of the man who was wounded, so said the jury, by Mr. Girard?"

Up sprang Claire, her eyes blazing. "Madeline," she cried. 'I see what you are coming at. You have got into your head the ridiculous idea that this man Percy and Edward Percy are the same. It is absurd!'

"Why?"

"Because—because it is!" Then, as if the matter were quite settled, "why, he must have been in Europe at the time."

"Claire, you are getting angry with me, and I have a long story to tell you. But there is an easy way to settle this matter. Are you willing to let me take the picture you have of Edward Percy, and accompany me into Olive's presence while I ask her if she ever saw the original?"

Nothing else could have so effectually quenched Claire's wrath. She saw that Madeline had some strong reason for her strange words. Sitting down with paling cheeks and trembling limbs, she thought. Then looking across at Madeline, she said, wearily:

"I can't understand you at all, Madeline. It never once occurred to me to connect the man who brought all that trouble upon poor Philip with my Edward Percy. It does not seem possible that they could be the same. I had supposed the other Percy to be a man like—like Davlin."

"My dear, did you ever see Davlin?"

"No."

"And you have fancied him a sort of handsome horse jockey, and this Percy one of the same brotherhood?"

"Perhaps!" smiling a little.

"Claire, Lucian Davlin is an Apollo in person, a courtier in manner, and a Mephistopheles at heart. And Percy is an abridgement of Davlin."

"I can't see," said Claire rather frostily, "even if Edward Percy is the man who was wounded by some unknown person five years ago, why he must of necessity be a villain and a deceiver. It would be very, very unpleasant, of course, to find that such was the case. But I could not hate Edward Percy for that, even if the fact must separate us."

"Claire, Edward Percy is not only the man who helped send your sister's husband to prison, but he is a villain doubly perjured; a deceiver, a betrayer. If justice ever gets her due he will end his days in the penitentiary."

Then, seeing that Claire was about to speak: "Let me finish; now you shall have your proof."

She recounted all there was to tell, from the day when Claire showed her the picture and she distrusted the face, to the present moment.

Claire Keith listened in immovable silence: not a muscle quivered. For many minutes after Madeline had finished her recital, she sat staring straight before her, like a statue. At length she arose and crossed to the door, drew back the bolt with a steady hand, put up a warning finger, and said, in a voice like frozen silver: "Wait;" then disappeared.

Madeline scarcely had time to wonder what she meant, before Claire was back, standing before her, calm and cold as an iceberg. She held in her hand the picture of Edward Percy, with the face turned away, and this she extended to Madeline.

"It is best that we make no mistakes," she said, quietly; "go show that to Olive. Dont tell her how it came into your possession; ask her if it is he. Then come back to me.

"Shall I tell her— began Madeline.

"Tell her nothing until you have brought me back the picture.

She pushed her toward the door.

Madeline walked downstairs, sorely puzzled, but thinking fast. "She fights these facts bravely," she muttered. "Does she doubt, I wonder?"

Olive was sitting before the window, watching the movements of John, the gardener, when Madeline entered the parlor. Going straight to her, she placed the picture in her hand, and said:

"Do you know that face?"

Olive Girard gave a startled cry.

"Madeline, how did you come by this?"

"No matter," calmly; "do you know the picture?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"The man who sent my husband to prison—Percy."

Madeline took the picture from her hand. "Are you sure?"

"I could swear to the face after these five years."

"Thank you, Olive. Now be patient; I must go back to my room for a little while. Don't ask me any questions yet. When I come down I will tell you how I obtained this, and why I have talked to you so much of this man."

Madeline walked out of the room, leaving Olive staring after her in bewilderment.

To be Continued

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" "	"	"	75	"
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