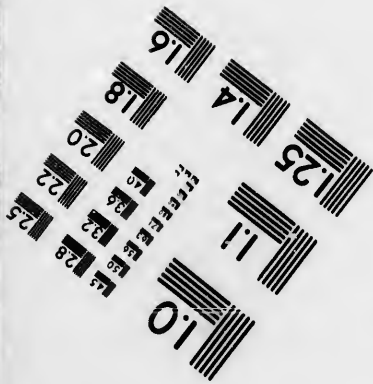
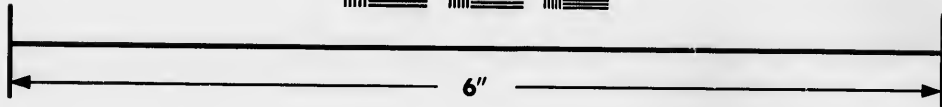
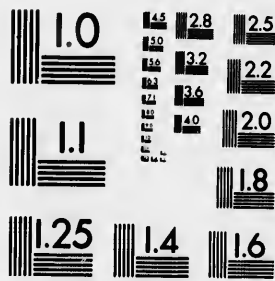


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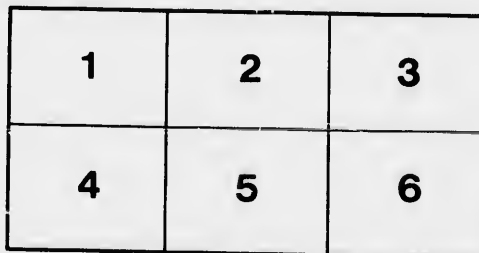
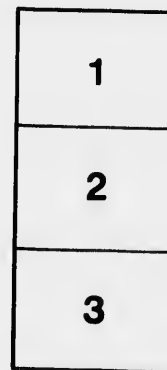
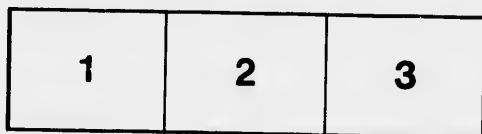
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PRETTY MISS SMITH.

CHAPTER I.

WE were schoolfellows, Mary Smith and I, with this difference, that whereas she, the handsome, well-dressed niece of two rich men, was considered to be an honor and an ornament to that school ; I, the less attractive daughter of a poor country vicar, had to look upon it as an honor to be there.

Not that I was specially ill-favored. I wish modestly to put on record that I was a well enough looking girl in my way ; but then that was not the way of Mary Smith. Despite her prosaic name, she was quite a romantically beautiful girl, tall and slender, with fair hair that was just not golden (it's only ugly, red-faced girls that have your real golden hair), and the prettiest pair of pleading grey eyes I ever saw. She made us all look "dumpy." No valiant struggles would ever get my waist to the slimness of hers ; no backboards and dumbbells, dancing masters and calisthenic exercises, sufficed to give anybody else's figure the suppleness and grace of hers. Mary was not exactly what you would call clever. If you wanted to get ahead of her in anything you always could ; but she was sweet and bright, full of fun and innocent mischief, and the nicest girl in the whole school. She and I were chums ; and unlike most friendships of the sort, the chumminess lasted all the time

we were at school together, and right into our lives afterwards. As I frequently pointed out to her, this was greatly to my advantage ; for it was a much greater treat to me to be invited up to her uncle's big house in Bayswater than it was for her to stay at Little Rainham Vicarage, overrun with mice and children !

Mary was an orphan, but the luckiest orphan I ever met. Her mother had made a mesalliance, but she and her husband died early, and her two brothers eagerly disputed for the charge of her little daughter. It was Charles Marshall, the younger brother, a thriving solicitor, who succeeded in carrying off the prize, on the ground that as he had a wife and children himself he could look after her better than his brother, who was a bachelor, and often an absentee from England on account of his health. Thomas, the elder, a rich millowner, assented in this view, and contented himself by sending Mary, from time to time, handsome presents of furs and jewellery. No wonder, therefore, that she grew up with rather extravagant tastes. Diamond brooches, to a properly regulated mind, suggest silk and velvet and rich lace ; while nobody can deny that a mantle trimmed with sable tails cries aloud for a victoria to show it off. But with her Uncle Charles, in whose house she lived when she left school, she had nothing in the way of luxury to wish for.

What a change it was for me, when they asked me up to town, as they were often good enough to do, to walk about on carpets which were not threadbare, to dine at a table glittering with glass and silver and soft lights, to be waited on by attentive footmen, to drive about shopping in the morning, to have a box at the theatre at night. It seemed as if people living under such conditions ought to be always tripping about wreathed in smiles, like the fairies in one of Mr. Augustus Harris' pantomimes ; but truth to tell, Mrs. Marshall was rather a peevish, complaining sort

of person, her daughter Maud was discontented, her younger son Ted was sulky, and Tom, the eldest of the three, was rude and cynical. The only member of the family who seemed really to enjoy life was the head of it, Mr. Charles Marshall, whose fair, open, handsome face always seemed to me typical of the "fine old English gentleman" of the song. Indeed, I often regretted, for his sake, that the days of powder, patches, and knee-breeches, in which he would have looked so well, were over. The whole household seemed to wake up into new life in the evening, when his jolly voice was heard in the hall; I never knew a personality less suggestive than his of the gloomy majesty of the law. He used to say he hid his villainy at the office, for fear of wearing it out by too constant use; but when we went to visit him in the city he was always the same. His only discernible failing was a weakness for champagne, which, he said, helped him to forget his crimes. His wife was too dissatisfied at having to remain in London when she wanted to live in Paris to be very fond of him, and the children had been too much spoilt to care for either of their parents; but Mary and I adored Mr. Marshall.

I am certain it was only because he was Mr. Marshall's son, and because there was nobody else about for me to make an idiot of myself over, that I committed the great, the unheard-of folly of falling in love with Tom Marshall. To do myself justice, he did try very hard to make me, thinking, no doubt, that it was great fun to make a goose of the little country girl, and saying to himself that even if the game were hardly worth the candle, at any rate it kept his hand in. He was not good-looking; his hair was inclined to be sandy, and he had a snub nose; but these attractions were enough for me evidently; for, although I guessed he was only amusing himself, and although he delighted in making me mad with jealousy, I was certainly by the time I was three and twenty hopelessly in love with him. He

was in a stock broker's office in the City, was shrewd, and considered likely to get on, and thought a great deal of himself. So much for my taste.

Mary knew all about it, teased me unmercifully, and said he was not half good enough. Mary was a great flirt, and had a decidedly low opinion of all her admirers, so that I often felt it my duty to warn her that she might die an old maid after all, or else fall more abjectly in love than I.

When, therefore, we learned from Tom that Hilary Gold, Mr. Marshall's ward, was coming to England after six years of a roving life abroad, Tom and I joined in declaring that Mary's fate was sealed; she was to form a romantic attachment to Mr. Gold. Mary entered into the fun heartily, and vowed she had long felt that the unknown Hilary was her fate. When the day came on which Mr. Marshall had announced that he would bring him home to dinner, we were all in a state of great excitement, and Tom, who had come home early from the City, was working up our interest in him by fabulous accounts of Mr. Gold's beauty and wealth. Tom's sister Maud, who looked down upon the City, and who was occupied with a novel to escape the tedious frivolity of our conversation, looked presently into the conservatory, where the rest of us were, with an expression of disgust.

"Really, Tom," she said, "I don't know what fun you can find in telling all those ridiculous stories! I heard papa telling mamma only this morning that Hilary Gold had anticipated all his money, and——"

"Hold your tongue, Maud," said Tom sharply. "When you overhear anything about people's private affairs, you should keep it to yourself."

Tom looked rather startled by this bit of news, however.

"Well," said Maud, flushing, "I didn't suppose there was any harm in repeating what I heard just to you."

"You have only broken a young girl's heart," said Tom, looking at Mary with mock melodramatic compassion.

"Never mind," said Mary, throwing herself into an heroic attitude, "I will go out charing. For what is money where there is love?"

"No," I broke in. "Your Uncle Thomas will leave you all his money, and you will be happy and rich ever after."

"Come, not so fast," interrupted Tom; "as I was christened after him, and brought up with the idea that I should come into his money, if he leaves it to Mary she will just have to marry me."

"What a sacrifice," cried I, with my heart beating absurdly fast at the mere notion of his marrying anybody.

"No," said Mary, who was as usual in high spirits, and brimming over with mischief, "you little understand the devotion of a noble heart. This is what I would do!"

She sprang up from the American chair in which she had been sitting, clasped her hands, and rolled up her great grey eyes to the roof of the conservatory. She looked so sweetly pretty in her high white silk dinner dress, with diamonds flashing in her ears and on her hands, and her pretty fair hair shining in the light of the fairy-lamp, that both Tom and I watched her in silent admiration, as she went through her little histrionic performance with great spirit.

"Hilary!" she cried, "Dearest Hilary!" with elaborate pantomime of passionate endearment, "Fondly loved one of my heart! Little dost thou understand the workings of the Master Love in a woman's breast. Poor thou mayest be, Hilary; penniless even. But what are bread and butter, beef, potatoes, candles; in fact, all the luxuries of the bloated rich, when we truly love. And do we not truly love? Oh, my Hilary. Does not thy heart beat in eternal sympathy with mine? Are not thy black locks the very foil nature designed for my fair ones? Yes, my Hilary, e'en before I knew thee I felt thou wast my fate, my——"

At that moment poor Mary stopped, seeing the awful change in my face.

"Sh—sh ! Sh—sh !" I hissed out feebly.

It was too late. Suddenly attracted by a look of indescribable wickedness on Tom's face, my eyes had followed the direction of his, and I had seen that standing just behind the curtains of the drawing-room stood two gentlemen. At my warning, Mary turned quickly, pulled aside the curtain, and discovered her Uncle Charles, and—Hilary Gold? There could be no doubt about that, for the very expression of the young man's face betrayed him. Mr. Marshall's hand was on his ward's arm, and a look of intense satisfaction mingled with the amusement on his face. Poor Mary could have sunk underground for shame : so could I, for her sake.

"I—I didn't see you, uncle. We were acting," she stammered, with a crimson face.

"So we supposed, eh, Hilary?" rejoined Mr. Marshall in great good humor. "Let me introduce you to Miss Mary Madcap Smith, a young lady warranted to get into more mischief in a day than a regiment of boys could in a week."

Mary was subdued enough now ; she could not even look the new-comer in the face and see what a deep impression her beauty had made upon him. Hilary Gold, without a moment's hesitation, had fallen twenty fathoms deep in love with her. Tom and I saw it at once, and exchanged glances of amusement. It already seemed to me as if that pretty piece of acting of Mary's for our amusement might turn out to be the fairy-like prelude to a real romance. For he was a handsome young fellow, rather tall and slimly-built, with black eyes and hair ; quite the sort of man one would have chosen for her, to look at, at any rate.

All through dinner Tom and I watched with deep interest the progress of his passion, for it was quite clear that

Hilary Gold fell more in love each minute. It was also plain that Mr. Marshall looked upon this incipient attachment without disfavor, a circumstance which appeared greatly to astonish Tom. When, after dinner, Mr. Marshall asked his ward if he would come into his study, as he wanted a little private conversation with him, Tom came up to the piano, where I was dutifully thrumming waltzes, and leaned upon it with an expression of utter dismay.

"I can't think what the gov'nor's about," he said, kindly assisting my musical efforts by an accompaniment on the wires of the piano. "He evidently sees this fellow's over head and ears in love with Mary. He evidently doesn't mind it, and yet, Gold has spent all his money, he certainly can't marry a girl without a farthing, and with Mary's extravagant tastes into the bargain."

"But why shouldn't she have her Uncle Thomas' money when he dies?" I asked. "I don't want to be unfeeling, but he must die some day; and as he's so delicate, he will probably die long before Mary."

"It will be a great shame if he does leave it to her," said Tom shortly, "when the gov'nor's had all the expense of bringing her up."

"I'm quite sure Mr. Marshall would never look upon it in that way," I said indignantly.

"He would be a fool if he didn't," said Tom, drily, "considering that he has a family and a position to keep up, while Mary Smith has neither."

I was disgusted with Tom, and I rose from the piano to get away from him. But he followed me across the room, and, seizing me by the arm, forced me to listen.

"Look here, Georgie," said he, "you think it very shocking for me to speak like that, but perhaps you don't quite know how much depends on this selfish old uncle of mine whom nobody even pretends to care for. Every letter he writes announces that he's dying, so life for him

can't be worth very much. Now my tastes are expensive, and the gov'nor, with all the claims he has on him, will never be able to leave me enough to support them. But if Uncle Thomas' money came to us, I could afford to marry somebody I liked, and that somebody would be you."

Perhaps this declaration was not, on the whole, much to be proud of; but I was so fond of Tom, and this was so much the warmest protestation of affection he had ever made me, that I began to tremble and to cry, and kept on trembling and crying when I found it made him gentle and kind to me. We were growing quite tender over the hard fate that makes it impossible for a young city man who respects himself to exist without the best wines and cigars, a dog-cart, and a couple of nice hacks, when the drawing room door opened, and Hilary Gold came in.

We were startled by the change in his appearance. His face was so white that, with his black hair and eyes, he looked, as Tom unkindly said, "like an engraving." He looked round the room quite wildly until he saw Mary, and then walked across to her with his eyes fixed upon her with a mad, bewildered stare. She was frightened, and uttered an exclamation of horror as he stopped in front of her, and began at once to address her in a hoarse, trembling voice. He was evidently suffering from some painful shock, and seemed unable to understand or remember anything except the presence of the girl he had fallen deeply in love with.

"Forgive me if I startled you," he said; and the words seemed to be drawn from him by a great effort. "I don't think I shall ever again see you after to-night, so I may—I must tell you what it is in my mind to say." He paused a moment, and put a shaking hand over his forehead and through his thick black hair. Then he went on without the least consciousness that others could hear him besides Mary. "When I first saw you to-night I knew I had met

my ideal ; I know it better now that I have talked to you. I made up my mind to win you—for my wife. But now I find——” His tones grew more passionate, and his gaze upon her face wilder—“ that I—I have no money. I have spent it all. Therefore I cannot hope. I felt I must tell you this ; it will not pain you, because you don't know me enough to know how well I would have loved you. Good-bye.”

“ Good-bye. I—I am very sorry,” murmured Mary, holding out her pretty hand, and looking shy, confused, and touched.

Hilary Gold pressed her hand in his, and looked into her face with such a strange expression, almost of proprietorship, that I was afraid he was going to kiss her. But as soon as she, with bent head and blush, tried to withdraw her hand, he gently let it go.

“ God bless you,” he said. And turning in a sort of dazed way, as if he did not know where to go, he walked unsteadily out of the room without a look back, and a few moments later we heard the front door slam as he let himself out of the house.

As soon as this sound fell upon her ear Mary made a step forward, as if with the impulse to detain her unfortunate lover ; then she sank down on a seat and burst into tears. Neither Maud nor Mrs. Marshall was in the room. To my great relief and joy, Tom did not begin to laugh, as I had expected, but very quietly left us together.

CHAPTER II.

HILARY GOLD's dramatic appearance and disappearance made a profound and lasting impression on at least three of us—Mary, Tom and myself. Mr. Marshall also showed much kindly sympathy with "the poor lad," as he called him; but then, as he said, as a man makes his bed, so he must lie upon it, and Hilary had known perfectly well that his fortune could not hold out at the rate at which he had been squandering it. I was glad that Tom took Hilary's part very warmly; it was only logical that he should, considering how extravagant his own tastes were. On Mary the young fellow's earnestness, and perhaps his good looks, had left quite a deep effect; and I could see how anxious she became when Mr. Marshall mentioned that the young man had gone no one knew where.

For my part, though I felt sorry for Hilary's disappointment, I did not think he had taken it in the best or most manly way. He should not have at once given up the idea of winning Mary when he found he had no money, but should have held his tongue and set about making some; at least, that was my opinion. But Tom said I was too hard.

When I went back home to the Vicarage a week later the subject was no longer talked about, and I thought it better in my letters thence not to allude to it. I wanted Mary to marry somebody else, somebody nice—anybody but Tom.

I don't think I ever received such a surprise in my life as I did some weeks later, one May morning, when the post brought a big, bulky letter, with wide black edge,

from Mary. The very first words prepared me for a thunderbolt.

It began .

MY DEAREST GEORGIE,—

I am going to take your breath away, so sit down in an armchair and hold fast to the sides before you get any further. Now then for it. Ready? Well, then, my Uncle Thomas has died and left me all his money. I am richer than Uncle Charles, richer than *anybody*, except the Queen and Baroness Burdett-Coutts, and a few other people like that! At least so it seems to me. I can't realize it a bit. Never to have to look at a frock any more and to say, "Well, it's rather shabby *here*, and it wants a bit of fresh trimming *there*, but it'll have to *do!*" Never to have to pass a confectioner's shop where the tarts look particularly nice with your head turned the other way because your allowance is getting low! Never to take an omnibus instead of a hansom, nor to wear English boots instead of French ones. Never in fact to have to do anything you don't like any more! Isn't the prospect stupendous? And the worst of all is, I *can't* be sorry for poor Uncle Thomas, when I ought to be crying my eyes out just out of gratitude. But how can I? I can only just remember his coming to see me once when I was a little girl at school, when I took him for a "bogey," and was so hurriedly frightened that I wouldn't take the bright half-crown he offered me. I do try hard to be sorry, but I can't, I can't. Try to imagine it, Georgie! All the shops of Bond-street and Regent-street full of things all for oneself, if one pleases! I am sending you a present, just to show it's all real—a little diamond brooch. Ha, ha! I am going to look down upon you now, and patronize you, and tell people "Georgie Oliver's a very good girl in her way!" I'm purse-proud, Georgie, and I feel it *growing* on me. You are good, and unselfish, and clever, and witty; but I am rich, rich, and so henceforward you will have to take quite "a back seat." I can use what slang I like now, nobody will dare to say it is "bad form" in "Rich Miss Smith."

Write to me *at once*, and tell me what you think.

Yours ever affectionately,

MARY.

P.S.—I am going to marry Hilary Gold. I met him one day; he ~~didn't~~ want to speak to me, but I made him. I told him of my good

fortune. We talked quite a long time. We went to Kensington Gardens. When I went back I told Uncle Charles I was engaged to Hilary. He was very angry, indeed, I think, though he did not say much.

Write and tell me what you *really* think.

I did not write and tell what I *really* thought, as it would have been rather too straight to the point. What I thought was that Mr. Marshall was quite right, and that Hilary ought to be ashamed of himself. To give up all idea of winning Mary when he found he had spent his own money, but to be quite ready to marry her and live on hers, seemed to me to give evidence of a nature too weak and worthless to give adequate support to Mary's, which was far more sweet than strong. I wrote the best letter I could in the circumstances, thanking her for her present, which was too handsome an ornament for me to wear, and hoping she would be very happy in her new life. I suppose the letter seemed cold and unsatisfactory to her in all the pride and glow of her good fortune, for nearly three months passed without my once hearing from her again.

The next news I got from Mary came one August evening in a most unexpected manner. Hearing Bennie, our old retriever, barking at someone coming up the garden, I looked out of the window, tea-caddy in one hand and caddy-spoon in the other, and saw Tom Marshall making passes at the old dog with his umbrella.

"Hallo!" said Tom. "You're not dead, Georgie?"

"N-not qu-u-ite," stammered I, coming to the French window and holding out the hand with the caddy-spoon in my bewilderment.

Tom took the spoon, examined it, murmured "Silver," and put it in his pocket.

"How are you?" I stammered.

"Not so well as you will be when you hear the magnificent prospect that's in store for you."

"What's that?"

"To be my wife. I don't say at once, but some day. These treats are too splendid to come quickly. My Uncle Thomas' money will do the trick for us."

"Didn't it go to Mary then, after all?"

"Yes, in the first place. But if she dies unmarried, it comes to my father, and consequently to me."

I laughed derisively.

"Mary die unmarried? The prettiest girl in London! Engaged too!"

"That's as good as 'off.' A lunatic can't marry."

"A *lunatic*?"

Tom nodded.

"Yes, poor girl. She's going, or I might say gone, off her head."

"Mary—mad? It's not true. I'll not believe it."

"Go and see her, and then you will."

Trembling from head to foot, and too miserable to say more without danger of bursting into tears, I signed to him to come into the house, to give me an explanation.

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CHAPTER III.

"TOM," I panted out, as soon as I had brought him into the dining-room and shut the door, "it is not true, of course you were only joking! Mary Smith *mad*? It can't be!"

"It is though," said Tom, with a nod, looking carefully over the things on the table, and finally fixing his eyes with great interest on the jam. "I say, is that quince preserve?"

"Now I know you were only in fun, or you would never be so heartless as to talk in that off-hand fashion."

"Indeed, my Georgina, then I'm afraid you don't yet know your Thomas if you think thus." And he took up a biscuit, spread it with preserve, and began to eat it with much enjoyment. "I should be very sorry to have a hand in sending any young woman off her head; but if Providence, wishing to put me in the way of a good thing, sends off her head a young woman who stands between me and a fortune, I should think it hypocritical to pretend I'm sorry."

"Tell me about it," I said, ready to cry

"Well, perhaps you know that Mary is bound by her uncle's will to live in the old house adjoining the distillery at Battersea that brings in her money. If she leaves the house, except for a short holiday, she is to lose her fortune. Uncle Thomas had a notion that she might be ashamed that his money came from such a plebian source as distilling, and so determined to take it out of her that way. Or perhaps he had some less kind motive: for anyhow, three months' living there has driven her cranky."

"How do you know?"

"Went down to see her; was refused admittance; couldn't get over the lodge-keeper, so got over a brick wall. Met Mary in the kitchen garden; on seeing me she turned as white as one of her own turnips—took me for a ghost, I think; tried to shriek and run away, asked all sorts of foolish questions, kept peeping about her as if she was nervous; and finally, when I asked her if she was happy in her new home, began to tremble all over and burst out crying.

"The place doesn't agree with her; she must go away," said I, decidedly.

"Indeed she must do nothing of the sort," said Tom more decidedly still. "If she once goes away she will never go back, and the distillery will be lost to us all."

"What does that matter compared with the poor girl's reason and health and happiness? She must be seen by a doctor at once, and if he says it is the influence of the place where she is living that is harming her, she must make the sacrifice, and you must put up with it. What does her charming *fiancé* say?"

"Hilary Gold? He doesn't have a chance of saying much. Lately she's refused to see him, he told me so himself."

I said nothing to this, being absorbed in consideration of the strange intelligence. I was full of vague suspicion, which Tom's unfeeling manner had greatly increased. So that when, for almost the first time, he tried to be sentimental with me, I would not listen to him, but repulsed him so coldly and decisively that he seemed disconcerted and almost unhappy. I maintained this attitude throughout the evening; and when, as he went away, he asked me quite humbly if I would not look kindly upon him "if any luck came to him," I told him plainly that if luck came to him through a misfortune to my best friend,

I would look more kindly on a pick-pocket than I would upon him.

The news he had brought tortured me, and I can't stand torture long. So next day I invaded dear old papa's library just when he had got to a critical point in his sermon, and asked him if he could spare me away for a little while. He didn't ask where I wanted to go; he seemed broken down, helpless, as he always was if one broke anything to him unexpectedly.

"You know, papa, Minnie is quite able to keep house for you now," said I reassuringly. "And her hand at pastry is lighter than mine."

Minnie was the next in age to me, and a good clever girl.

"If she can only keep the children quiet I don't mind," said my father reluctantly. "And tell the Marshalls they mustn't keep you long; I want you back."

He thought I had had an invitation from Bayswater. I hope I am a fairly honest person—but I did not undeceive him. Besides, I really was going to Mr. Marshall's first, for I wanted his advice.

I went up to town the very next day, left my one small trunk at Liverpool street, and took an omnibus to Mr. Marshall's office, in Lincoln's Inn. The heat was intense, and when I got inside the enclosure I was obliged to walk very slowly. For this reason I had time to notice the few people I met, and to remark especially the appearance of a woman who was walking, even more slowly than I, up and down, up and down a short "beat" which she seemed to have marked out for herself. The first things I noticed about her were her tall figure and her pretty fair hair. Next I saw that she was young, about seven or eight and twenty I should have guessed; that she was so very, very fair that if she had not slightly darkened her eyelashes and eyebrows with cosmetic they would scarcely have been

seen at all; and lastly, that there was something indefinable about her face which at one moment fascinated and at the next repelled me. She was dressed neatly and quietly in grey, with a black bonnet and veil, and her dress and walk were quite ladylike; yet I did not think she was a lady.

It was chiefly because there was nobody else now in sight that, as I drew nearer to my destination, I still watched this woman. I noticed next that when her back was turned to me she went rather fast, and that it was in returning only that she walked so slowly. She was apparently waiting for some one, and every now and then she raised her eyes, which were generally fixed upon the ground, and shot a sort of stealthy, cat-like look at one of the houses. And it proved to be the house to which I was going. When I found this out, some feeling which I hope and believe was not all vulgar curiosity made me drag my feet along still more slowly, and the woman, then seeming to see me for the first time, refrained from any more glances at the house until a gentleman came out from it.

Upon this gentleman the woman fixed her eyes with a curious light in them, a light which seemed to give her face an unpleasant hungry look. I remember that the expression of her face gave me an odd sort of feeling that I was sorry for this stranger, whoever he was, on whom her gaze lighted like that, so that I glanced curiously from her to the gentleman.

But he was no stranger; it was Hilary Gold.

He did not see me, he did not see her. He was walking away with hurried steps, and an expression of the deepest gloom and despondency upon his face. I should have run after him to ask him about Mary, but somehow the presence of that woman with the fair hair and stealthy eyes prevented me. So I went straight on to the house he had just left, and only turned at the door for a last glance at his rapidly disappearing figure.

The woman in the grey dress had left her beat, and seemed to be following him at a distance.

I found Mr. Marshall as kind as usual, but not quite as cheerful. Hilary had just been with him, he said.

"I know," I said, probably with a slight tightening of the lips. "I saw him go down the steps just before I came in."

"Ah! Did you speak to him?"

"No, he raced off with a scowl black enough to frighten anyone. Oh, Mr. Marshall, Tom says poor Mary's going mad; if she is, it is this Hilary who is driving her to it, I'm certain."

Mr. Marshall's look changed to one of deepest gravity.

"Sh—sh, my dear, you mustn't say things like that lightly. I am afraid myself that all is not quite right between them, but you must not lay all the blame hastily on the shoulders of the man, for no better reason than that you have seen him with a frown on his face."

But something in Mr. Marshall's manner encouraged me to believe that he agreed with me more nearly than his words implied. I jumped up impulsively and leaned over his great office desk, looking into his face.

"Are *you* satisfied with this treatment of Mary?"

He gave me a shrewd glance, and after a pause, during which he made pen-and-ink sketches on his blotting-pad, he said—

"Really I am hardly in a position to judge; I have only once seen Mary in the two months she has lived at Battersea. She then seemed changed certainly; but I don't know that we ought straightway to ascribe the change to Hilary. She seemed to have grown haughty and fanciful—so much so, indeed, that I was quite offended, and have never, as I tell you, been to see her in her own home."

"But she was not mad?"

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Tom's, who thinks any girl must be mad who doesn't jump at him."

Of course this speech gave me a sharp stab of jealousy. Tom had offended and disgusted me, but I was still faithful.

"You don't think so, do you, Mr. Marshall," I hesitatingly began again, trying to repress more closely personal feelings and to keep to Mary, "that this—that this Hilary Gold is—is what people call 'fast'?"

"My dear," he said hastily, "I am not much in his confidence. If there is in him a tendency to extravagance, and—well the amusements which extravagance in a young man usually means, we may trust that a happy marriage will cure him. We know that a taste say for racing may lead a man a little astray, but——"

"Racing!" I interrupted in alarm. "Why, if he is inclined that way, he might run through all poor Mary's money in a few months."

"Indeed he might. But remember, I only *suggested*; I don't *know*."

But the suggestion in his tone was stronger than the words, and I was dumb with consternation. He rose from his chair, evidently much distressed himself, and patted my shoulder kindly.

"Pray, be cautious, my dear girl, and don't accuse anybody rashly," he said. "You might do more harm than good, as I myself unwittingly did a short time ago, I fear. Are you going to try to see Mary?"

"Why do you say 'try to?' I am going to see her."

"Well, I hope with all my heart you will. You are on the side of her best interests, and may do good. But I must tell you that her latest caprice is a refusal to see anybody; even Tom only got a sight of her a little while ago by a trick."

I rose to go, trembling so much that I could scarcely stand. Everything I heard tended to convince me that

there was indeed something grievously wrong with my old school friend. I left the office hastily, with a sympathetic pressure of the hand from Mr. Marshall, in whose face I could see reflected all the anxiety I myself felt.

I had stayed a very short time with him, and in spite of the heat I hurried down to the Temple Station as fast as I could do, crazy with impatience to discover whether Mary Smith really would refuse to see her old friend. As I ran down the steps, therefore, I was just in time to see a meeting which gave me a shock.

The woman in the grey dress and black bonnet was walking quickly down the platform as I drew near; and I felt sure, as soon as I caught sight of Hilary standing by the bookstall, that she would speak to him.

She did so. He turned at once with a great start, as the train for West Brompton came in they were talking eagerly together. She followed him to the door of the carriage he entered, and I, having the curiosity to glance out of my window at her as the train moved off, saw a look of unmistakable satisfaction, as it seemed to me of an ugly kind, on her handsome features.

CHAPTER IV.

AT West Brompton I had to change trains, and so, of course, had Hilary Gold, who was also going to Battersea, I felt sure. I was very anxious not to have to speak to him, for I was too angry and disgusted to be civil. Who was this fair-haired woman, who followed him to the station, and at sight of whom he had started so guiltily? Was this the right sort of husband for sweet, pretty Mary, this spendthrift and, as Mr. Marshall thought, gambler, with doubtful female acquaintances? I tried to avoid him on the platform, where I had to wait for a train to take me to Battersea; but he caught sight of me, recognized and hastened to greet me.

"Miss Oliver!" he said. "This is a great pleasure to me. I don't think I could possibly have met anyone whom I had a stronger wish to see."

I let him shake my hand, but my manner must have been very cold. I thought this enthusiasm ridiculous, and the next moment, when he proceeded to ascribe it to my affection for Mary, I felt that it was hypocritical.

"Yes," he went on, when I had mumbled some conventional words which I didn't at all mean, "Mary has talked so much about you that I feel as if I had known you as long as she has."

"How is she?" I asked, to cut him short.

I was sorry not to be able to be more cordial, for, in spite of my prejudice, there was something about Mr. Gold which I rather liked. He had a simple, straightforward manner, and a way of looking one frankly in the face which would have made the fortune of any rogue.

His expression changed at my question. He saw that there was something wrong, and seemed puzzled by my tone.

"I haven't seen her for a fortnight," he said.

I raised my eyebrows slightly, for, indeed, this admission did not seem to savor of much lover-like devotion. Mr. Gold at once assumed an offended tone.

"I have had business to attend to," he went on.

"Yes?" said I, icily.

"And you don't know your friend as well as you suppose if you think she missed me."

"Well, I think it is not much to your credit if she didn't."

It was dreadfully rude to say this, I know. But I did mean it so heartily that it slipped out in spite of myself. It made Mr. Gold very angry, indeed.

"I—I believe ladies think," he stammered, "that there can be no better occupation for a man than studying their whims and caprices."

"Nobody could be less whimsical and capricious than Mary, I know that."

He seemed unfeignedly surprised.

"She has changed since she has known me then," he said shortly. "For she is fuller of mad fancies and jealous whims than any girl I ever met."

Now I did not like this. It chimed in too well with what I had recently heard about her; and, if it were true, it did, indeed, suggest an appalling change in my Mary.

"Is that all you have to complain of in her?" I asked in a trembling voice of ill-concealed anxiety.

"No. I don't like her choice of friends."

It was my turn to be angry. I had a retort ready.

"I think, Mr. Gold, if I may judge by what I have seen of your friends, that Mary's will compare with them very favorably."

"What do you mean, Miss Oliver?"

"I leave you to judge."

I had barely time to say this, for the Battersea train was on the point of starting. I carefully jumped into a compartment in which there was only one vacant seat, for I did not wish to enjoy any more of Hilary Gold's society. But I found, on getting out at Battersea, that he was quite as anxious to see no more of me as I was to see no more of him. For he ran down the steps and started off at a great pace for the distillery without so much as a glance at me.

I had to ask my way, and was directed to a busy street lined on the one side with riverside factories, and on the other with shops and small houses built for the convenience of the work-people, who were now, at the sound of the bell to cease work, pouring out from the factory gates in a noisy stream. At last I came to the "long, black wall, with two big gates a little way from one another," as Marshall's Distillery had been described to me. From the first of these gates, which was wide open, and led, as I could see, to the factory itself, a crowd of work-people came out.

As I approached the second gate I saw that Hilary Gold was standing there, talking to a stout man, whom I guessed to be the lodge keeper. Before I was near enough to hear more than the angry tone of the visitor and the surly tone of the servant I saw Hilary walk on away from me abruptly and impatiently, while the man in charge took a step out on to the pathway to shake his head and look after him.

My heart sank within me. If Hilary was not admitted, neither certainly should I be! Instead of being able to put on a bold face I felt that the consciousness that I had come on a vain errand made me particularly bashful and meek. As it happened, however, this fact proved my salvation, just as, in answer to my timid question whether

Miss Smith was at home, the lodge keeper replied rather curtly that he didn't know whether she was at home or not, but that in any case I could not see her, his wife ran out from the lodge just behind him, and said in a hasty whisper :

"John, John, perhaps it's one of the young women come after the place."

John, bless him! didn't think it was. But my gentility evidently did not greatly impress his better half, for she insisted on asking me, on tiptoe over her husband's shoulder, whether I *had* come after the place.

My first impulse was to answer "No" in such a tone of high-bred haughtiness as should cover Mrs. John with confusion at her mistake. My second, and that on which I acted, was to mumble meekly "Yes," and to enter through the closely guarded portals on the strength of the taradiddle, while the woman looked triumphantly at her husband, and he, with superior sagacity, for which I felt quite grateful, muttered, "Bless me, how they do dress themselves up! If I didn't take her for a lady!"

I walked down a long drive bordered by shrubs, flowers, and trees, until I reached the back of a big, plainly-built house, which might have been picturesque among trees, if it had not been recently "done up" in a very villainous manner. The ivy had been torn off, the space between the bricks had been picked out in glaring white, and the whole surface of the house looked as if it had been scraped. I was hesitating as to whether I should go in at an open door opposite me, or wander round in search of the front, when a stout lady with a florid complexion came to one of the ground floor windows, opened it and addressed me.

"Are you come about the situation?" she asked.

Look and tone were encouraging. I set the lady down as vulgar, but good-natured, and thinking I would have some fun I said much more boldly than before, "Yes."

"Ma'am," I added hastily.

She beckoned me in with another smile, and I entered, through the French window, a large double drawing-room which ran right through the house from back to front. The furniture was old-fashioned, stiff, and ugly; the ornaments were wax flowers, stuffed birds, alabaster vases, and other relics of the glass-shade and lustre period. There must indeed be something the matter with Mary when, having command of money, she suffered these abominations! The lady, whose appearance I now could examine more closely, was evidently one who had seen better days—and also worse ones. That is to say, her manners were better than her speech. It was not long before she explained this anomaly.

“I think you will suit us very well,” she said, when I had admitted that I “had not been out before;” “I want a very superior young person, just like yourself, in fact. More of a confidential maid than a parlor-maid really. I must tell you I am not quite the mistress here; I am chaperon to Miss Smith, a young lady of fortune; a most amiable person, but who has such indifferent health that I don’t quite like being left alone with her as it were. The responsibility is too great for me, the widow of a physician, and unused to anything derogatory.”

I wondered if the physician had married his cook. She was a good creature though, with self-complacent kindness beaming from every feature; she must have been handsome, too, in the days before shell-pink became lobster red, plumpness stoutness, and fair hair in need of dye.

“And am I to be maid to you, ma’am, or to the other lady?”

“Oh, Miss Smith has her own maid, and I am not supposed to have a maid at all. You are to help the parlor-maid and look after the house linen. But—but I want you to sleep in the next room to mine, so that if I should call to you in the night you would hear and come to me. Don’t you think the house is haunted,” she went on hastily, with

a nervous laugh ; " the girls who came last week all thought it must be, and refused to take the situation. But it is not so. It is only that Miss Smith is nervous, and—sometimes walks about the house at night, in fact."

The lady blurted this out in a frightened way. I was electrified. Mary a somnambulist ! What should I hear next ? Forgetting my interlocutor, I let my eyes rove out of the window by which I had entered. As I did so all my fears, all my doubts, received a shocking confirmation. Gliding rather than walking among the trees on a small lawn on the other side of the carriage drive, was a figure that looked to me like the wreck of my beautiful Mary. With a face white and drawn, a figure limp and stooping, a furtive, hesitating manner, this, I thought, could never be the girl whose only faults, a few months ago, had been levity, thoughtlessness, head-long frivolity. Was this what her uncle's fortune had brought her ?

I had risen from my seat, and was watching her spell-bound. This chaperon, whose name was Mrs. Camden, left her chair too, and came close to me to whisper :

" That is Miss Smith. And oh ! you wouldn't believe the change that's come over her in only three months' time. I can't make it out."

" No," said I slowly ; " but we must find out the cause, you know ; we must."

" You will stay then ? You'll take the situation ? You shall have good wages, anything you like," cried poor Mrs. Camden, with startling eagerness.

I had forgotten the part I was playing. Remembering it suddenly, and reflecting that I might be turned out ignominiously if I confessed, I said :

" Oh yes, I'll stay," and stepped closer to the window.

Whatever stratagem I might be forced to use, I could not leave the house until I had found out the reason of the change in my poor friend,

CHAPTER V.

MRS. CAMDEN seemed not to be able to make enough of me when she found me willing to accept the situation ; from this I was, of course, able to gather that there was some great drawback to it in the eyes of the young persons who had applied for it, and as she continued to assure me repeatedly that the house was *not* haunted, I came to the conclusion that it had the reputation of being so.

"Who lived here in Mr. Marshall's time, ma'am?" I asked Mrs. Camden, who seemed very willing to talk, and who had just informed me of the manner in which the distillery came into Miss Smith's possession.

"Nobody, I think, except a caretaker. And so, of course, stories got about of white ladies and things of that sort, as they always do of shut up houses."

"And does Miss Smith think she sees white ladies, ma'am?" asked I.

I thought it was very unlike the fun-loving Mary I used to know to be frightened by mere rumors of ghosts.

"I don't know what she thinks she sees," said Mrs. Camden, hastily. "I think it is some trouble with her *fancé* that makes her so depressed and fanciful. Lately she won't see him or anyone."

I remembered Hilary's complaint that Mary was jealous. I hadn't time for many reflections about the meeting I had witnessed between him and the fair-haired lady, when Mrs. Camden asked me whether I could stay at the house that very night and send for my boxes. I wished for nothing better, as by this means I might hope for a chance of an interview with Mary without delay. I at once assented to

the proposal, therefore, and Mrs. Camden herself led me upstairs.

It was a comfortable sort of old house, with wide passages and staircases, nearly destitute of modern improvements, but roomy and convenient. I was shown into a little room overlooking the river, and opening into Mrs. Camden's.

"I don't know how long you'll be able to keep it, I'm sure," said that lady dubiously. "Miss Smith has a fancy for constantly changing her bedroom, so that any day we are liable to be turned out, both you and I. I have been moved twice already. This room opposite," she went on, opening the door of a larger and much brighter apartment which the sun was only just leaving, "is where you will do your needlework. We keep the linen in this dresser."

She unlocked a huge piece of furniture, unwieldy and worm-eaten, in which the linen of a regiment might have been stored, and then, saying that she was late, and must go and dress for dinner, she left me at the door of my room, returning to say that she would have my tea sent up to me. I was to be spoilt then, evidently, in consideration of my condescension in accepting the situation. It was a very uncomfortable position for me, and I felt so guilty that Mrs. Camden had scarcely left me when I suddenly resolved to confess the deception I had practised upon her, and with that intention ran out of my room and down the passage. But I could not see her, and I called her by name without getting any answer. Well, if I could not see her I would see Mary; and I re-entered the workroom and looked out of the window for her.

It was nearly half-past six. The hot August sun was still glowing in the sky, the brilliancy of its light somewhat dimmed by the lingering smoke of factory chimneys. Beyond the little lawn below, and stretching for a long way to the right, was a great space of mingled orchard

and kitchen-garden, which looked neglected, but all the more picturesque on that account. It was a magnificent garden for the near neighborhood of London; and I thought that now at least, while the trees wore their summer foliage, the tall chimney and outbuildings of the distillery on the left, only partly seen from this side through a screen of well-grown elm trees, rather improved than spoiled the view. I could have made myself very happy here, I thought, if this place had been left to me. And it was exactly the sort of house Mary had often said it would delight her to be mistress of and to play Lady Bountiful in! Where now had my poor girl hidden herself? I scanned the wide stretch of ground carefully left and right, but saw no sign of her.

As I hung out of the window I heard the room door behind me open quickly, and looking round I saw a tall, merry-faced girl, with black hair and black eyes, who came into the room in a half-sly manner, shut the door softly, and made me a mock curtsy with an expression full of mischief in her pretty features.

"Allow me to introduce myself as 'Emily,'" she said. "I'm Miss Smith's maid, and I only stay because the wages are good and the work's light. *You*, I beg leave to say, won't stay at all. No, not if they give you £50 a year, and find you in gloves, French boots, and Sunday bonnets. So now you know."

And she gave me a mysterious nod.

"But why not?" asked I, alarmed and curious, not on my own account. "What shall I have to do that's so dreadful?"

"*Sleep here*," said Emily solemnly, pointing in the direction of the little room which had been assigned me. "They tried it on me once, but never again, oh no! So now I sleep where the rest of the servants do, in the wing on the right there, and at present Miss Smith and Mrs. Camden

have this floor to themselves. And doesn't poor Mrs. Camden wish she could come into our wing without letting down her dignity, that's all."

"But why, why?" I asked. "What is the reason for all this?"

"Oh, you'll find out soon enough, and I shan't tell you any more," said the girl, mischievously. "Only as five girls have tried the place, and only one has held out as far as the fourth night, why you'll be a regular heroine if you stay. Here's your tea, ma'am. Ha! ha!"

The girl went off into fits of laughter as a housemaid came in with a tray for me, and after giving me a curious glance, turned to Emily and told her she was "always on the giggle."

"Well," said the lady's maid, "they want someone to do their giggling for them in this establishment, I'm sure. And mind you don't burn this young lady's toast or make her coffee thick. Treat her well, for she won't stop long."

"Hush," said the housemaid, who was a much older and staid person than the other. "How you do go on."

And with another sidelong glance which seemed confirmatory of Emily's views, she left the room.

The giddy Emily, delighted to gossip, insisted on pouring out my tea, chattering all the while. But, from pure love of teasing, she would not tell me much more about her mistress, seeing that I was interested in the subject, but entertained me with her love affairs, or rather flirtations, which were evidently the chief business of her life. I was disgusted to find that my poor drooping Mary had such a careless and frivolous attendant; and Emily, finding my answers grow short, presently sprang up and offered to show me over the various rooms.

"They'll be at dinner now," she said.

I followed with alacrity, most anxious to examine every nook of the house which had proved the tomb of Mary's

high spirits. There was nothing in the least suggestive of phantoms or mysteries about the place. Roomy, airy, and well lighted, this floor contained a series of large, lofty rooms, most of them having two or more big windows, and each having a good sized ventilator in the ceiling.

"What a nice, large house," said I, in admiration, as I looked out of one of the open windows of the room which Emily said was "Miss Smith's, while the fad lasted."

There was another lawn on this side, which was the front of the house. I gathered that the front door was not much used, for the drive which led round the house up to it was grass-grown, and the steps, which I could see protruding from under a heavy portico, also looked green with damp and want of use. Beyond the lawn, which was fringed with trees and shrubs, was a wide, built-up path, which ran along the bank of the river, from the distillery on the right as far as the boundary wall of the garden some distance away on the left. The river here was no pretty pleasure stream, but a busy high-way, for great flat barges which, heavily laden and drawn in long procession by puffing little tugs, or empty, drifting with the tide, kept the black water stirring and rippling hour after hour, day and night. A flat marsh, fringed with straggling, new, small houses, ugly and dreary, formed the outlook on the opposite shore. On the right the great body of the distillery, with the high square tower in the centre, could be distinctly seen.

"What a pity," I went on, drawing my head in again and turning to the maid, "not to use more of these lovely big rooms."

"Yes," said Emily, "the house is full of wasted space. There's a floor above this which is nothing but an immense attic, full of lumber from the works. It was built by the late Mr. Marshall to ventilate this floor into. There's a splendid view from it, if you like miles of chimney pots ;

only you can't get up there from the house ; you have to go through the door that leads to the works first, and that's kept locked, of course."

A great, big attic above, entered only from the works. Here, thought I, is where the ghosts collect, and all manner of weird night noises are heard, the wind whistling through the chinks and crannies, and the rats and mice holding high revel. My reflections were interrupted by Emily, who was beginning to get restless and impatient of manner.

"And now I shall have to be off," she said. "You won't mind being left alone for a bit, will you? It will be daylight for a long time yet, you know."

I said I did not mind at all, and the girl hurried off, so full of excitement that I unkindly concluded it was some one more interesting to her than her mistress whom she was going to meet. For I had not been in her company nearly an hour without discovering that Emily's horizon was bounded by thoughts of "young men."

As soon as I was alone I returned to the workroom and again looked out of the window. The sun had sunk lower, but there was still a bright red glow in the west. Emily had said that dinner would be over by this time, and I was hoping that Mary would return to the garden. I had only waited a few moments when this wish was fulfilled. I saw my poor girl leave the house slowly, with a heavy, listless tread, as different as possible from the fairy-footed pace at which she used to trip across the lawn at Bayswater. She went straight across to the orchard, and there amongst the trees I lost sight of her. Running down the staircase and through the hall like a hare, without meeting anyone, I followed her. The shadows were growing black upon the rough, long grass under the apple trees. Mary's face, when I caught sight of it, looked ghastly in the cold shade. She was standing still, her hands hanging listlessly down,

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her eyes raised and fixed on the branches above her with an expression of utterly forlorn and helpless misery. My heart was beating fast, my eyes were filling with tears, and something seemed to rise up in my throat and choke me.

" Mary," I croaked out huskily, " My poor old Mary ! Don't you know me ? You haven't forgotten me ? Mary ! "

I was holding out my arms, not daring to advance any nearer, for she looked frightened at the first sound of my voice. As I finished speaking, however, I made one forward movement. With a stifled cry, my poor girl, with a rigid gesture as if to drive me away, turned and ran back into the house.

I did not attempt to follow her this time. I was appalled. I could no longer doubt the horrible truth of Tom's words : Mary was out of her mind. At the same moment I felt with passionate certainty that this calamity was the result of no accident. I would never rest until I had discovered who had brought it about.

CHAPTER VI.

BUT how to begin, how to begin? I could not approach near enough to question her; I could not confide in anyone about her; I was full of suspicions of everybody in the house. I stole timidly round the house to the river-front, where the mists were beginning to rise from the water. The tide was going down, and a margin of black mud, which gave forth no very sweet perfume, was growing wider on each side of the retreating stream. I saw no faces at the window; the house looked blank and desolate. I walked as far as a wall which ran down to the river path, separating the garden from the distillery yard. This wall was almost hidden by a clump of trees and high evergreens, and I stood in the shade of these, looking at the river very thoughtfully.

"Hallo, Mary, my girl!" cried a voice above me, startling me very much.

I looked up quickly, and saw what I took for a boy, wearing a round felt black hat very much at the back of his head, and smoking a short briar pipe. This figure was sitting on the top of the wall, with its feet up, its sallow, snub-nosed face peeping at me through the trees.

"What are you doing up there," I asked angrily, much disgusted by the lad's impertinence.

"I'm a-looking at you, my dear," was the cool answer. "And when I've looked long enough I'm a-coming down to hev' a kiss, blest if I ain't. And you may as well smile and look pretty, for them's my perquisites from all the new slaves in this establishment."

"I shall go and fetch someone to turn you out," I said

indignantly. "I know you're trespassing, and as for that pipe you're pretending to enjoy, why it's turning you perfectly green."

I was moving away, a good deal annoyed at finding the sort of encounter my deception exposed me to, when, with a cracked laugh, my persecutor jumped or scrambled to the ground, and placed himself in front of me. I then discovered, to my astonishment, that not only was he a full-grown man, but that he was not even a very young man. His thin, hairless face proved, on closer inspection, to be full of minute wrinkles, and the expression of his small eyes was decidedly knowing.

"If I'm green, my dear, it's all on the outside, I assure you," he added with a bow and a frightful cockney accent. "And, as for havin' me turned out, as I've been night watchman to these here premises over eight years, and am about as useful a member as there is on the establishment, why you've overshot the mark, my dear, and no mistake."

"Whoever you are, I won't have you call me 'My dear.' I never heard of such presumption!"

"Hoighty toighty! The airs these pretty slaveys give themselves, bless their dear little 'earts! But perhaps you feel to want a proper introduction. 'Ere, then, at your pretty feet (and if those spicy boots didn't come out of the wardrobe of your late missus, I'm a Dutchman!) I figuratively kneel and introduce myself as 'Arry 'Opkins, born in the Borough, educated at Gutter College, Bachelor of the Arts of Distilling Whisky, and likewise drinking it, at your service."

This curious, shrivelled-looking man-imp had a good-natured twinkle in his eyes, and I could not help being rather amused by him.

"Well," I said, "that's very interesting, but I don't see the use of all this ceremony, as we shall certainly not come much in each other's way."

"That's all you know about it. I come very much in the way of anybody I take a fancy to, and I've taken a fancy to you, Mary. You don't mind my calling you Mary, do you? You see, the missus changes her dolly-mops so often that I have to give 'em names accordin' to their situations; and the name for the situation of parlormaid is Mary."

The grandiloquence of this speech, combined with the cockney accent, was so irresistibly funny that I had great difficulty in keeping my countenance while I assured him that he might call me what he liked.

"That's right, Mary," he said approvingly. "You won't lose anything by being civil to me. I have keys to all the private doors, and I know many a short cut by which one's cousin can make himself scarce in a case of emergency. And now good-night, my dear; I'll have that kiss to-morrow, when you feel a little less shy with me."

And the impudent little man, with an odious contortion of his features which I believe is called a wink, turned on his heel and got back on to the top of the wall, singing to himself in a cracked voice something like this: "If you wish to know the time ask a p'liceman."

I went back into the house after this encounter, which had made me rather shy of further exploration. As I reached the first floor a pitiful sight met my eyes. It was poor Mary, wandering slowly but restlessly along the corridor, listening at every door, and from time to time retracing her steps to peep into one of the rooms she had passed. On such occasions the light from the windows showed me that her beautiful blue eyes were distended with terror, and that her lips moved as if she was talking to herself.

I was afraid to come near her or to attempt again to make myself known; something in the expression of her face told me it would be useless. I could only remain quietly

watching my poor girl and yearning to put my arms round her and comfort her, with the tears creeping down my cheeks. At last she came to the door of the room which had been pointed out to me as her sleeping apartment. She stopped before it, evidently hesitating whether she could enter. First she put her fingers lightly on the handle, then she withdrew them with a gasp; then after a short space she did the same again. Finally she put her hands over her face and began to tremble with sobs. This was too much for me; I ran along the corridor towards her. But no sooner had she caught the sound of footsteps than, without looking up to see whose they were, she burst open the door of her room with a shudder which betrayed that she felt a dread of some experience she had undergone there, and shut herself in.

I retreated to the little room which had been assigned me where I remained until my supper was brought up into the workroom opposite. The maid Emily bounced in upon me while I was eating.

"Well," she cried, evidently in the best of spirits, "and how do you like solitary confinement, eh? Don't make the mistake of thinking that it's due to your merits you're served in state like this. It's because Mrs. Camden's afraid that the tales told in the servants' hall would frighten you away."

And she burst into a ringing peal of laughter, in which she was interrupted by the sound of her mistress' bell. Emily sobered down at once.

"And now for Miss Mumchance," she said with a grimace. "Ta-ta. Shan't see you again to-night, I expect; but—I'll be sure and see you—off in the morning."

And with a look of demure mischief, she curtseyed herself out of the room.

I saw no one else before going to bed except Mrs. Camden, who seemed rather nervous and anxious to be off,

afraid, I think, that I might insist upon leaving the house at once. She seemed much relieved to hear that I was comfortable and had no complaints to make, and wished me "Good-night" with great cordiality.

I meant to lie awake to see if, after all these disquieting hints and suggestions, anything mysterious should happen; but I must have been very tired, for I fell asleep almost immediately, to be awakened presently by a shriek, which brought me out of bed in the twinkling of an eye.

I am not strong-minded, but I don't deny that I was horribly frightened, and that I would have given the world to be able, with a clear conscience, to jump into bed again and tuck the clothes rightly down over my ears. But Mary. What was I here for but to find out what was being done to her? Was I to be as callously selfish as the rest of the household seemed to be? I hastily put on my dressing gown and slippers, the shrieks still continuing, though they were not so piercing as the first. I had to fortify myself with virtuous maxims as I unlocked my door with a trembling hand and ran along the corridor.

I faltered again when I reached Mary's door. The cries had ceased, and instead I heard low moans, whether of pain or misery I could not tell. There was another sound too, not so loud, but more inexplicable; a soft, swish-swish, as of something rushing through the air and beating against the walls. Only the old wives' saying, "My heart was in my mouth," gives any idea of what I felt as I turned the handle. The door was not locked. There was no light in the room; that horrible swishing sound still went on; the wind seemed to be sweeping round the walls. Suddenly something flapped violently against my face with a loud screech. As my eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, I could faintly see, by the light of the summer night through the blinds, that the air was full of whirling bodies that beat the walls with great fluttering wings, uttering from

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time to time weird, ear-piercing cries. They must be birds, or bats, I knew : but even though I felt that this was some trick which had been played on my nervous Mary, I confess I could myself have shrieked aloud as the creatures flapped against my face.

A light I must have. I ran out of the room, leaving the door open, and returned in a few moments with a lighted candle and a box of matches. As I approached the open door I noticed that the moaning of my poor friend was the only sound to be heard. Creeping cautiously into the room protecting the candle-flame with my hand lest the wind made by the flying creature should blow it out, I received another shock.

There was no sign of bird or bat in the room, and the air was quite still. The windows were shut ; nothing had flown past me as I went through the corridor. But in some mysterious way the great flapping, screeching creatures, whose wings had made a wind in the room, had disappeared leaving no trace.

CHAPTER VII.

I FELT dazed and shivery as I crept into Mary's room, like one who has just woken after a nightmare. If this was a trick, how was it done? and above all, who had done it?

Mary was in bed, lying on her face, moaning piteously, and clasping the brass rails above her with her hands. I approached the bed very quietly, and touched the girl, calling to her softly by name. But she only shivered and cowered down, as if seized by some fresh horror. I would not be put off though this time. Putting down my candle I clasped the girl warmly in my arms, whispering soothing words into her ears, and trying by every means in my power to calm her nervous fears. At last I succeeded so far as to induce her to turn and look at me, and presently I saw a gleam of recognition in her poor eyes. But she was so completely wrecked by a strain upon her nerves, which I was sure must have lasted for weeks, that she gave me no welcome, expressed no surprise. I didn't care; to be able to say she knew me was a great step.

She made no opposition when I insisted upon getting into the bed and passing the remainder of the night by her side. However, there was no further disturbance, and in the morning I was able to slip back to my own room while she was still asleep.

All that day I had ample opportunities for considering the events of the past night, and deciding what steps I should next take towards solving the mystery. For I could not obtain another interview with Mary. She did indeed see me once or twice, and she did not shriek as she had done when I met her in the orchard the day before. But

she shrank away in avoidance of me, and I was forced to come to the conclusion that the sight of me reminded her painfully of her sensations of the night before, and that it would be better to wait for a favorable opportunity of approaching her again. In the meantime I wrote to my second sister, the bright one, asking her to send me some clothes, as I should be staying where I was for some time. None of this new household of Mary's had ever heard of Georgie Oliver, I felt sure. I thought I would keep up my disguise a little longer, as the person or persons who had designs against Mary would use extra caution if they knew she had a friend about her.

But already I found that Emily looked upon me with some distrust. Mrs. Camden had heard me go to Miss Smith's room, and knew that I had passed part of the night there. This fact getting abroad, was, of course, looked upon as an attempt to "curry favor," and when I asked, with real solicitude, some questions of the lady's maid, she answered with marked coldness:

The cries and moans Miss Smith uttered at night had gone on for about two months, she said. She had never tried to get into her mistress' bedroom when she heard these sounds, "not caring to poke her nose where she wasn't wanted." If Miss Smith had wanted her she would have rung her bell. Mrs. Camden had gone in once or twice, she believed, and had heard and seen nothing. Whichever room Miss Smith slept in the cries and moans and unearthly flappings and screechings went on just the same. Nobody else in the house had ever been troubled with either ghosts or nocturnal noises. This was all I could learn from Emily.

My best chance of getting further into the mystery was by the help of my Cockney friend, Harry Hopkins; and although further acquaintance with him would not, I felt, be unaccompanied by drawbacks, there was nothing for it

but to use such means as came to my hand. When I asked Emily where he was to be found, she drew herself up with such a superb air that I saw there was, for some reason, war between her and the night-watchman.

"That creature!" she exclaimed in answer to my inquiry. "You are surely never thinking of taking up with *him*! Well, I never should have thought it of a girl like you!"

"I want to get him to show me over the works," I explained. "He said he had the keys of all the doors in the place."

By the look in Emily's face I guessed that she had either got him to open some of those doors on her account, or had wanted him to do so.

"Oh, he told you that, did he?" she said with a sly, side-long look, "and so you think he may prove a useful friend! Well, don't trust him too far, that's all. He's always after the girls, the little wretch, and he's a perfect nuisance if you encourage him."

No assurances on this head were needed, and I told her so. Still, I asked again where he was to be found. He lodged off the premises, Emily said, and she did not know his address; she was "not sufficiently interested in him to inquire," she added pointedly. He was on duty as chief watchman from six o'clock in the evening until six o'clock in the morning; but as he had several men under him, he was often to be met strolling about the yard with his pipe in the evening.

"And playing the spy, you may be sure," she went on viciously, "or it wouldn't be Harry Hopkins."

I strolled about the garden and the river-path in front that evening in the hope of meeting my Cockney friend; but he did not appear. My light duties had consisted for the present chiefly of mending the house-linen and relieving the tedium of Mrs. Camden's existence by listening to her while she talked. She chattered so hard, poor lady, to

make up for having had "nobody to speak to" for many weeks (she did not like Emily), that when she went down to dinner I felt as if a mill had suddenly stopped.

I saw nothing of Mary that night until she had gone to her room; then I knocked softly and suggested to her, in a low whisper, when she opened the door, that we should change rooms.

"Oh, would you dare?" asked the poor, dazed creature, clutching at my arm. The next moment her hand dropped listlessly at her side, and she shook her head. "It would be of no use," she said drearily; "it is only to me they come—these shrieks and flapping wings; and it is because I am going mad—mad!"

She raised her hands to her head with a shudder. Not knowing whether we might not even then be watched, I felt that there was no time to lose, and urged her, with loving whispers, to let me take her place. She was docile enough, poor creature, when once one approached her, and in very few minutes I had seen her go into my little room, and had got into her bed in fear and trembling.

For oh! I was frightened, horribly frightened. To lie awake and expect a trick to be played upon you in fun in bed is bad enough; but to wait for a trick which has been played for weeks in systematic cruelty upon a gentle, unoffending woman filled me with such a sense of the wickedness that is in the world as I had never felt before. There was a horrible ingenuity about it, too, which seemed to me not far short of fiendish.

Hours seemed to pass while I lay waiting, watching the night-light burning on the table by the bedside, and fancying horrible shapes in the flickering shadows it cast upon the walls. Now and then a board creaked, or a mouse scampered behind the ceiling. I began to fear that poor Mary was right; that her unseen persecutor had discovered the fraud we had practised.

Suddenly, with a hiss and a splutter, the light went out, and I felt a few drops of cold water dashed on my hair and face. All my fine reserve of fortitude and preparation proved of no avail; I shrieked and sprang into a sitting posture. Something flapped against my face with a screech, the air was all alive with moving things, as it had been the night before. Overcome by childish terror, I flung myself down again, and buried my head in the bedclothes, and waited. The disturbance continued for a few minutes only, I am sure, although, of course, it seemed much longer. Then as suddenly as it begun it ceased, and there was a sound like the shutting down of a box. I tried to re-light the night-light, but the wick was too wet. The glimmer of the matches only showed me that the nocturnal intruders had disappeared. To make doubly sure I summoned courage enough to leap out of bed, and, still with the aid of my matches, to examine every cupboard, crevice, and corner, as I had already done before going to bed. All that I found was a couple of small feathers, one on the washhand-stand and one on the floor. The fireplace was blocked up by a board, which had not been moved; the door was locked as I had left it.

Poor Mary! I was not surprised at the havoc this persecution had wrought on her malleable nature, when I, of much coarser fibre, felt completely shattered by the adventures of these two nights. Of course, I never closed my eyes till morning, and appeared next day so sallow and haggard that I am sure Mrs. Camden expected me to put on my bonnet and leave without warning.

Mary crept into the workroom that afternoon when I was alone, to thank me, with bated breath, for what I had done.

"I slept, Georgie, I did really sleep; and I saw nothing, heard nothing. It makes me feel quite different, as if I was alive again after being dead," she went on in a trem-

bling voice, while her eyes wandered about the room in that horrible straining, searching way which had become habitual to her. "And did you hear nothing?" she faltered.

"I heard something which convinced me that someone has been playing cruel tricks upon you," I answered stoutly. "Why have you stayed quietly here without complaining?"

"I did tell my guardian that I had—fancies," and she shuddered; "and I told Hilary. But they all laughed; nobody believed me; they thought it was caprice. And Hilary was angry; he said if I left this house, and lost my fortune, he could not marry me, as he was too poor."

It was evidently only by a strong and now unusual effort that the poor girl was able to concentrate her mind for so much consecutive speech. She had spoken in short, jerky sentences, and now, exhausted by the effort, she broke down into childish tears. I was doing my best to console her, when Mrs. Camden's footsteps were heard approaching, and Mary, with a scared face, sprang up from her knees and ran out of the room.

I was too suspicious of all the household of my poor friend to make a confidant of the talkative chaperon. I was bursting with impatience to get into the attics on the floor above, and also to interrogate the night-watchman, who could, I felt sure, let some light upon the mystery.

My opportunity came when I was strolling upon the lawn while the ladies were at dinner.

"Evings, 'tis she!" was the welcome exclamation that told me my admirer was at hand.

Hopkins was looking over the wall this time, with his head perched on one side in what I guessed was meant to be an attitude of fascination. I was, in truth, delighted to see him, and I made such an ecstatic rush towards the wall, that even he, great as was his confidence in his own charms, was surprised.

"How do you do?" I cried effusively. "I am very glad to see you."

"Thanks, thanks, my gal, you do me proud, blest if you don't," he said cordially enough but with just a touch of patronage which showed that he was shrewd enough to doubt my entire sincerity. "Glad you hev the sense to know a good thing when you see it. 'Arry 'Opkins is a werry good thing; taik his word for it and no error. And a werry good friend he can be to gals as don't give themselves airs." Then with a sudden change of tone he asked drily: "And what might yer be pleased to want of me, my dear?"

"I want you to take me over the works," I said boldly.

"And not too much to arsk either," said he promptly.

"If you'll just get your pretty little tootsies to carry you up to the first floor landing, and then wait at the end of the passage, I'll be up on the other side in a jiffey. And then one turn of my key and two fond 'earts will be 'appy."

I wondered whether all young men of his class winked so much and so often as he did, and whether it did not have some permanent effect upon their features. Hopkins emphasized every other sentence in this way, until I began to feel a nervous twitching down one side of my face, as if I must do it too.

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CHAPTER VIII.

I RATHER dreaded what my friend's conduct might be like when I found myself alone with him. But the little man took a great pride in the establishment where he had been employed so long; and, once in the distillery, he grew so enthusiastic over his description of the works, and the various processes of malting, drying, grinding, mashing, fermenting, and distilling, that I became in his eyes only a more or less intellectual listener to the wonders he had to tell.

"It's too late to see much to-night," he said regretfully, never guessing, as I thought, how little I wanted to see if only I could get into those attics above the bedrooms. "You must come over the malting floors by daylight, and I'll explain everything to you till I'm hoarse. There's nothing much to be seen to-night; we're distilling; that's the last process of all. You shall come into the stillhouse and just see the stills at work. The grinding and mashing's more interesting, but that's done with for this 'period.' And when I talk of mashing, don't you go for to think it's the sort you've been used to, or you'll be disappointed. This is where we do our 'mashing' ere."

He led me into a narrow gallery along the wall of a great bare building in which the voice sounded hollow. Through the skylight in the roof enough light still came for me to make out, many feet below us, a huge tun, like a yawning black mouth, across one half of which were fixed two long bars, armed with double rows of sharp metal teeth, some curved one way, some the other, and so arranged that not a grain could escape battering and bruising as the malt, churning and seething in hot water, was

whirled round the tun. Although the sharp teeth and the machinery which worked them were now motionless, I turned suddenly sick with nervous fright as Hopkins, leaning on the fragile wooden rail which ran round the gallery, explained this process to me with much enthusiasm. I drew back suddenly. "Supposing someone were to fall over this rail—it isn't very high—while the machinery was in motion?" suggested I.

"Someone 'ud be mashed up very small, that's all," said Hopkins, dryly. "Why, bless you, if you was to fall into the malt down there while the mashing was going on, you'd be mincemeat before I could call out 'Jack Robinson!' Those prongs are no toothpicks, I can tell you."

"Let us go back, or see something else," said I shuddering.

My nerves were not at their best, after the shock of the previous night; and the idea shot into my fanciful head that the nearness of this huge metal pit, with its rows of hungry teeth, was a danger to Mary. Hopkins gave a little cracked laugh which echoed among the rafters.

"Will you come and see the still-house?" said he. "Four thousand gallons of whiskey all goin' at once. Don't it make yer mouth water?"

But it did not. I wanted to get into those attics.

"I think we'll leave the still-house for another time," said I. "The ladies will have finished dinner long ago, and Mr. Camden may want me."

And I turned back towards the house, while he followed, trying to persuade me to change my mind.

The buildings which connected the house with the distillery proper were great store houses full of grain; we returned as we had come, down a long lane, with stores of barley, and oats filled in sacks on each side. I hurried on before my companion, who said very little, and seemed rather disconcerted by my sudden freak. At last the door

which led through into the house came in sight ; and with a loudly-beating heart I noticed a flight of rough wooden steps to the right of the door, which led, I felt sure, into those attics I was so anxious to explore.

"Where do those steps lead to?" I asked.

But my assumption of indifference was not good enough to deceive Hopkins.

"Oh," said he, with a curious whistle through his teeth. "That's what you want to know, is it? Well, why couldn't yer say so before, instead of taking me trapesing all night round those blooming vats? They lead to the attics where we keep our lumber."

I flattered myself that if Mr. Hopkins was sharp, I was sharp too ; and I concluded that he knew something about the mysterious haunts of the attics. Without waiting for the chance of being refused permission, therefore, I ran up the steps, opened the door at the top, and ran through into what he had rightly described as a lumber-room. It was a big place, running the entire length of the floor, high-roofed and draughty, so piled with rubbish of all sorts that it would have been a month's work to examine the contents thoroughly. The big square ventilators, which had been a freak of the late Mr. Marshall's, and which formed so special a feature of the house, were all left unencumbered, and I made my way quickly, stumbling over bolts and cordage and old sacking, and clutching at ruinous-looking packing cases, to the spot which I judged would be immediately over Mary's room.

I had skipped along so quickly that by this time I was well ahead of my conductor, and was able to grope about at my leisure. This floor was lighted by gable windows in the roof, which sloped up to a great height at the back of the house. The panes were very dusty, and the light was fading fast ; still I managed to discover that the particular ventilator which I believed to be that of Mary's

room was quite clean on the top, in striking contrast with the thick dust which lay on everything around. I was down on my knees beside it in a moment, and trusting that the intervening bales, cases, and barrels would enable me to play hide-and-seek with Hopkins for a few minutes longer, I raised the cover with some little difficulty, and putting my face down close to the wire-work underneath, saw that my guess or my calculation had been a lucky one.

I was over Mary's room.

Knowing very well that the girl's nocturnal tormentors whatever they were, had been introduced from this quarter, I next tried to raise the wire-work itself, and found that it had been pulled away from its fastenings, so that it could be raised and lowered as easily as the lid itself. This was enough for me. It was clear that to discover the identity of Mary's heartless persecutor I must watch this spot.

The question was—How to return here late at night? I dared not confide in Hopkins, whose voice I heard calling to me, with exceedingly uncomplimentary comments on my behavior, as he made his way among the lumber in search of me. I could not hope that I could remain here undiscovered in the meantime. The watchman was getting each moment more angry, and there was no doubt that he would summon half-a-dozen men to help him rather than leave before I was unearthed.

"Mary! Mary! I say!—" Then followed a growling volley of imprecations as he hurt his foot against a pile of old metal that made a clanking sound. "Blest if I'll ever trust a girl again! Mary, Mary! 'ere, come on, chuck it!" in a louder tone. Then again to himself: "'Arry 'Opkins, you are a bloomin' jackass, and no flies. Mary, my love, I'm that discons'late without yer that I can't abear myself, and if you don't make tracks out of this in rather less than a brace of shakes, I'll ring the fire-alarm, and raise — and Tommy about your ears."

I scarcely heard him. For I had found something; not indeed anything likely to prove of much value towards identification, but something which told me enough to fill me with doubt and amazement. It was part of a gentleman's riding glove, almost new and of the finest quality; one button was still attached to it. This strip had, I supposed, been partly torn off by the sharp corner of the ventilator, and had then been wrenched from the rest of the glove and flung aside by the wearer into the corner where I found it.

I put the scrap of dogskin into my pocket with shaking fingers. There was no denying that the discovery pointed strongly in the direction of one solution of the mystery which I had scarcely dared to admit into my mind. Hilary Gold's conduct and manner had been so suspicious on the last occasion of my seeing him that it was inevitable that I should ask myself if we had not been altogether deceived in him. But was it conceivable that a man could take such a base revenge upon a woman for throwing him over, as to form a deliberate and cold-blooded plan for driving her out of her mind? My brain reeled with agonizing suspicions.

Suddenly Harry Hopkins' voice, much nearer than before, roused me to a remembrance of my strange situation. I, however, kept quite still, on the chance that he might pass me. He did. I heard him stumbling along, soliloquizing so loudly as to preclude the possibility of his discovering me by the aid of his ears, and using expressions of which I understood nothing save that they expressed the strongest disapprobation of my conduct and an acute desire to "have it out" with me. He went so far down the long room that the inspiration seized me to try to make my escape while his back was still turned.

Cautiously stealing out of my hiding-place, I crept along the uneven floor, praying that no incautious tread, no un-

preventible stumble would discover me to my pursuer. Only once did I trip, and at that moment, by good fortune, he tripped too ; and as I bore my mishap in silence, while he did not, I was able to limp on unheard while he was uttering more quaint maledictions in his piping voice.

At last I got to the door, slipped through and down the rough ladder staircase. Now, where should I hide myself? If I had only been lucky enough to come through the door unheard by him he would go on hunting for me among the lumber while I had plenty of time to secrete myself securely. On the other hand, even if he heard me he would probably imagine that I had gone back into the house, satisfied with having played him a trick. On the whole I decided, therefore that I might, with a good chance of remaining undiscovered, secrete myself among the sacks of grain with which this floor was filled. Then, when Hopkins had given up his search as hopeless, I could creep out and decide from what point of vantage to watch for the man who was slowly destroying poor Mary's mind.

I had scarcely squeezed myself behind a pile of full sacks near the wall, as far as possible from the ladder staircase by which I had just descended, when Harry Hopkins, more furiously angry than ever, burst open the door and began to come down.

Oh heavens ! the dust from the grain sacks was choking me ! I was going to sneeze !

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CHAPTER IX.

By the help of that lucky star which seemed to be protecting me through my adventures, I was able to stifle the coughing and sneezing I could not altogether repress, so that the night-watchman could not hear me.

He continued to call me in alternating coaxing and threatening tones, now informing me that I was "the light of his bloomin' eyes," and anon that he would "get me the sack next day, blest if he wouldn't." To all these blandishments, however, I of course remained mute. There was a dogged obstinacy about his tones, however, which convinced me that I was not yet out of danger of discovery. There was no key to the attic-door, so he pulled an end of string out of his pocket and tied the latch to a nail in the wall. Then, running down the steps, he detached them from the hook which kept them in place, and removed them to some distance.

"Now, Miss Clever," he said to himself in a low voice, with spiteful emphasis, "if you're up there still I give you leave to try to come down when my back's turned. If you can't burst the string, you can just stay there till you sing small; and if you can, by Jingo you'll stand a good chance of breaking your neck. And serve you jolly well right too!"

"You little wretch!" I said to myself.

But he was not content with this most mean attempt at revenge. Unlocking the door which led into the house, he went through, evidently with the object of ascertaining

whether I had gone back. Now was my chance if I wanted to find a safer place of concealment. But though I felt sure there were plenty of nooks and crannies about the works where a person who knew his way about could hide without fear of discovery, I had such a strong feminine horror of "machinery" that I dared not go by myself through those rooms full of vats, and pipes, and clogged wheels, and stills with curly chimneys. So I only crouched down a little lower behind the sacks, and picked holes in them to find out what was inside.

I hoped I should not have to stay long in my hole though, for already I was getting cramped and stiff, and covered with dust and flour, which got down my throat and half stifled me. There was a window very near my back, too, and, although it was summer time, the draughts which came through the chinks and between the boards of the unceiled floor were bad enough to give me a stiff neck for a month. Besides, I hate mice even worse than black-beetles, and the very mention of a rat makes me scream; and all the time I could hear the creatures scamper, scamper and gnaw, gnaw all round me, and thought every moment that I should have one on me, in which case no philosophy, no caution, would have prevented me from shrieking myself hoarse.

In the prolonged absence of Hopkins, who, I doubted not, was taking the opportunity of exercising his fascinations in the servants' hall, I was getting absorbed in these minor terrors, when I became suddenly aware of a noise which was not that of a mouse. Someone was coming, with slow and, as it seemed, stealthy footsteps, down the long storeroom *from* the distillery. The tread was so soft, so cat-like, that if the boards had not been old and loose, I doubt not whether I should have heard it. As it was, my thoughts, instead of turning to the human persecutor for whom I was on the watch, flew to "ghosts" and the

stories about the house being "haunted." No man, however careful, could tread as softly as that; besides, from time to time I detected a faint, rustling sound, like the noise of a silk skirt brushing against some object as it passed.

Holding my breath, I tried to peep out. There was scarcely any daylight left, and no window on the opposite side of the storeroom for some distance down. Peering between the cornsacks, however, with straining eyes, I fancied I could distinguish the figure of a woman, gliding very slowly along, like a grey shadow in the gloom. The window behind me was so blocked up with sacks and boards that scarcely a ray of light came through, and I was asking myself whether my imagination had not carried me away when I heard the handle of the door which led into the house softly turned. The door was locked, however, and presently I heard the handle rattled impatiently—and the door shaken with some violence. Almost at the same moment I heard Harry Hopkins' voice, within the house, humming a comic song in respectfully modulated tones. At this sound, the intruder fled back down the storeroom—scarcely in time. As the watchman opened the door, he caught sight of the intruder, whom he mistook for me.

"Hallo! There you are, ma'am, are you? Well, you don't get away this time!"

Taking a whistle from his pocket, he blew it three times, the shrill sound making the windows rattle in their frames.

In a few moments a tall, broad-shouldered young man, carrying a lantern, appeared at the further end of the storeroom.

"Hello!" he said. "What's up?"

"There's a girl, the new girl at the 'ouse, a-wanderin' somewhere about the place," said Hopkins, in a half-grumbling, half-excited tone. "I am afraid she'll get me into trouble, fall down the lift p'raps, or something."

"I see. It don't matter for the girl," said the younger man drily.

"Well, she'd have brought it on herself, yer see."

"You're always a-running after the girls, 'Arry, but you might have knowed better than to take this one for a servant."

I was astonished, but pleased by the young man's discrimination. The next moment, however, my vanity had a fall.

"I took her for a lady at first," the young man went on, "but the minute after I see'd there was somethink wrong about her."

Something wrong about me, indeed! What on earth did the stupid fellow mean?

He went on: "So 'hat when she asked for the manager, I guessed she might be meaning you, and I let her go up."

"Let her go up!" repeated Hopkins, who was walking down the storeroom with the other, "Why, who do yer mean?"

"A tall lady in a grey silk dress and black bonnet, who came through the yard ten minutes ago, and asked to see the manager, as I tell you."

Hopkins stopped short in amazement.

"Well, of all the bloomin' rum things as ever 'appened," he ejaculated softly. "Then there are two women, Bill, a-playin' hide-and-seek about this 'ere place, as sure as my name's 'Opkins!"

"Rivals, eh, 'Arry? A-bustin' to tear each other's 'air out, all on account of the same young spark?"

Hopkins seemed not displeased at the suggestion, though he affected to reject it, and proposed a search of the storeroom to begin with. But the younger man laughed at the notion, told him it would take a dozen men to make the search properly, and added his confident belief that the girl, or girls, in hiding, would come out fast enough if they were left alone.

"A girl keeps out of the way of a chap like you because she knows precious well you'll run after her," said Bill, sententiously. "Now if it was me she'd never let me alone, because if she did I should let her alone. That's all the difference. Girls know, bless you!"

And having succeeded in restoring the calmness of his chief somewhat, Bill left the storeroom, swinging his lantern, and Hopkins, after a few minutes' hesitation, slowly followed him.

After this there was a long period of dead silence but for the night-noises, which seemed to grow louder as the darkness came on, and the wind blew colder through the cracks and crevices. Every bone in my body ached with the strain of remaining so long in a cramped position. I felt at last that I must come out of my hiding place and move about a little, when suddenly I thought I could distinguish sounds of voices in the distance. They came nearer. I distinctly heard "All right; thank you, sir," in Hopkins' voice, and then, after a short pause, the door at the further end of the storeroom opened quietly, and I heard a man's tread along the creaking boards.

Surely he would hear my heart beating! The man carried no light, and the darkness was now complete; but he came on without faltering, like a person who knows his way. Of course I could not see him, though I crawled out of my hiding place on my hands and knees in the vain effort to do so. He stopped under the attic door, evidently feeling for the steps which Hopkins had removed. However, he was so familiar with the place that he found, replaced, and mounted them with very little difficulty; and finding the door fastened up, either cut or untied the string, and let himself through without more than a few moments' delay. The strangest thing about the intruder was the utter silence he preserved; though he had evidently not been prepared for the obstacles he met with, no slightest sound of impatience or surprise escaped him.

This, I was sure, was the man I had set myself to track, the man who was carrying out an infamous design against Mary's sanity. But I had not realized until that moment, when he stood within a few yards of me, what courage it would need to follow to his work a man who had, there could be no doubt, all the instincts of a cold-blooded and heartless murderer. I shook like a leaf as I came out from my hiding-place and stood, with my blood frozen in my veins, at the bottom of the steps, at first not daring to go up. Yet how could I draw back now, with the solution of the mystery at my very feet? The man, whoever he was, would surely have to use a light at some period of his operations, and I must then be able to see his face if I died for it.

I climbed up the staircase with feet deadened by cold and fear, and slipped through the door noiselessly. How horribly quiet the wretch was! I waited, holding my breath, for some moments, before a slight scraping sound told me in what direction he had gone. Then satisfied that he was some distance off, and perceiving that, if I hoped to be successful, I must make as little noise as he, I went down on my hands and knees, and absolutely crawled along the floor, feeling my way with my hands before each forward movement.

Nobody who has not found himself late at night in a great room dark as pitch, out of hearing of every human creature but one desperate scoundrel, can realize what my feelings were as I drew near to the spot where he was at work. When nothing but one empty packing-case stood between him and myself I stopped and waited. I could just hear him raise the lid of the ventilator, and then I heard Mary sigh as she turned in bed. This man had calculated his time to a minute or two. He moved slowly away, while I trembled lest he should have discovered me. But no, he was penetrating much further into the long attic. When

he returned, I could hear from certain slight sounds that he was bringing with him the birds he used for the trick played upon Mary. Then came the expected moment—the wire work of the ventilator was lifted, and the birds let through, with the fluttering and screeching I had heard twice before. Again poor Mary's sobs and moans brought the tears to my eyes and made me grind my teeth. After a short interval the birds were withdrawn, so quickly and neatly that I was certain they must be secured in some way, and the ventilator was softly closed.

I was beginning to think that I should have no opportunity of seeing the man's face, when another and much louder sound caused me to turn my head towards the door of the attic. Someone was coming in, someone with a light, someone who had no care about being heard or not heard. In a few minutes I saw to my astonishment that it was the woman who had followed Hilary from the door of Mr. Marshall's office, and who had met him at the Temple station. The expression of her face was wild, but determined and almost fierce. I noted what a tall, powerful woman she was as she raised the watchman's lantern she carried, and moved it from side to side, evidently in search of someone.

That one glimpse of her was enough for me. Dreadfully afraid that she might see me and haul me out to answer questions, I crouched down behind my packing case and waited for the meeting.

CHAPTER X.

STILL waving her lantern from side to side, the woman came recklessly on, and passed without seeing me, as I cowered down close to the floor. I felt as much afraid of her as I did of the unknown man. There was something wolfish in the expression of her long, grey-green eyes with their straight light brows, and in the wide, straight mouth with its crimson lips. As soon as she had passed me, I ventured to creep round the back of the packing-case which stood between me and the unknown man. Whatever the risk I ran, I felt that I must see his face, when the light of the lantern should be flashed upon him.

But he was gone. The only trace he had left was a handful of little soft feathers from a bird's breast.

In my impatience and disappointment, I could not refrain from uttering a slight sound. It was scarcely more than a long breath, but the woman heard it, and turning quickly round she discovered my presence and laid a strong hand upon my shoulder.

"Get up," she exclaimed in a harsh whisper. "Let me see your face. Who are you?"

She flashed the lantern into my eyes, making them blink and smart; and apparently taking my confusion for a sign of guilt, she shook me roughly, and peered into my face with her lips drawn back from her teeth, just like some savage animal.

"I—I am a friend of Miss Smith's," I said as boldly as I could.

The woman laughed derisively.

"Oh yes, we're all friends of Miss Smith's, aren't we?"

We all want a dip into her lucky bag, you as well as the rest, I have no doubt. And pray what is Miss Smith's friend doing up here at this time of night?"

"That is no business of yours," I said resolutely.

The woman took her hand off my shoulder and looked at me curiously.

"You didn't by any chance come up here to meet somebody, I suppose?" she said drily, but with a good deal of doubt in her tone.

"I came here to watch somebody," I answered simply, "if that is what you call meeting."

"Oh!"

She seemed puzzled and disconcerted, but half inclined to believe me. After considering my face for some moments she spoke again in a much lower tone.

"Tell me—who were you watching?"

"I don't know. That is just what I wanted to find out. Somebody is doing mischief here, and I don't yet know who it is."

She threw back her head defiantly.

"So you're a kind of private detective?" she said.

"Yes, if you like. At any rate I mean to find out who are the enemies of my friend."

"Well, I don't much mind if I tell you. You have your own ends to serve, of course, but as I've been treated unfairly, I'd as soon serve yours as his."

"Well, well, whose?"

I was on fire with impatience to hear the name. Just as she was overcoming her final hesitancy, however, I saw something moving behind her. The next instant the lantern was snatched out of her hand. I heard a crash, and we were in darkness.

"Help!" cried the woman in a voice so stifled that I knew a hand was being held over her mouth. "Help. Murder!"

"Who is it? Who are you?" I cried, groping in the darkness, trying to find my way to the door that I might raise an alarm.

The woman uttered a loud groan.

"My arm! Don't break my arm! Oh, mercy, mercy!"

The brute was using personal violence to make her keep his secret.

Still he never uttered a word.

"I won't betray you, I won't betray you," she cried in a voice of agony, too much excited to keep silent. "You know what you promised me, you know what you promised. I only came down here to find out if you were keeping your word. I'm not jealous, not a bit. It's all over between us long ago, I know. But I want money, and you said I should have it out of this girl's. Well, when is it coming? When? That's what I want to know!"

She had torn herself away from him, and her excited tones grew louder and louder as he pursued her in the darkness. Long before the end of this speech she had forgotten the presence of a third person, I was sure. But he had not. Never once, when her excitement was at its highest, loudest point, did he betray himself by the utterance of a single word. Yet all the time he was stealthily chasing her in the darkness, while I trembled with fear of what he would do if he caught her.

I had by this time reached the door, and was placing my foot on the step outside, when a cry, in a woman's voice, fell upon my ear.

"I will get help. Help!" I shouted, as I fell rather than walked down the ladder-staircase, and scurried along the storeroom. "Help! Help!" I repeated, as I ran into a bare, unceiled loft, where the malt lay, in a smooth mass, all over the floor.

"Hallo!" cried a well-known voice, and Hopkins, the watchman, caught me as I was rushing blindly past him.

"So here's the truant at last. You've had a fright, have you, young woman? Well, serve you right!"

I was still ejaculating "Help!" disjointedly, as I tried to recover my breath, and struggled to free myself from his detaining hands.

"Come with me, come back to the attic," I gasped out, turning to lead him to the scene of the struggle. "There's a man there——"

Hopkins interrupted me, with his high cackling laugh.

"I know there's a man there," said he composedly, without moving a step. "I let him in myself, and he's a particular pal of mine. If he's given you a fright, it's no more than you deserve for the trick you've played me."

I was so bewildered by the watchman's coolness that I stood for a moment hazily wondering whether I was awake and in my right senses, or whether all the exciting incidents of the past hour had been the work of my excited imagination. But these experiences have been too vivid, and I shook my head with a shudder.

"There's a woman in there, too," I panted out. "They are quarrelling, and if you don't go and stop him I believe he will do her some harm."

"A woman!" cried Hopkins. Then, with a nod of apprehension, he went on: "Oh, yes; the mysterious woman who wanted to see the manager, no doubt."

"But why don't you go and see?" said I impatiently.

"Cos I ain't so fond of interfering in other folks' quarrels," he said drily, "specially between a man and a woman, and most likely husband and wife into the bargain. 'Ow-er, I don't mind going back with you to show you it's all right."

He unhooked a lantern which hung on a nail in the wall, and proceeded to accompany me through the storeroom at a sauntering pace which I could not induce him to quicken. Expecting that the woman's cries and groans and

loud complaints would break upon our ears as we returned, I was surprised and rather alarmed to hear no sound from the attics. A horrible fear flashed into my mind that the woman might have been stunned or even murdered, while I was trying to persuade the watchman to come back with me. Just as we turned a corner from one storeroom to another round a great pile of grain-filled sacks, we heard light footsteps hurrying towards us, and came face to face with the strange woman. Her hair and dress were disordered, and her features were quivering with pain or excitement. I uttered a cry of relief at sight of her, but she hurried on with only a hasty glance in my direction. The watchman, however, was not so easily satisfied.

"Hello!" he cried. "Stop, miss; I want to know something about this."

As she took no notice, he left me and ran after her.

I wanted to know what explanation the woman would give; on the other hand, I was still more anxious that the unknown man, who had not, I supposed, yet left the attics, should not again escape me. There was no light near where I was standing, so I decided to follow Hopkins and the woman towards the entrance. The watchman had a lantern I knew.

Hopkins and the woman were standing at the foot of the iron staircase, and by the time I reached the top they seemed to have got over the first shyness of strangers.

The woman was speaking as I came within hearing, and, in the hope of learning something of importance, I condescended to listen.

"So, as I didn't see why I should be left in the lurch, I just found out where he went to, and followed him down here. That was fair enough, wasn't it? I haven't done you or anybody any harm; I only wanted an explanation from my young man."

"Well, I don't see as that's any excuse for comin' an

kicking up a rumpus in Miss Smith's house. And it's doubly wrong to come a-arskin' for the manager just to get inside the premises, 'cause it's calculated to get me into trouble. Therefore, you'll please, miss, in future to have your shindies outside. In the meantime, as I must just see whether the gentleman backs you up, I'll just trouble you to step inside here a minute."

Little insignificant creature as Hopkins looked, he was strong, and wiry, and active. Although the woman was a head taller than himself, and in spite of her struggles to escape, he half dragged, half pushed her into a small room on the right which was used as an office, and with the terse remark—"You're all right, missis," he turned the key in the lock and walked away from the door towards the staircase.

Just at this moment I heard a man's footsteps behind me, coming in the direction of the staircase. It was the cat-like tread I had heard before, the tread of the man I was tracking. I stood back in the darkness, shaking from head to foot with excitement, to let him pass me. I was so convinced that I knew who it was, that I fancied it could only be necessary for me to see his descending figure against the light thrown by the watchman's raised lantern, to have my suspicions confirmed. But as he set foot on the staircase I saw that the man was dressed in a long, loose, rough coat and broad-brimmed felt hat, which entirely disguised both head and figure from where I stood. Crane my neck to look at him as I might, and as I did, there was no information to be gleamed without a sight of his face. He was running rapidly down the stairs. I think he had heard me, though he did not look round. I had no time to lose.

Precipitating myself upon the staircase, I almost flew down, perceiving, as I speedily did, that he was bent upon escaping me. I caught him within half a dozen steps of

the bottom, and clung to him like a leech as he tried to shake me off. If it had not been for the watchman's presence I believe he would have flung me over the iron banisters, for he uttered a vicious hiss through his teeth as my hands closed round his arm. Still he kept his face turned so that I could not see it. We were within three steps of the ground.

"Your light! show your light?" I shrieked shrilly to Hopkins, who was standing lantern in hand.

Hopkins complied. Raising his lantern with a jerk, as he moved a step forward, he turned the light full upon the man's face.

For one moment I stared blankly at the drawn features, the wild eyes of a creature who looked more like a beast of prey than a man, the next, my arm sank to my sides as, with a shiver, I let him go.

For it was the face of a man I had never seen before.

CHAPTER XI.

I SUPPOSE I fainted or went out of my mind for a short period, overcome by the excitement of my chase of the mysterious man, and by the amazement I felt on discovering him to be a stranger.

At any rate, when I came to myself I was sitting on the hard stone floor, propped up against the bottom step of the front staircase, and Hopkins was standing over me, flashing the light of his lantern on my face, with a rather malignant expression on his own features.

"Oh, so you've come to, hev' you?" said he drily, before I remembered much.

I sat up and put my hands over my face, trying to recollect.

"So you've been a playin' the spy, and a workin' of yerself into a fever all about nothing," continued the watchman jeeringly. "Now I s'pose you're not a servant at all, but hev' come here with some hend in your heye, most likely a man. But I tell you, whoever you are, it won't wash. I ain't a-goin' to hev' this place made a 'unting ground for young women that hev' grievances against their young men, and so I tell yer."

I listened very quietly, a good deal impressed by the serious, earnest manner of the little Cockney, who gave me strongly the idea that he would be above a bribe.

"That doesn't apply to me," I said at last, "but I think it does to the woman whom you shut in that room." And I pointed to the door he had locked upon her, which now stood open. "What has become of her?"

"There's not much to choose between yer, I expect, if the truth was know'n," said Hopkins bluntly. "However,

she was able to give a better account of herself than what you've done, and what's more she had someone to back her up; so she's gone. But as for you, I mean to take yer back into the 'ouse myself and complain about yer. And if ever you set foot in the works again, blest if I don't set the watch-dawg at yer. So now yer know."

I listened to this harangue quite unmoved, if indeed I could be said to listen at all with my mind full of the mystery which I had so utterly failed to solve.

"Tell me," said I abruptly, when he had finished, "who was that man?"

Hopkins began to chuckle a little, and to look mysterious.

"Oh, he's a pal o' mine, that's all," said he.

"And what was your 'pal' doing in the attics over the house?"

"That's my business. I put my friends where I like," answered Hopkins doggedly.

"And do you find out how they employ themselves when they are left alone? Did you ever hear of night-frights suffered by the lady of the house? And did it ever occur to you to connect your precious 'pal' with them?"

The opinion I had conceived of the watchman's integrity was strengthened by the way in which he took these questions. He stared at me at first blankly, then curiously, and finally his little ferret-face assumed an anxious, inquiring look.

"Bless my soul, no!" he murmured at last, evidently taken aback at my suggestion.

I followed up my advantage, speaking in very decided tones.

"Well perhaps, now that I have put you on the watch, you'll be a little less obtuse. If your 'pal' should come again to-morrow night, which I tell you is in the highest degree unlikely, just follow him as he goes to the attics, and find out how he passes his time there."

By this time I could see that Hopkins was as much impressed by my earnestness as I had been by his. He stared at me out of the corners of his eyes for some moments, and then asked bluntly:

"And who the dickens are *you*?"

There was no further use in concealing my identity, in fact it must be known the next day by all the household, as I intended to go up to town and bring Mr. Marshall back with me, if I could.

"I was a schoolfellow of Miss Smith's, and her dearest friend," I said. "And I am intimate with Mr. Marshall and all his family. I pretended to be a servant to gain admittance here, because I was sure something was wrong with my friend. Now I have found out what it is, and I shall bring Mr. Marshall down to put things right."

Hopkins looked at me with something like consternation on his face.

"Mr. Charles Marshall, that is, ain't it?" he said dubiously. "I don't know him; he's never been down here, as I knows on, in all the years I've been here. Well," he went on after a pause, in a great burst of resignation, "if anything wrong's happened it's no fault of mine. But as for it's being the man you saw to-night that's at the bottom of it, why it's all my eye; for he's a government detective sent to keep his eye on the excisement!"

He brought this explanation out triumphantly, and I confess it was what Tom Marshall would have called a 'staggerer' to me. What object could a government detective have in frightening poor Mary out of her wits?

"Are you quite sure he's a detective—that man I saw?" I asked much more humbly.

Hopkins laughed contemptuously.

"As sure as I am that my name's 'Opkins, that's all. Why, he's been on this lay for weeks."

"And the woman? Who is she?"

"I don't know. I never see her before. He's been after her 'man' it seems, who's 'wanted' for obtaining goods under false pretences, or something. So she's been following him to try to bribe him off."

"That's not what she said," observed I doubtfully.

"Of course not. Trust a woman not to tell the truth, specially when there ain't nothing to be got by lying. Now then, miss, if you're ready, I'll take you back," he finished bluntly.

He escorted me back into the house, as if I had been a prisoner; and as we met Mrs. Camden in the corridor, he delivered me up to her with the briefly expressed hope that whoever I was, she'd be good enough to keep me out of the works. Then, with a curt salute, he walked off, leaving me to face the chaperon's ire.

For there had been a little scene in my absence. Poor Mary had been running about, crying for "Georgie!" "Georgie Oliver!" and had incoherently let fall words which betrayed me. The rumor had then spread quickly through the household that I was a spy in the camp. I had, therefore, not only to run the gauntlet of Mrs. Camden's fretful questioning, but to bear the hostile and suspicious glances of the servants, a knot of whom, with the vivacious Emily at their head, stood watching me from the end of the corridor as Mary, hearing my voice, rushed from her bedroom and threw her arms round my neck.

It was nearly one o'clock. My absence, and the mysterious rumors that followed, had kept the whole household out of their beds. Telling Mrs. Camden briefly that I would give her any explanations she wanted on the following day, I took Mary back into her room, where she insisted on my passing the rest of the night.

Next day I told both Mrs. Camden and my poor girl that I believed that the latter had been the victim of a trick which, however, I did not think she would suffer from

again. When, however, they both pressed me to say who it was who had played the trick, I had to own myself at a loss; and this fact I could see laid my evidence open to suspicion, especially as I did not think it necessary to relate my adventures of the night. These I was reserving for Mr. Marshall's ear. He, a shrewd lawyer as well as a sympathetic friend, was, I knew, the proper person to go to for advice in the matter.

Mary would not let me start for the City as early as I wished, being nervous, depressed, and anxious to keep me with her. When at last she reluctantly permitted me to get ready, she insisted on following me to my room and remaining while I put on my hat. My dressing-table was in front of the window which was opened. I was glancing out at a big barge, laden with straw, slowly making its way up the river with the incoming tide, when my attention was caught by a female figure on the river-path below. A second look told me that it was the woman who had got into the distillery on the previous night. She was keeping so closely under the shadow of the wall that I did not once get a full view of her, but yet I knew her without the possibility of mistake. The sight filled me with dismay. Who was she? What could her object be in haunting this place? In the present almost childish state of Mary's mind, when she was hardly able to think or care for herself, I did not like to leave her, even for a couple of hours, exposed to the chance of an interview with a jealous or revengeful woman.

As I stood considering what I should do, one of the maids knocked at the door.

"If you please, is Miss Smith here?"

Mary, who was easily startled, sprang up and ran towards me.

"What do you want?" she asked, in a trembling voice.

"If you please, ma'am, Mr. Gold and young Mr. Mar-

shall are at the door, asking if they can see you. I didn't know whether I was to let them in, and so——"

"No, no, no!" cried Mary vehemently. "Tell them I can see no one, I am not well. I——" she stopped, and turned to me in great excitement. "Georgie, you see them; tell them to go away."

I did not try to persuade her to accord the young men an interview, since no good could come of her meeting Hilary in her present state of mind. I was anxious, too, to clear up certain suspicions of my own concerning the young man's conduct, before exerting myself to heal the breach between him and Mary. So I left her and ran down to the front door, not without agitation on my own account, since I had not yet been able entirely to overcome my weakness for that Tom.

When I opened the front door, it was Tom alone whom I found outside.

I suppose we girls are all alike. Because my heart beat very high at sight of him, my manner was very cold.

"Oh, it's you, is it? I thought Mr. Gold was here," I said, holding out my hand a very little way.

Tom, who never took a snub, pressed my fingers effusively. It flashed through my mind as strange that he did not seem surprised to see me.

"He couldn't stand being insulted," he said. "I can. So he's gone to wait for me on the bridge, while I talk to you. Suppose we take a walk round the garden, as I'm not considered good enough to come indoors."

Well as I knew him, his quiet assurance surprised me. He did not a bit mind walking about in full view of the servants, who knew he had been refused admittance to the house. He drew my hand under his arm with a quiet air of proprietorship and began to drag me towards the fruit-trees.

"It's too hot to stay out here in the sun," he explained coolly. "Besides, I like trees."

And he gave my hand another squeeze.

"But you can't stay in the garden," I objected, "when Mary won't let you into the house!"

"The very reason why I should stay in the garden," he retorted calmly. "Besides, why should I be so particular about respecting the orders of a crazy girl, who is just keeping me out of the property which will be mine some day?"

I was appalled by this cold, brutal frankness.

"What are you saying?" I panted out at last. "Have you no heart, no sense of decency?"

"I hope I have a little of both," said Tom composedly.

"But not enough to make a hypocrite of me. If Mary's out of her mind, I'm very sorry for her; but I can't pretend to feel much sympathy for a girl who loses her wits without any provocation, especially when she treats my friend badly, and when her insanity will help me to fortune."

"A pretty pair—you and your friend!" I burst out indignantly. "All you care about is the poor girl's money. I think, in the circumstances, you might have the decency to stay away from the place."

"Perhaps I should if you were not here," said Tom, knocking down an apple from the tree under which he was passing.

"Don't dare to mention me, sir, in the same breath with—with anything, in fact," I finished lamely, unable to express my indignation in well chosen words. "I would never have anything to do with such a heartless creature as you have proved yourself to be, if you were an emperor!"

"Quite right," said Tom. "An empress is hedged round with all sorts of restrictions which you would never stand. You'd be always wanting to go down into the kitchen to see whether the cook's ways were clean."

What was the use of throwing away passionate indignation on this creature?

"How did you know I was here," I asked abruptly and rather suspiciously.

"Hilary met you coming down here, and I guessed that, finding something wrong, you would be quixotic enough to stay."

I had purposely led Tom towards the river, in the hope that we might see the woman on the path below, and that Tom might be able to give me some clue to her identity. We did see her, walking as before close under the shadow of the wall; her back was towards us, and Tom's eyes glanced at her retreating figure with no sign of recognition. He turned his face with more interest towards the bridge on the left.

"There's Hilary," he said.

I followed his glance and saw Mary's discarded *fiancé* leaning moodily against the side of the bridge. Suddenly, however, as we looked, a great change came over him. He sprang up, alert and eager, gazing out before him with a face full of interest. Then he ran back off the bridge at a great rate, and disappeared for a few moments from our eyes; the next glimpse we caught of him showed us his figure getting over the wall of the garden. A few steps more and he was on the river-path below us, walking very quickly, with a flushed face. I watched him breathlessly. Tom curiously: he was in pursuit of the woman. She turned at the sound of his rapid footsteps, and held out her hand with a smile. After the interchange of a few words, they walked on together, still talking earnestly.

I turned sharply to Tom. For once he looked disconcerted as he tried hastily to draw me away.

"Tom," I said, "who is that woman?"

"I—I don't know," said he shortly.

But I laughed in his face. For his assurance had forsaken him.

CHAPTER XII.

WITH one disgusted glance from Hilary and his companion to Tom, I turned abruptly away and walked back through the garden towards the entrance-gates as fast as I could. But Tom was not to be shaken off. He followed, and was of course able easily to keep pace with me,

"Where are you off to in such a hurry?" he asked.

"I'm going up to town to see Mr. Marshall, and I don't wish for your escort, thank you," I replied.

"You're going to have that advantage thrown in, though," he said coolly. "And you ought to be grateful; for the governor's very busy this morning, and perhaps you'll have to come away without seeing him, and be dependent on me for your lunch. And if I have any more tantrums it shall not go beyond the humble bun, 'penny,' not 'Bath.' So be a good girl, and don't give me any more trouble."

I stopped short in dismay.

"Not be able to see him!" I exclaimed. "Oh, but I must, I must. It's life and death almost," I went on, threatening to become hysterical.

It had occurred to me already that Tom's light manner was partly assumed that morning, that there was some real care underneath. Now I felt sure of it; for instead of taking my tragic outburst lightly, as at another time I felt sure he would have done, he grew quite white, and looked at me with a curious questioning expression in his eyes.

"What have you got to tell him?" he asked very shortly, after a moment's pause.

"Never mind."

"I don't see the use of making all this mystery," he said with some acerbity. "I am in my father's confidence, and whatever you tell him I shall hear."

I made no answer to this, and we walked the rest of the way to the station almost in silence. For my part, I think I should have been stoical enough to have travelled the whole distance to the city in dignified silence, if Tom had not presently exerted himself to break it. Assuming a coaxing manner which to me, in my weakness for him, was quite irresistible, he sidled along the seat of the railway-carriage until he was close beside me, and half whispered:

"You've grown very hard, Georgie."

Now, I am not one of those silly girls who burst into tears on the slightest provocation; but I was miserable and mystified, stupid after a bad night's rest, angry with myself for still caring for this heartless fellow, yet weak enough to be moved by his reproach. So I began to cry; and Tom, in real or affected sympathy, put his hand with mine into my pocket in search of a handkerchief to dry my eyes. What he drew out, however, was a piece of cream-colored ribbon which I was taking to town to match. Without seeming to notice the difference, he applied it to my eyes, and of course my horror at finding it spoilt dried up my tears as no tenderness could have done.

"Look what you've done," I sobbed. "It's spoilt now, and it was quite n—new!"

"It was my emotion—it got the better of me," murmured Tom. "Don't you believe I'm fond of you, Georgie?"

I shook my head.

"No, indeed I don't," I said decidedly. "For one thing, I don't believe, after the heartless way in which you spoke about poor Mary, that you are capable of feeling much for any woman; and in the second place, I know you're not capable of feeling much for me."

I ended with a little tremor of the voice ; I couldn't help it.

"And yet you care for me a little bit still?" whispered Tom.

"That doesn't prove you to be worth caring for. It only proves that I'm an idiot."

"Will you give me a kiss, Georgie?" he said insinuatingly putting his great ginger moustache close to my face.

But I intended to let him see that an idiot once is not necessarily an idiot always.

"No!" I said, shooting the word out like a bullet, and drawing myself up very straight. "I will never kiss you again, until you have left off being friends with the man who is breaking Mary's heart."

These words gave Tom a shock. He told me that I was hard and unjust, and that it was Mary, on the contrary, whose caprice and coldness had made Hilary miserable. But of course I was too loyal to my friend to listen to him, and when we arrived at the door of Mr. Marshall's office I was as unconvinced as ever.

Rather afraid lest Tom, in his jealousy at my want of confidence, should try to prevent my seeing his father, I took the daring step of running right through into the private office without knocking or any sort of announcement.

Mr. Marshall was alone, writing at his desk. When I suddenly threw myself on my knees beside him and looked up into his face, he looked as if a cannon ball had landed at his feet.

"Forgive me," I panted out. "Tom said you were busy and perhaps wouldn't see me, and I had something so important to say to you that I had to come. I have been staying with Mary Smith, and last night I caught a man trying to frighten her to death, and he's being doing it for ever so long."

No wonder this incoherent statement took the lawyer's breath away. He examined my face with peculiar intentness, trying to ascertain whether I was really sane.

"A man!" he echoed at last slowly. Then, after another long scrutiny of my features, he asked: "What man?"

I drew a deep sigh and shook my head.

"I don't know. I had never seen him before. The watchman said he was a detective, but I can't believe it. It is all a mystery. I could do nothing but come to you."

I was relieved to see that Mr. Marshall was by no means inclined to make light of my adventure, which I then recounted to him at length. Tom, who had followed me into the room, heard it all, but stood very quietly in the background making no comment. When I had finished, Mr. Marshall spoke, very decidedly.

"This is a very serious matter," he said. "Some one has evidently been tampering with the poor girl's wits. You must tell all you have told me to Mr. Ibbetson, Mary's other guardian. He's a hard-headed man, and his advice may help us."

I was sitting by the table, playing nervously with the torn bit of glove which was one piece of my evidence which I had not yet shown him.

"Tom," and Mr. Marshall turned to his son, "just run round to his office, will you? and ask him if he can come round for five minutes."

But Tom evidently wished to have no more to do with the matter.

"Send Follington," he said shortly. "I've got to drive young Bailey down to Rochampton, and I ought to be with him by this time. The dog-cart's round now."

As he spoke, he opened the door, gave an order in the outer office, and returning, crossed the room to the window and looked out. He was fumbling in his pockets, and the

next moment he pulled out two pair of gloves. One, a pair of light, thin kid that he had worn that morning, he threw carelessly on the table. The other pair he proceeded to draw on his hands.

I watched him, horror-struck. As he proceeded to draw on the second, I noticed that the end was torn off.

With a cry, scarcely knowing what I did, I snatched it from his hand and produced the strip of dogskin I had been carrying.

It fitted exactly into the torn place.

CHAPTER XIII.

At the cry I gave on discovering that the torn glove was Tom's, both father and son stood for a moment as if transfixed, the former, I think, scarcely understanding what had happened until I explained where I had found the incriminating scrap of dogskin. But Tom understood even before, with incoherent words broken by sobs, I owned that I had found it close by the ventilator over Mary's room. Then, overcome by misery and shame, I hung my head and cried without restraint.

Father and son, meanwhile, stood facing each other silently, it seemed for quite a long time. At last I looked up, still scarcely able to repress my sobs.

"Oh, Tom," I whispered, "how could you?"

Tom, whose face was a curious grey color, laughed hoarsely.

"Well, you thought me capable of any villainy, and so I am, you see."

"But it was not you! You were not the man I saw!" I cried in an eager whisper.

"No, but I know all about him," said Tom shortly. "I may as well make a clean breast of it now," he continued in a strange, constrained tone, looking at his father. "And we needn't pretend it's very shocking in me, as it would be in a person who'd borne a high character. Everybody knows me and my opinions!"

Even at that moment, with a young man's vanity, Tom seemed to feel a little pride in his reputation for cynicism. But I could not refrain from a wail of disappointment.

"Oh Tom, but I had always believed in my heart that you were better than your opinions."

He looked round at me quickly, and I thought he seemed touched.

"Well, I've undeceived you now," he said in a much less resolute tone than before. "Instead of wavering between trust and distrust you can have the satisfaction of knowing I'm a real out-and-outer."

But for all his levity, he was ashamed, I could see that; and I own to the disgraceful fact that my heart went out to him in his humiliation, guilty though it was, even more than it had done in the days when his airs of easy superiority had been sometimes rather hard to bear. A sudden stab of jealousy went through me, however, as I remembered another feature of the case.

"The woman!" I cried. "Oh, Tom, then you knew who the woman was!"

"Upon my honor—if you think I have enough left to swear by—I never saw her before this morning."

If this were only true I felt, weak that I was, that I could forgive him all the rest—in time. I could not repress a sigh of relief. At that moment a clerk came in and announced "Mr. Ibbetson!"

"You'll keep my counsel—just for this morning?" said Tom abruptly, leaning over me and speaking in a low voice.

I did not answer him except by a reproachful look. He might have known he need not ask me that!

"Of course she will," broke in Mr. Marshall's voice, "Georgie would never utter a word to get an old friend into trouble, if they tied her to the stake; isn't that true, Georgie?"

"I hope so, Mr. Marshall," said I.

The sound of his voice had startled me. In truth I had been so much absorbed in my feelings about Tom that I had almost forgotten that anyone else was in the room. But now I noticed in the father's face the effects of the son's confes-

sion of guilt. I had never seen Mr. Marshall, even when most hardworked, look so pale and so disturbed. He, like me, had always, I knew, had a secret belief in Tom. I had just time to cross over to his chair and to whisper, with my hand placed affectionately on his shoulder, "Don't be hard upon Tom, will you?" when Mr. Ibbetson walked slowly into the room.

His entrance cast a fresh gloom upon all of us.

Mary's second guardian was a man of about sixty-five years of age, who possessed the peculiar faculty of making you feel, in his presence, how bad human nature could be. This arose from no failing in Mr. Ibbetson himself, who had always borne as high a character for integrity as for shrewdness; it was a consequence of his life-long habit of looking out for and finding the worst traits of the men and women with whom he had to deal. One always, therefore, appeared before him in one's worst colors: I, for one, felt that I was never so hasty, so foolish, or so frivolous as when he was in the room, however silent he might be. I knew that he repaid my dislike very heartily; and I thought he showed his displeasure at my presence by a slight contraction of his thin, bristly grey eyebrows as he entered, walking as usual in a stooping attitude, as if to hide his face as much as possible.

He nodded without smiling first to Mr. Marshall, and then to Tom, and without extending the courtesy to me, sat down and began to rub the gold eyeglasses he scarcely ever used.

"You sent for me, Marshall?" he said.

"Yes," answered poor Mr. Marshall, who was not very successful in concealing the fact that he had had a great shock. "I have had some very unsatisfactory news about our unfortunate ward, Mary Smith. There is some sort of mystery about it, and I hoped that you might help us to clear it up."

Poor Mr. Marshall! He may have hoped this when he sent for his co-guardian a few minutes before, but he certainly could not be in the same mind now that he had discovered the culprit to be his own son. I felt so sorry both for him and for Tom that I looked steadfastly out of the window, for fear those cold, shrewd eyes should read any part of the truth in mine. Mr. Ibbetson gave one shrewd glance at us all round, and then went on rubbing his eye-glasses as if his whole attention was given to that occupation.

“Let’s hear it,” he said briefly.

“I am afraid neither you nor I can entirely acquit ourselves of blame in the matter; for it seems that since she has been living down at the distillery she has been quietly losing her wits. Now we ought to have gone down there from time to time to see how she was getting on. I have been so busy that it would have been difficult for me to spare the time; but you, Ibbetson, a comparatively idle man, might have given the girl a look in.”

Mr. Ibbetson shook his head without looking up.

“Not much use for me to go,” he said drily. “Never knew Mary Smith had any wits: shouldn’t have noticed the loss of them.”

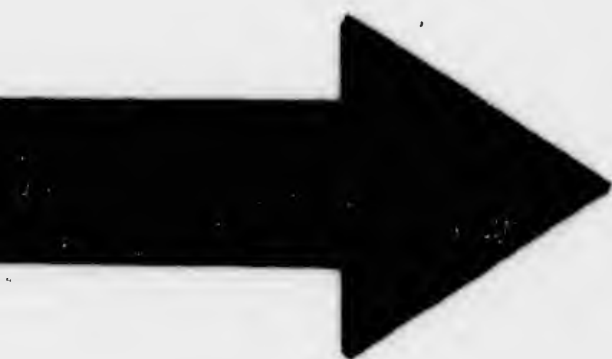
I, in my seat at the window, moved impatiently. Mr. Ibbetson noticed this, as he noticed everything; but he did not look up.

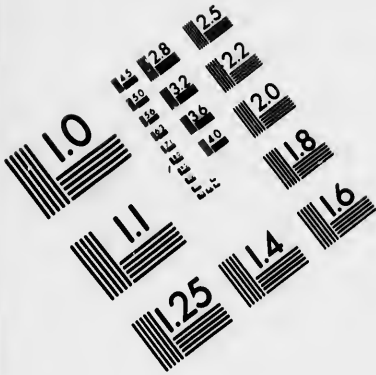
“You mustn’t say that before Georgie Oliver,” said Mr. Marshall, turning round kindly towards me. “It is she who found out poor Mary’s case, and it is from her that you must hear all about it. You know Georgie, I think?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Ibbetson, in a tone which plainly said that the acquaintance gave him no pleasure. He wheeled his chair round so as to face me. “Is it you who are to tell the story? Begin then.”

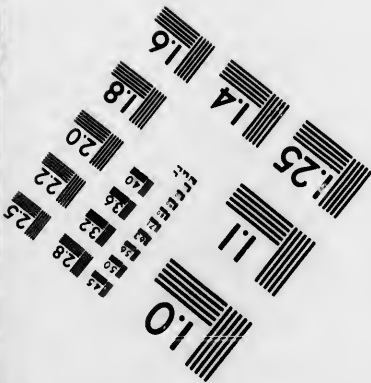
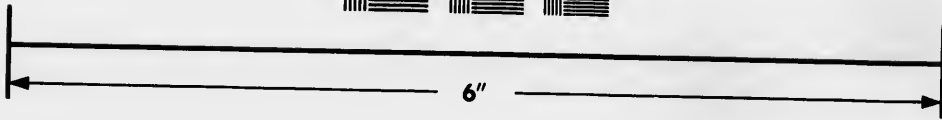
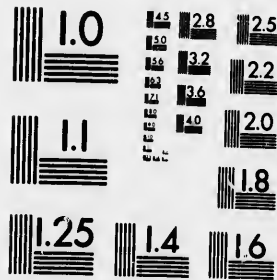
I obeyed, feeling more nervous and miserable than I had ever done in my life before. However I may try to tone







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down my narrative, I felt sure that he would pierce to the truth. It was in vain that I made the recital as bare as possible ; by adroit and unexpected questions he ferreted out every incident, excepting, of course, that of the glove. When I had finished he remained quite silent, making no comment, until Mr. Marshall spoke to him.

"Well, what do you think of it all?"

"It doesn't much matter what I think, until I think I know what scoundrel is at the bottom of this," answered Mr. Ibbetson quietly.

Then he got up as if to go. Mr. Marshall rose too, evidently excited.

"Do you mean to take any steps?"

"Yes. One of us must go down and stay at the house ; that will put a stop to this hanky-panky. And as you are so busy, I suppose it must be I."

Mr. Marshall looked disturbed and glanced at Tom. I thought he felt his son's misdemeanors would stand a poor chance of concealment under that cynical pair of eyes.

"You had better let me go down," he said, in a desperate sort of tone. "There's a woman to be faced and questioned, and you'd come off badly in that part of the business."

"Perhaps I should," returned the other with a grimace of distaste. "But can you go at once? The girl's a fool, but that's no reason why we should let a knave profit by her folly. The matter must be looked into immediately."

"I will go down to-night," said Mr. Marshall, to my great relief. "It's an awful sacrifice of my time to get away just now, but I feel so guilty at my share in neglecting her, that I shall go, whatever it costs."

I jumped up from my chair with an exclamation of joy.

"You'll come to-night, really to-night?" I asked eagerly.

"Really to-night," said Mr. Marshall decidedly. "And now, my dear, you must be off ; for I have a lot of work to do before I can get away."

He shook me warmly by both hands, and I went out of the office nearly as sorry for him as for Tom, who ran down the stairs after me and caught me at the bottom. He had stood by quite silently while I told my story for the second time. I looked up into his face timidly, as if to ask mutely if I had not done the best I could for him. I think he understood, for his eyes looked moist, and he spoke to me in a gentler tone than I had ever before heard him use. He seemed more contrite, more cast down than one would have thought possible in a man capable of such conduct as he had just confessed to.

"Will you let me take you somewhere to lunch, Georgie?"

I hesitated. I wanted to go with him dreadfully, but I was rather afraid, if I saw too much of him just then in his penitent mood, that I might condone too much and too quickly. The dog-cart standing outside caught my eye.

"You have an appointment," I said hastily.

"What's an appointment when a girl is concerned? And you, of all girls," said he, rather more adoringly than I liked.

For Mr. Ibbetson was close behind us on the stairs.

"I'll send the dog-cart away," said Tom, and he ran out of the door and down the steps. I blushed crimson with shame and a kind of terror, for Mr. Ibbetson stopped and looked straight at me for a couple of seconds.

"Do you know who is at the bottom of this business?" he asked abruptly.

"I—Oh, no, no. How should I? How——"

"That will do," said the old man drily, tightening his lips as if in disdain. "But you won't be able to shield anybody long, my good girl, for I have a capital scent for a rogue."

CHAPTER XIV.

I WAS so much shocked by the threat contained in the old lawyer's words that when Tom, a moment later, returned to say that he had dismissed his dog-cart and was ready to take me to luncheon I stammered out an excuse as coldly as I could, trying in this weak way to put Mr. Ibbetson off the scent of my liking for him. But all the while I felt that the cold eyes read my real feelings under every pretence, and I ran off, miserable and shame-faced, on my way to the station.

Tom didn't run after me, as I had hoped he would do. Perhaps he shared my wish to trick Mr. Ibbetson by a show of indifference. At any rate I lost two trains on purpose without his catching me up, and a last despairing look up and down the platform as I got into the third showed me no sign of him.

I should have thought myself incapable of feeling any more shocks that day; but when a hoarse voice called to me just as I was entering Mary's gates, I started and almost staggered. For I recognized the voice as that of Hilary Gold, whom I had forgotten in my emotions concerning Tom. Yet Hilary was implicated too, I was sure, for he knew the woman.

"Don't go in yet, don't go in," he pleaded, coming to my side and speaking with great earnestness. "I knew you had gone up to town, and I have been waiting about all day for your return. I must speak to you, I must. I am miserable, almost mad."

Indeed his appearance confirmed these words. His handsome face was haggard and thin, his eyes were wild,

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his manner was restless and desperate. I turned back into the road with him, half-reluctant, half-anxious to hear what he had to say for himself.

"You are Mary's friend ; perhaps you understand her," he began at once. "Tell me what her treatment of me means then. She has no right to behave to me like this. I write to her ; my letters are returned. I call ; she refuses to see me. What am I to think ? What does it mean ?"

"I suppose it means that she wants to break off her engagement with you——" I began.

He interrupted me fiercely.

"She has no right to do it, she shall not do it," he burst out passionately. "What has she to complain of ? I worship her ; she is never out of my thoughts. She is my ideal, with all her little faults and caprices. As I loved her on the night I first saw her so I love her still ; it is an infatuation if you like ; but there is no denying it, nor reasoning with it. I adore her, and I will not be flung aside like a cast-off glove without explanation or reason."

He seemed so passionately in earnest that my wits were shaken, and I asked myself if this apparently desperate lover could really have had a hand in a scheme for turning his *fiancée's* brain. And if so, what could his object be ? But then there was that woman with the long, grey-green eyes ! I had not the courage deliberately to tax him with the acquaintance of this suspicious-looking lady, but I thought I could work round to the subject.

"You don't seem to understand the state of mind poor Mary is in," I said, looking at him very intently. "She is really scarcely responsible for her actions, owing to a series of frights to which she has been subjected."

Hilary laughed incredulously.

"Of course a girl is never accountable for her conduct when she treats a man badly, if that is what you mean," he said shortly. "I know that. As for this story about

ghosts, frights, or whatever it is, I don't believe a word of it. It is simply an excuse to shake me off."

"Well, if a girl likes to break her engagement with a man, there is nothing more to be said, except perhaps to call her a jilt," said I.

"But there is a great deal more to be said," cried Hilary, suddenly stopping in front of me and looking down with a savagery which almost frightened me. "She is bound by every tie of common honor to marry me. She does not understand that I am a desperate man. She has ruined me; she is bound to compensate me. She will listen to you, and you can tell her this: if she returns the letter I am going to write to her to-night I will not be put off again; I will see her, if I have to force my way into her house."

I was really frightened, not only by the tone in which he said this, but by some of the words themselves.

"She has *ruined* you! What do you mean?" I exclaimed.

But Hilary did not answer. He was looking rather confused, as if he had said more than he intended to say. After a short pause, I began again to take him to task for the way in which he spoke of Mary. He did not at all fulfil my ideal of a lover, I said.

"No, I suppose not. Tom Marshall does, no doubt."

I don't know whether he meant to speak sarcastically, but of course I thought he did; I was so overwhelmed with anger and shame that I turned abruptly round without another word, and with tears of mortification in my eyes, dashed through the gate, by which the porter was standing, and fled up to the house in a passion of distress.

I had to check my grief when I came in sight of the drawing-room windows, for Mary was looking out for me and ran to meet me. I was glad to see already the little change for the better in her condition implied by this eagerness.

"You have been crying, Georgie," she said, putting her arm affectionately around me.

"N—no, at least—it's all right," I answered incoherently. "Your Uncle Charles is coming here this evening, and he's going to find out who has been frightening you, and he won't go away until he has found everything out."

"I'm so glad," whispered the girl, though a shade fell over her face even at this reference to the frights she had experienced. "Oh, Georgie, I don't know what to say to you! I have begun to live again since you came. You see, they all look upon me as such a fanciful creature that they wouldn't pay any attention to what I told them. I wanted Uncle Charles to come down here, but he wrote to say he was too busy; then I went up to see him, and he roared with laughter when I told him about the light going out in my room,—and—and the things flying about in it."

Her voice sank to a hoarse whisper on the last words, and she glanced furtively from side to side at the shrubs and the overhanging trees of the avenue, as if in the half-light she was afraid of seeing something uncanny.

Mr. Marshall had told me that he should not be able to arrive until late, but Mary began to get very anxious when dinner, which she had put off, had to be eaten without him. It was not until just past nine o'clock that he drove up in a cab. I noticed then what a strong effect the disclosures of the morning had had upon him; he looked haggard, uneasy, and ill. He greeted us both in his usual affectionate manner, but it was easy to see that it was only by an effort that he spoke to us with his accustomed brightness. When Mary, who was in a highly excited state, and anxious to impress upon him the truth of the experiences she had suffered, clung to his arm and tried to draw him away for a private talk with her, he disengaged himself hurriedly, with a sort of shrinking, as if he himself bore part of the disgrace of his son's delinquencies,

"Yes, yes, I know," he said hastily. "Georgie has told me everything. I feel I have to ask your forgiveness, child, for not having listened to you when you told me the same story. But you know we always looked upon you as a little feather-brain, and so you had to wait until sensible Georgie came to confirm your words."

Mr. Marshall did not once look at her as he spoke, and then he put his hand through my arm and walked with me to the window, not leaving Mary time to answer. I felt very sorry to see him take the matter so much to heart, although it was only what I had expected of him.

"Dear, Mr. Marshall," I said, as he stepped with me out on to the lawn, complaining that it was very hot indoors, "indeed you must not worry yourself so much about this. Mary is less ill than I thought; already now that she has her friends about her she seems to be getting all right again. Do you know, I think there is some one at least as much to blame as—as poor Tom!"

Mr. Marshall started.

"Well," said he after a pause, "and who is that?"

"Hilary Gold."

He seemed very much surprised at this answer.

"Hilary!" he echoed. "What can he have to do with it? How can it be to his interest to frighten the girl out of her wits."

"I don't know, unless he is mean enough to revenge himself in that way upon her for refusing to see him or to answer his letters. That is what he complains of. And, Mr. Marshall—" I hesitated; "Hilary knows something about that woman who seems to haunt the place. You know I have seen him meet her twice."

Mr. Marshall looked angry and disturbed.

"I saw Hilary two hours ago outside the gates," I said. "But of course I did not like to say anything about this woman to him. It is such a delicate matter that I

thought it best to leave it to you. Who was this man she met in the attic? And what has she to do with Hilary? If only the woman would come again while you are here, you might be able to make her tell something."

But Mr. Marshall looked as if this was the last thing he should wish; indeed it *was* a delicate matter. We had by this time walked the whole length of the garden, and were standing under the boundary wall by the bridge. It was almost dark; only faint gleams of dying light from the west came to us through the branches of the fruit-trees, which grew thickly about us.

"Come," said Mr. Marshall suddenly, "it is time to go in; it's getting cold."

I saw that he was shivering, yet it seemed to me quite warm still.

"You are ill," said I anxiously. "You have let this business distress you too much, and with the worry of your own proper work, you will break down under it, if you don't take care."

For indeed he seemed to be growing livid before my eyes, and he began to hurry me along to the house with nervous steps. I fancied, as I almost ran by his side to keep pace with him, that I heard a noise among the trees on our right, as of some one forcing his way between the branches. Mr. Marshall heard it too, I think, and in the nervous state to which the disclosures of the morning had reduced him, it affected him strangely. Seizing my arm, he began to talk loudly in a tone of forced liveliness as he drew me along, as far from the trees as possible, on our way to the lawn. But quick as we might be, somebody else was quicker still.

We had reached the lawn, on which the lamps in the drawing-room were now throwing lines of yellow light, when a figure sprang out from among the trees and intercepted us.

It was the woman who was haunting the place, the woman with the grey-green eyes. She was breathing heavily, in a state of great excitement, and she was holding her arms a little bent, with clenched hands, as if she wanted to fall upon us and tear us to pieces.

Mr. Marshall was, if anything, even more alarmed than I. He stood quite still, uttering almost a moan as the woman stared into his face. I tried to speak to her, to ask her why she burst out upon us like that. But she only tossed her head and laughed at my efforts derisively, without even looking at me.

"I shall have justice now," she said.

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CHAPTER XV.

As was to be expected, it was Mr. Marshall who recovered first from the shock of the woman's sudden appearance before us. I saw at once that he, a lawyer, jumped to the conclusion that the lady's errand was the levying of blackmail. He addressed her firmly, but with the utmost courtesy.

"If it is justice you are in search of, madam, you could not come to a better person than myself to get it for you. I am, as this lady will tell you, a lawyer——"

"I don't want to know that," said the woman sullenly. She seemed rather taken aback at finding herself treated with so much courtesy, I thought; and after staring intently at Mr. Marshall for a few moments, she dropped her eyes uneasily, as she went on in a tone of subdued anger: "I don't want any fine words at all; I've heard plenty, and they've done me no good. I've been promised money, and it's money I want and must have; and will have too!" she added with an access of ferocity, as she raised her eyes, and glared first at Mr. Marshall and then at me.

The lawyer took this outburst quite quietly.

"If," said he, "you can make out a good case—without scandalizing this young lady, mind—" and he laid his hand upon my shoulder—"we will see if something cannot be done towards giving you justice, or money, which you seem to consider the same thing, immediately."

She hesitated. The lawyer's unemotional yet courteous treatment evidently puzzled her. She seemed to doubt

whether to trust these smooth appearances. At last she said shortly, glancing at me :

"Why don't you send her away?"

"Because," answered Mr. Marshall, with more asperity than he had used yet, "this lady has been very much alarmed by some extraordinary tricks which you seem to have been playing about the place the last day or two——"

She interrupted him with an ironical laugh.

"Extraordinary tricks *I* have been playing, have I? Not so extraordinary as some that have been played by other people, I rather think!"

I was in agony. She was going to implicate Tom, I felt sure: so did Mr. Marshall, whose face suddenly became full of anxiety as he interrupted her.

"Well, explain your own share in this business as well as you can; you need not drag others into it."

"Oh, I needn't? Thank you. That is satisfactory, at any rate," she went on, in the same tone as before.

I wondered, as I noticed the keen, inquiring expression with which she regarded Mr. Marshall's face, whether she knew or guessed that Tom was his son.

"You have a grievance, we understand, against someone," said Mr. Marshall as she paused.

"Ye—es," she answered, glancing at me and then casting down her eyes, as if hesitating whether she would submit to this interrogatory after all. Apparently she then made up her mind that she would not, for she crossed her arms doggedly and threw back her head. I think she was going to burst out into a passionate tirade, when Mr. Marshall hastily stemmed the rising torrent.

"Remember," he said in a clear, cold voice, like the falling of water drop by drop upon a stone, "that whether or no we do our best to satisfy you now depends on the explanation you give this young lady."

If passion gleamed in one of this woman's eyes, calcula-

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tion certainly peeped out of the other. After a few moments' thought—

"What will you do for me?" she asked briefly.

"Why, if you will satisfy us who it is that promised you money, I will advance you some myself; and, being a lawyer, I shall know how to get it repaid."

"But he hasn't got any, at least he says so. That's his excuse," said the woman slowly, still fixing her cunning eyes upon Mr. Marshall's face.

"Well, leave that to me to find out. The point with you is that if you answer our questions satisfactorily—mine and this lady's—you will get some to-night."

The woman smiled, and I really thought I liked her angry looks the best. It was a wicked smile, the smile of a creature without heart or conscience, or so it seemed to me.

"I have been very badly treated," she began slowly, looking away from us on to the lines of light thrown by the lamp on the grass, as if carefully considering the effect of each word she uttered. "I understood that this man would marry me, and I gave up a very good position in that belief. Therefore, when he tried to throw me over, it was a good deal more than a question of the affections. Don't you think so?"

She turned abruptly, even fiercely, to me.

"Certainly. If—if it is as you say," I assented rather timidly.

"I tell you it is, and I could prove it," she burst out, in an almost menacing tone.

Mr. Marshall hastened to calm her.

"The lady did not mean to express incredulity, I am sure."

"Oh no," I agreed quickly,

She gave a scornful glance at both of us, and went on.

"So when I found myself thrown over, I took the trouble to track him out, and discovered, as I had expected, that

he had been masquerading under a false name. The rascal had never meant to marry me at all, of course."

"Perhaps there was some obstacle," suggested Mr. Marshall.

"Rather," returned the woman, with a sharp glance at him and a sharp laugh. "Luckily, I had taken care to find out a few things, which gave me a hold upon my gentleman. So that he had to promise me money, and as, what with his betting and other extravagances, he never had any, it was to come out of somebody else's pocket—Miss Smith's."

I started. Mr. Marshall was still more shocked than I. He stared at the woman in speechless horror. She would not meet our eyes, but gave a little chuckling laugh.

"I thought I should surprise you," she said in a very soft voice.

I had recovered my power of speech.

"And who is it that has done this?" I asked breathlessly. "Not, surely, Hilary Gold!"

The woman said nothing. Possessed by a terrible dread lest after all it should not be Hilary but someone I held dearer, I looked piteously into her face, not daring to put another question. After a few moments of horrible silence Mr. Marshall spoke. His voice was husky, and I thought that he must share my own fear.

"Won't you answer this young lady?" he asked very gently, very gravely. "Was the name Hilary Gold?"

"That was not the name I knew him by," said she slowly.

Suspense was growing agonizing. I touched the sleeve of her dress imploringly.

"Was it"—I could scarcely utter the words, "was it the gentleman you were speaking to on the path by the river this morning?"

She looked at Mr. Marshall, she looked at me. Then

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she folded her hands tightly together and answered in a clear voice :

" Yes."

I was half relieved, I confess, but still miserable and suspicious, for all the mystery was by no means cleared up, and one could not feel entire confidence in this lady's veracity.

" But the man who was with you in the attic, whom you spoke to, appealed to, *that* was not Hilary Gold ! For I saw him."

The woman looked at me in some astonishment.

" You saw him, you say ? "

" Yes."

" Then you didn't see quite enough, that's all."

She turned from me very unceremoniously, as if she felt that her duty was done, and it was time for her reward. Mr. Marshall also interpreted her action in this manner. By his tone when he next spoke I felt more than ever convinced that he had feared she would implicate his son, for there was in his voice a sound of relief from a great suspense.

" You have been honest and straightforward with us," he said, " and we must keep our bargain with you. I am deeply grieved for my ward's conduct to you——"

" Your ward ! " interrupted the woman sharply.

" Yes. I regret to say that Hilary Gold is my ward," he went on hastily. " I say I am sorry for his conduct to you, and I will myself take him to task about it, though it is, as you see, a delicate matter."

" Very," she threw in drily.

" In the meantime," went on Mr. Marshall without heeding her, " I must keep my promise to lend you what money you immediately want. How much will that be ? "

" Fifty pounds," she answered promptly.

Mr. Marshall raised his eyebrows.

"I am afraid you are right, and it will be a long time before I get that sum back from poor Hilary Gold," said he. "I must go and see if I have brought my cheque-book; I have some notes here," and he took out his pocket-book, "but—not enough."

He was proceeding to enter the house; but the woman, in whose eyes cupidity had begun to gleam more brightly than revenge, detained him with a strong grip.

"Send the young lady," she said quietly. "I don't know you, you see; and as the gentleman is your ward, I don't know whether I should be wise to trust you."

Mr. Marshall and I were both amused at this. I smiled at him, and he smiled back at me, as he said:

"Take this key, Georgie, and open my writing-case. Look in all the pockets. If you find a cheque book, bring it to me with a pen and ink. If not, go to Mary, and ask her to lend me fifty pounds, and to make the cheque payable to—What name shall I say?"

And he turned to the woman.

"Dora Selton."

I ran into the house and up to Mr. Marshall's room, and found the writing-case in his portmanteau. But there was no cheque-book in it, nothing but letters and papers; so I ran downstairs and asked Mary for the fifty pounds, as I had been told to do. Mary showed no curiosity to learn what it was for, but as soon as I said that Mr. Marshall wanted it she gave me twenty pounds in gold and a cheque for thirty more. Even the woman's name seemed to rouse no interest in her deadened mind. All she seemed anxious about was that she should not betray stupidity by making a mistake in writing out the cheque.

"Is that right, Georgie, is that right?" she asked, as she handed me the strip of paper, raising her blue eyes to my face with that helpless, pleading look now so common with her.

"Yes, quite right, dear," I answered, kissing her forehead in rather a shame-faced way as I left her.

For it was exceedingly repugnant to my feelings to have to take her money to satisfy this other woman, even as a loan to Mr. Marshall. I wished he had not set me this task, but of course it was not for me to gainsay him.

I had found Mary in the inner drawing-room; so, not wishing to pass again through the outer one, where Mrs. Camden was, I opened the nearest of the French windows, which was seldom used, and burst out on to the garden-path, brushing past a clump of evergreens which grew right up against the window. To my great fright, I almost fell against a man in hiding among them. Suppressing a scream, and determined not to let him go without knowing who it was, I dragged him out—for he was a little man—into what faint light there was from the lamp rays. It was Hopkins.

"'Ere, 'old 'ard, missis," said he in a low voice, "I ain't a-burgling. If I like to do a little spying as well as you, I s'pose there ain't no call to kick up a shindy."

"Oh, if it's only you," I said disdainfully, "it's all right of course. Stop," I went on suddenly, though indeed he was not attempting to move. "Mr. Marshall is here, and he might like to ask you a few questions."

Away at the other end of the lawn, well under the trees, so that it was only by straining my eyes I could distinguish them, were the two persons I had left.

"Ah, he might, mightn't he?" answered Hopkins drily. "Why shouldn't he have a turn at the pump, eh?"

Without answering this vague question, I ran across the lawn and put the money silently into Mr. Marshall's hands. The woman took it greedily, not paying much heed, I thought, to a few words of advice from Mr. Marshall, who particularly warned her against appearing in this part of the world again.

"Mind, I've befriended you this time, because I admit that you have not been well treated," he concluded, "but I consider that we have now done as much as you have any right to expect—for after all my ward is a poor man, and it would have done you very little good to marry him—while you must see yourself the impropriety of haunting the house of a perfectly inoffensive lady like my niece."

"Oh, I quite understand how the case lies," answered the woman in her hardest tone of mockery. "And I appreciate your motives only a little less than I do your money. Good-evening, And good-evening, madam."

She turned from the one to the other with a deep bend, and walked away down the avenue. Her dress and carriage were so ladylike that I guessed that the lodge-porter let her in and out without suspicion, but I suggested to Mr. Marshall, as she disappeared, that the man should be warned against doing so in the future.

"Oh well, we'll see about that to-morrow," he said wearily. "It's rather hard upon us old fogeys that the young fellow should bring down this explosive sort of lady upon our heads. I feel as if I had been facing a she-bear, and she had left the mark of her claws upon me."

He looked inexpressibly tired, worried and haggard. I thought I would not teeze him to interrogate Hopkins until next day; but as we drew near the house he saw a movement among the shrubs and clutched at my arm.

"I am nervous to-night," he said hoarsely. "I fancied I saw a face thrust out from between the evergreens."

"It was no fancy," said I, as I laughed reassuringly. "It is the night-watchman at the distillery. I thought you would like to ask him some questions, so I told him to wait. But you are too tired to-night, Mr. Marshall. Put it off till to-morrow morning."

The thought of another harassing interview was too much for him. He did not say a single word in answer, but

leaned on my arm so heavily that I got frightened, and motioning to Hopkins with my hand to go away, hurried Mr. Marshall into the house. As soon as I had seen him seat himself, in an attitude of intense weariness, I ran out again to speak to Hopkins.

But I was too late. Chuckling to himself in a mocking manner like a little wiry imp of mischief, the night-watchman, lantern in hand, was vaulting over the wall into his own domain, and vouchsafed no word in answer to my calls, screeching out instead, in a cracked voice without any trace of melody :

“For—or he’s a jolly good fellow, for he’s a jolly good fe—hellow ;
For—or he’s a jolly good fe—hellow, which no—body can deny.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE rest of the evening was passed most uncomfortably by all of us. Poor Mrs. Camden, who felt that this sudden influx of friends of Mary's was a tacit reproach to her guardianship, was cold and distant to me, alternately dignified and humble to Mr. Marshall. He himself was evidently worn out by fatigue and anxiety, which he in vain tried to dissemble by a forced gaiety quite unlike his habitual cheerfulness. Mary, in whose mental condition the improvement seemed to show hour by hour, was depressed by her uncle's manner, and also by certain misgivings of her own which she confided to me, much to my consternation.

It was quite late in the evening ; I was shutting up the piano, after having had my efforts to wile away the melancholy of the assemblage by music very much "sat upon." Suddenly I felt Mary's hand upon my shoulder, and looking round with a start I saw that her great blue eyes were bright with excitement, and that the dull and dangerous apathy which had alarmed me so much was gone—for the time at least.

"Georgie," she whispered. "Come into my room when we go upstairs, I want to speak to you."

When, therefore, we all separated for the night, I tapped at Mary's door when I had taken my candle into my own room. She dragged me in quickly, and shut the door with one of the old, frightened glances around. I put my arm reassuringly round her waist.

"Come, Mary," I cried, laughing, "you have nothing to be afraid of now. The person or persons who played you

those cruel tricks won't try them while Mr. Marshall is about, you may be quite sure."

After Tom's confession, of course I had the best possible reason to believe that we were safe from any more nocturnal frights, and my confidence gave her courage. Recovering a calmer manner, she told me what was troubling her.

"Do you know, Georgie," she said in a low voice, "I am afraid I have been treating poor Hilary very badly."

What could I say? How could I sympathize with her, having such good reason to fear that he had been treated by us all a great deal too well? On the other hand, I dared not, in her present excitable state and without consulting Mr. Marshall, add to her trouble by any hint of my own knowledge or suspicions. I could only listen while she went on with great earnestness :

"I know he has been irritable with me ; but then, as he says, it is a very difficult position for a man without money — that of *fiancé* to a girl as well off as I. And then Uncle Charles seemed to doubt him, and that made me doubtful and suspicious. And then these frights came, and he wouldn't believe them, and laughed at me. So then I wouldn't see him ; and because he wrote in what I thought a jeering tone I sent back his letters. And presently, as I grew more frightened and suspicious, I refused to see him at all, and he sent me rude and angry letters. Some I read, and some I sent back ; but still I wouldn't see him. But now, Georgie, that you and Uncle Charles are here, and I am safe and more like my old self once more, I feel that I may have been too hard upon him. My love for him seems to come back, and I know—I am sure that I have wronged him by my capricious treatment and my hard thoughts. Oh, Georgie, I am sure of it, and I must see him at once to tell him so."

I did not know how to meet her eyes, which were trying

to look into mine with a wistful brightness that told of returning health of mind.

While I was racking my brains for something coherent and calming to say, which should yet commit me to nothing, we were both startled by a loud, harsh cry in a man's voice. Poor Mary clung to me in terror. I rushed to the door and opened it. There was a horrible, gurgling sound as of someone calling, gasping for breath.

"It is in Mr. Marshall's room!" I cried. "He is in a fit, or struggling with someone. Let me go, let me go!"

I broke away from Mary, who would have detained me, and rushing to the door of the room Mr. Marshall occupied, I tried to open it. But it was locked. From inside still came the hoarse, choking cries. They seemed to me, however, to be growing fainter as I knocked and called, getting no answer. In desperation I rushed to the work-room and brought back the poker, with which I proceeded to batter the door with such good-will that in the course of a few minutes I managed to burst it open.

By that time Mr. Marshall's cries and moans had entirely ceased. He was lying, fully dressed, on the floor, with his hands tightly clenched and his eyes rolled up. I knew that he was in a fit. About the room half-a-dozen great owls were flying, beating the air and the walls with their wings, and uttering hideous screeching noises, just as they had done in Mary's room the night before. Only now the faint light from the corridor showed me that a string was attached to the leg of each; and even as I entered, I saw them drawn up quickly, one by one, shrieking and fluttering, through the square ventilator overhead. At the same time a high, cackling laugh, that I recognized, broke upon my ears. Surely, surely, it was Hopkins' voice!

I rang the bell loudly, and in a little while some of the servants came, entering in a body, and evidently very much alarmed. By that time Mr. Marshall, whose clothes

I had soaked through and through with cold water in my attempts to bring him back to consciousness, was recovering. We gave him some brandy, and Mrs. Camden and I stayed with him until he was himself again. But the natural color never came back to his face; I was almost afraid to leave him, lest he should die in the night. For the paltry trick had had an even more startling effect upon him than it had had upon his fragile niece.

"You won't laugh at poor Mary now, will you?" I said, when he had declared himself "all right again."

Strong man as he was, he shuddered.

"No, indeed," he said, "I—I—we won't talk about it."

When at last we left him, he had the room bright with a whole forest of candles, and said that he should sit up reading until it was daylight. I was in such a bewildered state of mind, that when I came out of his room I turned to the right instead of to the left, and walked on until I found myself close to the door which divided the house proper from the distillery stores. There I suddenly stopped with a cry.

The door was ajar, and peeping through was the little impish face of the night-watchman, wearing a curious expression. I drew a long breath and stopped him as he was trying to draw back.

"You, it must be *you*, who are at the bottom of all this! It was *your* laugh I heard!" I cried breathlessly.

And at the same moment I perceived that his hands were torn and scratched, and that there were a few loose feathers on his clothes.

"Well," said he, "you'd better have me took up then!"

And with a straight stare, half-quizzical, half-defiant, which I could not understand, he shut himself into his own domain.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN I woke up the next morning and remembered the events I had so recently taken part in, I felt that the mystery of it all was threatening to turn my own brain. Whose pay was Harry Hopkins in, if, as it now appeared, it was he who worked the nightly disturbances? Was it really Tom who had engaged him in this wicked business? If so, how was it that it had not been stopped since the exposure of the day before? And why, for the first time, had another victim than Mary been chosen—and that victim Mr. Marshall?

There was no satisfactory answer forthcoming to any of these questions, and it was with a heavy heart that I went downstairs. Mary had had a good night, but it was something more than that which made her cheeks burn and her eyes glitter, and gave her a feverish animation which alarmed me nearly as much as the apathy from which she had previously suffered. Mr. Marshall sent down word that he would breakfast upstairs, and would be glad to see Mary and me afterwards, if we would not mind the trouble of coming up to his room, as he was too ill to get up.

Mary seized me after breakfast, just as I was leaving the room.

"Don't go yet," she whispered. "I'm going to send Mrs. Camden to see how uncle is, and we'll go up presently. I've something to show you—or at least something to tell you."

She dragged me to the window and took out of her pocket a letter which I saw was of portentous length. Of course I guessed at once that it was from Hilary.

"The poor fellow is so miserable," said Mary, with tears in her eyes. "He begs me to let him come here and see me, and says he has a right to come; which after all is true, you know, since I never formally broke it off with him. He reproaches me for having let anyone come between us; I suppose he means you, Georgie, so I want to see him to tell him he is wrong. And he says this is the last appeal his pride will let him make, Georgie," she continued, breaking down into sobs; "and that if I reject it he will go abroad again; for although he loves me just as much as ever, he can't, in his position, humble himself any more."

"Young men always write like that, if they can't have any—everything their own way," said I, in the tone of one who had bales of such letters stored up as evidence of the value set upon her charms. "I shouldn't answer him, Mary, until you have consulted Mr. Marshall."

"But I know that Uncle Charles doesn't approve of our engagement, so he is not likely to be kind!" pleaded poor Mary.

Indeed, knowing what I knew, I did not think he was, and I was very much afraid that we should have great difficulty in persuading her to give Hilary up, whatever we might succeed in proving against him. For, like many other sweet and apparently yielding women, Mary could be even more obstinate than people of stronger judgment.

We found Mr. Marshall in his dressing-gown, writing in an armchair by the window. He looked very ill, and in reply to our reproaches for getting up at all, he said, with a weary sort of smile, that he was not going to turn invalid until he was forced to do so. But he consented to our sending for a doctor, although he peremptorily refused to let us communicate with his wife.

It was with manifest reluctance that Mary introduced the subject of Hilary and his appealing letter. Mr. Mar-

shall and I exchanged glances. In mine I tried to convey a warning to him to deal gently with her; but it was not needed. He addressed her in the very gentlest of tones.

"My dear girl," he said, while the harassed look came again strongly into his face, "you put me in a very difficult position. I don't deny that I have heard certain reports of Hilary which I should like explained before matters go any further between you. I therefore strongly recommend—indeed I beg you—to let things rest as they are until I am able to get about again."

"But he says he shall go away!" said Mary tearfully.

"Don't be afraid. He'll not go far, with such a tender pair of blue eyes looking out for him," answered her uncle reassuringly.

But Mary was not easy to convince. She very soon made an excuse to leave the room, saying she must send for the doctor, adding a little fretful protest below her breath that she was not allowed to do as she liked in her own house. I supposed that she had gone off to write to Hilary. Mr. Marshall looked grave and worried.

"Do you think she sends him money?" he asked abruptly, after a short pause, when she had left the room.

"Oh, Mr. Marshall, surely not! He could never have sunk so low as that!"

But the lawyer, whose experience of human nature was both more extensive and less favorable than mine, shook his head.

"There are no depths, that I know of, to which a man badly in want of money may not sink," he said with conviction. "Mary has a large balance at her banker's that she can draw upon at any time. It was, I consider, the most foolish of my brother Tom's provisions for her. The temptation may have been too strong for young Gold. Mary is as open-handed as the sun."

"Yes, that is true," said I uneasily. "Now that I have a chance of speaking to you alone, Mr. Marshall, I want to

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ask you a question about last night. I met Hopkins, the watchman, when I left your room. He was peering in through the door that leads to the works, and I am sure I heard his laugh up above our heads"—and I glanced at the ventilator—"when we came and found you here. Do you think it was he who played all those tricks on Mary? Of course at somebody else's instigation."

At my first mention of this subject Mr. Marshall had grown livid; and I would have stopped, perceiving my indiscretion, but that he made me a sign to go on.

"I can't tell," he said. "I have not seen the man yet, you know. When I do, I dare say I shall be able to make a fairly good guess as to whether the fellow is honest or not."

"And you will be able to get the truth out of him about the man I saw, whom he declares to be a detective. I believe if we got hold of him the whole mystery would be cleared up—about the woman and all. I don't like the look of that woman a bit, and I don't believe half she says. The way to get to the truth, as far as she is concerned, would be to bring her face to face with Hilary Gold."

Mr. Marshall had no time to reply to this suggestion, as at that moment Mrs. Camden herself knocked at the door and brought in the doctor, whose brougham we had seen come up the avenue. He did not stay very long. He declared that his patient was suffering from the effects of mental overstrain and nervous shock, and advised him to give up all thoughts of business for a time, and if possible to go away for a thorough change of climate and surroundings.

"You are thoroughly run down," he pronounced as he rose to go. "Just now I noticed that the mere sight of a person crossing the garden path startled you and made you change color."

Mr. Marshall, whose eye had been wandering out of window with a strained and eager glance, turned quickly to the doctor.

"Oh no, surely you are exaggerating my weakness," he said with a laugh.

But even while the doctor was shaking his hand in farewell, Mr. Marshall's restless eyes were again glancing searchingly out of window. I had perceived the cause, and it troubled me as much as it did him. Treading cautiously in and out among the trees and shrubs, haunting the place as she had haunted it the day before, was the mysterious woman with the grey-green eyes, who had given her name as Dora Selton.

I left the room with the doctor, determined to approach the woman myself. But either she did not wish to be approached, or she had retreated into some corner whence she could not see me, for I wandered about the garden for nearly half-an-hour without catching another glimpse of her. Giving up the search at last, I left the grounds of the house and entered the distillery-yard, and passed thence, without any difficulties being offered, into the works. Hopkins would be away at his lodgings at this time, I knew; which was all the better for my investigations. I ran up the iron staircase, and passed through the long storerooms to the attics above the house.

I had scrambled, panting, up the ladder staircase and almost fallen to the dusty floor in my eagerness, when I caught sight of a row of objects hanging in the air before me which solved one part of the mystery of the tricks played upon Mary. There were the dead bodies of eight large owls, which were suspended from side to side of the wide attic by a cord which was passed round their necks. Helpless and harmless as they were now, I shuddered as I remembered the horrible effect their weird cries and flutterings had had upon me, upon poor Mary, and even upon

a hard-headed lawyer like Mr. Marshall. Then I heaved a sigh of relief, for this was ocular demonstration that the trick had been played for the last time. But the mystery surrounding the perpetrator remained as profound as ever.

I crept down the staircase again with my teeth chattering although it was a hot summer day. The thought that there was only one person about in whom I could confide, and that he was so ill that it was selfish to trouble him with confidences, gave me a sickening feeling of responsibility. When I got back to the house, I was more sorry than surprised to find Mary's manner changed towards me. With some shrewdness, she had conceived the idea that I shared Mr. Marshall's distrust of Hilary, and was not likely to sympathize with her reviving feelings of affection towards him. So the day passed very uncomfortably, Mary not confiding to me whether she had answered Hilary's letter. She was too much annoyed with her uncle to do more than pay him another fleeting visit, while Mrs. Camden and I spent the whole afternoon with him, reading the papers and trying to distract his thoughts by lively conversation. However, through all her petulance I saw that Mary was better; even the emotions of anger and mortification were welcome after that dangerous apathy of a few days ago.

I was sorry to find, when tea was brought into the drawing-room that afternoon, that Mary's indignation was still too warm to let her join us. I saw nothing of her for the next two hours, and then, as the first bell had rung for dinner, I asked Emily, whom I met on the stairs, what had become of her mistress.

"She went out into the grounds, ma'am, about half-an-hour ago," said the maid, in the distant tone with which she still emphasized her disapproval of the subterfuge by which I had at first gained a footing in the house. "I don't think she will be in to dinner."

"Not in to dinner!" I echoed in vague alarm. "Did she say she was going out, then?"

I think Emily was glad to impart to me a piece of intelligence which evidently caused me uneasiness.

"She didn't *say* she was going out, but she was talking for some time to a lady on the river-path, and then they went off together in one of our private boats!"

"A lady! A tall lady in a black and white check silk dress?" I asked, unable to hide my agitation.

"Yes, ma'am," answered Emily, with increasing satisfaction, as my expression grew more distressed. "And I think Miss Smith must have meant to go out; for she sent me a little while ago to get change for a cheque for her."

"A cheque!" I echoed faintly. "For how much?"

"Twenty pounds, ma'am."

I turned away without another word, too sick at heart to say more. It seemed to me that my silly, obstinate, generous-hearted girl was giving herself into the hands of the spoiler. And was I too fanciful in fearing absolute physical danger from the companionship she had so rashly chosen?

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CHAPTER XVIII.

I COULD do nothing, that was the worst of it. If I had known Hilary Gold's address, I think I should have posted off thither at once, and risked bringing everybody's maledictions down on my head for an interfering busybody. But I did not. Restless and unhappy, I went into the drawing-room, instead of dressing for dinner, and hunted about for an explanatory note which I thought perhaps Mary might have left for me. But she had been too deeply offended with me for that.

While I was searching, the door-bell rang, and I started up with my heart beating fast. I guessed who the visitor was, for Mr. Marshall had said that his son would come that evening, to bring a report of the business transacted during the day. I had had many battles with myself since Tom's confession the day before, but they always resolved themselves into a ridiculous hunt for extenuating circumstances on the culprit's behalf. I loved him; there was an end of the matter. Whatever he might do would not alter that fact; his guilt would only lower me in my own estimation for caring for such a creature, it would not kill my feeling for him. But I meant to fight against this conviction, and not to let him see that my heart was softer than my conscience.

I must have something to do, something to occupy me in case I should have to keep up a conversation with him; so that I should not have to look at him much, and could fill up the pauses conveniently. I rushed across to the piano, therefore, and turning the whole contents of the canterbury out on to the floor, busied myself in sorting the music. Unluckily, only that I did not know it, Tom

had come quietly to the open door unannounced, and had the meanness to watch the whole manœuvre.

The first intimation I had of his presence was an arm put round my waist as I sat on the floor. I had overdone my part altogether, making such a noise of rustling and leaf-turning that I had not even heard him come into the room. I tried to disengage myself, with an affectation of coldness and anger; but Tom was not so easily taken in, and he resisted all my efforts to rise, and spoke in such a humble, pleading voice that I was touched in spite of myself.

"Don't snap and scratch, Georgie dear," he said plaintively. "Why be so hard and unkind to your future husband—and just when he is in low spirits too!"

"Future husband!" I echoed, gasping for breath. "What do you mean, Tom?"

"Why, that I've quite made up my mind to carry out the threat I have held over you so long, and marry you. I was touched yesterday, Georgie, by the way you spoke of me and took my part, and I made up my mind there and then that I couldn't do better."

This piece of impertinence made me furious. I managed to release myself by a great effort, and standing up, towered over him as he still remained on the floor at my feet.

"And you really think," I said, throwing all the dignified sarcasm I could muster into my voice, "that after all the disgraceful meanness and cruelty you confessed to yesterday, you have only to throw the handkerchief in my direction for me to seize it with rapturous gratitude?"

He had curled himself comfortably on the carpet, and was nursing one knee. He did not hurry himself to answer; and when he did, it was in sententious tones, looking at the music-stool instead of at me.

"There are more women than men in the world—at least in England," he said, "so there is no doubt that ma-

trimonially I belong to the more valuable sex of the two. Surely it is better, then, to take a husband who may be 'stained with a crime,' as the novelists would say, than to run the risk of not having one at all! Consider the matter calmly, and I'm sure you will agree with me."

My spirits were rising while he spoke. I was used to Tom; and it seemed to me that, since he was able to talk in just the old way, his conscience could not be very heavily burdened.

"Tom," I burst out with that sudden flitting away from the subject of matrimony which was a common feature of our intercourse, "I don't believe you had much to do with those shameful tricks after all."

"That's right," said he composedly, with a face like a wall, "cultivate that beautiful, blind, trusting confidence in the face of proof; it will be very useful when I want to stay late at the club, and call it 'visiting a sick-friend.'"

"For," I went on, not heeding his comments, "if it had been you who worked that trick, it would not have been played again last night, and on your own father!"

"What?" cried Tom, utterly taken aback, while I laughed in triumph.

But the next moment my heart sank again, for his utter bewilderment seemed to suggest that the trick had been played for the first time without him. I turned away, full of doubt and misery.

"You wish to see your father," I said coldly.

But Tom interrupted me before I could get any further.

"No, I don't," he answered shortly.

And again I was distressed by this sign of an uneasy conscience.

"You can take him these papers, and this note; it tells him all we have done during the day."

"Don't you want to know where he is, why he is not about?" asked I, surprised. Without waiting for an

answer from Tom, who hung his head and looked rather abashed, I went on: "He is ill, really very ill; we had to send for the doctor, and he says so. I should think, Tom," I continued, anxious at all risks to "rub in" a little moral lesson, "that you are at least sorry your conduct has brought that about. You were always fond of your father, weren't you?"

"Yes," said he shortly, in a sort of strangled voice. "But he has been overdoing it lately. It isn't quite all the fault of the prodigal son," he added with a disagreeable sneer in his tone. Then he sprang up suddenly from the floor. "Where's Mary?"

My face fell.

"I—I don't know. She went out about an hour ago, before you came. I am afraid—I think she went to see Hilary. But the strangest, the worst part of it is that the strange woman you and I both saw with Hilary went with her. They went in a boat, Emily said; and Mary had just changed a cheque."

I babbled this out very quickly, ashamed of having neglected the subject of Mary for so long. Tom took the news even more seriously than I had done.

"What madness! Mary is a born idiot!" he said contemptuously. "I shall order the launch out and give chase. Down the river, I suppose?"

He was already at the door.

"I don't know. Won't you let me go too?"

"Make haste then. As soon as the steam is up I shall start, whether you are there or not."

Delighted to find that, whatever he might have done in the past, he was really striving to serve the poor girl now, I ran upstairs, made my excuses to Mrs. Camden, to whom I entrusted the papers for Mr. Marshall, and reached the little landing-stage in plenty of time for the start. Tom was looking moody and anxious, and he spoke very little.

"It is up the river they have gone, not down," I said briefly. "I asked Emily, who saw them start."

Tom received this intelligence with evident uneasiness, and gave the order to proceed slowly. It was rapidly growing dark, and we had to keep a sharp look-out for the little skiff—he on one side of the launch, and I on the other.

"They won't have got very far, I expect," said Tom; "the tide is running out fast, and besides—the river is lonelier about here than it is higher up."

What did he fear then? Did he know more about this Dora Selton, her character and motives, than he pretended? I dared not ask him; for his face had clouded over with anxiety and suspicion which made him so unlike the Tom I knew that he seemed like a stranger.

We were on that wide reach of water, with flat shores, that is between Wandsworth and Putney. It is little frequented by pleasure-boats of the better sort; but the 'owl of the 'Arry from the four-oared tub he is doing his best to overturn frequently echoes in the trees of Hurlingham on the right bank. We passed the black hulks of a few barges coming down with the tide; except for these the river was deserted. The line of slime and mud left by the out-running tide was growing wider on each side; the night shadows on the grey water were getting blacker; the air of this reach, always dreary, was more desolate than usual.

Suddenly I thought I heard a faint cry, and I shuddered. Tom, who heard it too, after a moment's thought, gave directions to steam quickly to the left bank, which at this point was a mere waste of mud and barren, broken ground. Slackening speed when we were close on shore, he seized his opportunity, and regardless of the mud into which he at once sank ankle-deep, he scrambled on to firmer ground, and ran quickly along the bank.

I then perceived, a little way ahead of us, the skiff, of which we were in search, buried deep in the mud. There

were two figures in it, the one standing, the other sitting ; but at first in the gloom I could not distinguish which was which. As I leaned over the bow of the launch, straining my eyes in the gloom, there was another low cry. Getting accustomed to the darkness, and the launch being by this time nearer to the smaller boat, I was able to see that the sitting figure was Mary, who was crouching down on the seat, while leaning over her was the woman Dora Selton. The latter sprang erect as Tom came near, and, leaping out into the mud, made for the firm ground of the bank. After a short chase on the level ground, he came up with her, and by that time we had drifted near enough for me to notice a very curious thing.

Just as Tom seized the woman's arm with no gentle hand, she turned round upon him like an animal brought to bay, and uttered half-a-dozen words in a tone the fierceness of which struck me even at a distance too great for me to distinguish the words.

I saw Tom stagger back as if he had been struck, and the woman, without further hindrance on his part, walk away.

What could she have said to him ?

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CHAPTER XIX.

For some minutes after the woman had left him, walking quickly away over the waste ground in the direction of the nearest railway station, Tom remained standing as if turned to stone. Then he turned slowly, as if he did not know where he was, and seeming to collect his scattered wits by an effort made his way back to the skiff, on the seat of which Mary was still crouching. We were close up by the little boat by this time ; indeed I had called to the girl, but had received no answer. Tom got into the skiff, his boots heavy with black mud, in a mechanical sort of manner, and tried at first, without speaking, to push off into the stream. Mary had started up on hearing his approach, but to my surprise he had taken no notice of her. He seemed to have received some overwhelming shock.

Finding all his efforts to dislodge the skiff useless, he got the men on the launch to help him with a rope. I noticed that his voice was hoarse and changed, with quite a new peremptory harshness in his tone. He directed the captain to return home with me, and taking up the sculls of the skiff, proceeded to follow us, still without a word to Mary.

It was a dreary procession back along the grey water, a mystery hanging over us all which showed a different side to each of us. Although the launch went slowly, of course it got back first, and I waited for the others on the landing-stage, shivering less with cold than with sick, nameless fears. When the skiff arrived, I held out my hand eagerly to help Mary to land. She raised her head, which had been bent in her hands, and I saw by what faint light was left that a change had come over her too, almost as

great as that I had perceived in Tom. The sweetness had gone out of her face, which was clouded by black doubt, suspicion, and even anger—quite a new feeling for my gentle Mary. She thanked me in a hard, perfunctory tone as if some late experience had soured her feelings even to her dearest friends. I let her go by towards the house, and waited for her cousin.

"Tom," I asked in an eager whisper, resolved not to be awed by the change in him. "What have you found out? What did the woman say to you? Who is she?"

He turned sharply to me with a white face looking older than his own father.

"I know nothing about her," he answered rudely. "Ask that girl," with a nod in the direction of Mary. "Ask her, I say; don't you hear?" he repeated quite savagely, as I stood motionless.

Mechanically I walked after Mary, he following.

"Mary," I asked in a tremulous voice, when I came up with her, "who is that woman who was with you in the boat?"

Looking back at Tom, I saw that he was waiting for her answer with an interest, an anxiety, even stronger than my own.

"Ask Hilary Gold," said Mary, coldly and haughtily.

I tried to see what effect this reply of hers would have on Tom, but he was shrewd enough to perceive my intention, and to keep his face turned away as she uttered it.

We all entered the house in silence, and found poor Mrs. Camden fluttering about in a great state of anxiety as to what had become of us. Mr. Marshall had sent again and again to ask where we had gone and whether we had returned, she said. At these words Tom turned round.

"I must see my father," he said.

"I think you had better not to-night, if you have anything of an exciting or disturbing nature to impart to him,"

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said Mrs. Camden, noticing the expression on the young man's face.

"I have to ask his advice on a very important matter, that's all. But I must see him. Which room is he in?"

He was walking towards the stairs. Mrs. Camden directed him with manifest reluctance. I tried to calm her fears by assuring her that Tom was by no means the silly young man she thought him, who would disturb an invalid unnecessarily, but I myself felt uneasy, remembering the manner in which the occurrences of the day before had preyed upon the hard-worked lawyer.

Tom was in his father's room by the time I went upstairs to take my hat off. I was two rooms away, but all the windows were open, and in a few moments I caught tones of passionate excitement issuing from the apartment where father and son were conversing. Suspense, anxiety made my ears sharp. Without trying, though scarcely without wishing to hear, I presently caught fragments of speech. Both speakers were greatly excited, sometimes to the point of speaking at the same time. The father's tone was one of reproach, that of the son was alternately sullen and entreating.

"My son, my own son! How could I expect it of you!" said Mr. Marshall's voice.

And there followed a heated discussion throughout which both voices sank lower. It was Tom whose words I caught next, spoken in a tone of recklessness and passion.

"What's the use of wasting time in talk? It's all found out; or what is not known yet may be known any minute. You don't suppose that woman would keep a man's counsel a minute longer than suits her purpose. We had better go abroad, the whole lot; we're done for here."

His voice had gradually risen so high that every word of this speech came to me quite clearly. Ashamed of playing eavesdropper, I now rose quickly from the chair on which

I had sunk down when I heard Mr. Marshall, with a sharp reproof to his son for imprudence, close his window. As I opened my door, that of Mr. Marshall's room was flung open, and Tom appeared. He guessed that I had overheard something, but with a keen glance he withdrew again into his father's apartment, saying simply :

"It's Georgie."

Downstairs I found Mary in the drawing-room, pretending to read in order to avoid the questions of Mrs. Camden, who was exceedingly hurt because nobody took her into his confidence regarding the interesting things which she felt were going on around her. As a consequence she was exceedingly dignified that evening, and we were forced to hear more than usual about "my dear friend the Marchioness of Silvertown" and "that charming man Lord Shoeburyness." After a miserable twenty minutes during which Mrs. Camden tried to snub me, and I in vain tried to rouse Mary's attention, I heard Tom's footstep on the stairs, and thoughtlessly sprang to my feet. Mrs. Camden gave an icy little laugh.

"In the set I have been accustomed to mix with," she said with emphasis, "it was understood that for a young girl to show emotion on the approach of a young man betrayed the manners of the kitchen."

"In *my* set," I retorted with more emphasis still, "we know nothing about the kitchen, nor do we trouble ourselves about its manners."

I didn't want to be rude to the poor old thing, but I was really tired of being sat upon. She was on the verge of hysterics as, in spite of her comments, I hurried out of the room.

Tom was by this time standing at the foot of the stairs with his hat in his hand. He turned to me with a hard, stern face.

"Oh," he exclaimed, "I want to speak to you. Come into the dining-room, we shall escape the women."

I followed him into the long apartment which, with its dark family portraits and heavy mahogany furniture, always seemed to me bare and dreary. A glimmer of gas was left in the chandelier, just enough to make the eyes on the canvasses blink at you.

"Now then," he said abruptly. "You were eavesdropping upstairs just now; what was it you heard?"

"Tom," I remonstrated tearfully, "how can you accuse me of such a thing! Do you really think I would condescend to listen at doors?"

"Well, you listened to private conversation that you knew was not intended for you. I know by the guilty look on your face when I caught you at the door," he continued harshly.

"Guilty look!" I echoed fiercely, raising my head and looking full in his face. "Indeed, Tom, I think it would be well if nobody in the house had a greater reason to look guilty than I."

It was an ungenerous taunt, but I was stung to the quick by the tone he was taking with me, as if I had been an enemy anxious to use any knowledge I might have to his harm. To my utter surprise and consternation, instead of reproaching or even answering me, he turned away without one word, and sinking upon one of the heavy mahogany chairs that still stood near the table, laid his head upon his arms, and fairly sobbed. It was so utterly unlike self-contained, cynical Tom to give way like this, that for a few moments I was too much startled to go near him. Then I crept up in very humble, slave-like fashion, and ventured, oh so gently, to touch his sleeve. In the old fashioned household where I had been brought up, the great superiority of the male sex was never seriously questioned, and to see one of the mighty beings humiliated like this was to me a most painful and confusing thing.

"Tom," I whispered huskily, "Tom, don't go on like

that! As if I meant to say anything to hurt you! Oh, you don't know how miserable it makes me to see you unhappy. Tom, dear, dear Tom, do say you forgive me."

I had drawn a little nearer, and he suddenly raised his head and transferred it from the table to my shoulder. At first I was rather frightened by this demonstration, and inclined to draw back. But becoming rapidly used to the burden, and recognizing the honor of it, I soon, from simply supporting the precious freight, took courage to advance as far as stroking the disordered hair of my condescending admirer.

"Go on," said he peremptorily, as, overcome by modest diffidence, I withdrew my hand. "Go on," he repeated, "you may stroke my hair as long as you like. I don't mind a bit; I may say I like it."

"How good of you!" I murmured, ironically, I am afraid. For surely my meekness deserved a show of meekness in return.

Still Tom never raised his head.

"What did you hear?" he asked after a few minutes, in a stifled voice.

"I—I heard you say, you—you must all go away—abroad!" I wailed out plaintively. "Oh, you won't, Tom, will you? I don't understand what you have done, or what all this mystery is about the woman, and Hilary, and you, and poor Mary's money. But surely you can live through it—already you are sorry, and—and—if you go away, Tom, I—I shan't know—ow what to do—o—!"

"You'll marry some other fellow, of course," said Tom, still with his head buried, putting out first one arm and then the other until they met round my shoulders.

"Well, but, Tom," I suggested after a moment's pause, "what would the other fellow say if he saw me now?"

"Wait till he turns up, it will be time enough to bother our heads about him then, won't it?"

"Ye—es, perhaps. Only, Tom, you must promise not to go away!"

Suddenly he started up, and stared into my face in a way that frightened me.

"Go away! Yes, yes, I must. The disgrace is too much to bear."

"Well then, let me go too—o—o."

Tom's expression changed as he looked at me.

"You're a good girl, Georgie," he said in a husky voice. "Perhaps I will—if—if things don't turn out quite as badly as I expect," he added dubiously.

Suddenly he turned his face towards the door and signed to me to keep silence. Then I heard uncertain, hesitating footsteps outside. Tom crossed the room softly and threw open the door.

Mary was standing outside, with a wild, but determined look on her pale face. She had a letter in her hand.

CHAPTER XX.

TOM looked relieved when he saw who it was.

"Hallo, Mary," he exclaimed. "Wandering about like a ghost! Why, what's the matter?"

She hesitated a moment, looking down, and then glancing, in a cold, suspicious manner, from him to me.

"I want this letter posted, and I don't know whom to trust."

"Letter! Oh, Mary, whom is it for?" cried I entreatingly.

She answered at once, in a firmer voice:

"Hilary Gold. I have told him to come here to-morrow. I must see him, speak with him; I must have all this mystery made clear. He can do it. So I have told him to come."

Tom was evidently much disturbed. I could tell this by the twitching of his face and the movements of his hands. Mary looked at him keenly, and then abruptly began to walk away towards the front-door.

"Where are you going? I will post your letter," said he.

She shook her head with a little suspicious laugh.

"No, no, I will go out with it myself. I have been trustful too long."

She quickened her pace, and had her hand upon the door when Tom, shaking with suppressed excitement, crossed the hall hastily, and stood with his back against it, thus forcibly detaining her.

"Wait," said he hoarsely. "You don't know what you're doing. If you care for Hilary, think how your suspicions will pain him."

Mary laughed with quite a new tone of harshness.

"If my suspicions are true, he deserves to be pained. If they are not, and I don't believe they are," she went on wistfully, "he will be delighted to have them cleared up, and we shall all be happy again."

Tom evidently did not share this view.

"Look here," said he at last, "you can see that this is an important step you are going to take, accusing a man of very serious things. You must take somebody's advice. Will you take my father's?"

She stared for a few moments thoughtfully before her.

"Yes," she said at last slowly. "I don't mind hearing what Uncle Charles has to say."

Mary could not judge as well as I could the great relief this decision afforded Tom. He sprang away from the door, dragging Mary towards the staircase. I followed as a matter of course.

We found Mr. Marshall writing at the table which had been brought in for the purpose. He looked up with rather a wan smile, as we entered, and seemed to ask us with his eyes, before he spoke, what fresh trouble we had brought for his consideration.

"Well!" and he looked from one to the other.

"Uncle," began Mary, in a resolute tone which told how fast she was recovering her health of mind, "I want to write to Hilary. I want to see him, to ask him questions, if possible to confront him with Miss Selton. Tom and Georgie want to prevent my seeing him. But I cannot rest until I have done so. Am I not right?"

Mr. Marshall leaned back in his chair, and softly tapping the fingers of his left hand against those of his right, sat considering for a few moments, just as he did when a client brought him a difficult case.

"I think you are right," he pronounced at last in a judicial tone. "It is only fair to the young man himself; and

although it must necessarily be painful to both of you, I don't see how we can all be comfortable again until everything is explained. Write to him yourself, telling him to come."

"I have written." And Mary produced her letter. "I meant to give it to Tom, but I am afraid he wouldn't post it."

"Go and post it yourself then," said her uncle, simply.

Without another word Mary turned to obey with alacrity. Tom looked at his father with an anxious face. I thought he perhaps wanted to exchange a few words with Mr. Marshall before taking his leave for the night, so I followed Mary out of the room, leaving father and son together. Tom, however, after a hurried good-night, ran out after me, as if his guilty conscience would not allow him to wait for another paternal lecture.

We all three got down into the hall together; and Mary, seizing a garden hat, ran off with her letter, while Tom and I lingered at the front door. Instead of indulging me with a few affectionate words, as I had hoped and indeed expected, he peered out into the darkness, watching his cousin's light dress flitting down the drive.

"You will look after her well. And—you will not leave her alone to-night?" he said in a curious, guilty sort of voice.

"I always stay with her up to the last," I answered, surprised and anxious.

"Up to the last won't do," said Tom rudely. "You've got to stay with her all night, and—and behave like a wise girl if you can."

With this enigmatical farewell, and without so much as another look at me, Tom darted down the drive and I saw no more of him that night.

I remained standing like a statue where he had left me for some minutes, a prey to the deepest anxiety, on his

account as well as on Mary's. I could not understand him. Since this painful discovery about Mary, he had seemed, in spite of his acknowledged guilt, to have assumed a new manliness and responsibility. Had he, I asked myself, engaged himself so deeply in a shameful conspiracy that he could not draw back, and could only seek to palliate his offence by secretly undoing with one hand what he did openly with the other. It was a terrible suspicion to entertain of the man I loved, and I shuddered as these doubts would flash into my mind. I was staring out into the darkness, listening to Tom's retreating footsteps and watching for Mary's return, when I perceived on the left, close to the edge of the lawn, a figure which I took for hers. It lingered, however, instead of coming to the house.

"Mary!" I cried. And then, as she did not come, I stepped down upon the path and called again.

Instead of answering, the woman glided away quickly behind the evergreens, and I recognized with a shiver that it was not Mary at all, but Dora Selton.

Had Tom seen her? Or had he only guessed that she would be haunting the place again that night? I could not tell; but the reason of his warning now seemed clear. Seeing that on the sound of my voice she must have gone down the drive, I gave chase, examining the trees and evergreens on the left all the way along as I went, and fancying that from time to time I heard a rustle or caught a glimpse of a skirt. I passed Mary, returning hurriedly from the post. In reply to my questions she said that a woman had passed out of the gate as she came in. She had not noticed her particularly, supposing her to be a friend of one of the servants. I did not tell her my suspicion, but Mary watched me curiously as I left her and passed out through the distillery-yard and asked the man on duty at the door if he had seen a woman pass. He said, "No," and looked at me suspiciously; but he called Hopkins at my request. The

night-watchman, who now held me in much disfavor, asked me very surlily what I wanted.

"I want you," I said entreatingly, "to be on the look-out to-night. That strange woman is about the place again."

"You're all strange women about 'ere, it seems to me," said he drily. "As to being on the look-out, p'raps I'm more on the look-out already than you think for."

And his little eyes gave me such a shrewd glance that it struck me more forcibly than ever that he knew at least as much about the mystery as any one

"What's become of your detective?" I asked quietly.

"He's all right."

"He comes here still?"

"Reg'lar."

But Mr. Hopkins was keeping something back, I felt sure. However, as it was waste of time to try to worm out of the clever little Cockney anything he wished to keep to himself, I had to withdraw reluctantly, feeling that I had done all I could in putting him on his guard.

The distillery, with its wilderness of sheds and out-buildings, had so many nooks and corners where a person might lie hidden for whole days undiscovered, that it was with many misgivings, many glances to left and right among the great pyramids of casks and barrels that lined the yard, that I went back to the house, where Mary and Mrs. Camden were only waiting for my return to go to bed.

Full of Tom's fears and my own, I did not go to bed, but slipping upstairs before the others, hid myself in the large wardrobe in Mary's room. I felt like an idiot when Mary came up and retired to bed without any suspicion of my intrusion. For I was dreadfully tired, and no change of my cramped position made me at all comfortable. Presently I heard, by her regular breathing, that she was asleep; and feeling cold, cross, and ashamed of my escapade, I was

debating whether I should not creep out quietly and go to my own room, when a faint noise of the door-handle made me hold my breath. A little more soft fumbling, and I knew that some person had entered the room.

Should I leap out and seize the intruder? Should I keep quiet and see what happened? I decided on the latter course, for the mean reason that I was afraid—though of what I scarcely knew.

Someone was moving about very softly in the darkness; for Mary's night-light was not burning, as usual, by her bedside. Then I heard, as I held my breath, a hand stealthily drawing back the bed-clothes.

CHAPTER XXI.

FOR the first moment I was as if paralyzed with horror ; the next I slid out of my hiding-place and crept with leaden feet across the room. I did not scream, however, or utter a word. Groping my way in the direction of the bed where Mary lay, I put out my hands before me in the darkness, expecting to catch the intruder ; but I touched nothing until I came in contact with the bed itself. At that moment I heard the door close softly.

The intruder had escaped.

Had my footsteps, soft as they were, been heard ? And had my presence saved Mary from some great danger ? I found my way to the shelf on the wall where a box of matches was kept, and struck a light. As I did so, a peculiar, sickly smell came to my nostrils, which, although I did not recognize it, I knew must be that of some drug. I lit a candle which I found close to my hand, and held it up over the bed.

Mary was sitting up with an expression on her face which I shall never forget ; it was so wild, so horror-struck. In her hands she held a towel, on which her eyes now fell. I tried to take it from her, but she snatched it back, with a laugh which seemed nearer to madness than any sign I had yet seen in her. Then she turned towards me, and thrusting out her hands as if to guard against my approach, glared at me with unmistakable terror and abhorrence.

"Mary, don't look at me like that, for Heaven's sake, don't !" I cried hoarsely. "What is that in your hand ? Is it chloroform ? Did they try to suffocate you ?"

"*They ! They !* You don't know who did it, I suppose ! No, of course not."

And with another high-pitched, maniac's laugh, she threw the cloth she held up in the air. As it fell, it filled the air with the same heavy, sickly perfume I had already noticed.

"Indeed I don't. Oh, Mary, do you? Weren't you asleep?"

"Unfortunately, no."

"Who was it? Indeed, indeed I don't know anything about it."

She turned upon me with sudden sternness.

"What were you doing in my room then?"

Great heaven! Did she suspect *me*? Her great blue eyes seemed to blaze and flash luridly as she bent her head forward to peer into my face with fierce, unconcealed suspicion.

I stammered and fell back in my horror.

"Mary, is it you? Are you yourself?" I whispered huskily, as soon as I could speak clearly. "Do you need to be told that I love you like my own sister, and that I could do nothing but good to you?"

"But how about this? I felt it on my face, stifling me. And I knew whose hand put it there."

Again she fixed her eyes upon me with such an unmistakable implication of guilt that I broke down. After all my anxiety, all my solicitude, it was too much. I burst into hysterical sobbing as I fell upon the little cretonne-covered sofa. In a few moments I felt a gentle hand on my shoulder, and then Mary's two arms, as lovingly as ever, put round my neck.

"Don't cry, Georgie, my dear," she whispered softly; "I *was* mad, you are right; that stuff got into my head and poisoned me. But look up, see I am quite myself again."

I did look up, and I saw that her face was drawn and pale, with the shadow cast by a great horror still upon it,

but with the fierceness all gone. It was Mary, my own, poor haunted Mary again.

"Tell me, Mary, what did you fancy? Who did you think it was?" I whispered.

But another look of wild horror swept over her face. She shuddered and almost shook me.

"Don't ask me, don't talk about it," she rattled out hoarsely. "It was a nightmare, a hideous fancy, that was all."

I got up, and crossing the room, took up the cloth from the bed. It was a thick towel, which had been folded and saturated with chloroform.

"We must talk about it," said I, "for somebody must have done it. Didn't you hear the door-handle turned?"

"No," answered Mary.

I felt sick at heart. I could no longer have any doubt that, in her first frenzy of fright, she had fancied it was my hand that put the cloth over her face. Of course there was no reasoning possible on such a subject; it was a mere wild fancy, entirely excusable in a girl who had found treachery among her dearest friends; cold reason had already banished it to the four winds, I could not doubt. Still it left a most unpleasant impression behind, and raised a cloud between us across which we looked at each other with bedimmed eyes.

I insisted on passing the rest of the night upon the sofa. I had a very well-defined thought in my mind. The would-be criminal would certainly not wish the crime to be discovered, and would therefore in all probability return before morning to find out whether the victim was dead, and to remove the implicating cloth. But the morning broke, and still no one came. Mary had fallen asleep, and I myself was at last dozing, when my ears, more on the alert than usual, again caught a sound outside the door. I leaped up half asleep as I was, rushed to the door, threw

it open, and confronted not my supposed murderess, but—Mr. Marshall.

He staggered back in evident consternation at my onslaught.

“Georgie! You! Why. Why, what’s the matter?” stammered he.

“Oh, Mr. Marshall,” I cried, “I didn’t know it was you. We have had a most dreadful night.”

“Dreadful night! Why, what has been the matter?”

“Somebody has tried to suffocate Mary with chloroform.”

“What?”

“It is true, indeed it is. A towel, saturated with the stuff, was thrown over her face. Oh!” I went on with an expression of disgust, “I seem to smell it still. Why,” I exclaimed suddenly, struck with the knowledge that this was more than fancy. “It is on your clothes too—that smell! Did the woman get into your room also?”

Mr. Marshall started, and looked at me inquiringly.

“Someone did,” he answered in a troubled voice. “I distinctly heard footsteps by my bedside. But then I lost consciousness and I don’t know what happened. I slept heavily and woke up with a headache, and supposed I must have suffered from nightmare. But the fancy that somebody had been in my room was so strong that I was impelled to come and see if Mary was all right. It must have been only a fancy, though, for my door was locked.”

“That is nothing,” said I, “so was Mary’s. Oh, Mr. Marshall,” I went on with decision, “there must be no more of this. You must take Mary away at once—to-day, at all risks. Even with her dearest and most devoted friends about her we cannot protect her properly, you see. This house, with the nooks and hiding places in the distillery, is not safe for her. We don’t want to call in the police.”

"No, that wouldn't do. You are right; we must take her away as early in the day as we can. We don't want to have a scene with Hilary first."

"No," cried I, struck with a new idea. "Of course he would want her to stay, because if she goes away she forfeits her money."

"Only if she *lives* away," corrected Mr. Marshall, "a visit for her health's sake to the seaside, for instance, wouldn't count against her."

"Mr. Marshall," I burst out suddenly, after a minute's reflection. "Do you know I think more strongly that Mary had better see Hilary before she goes."

"Do you? Why?"

"I am more and more inclined to believe that he is not half so guilty as we imagine."

"But the woman——"

"Well, I suppose he must have been fond of her once, but I don't believe he cares for her now. That is what makes her greedy and dangerous. And yet," a fresh doubt crossed my mind, "why should she want to kill Mary? If she only cares for money—and she gives one that impression, doesn't she?—it is to her advantage for Hilary to become rich by marrying Mary."

"Perhaps," suggested the solicitor thoughtfully, "Gold has induced Mary to make some foolish will in his favor."

I drew a long breath. Hilary had certainly more than half suggested, in his last interview with me, that he considered Mary to be under monetary obligations to him. Mary's voice, from inside her room, startled us both at this point. I nodded to Mr. Marshall, and went back into the bedroom, feeling rather guilty, as if we had been conspiring about her. Mary's look and manner as she greeted me strengthened this impression. She was sitting up in bed, with her arms folded, with the same altogether unaccustomed expression of sternness and suspicion which I had seen on her face on the previous night.

"Was that my uncle talking to you?" she asked.

"Yes," I hesitated. "Someone got into his room too, he thinks," I went on in a low voice.

Mary flashed at me a look of keen suspicion. I wished, with a great pang, that I had not been so communicative, for it was evident that these words of mine had roused afresh her cruel doubts of me. I was too much hurt to trust myself to another word on this subject; with a little quaver in my voice I said I would go and get ready for breakfast.

As I hurried to my room I decided that I would go back home that morning. I could be of little use to her now that she had once lost faith in me; I must trust to time to teach her again what she seemed to have forgotten, how honestly and loyally I was her friend.

Mr. Marshall appeared that morning at the breakfast table. He looked haggard and ill, and I reproached him for coming down, but Mary accepted his presence with her new customary apathy. He spoke to Mary gravely about her adventure of the night, but she only gave a little hard laugh and said that women with money must expect these adventures. This new harshness in a girl who had always been so gentle was a great trouble to me, although I could not be surprised by it. I began to feel a diffidence even about suggesting her going away, but it had to be done, and so, when breakfast was half over, I made a "rush at it."

"Don't you think, Mary, that it would be wiser of you to go away somewhere for a little while, until you have got over the effects of the horrible frights you have had lately?"

She turned round towards me very slowly, with the air of a princess.

"I shall never get over them," she said quietly; "they have changed my whole view of life, and of my friends."

Again she would not let me off—a cruel emphasis on the word "friends."

"As for its being wiser to go away, why, I never do anything wise, and I am not going to belie my character for foolishness now. I shall stay here until the end of the summer."

A blank silence fell upon everybody at the table.

This calm decision on the part of a girl whose chief hold upon our esteem had been her yielding loveliness overwhelmed us with astonishment. For the first time, Mary had asserted herself as mistress in her own house, and guide of her own actions.

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CHAPTER XXII.

AFTER the first moment of surprise I felt a sensation of intense relief at this new attitude of Mary's, accompanied by a feeling of comfort and hopefulness such as I had not experienced since my arrival under her roof. From a puppet she had become a reasoning being, determined to hold her own; and the change, while its suddenness puzzled me, was evidently greatly for the better.

In the face of her apparent loss of confidence in me, I avoided any further private conversation with Mr. Marshall, lest she should again fancy that we were conspiring against her. I also took an early opportunity of telling her that it was time for me to go back home; my father would be wanting me. She received my information as unemotionally as she had taken everything else that day, and merely said that she supposed I should not want to go until the following morning. This could hardly be construed as the warmest possible invitation to stay, but I was so anxious to learn the results of her forthcoming interview with Hilary that I put my pride in my pocket and said that the next morning would do very well for my departure.

After the interchange of these few words, the day hung heavily on my hands. Hilary did not come, Mr. Marshall returned early to his room, Mary avoided all of us; I was quite glad of the companionship of Mrs. Camden, and gave a more sympathetic ear than ever before to the recital of the doings and sayings of her aristocratic "friends."

Dinner was over early, and as soon as we left the dining-room I hurried round to the distillery, hoping that the revelations I had to make concerning the previous night

would incline the night-watchman to be less reticent with me than before. It was still almost broad daylight, being scarcely eight o'clock, when I came upon Harry Hopkins, lounging in the yard with his pipe in his mouth.

"Mr. Hopkins," I began, "I wish you would trust me a little more than you do."

For reply he took his pipe out of his mouth, and said briefly:

"Trust you? Now, does the missus?"

I grew crimson and was inclined to turn away without pursuing my inquiries further; but Hopkins did not mean to let me off like that.

"By what I can 'ear of the goings on in the 'ouse, it's all you and Mr. Marshall, you and Mr. Tom, and the missus out of it all; just as if she was only a child, and not a growed-up woman and her own missus."

Hopkins was too important a person to be treated lightly, so I condescended to explain.

"Don't you know," I said, "that Miss Smith has not been herself lately, owing to the night-frights she has had? It doesn't say much for your watchfulness that anyone was able to get in and give them to her," I went on boldly.

I had entirely given up the idea that Hopkins himself was a party to these tricks. He seemed taken aback by my boldness, and looked at me out of the corners of his small eyes.

"Who do you think it was gave 'em to her?" he asked after a pause.

"Well, that strange woman had a hand in it, I know," I said decidedly. "And last night, after all I said to you, you let her get in again, and she tried to smother Miss Smith during the night."

"Did she, though?" said Hopkins.

But to do him justice, he began to look very serious.

"You're sure it was her, I s'pose," he remarked, with another sidelong look.

"Why, yes, who else could it be!" said I, with an uncomfortable sensation stealing over me of suspicion of the entire world.

"And the missus, what does *she* think? P'raps she's a-coming for to arsk my opinion too."

He was looking behind me towards the gate of the yard. Turning my head I saw, to my astonishment, that Mary was indeed coming towards us, with the same cold, suspicious expression which she had worn all day. Instinctively I fell back a little, and Mary smiled contemptuously as she noticed this.

"You can go on talking," she said drily as she came up. "For I have come about the same subject—my affairs."

I saw in the little Cockney watchman's face, as he respectfully touched his cap, and took his pipe out of his mouth, a look of genuine sympathy which at once gave me a favorable insight into his character.

"There has been a great mystery made about some doings which have taken place here lately," she began. "My household and my friends seem to have sifted it thoroughly: only I have been left in the dark. Perhaps you can throw a little light on it for me too."

A sort of uncomfortable blush rose in the little man's cheek.

"P'raps I could, ma'am," he said, with his eyes on the ground, "but p'raps I won't. There, that's flat, ain't it?"

"Don't you think that, as the mistress, I have a right to know what goes on here?"

"Right or no right, ma'am, I ain't a-going to tell you what I knows about this job, not if you was to turn me off to-morrer. I ain't a going to break a lady's 'eart what has been a good mistress to me, and it would go nigh to breaking yours if you was to know all I know—or guess," he added in a low voice.

Mary said nothing more for a few moments. She could

not fail to be impressed by the sincerity of the man's manner. For my part I was miserable, because it seemed to me probable that these hints of his would deepen what I believed to be her suspicions of me.

"Tell Miss Smith about the woman, tell her there has been a woman about," I pleaded earnestly.

Mary looked interested at once.

"A woman!" she repeated. "The woman I want to see perhaps! Is it a tall, good-looking woman, who dresses quietly? Is she about now?"

"She's sure to be, sure to be," I broke in hastily. "She was here last night, she's always here. And she hides about, so that you either cannot or will not find her."

And I turned passionately on Hopkins.

"I haven't seen her, I give you my word," grumbled he.

"But of course I don't say it's easy to keep watch over every nook and cranny in this 'ere big, rambling place."

"Well!" I said boldly, "you had better keep a watch on the door between the house and the works to-night, unless Miss Smith would like to have another attempt made on her life."

Both my hearers started at this speech. Mary presently held out her hand with a commanding gesture.

"Give me the key of that door," she said decisively.

The night watchman detached a key from his bunch and gave it to her.

"I can go through to the house by that way now," said she.

And bidding us both good-night in the same cold manner, she passed through into the distillery building. Hopkins slowly followed her as far as the bottom of the staircase, and stood looking at her with a half-puzzled, half-pitying expression of face.

Finding myself thus left alone, I returned to the house as I had come, through the yard and the garden. In the

hall I met one of the maids, who told me that Mr. Gold was in the drawing-room.

"I couldn't find Miss Smith anywhere, ma'am, so I went up and told Mr. Marshall. And he told me to say as Miss Smith was out. But Mr. Gold was very angry when I told him, and he said he had been asked to come by Miss Smith herself, and he should stay till he could see her, if he waited till to-morrow morning. You can hear him now, ma'am, walking up and down."

At that moment Hilary, hearing the servant's voice, flung open the drawing-room door. His face wore that savage, black look that anger gives to dark-complexioned people, and I felt quite thankful, as I looked at him, that Mary was out of the way. He gave me a little scowling bow, but did not speak; he was listening for Mary's voice.

"Mary is not in the house at present," I said coldly.

"So I hear. I am waiting until she returns," said he.

I hesitated, wishing I could think of something to say which would induce him to go away. But he looked too determined to be put off, so I turned away and went upstairs, hoping that he would not see Mary that night. When I reached the first-floor I saw Mary coming quickly through the door which led from the works. She went straight to her own room, and in a few moments came out again, thrusting something into her pocket as she turned again towards the storehouses.

"Good-night, Mary," said I.

"Good-night," she said shortly, without looking at me.

And before I could attempt to detain her, she had passed through the door which separated the house from the works, leaving it open behind her. As I stood wondering what she was going to do there, I heard a man's rapid steps along the corridor, and saw Hilary Gold run past me, following Mary through the doorway. He had evidently

been listening on the staircase for her voice, and at the sound of it had boldly dashed up in pursuit of her.

I called to him, trying to detain him ; but he would not hear.

I was seized suddenly by a paroxysm of nervous fright as to what would happen if this passionate, angry man encountered the girl in the highly-wrought state of feeling she was in that evening. So I crossed the corridor and knocked at Mr. Marshall's door. I knocked softly, for fear he might be asleep ; and getting no answer I concluded that this was so. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to follow the two headstrong young people myself, with a fervent hope that no harm would come of their meeting. I passed through the long, dim storerooms, when the last faint rays of light struggled between the piled up sacks of grain ; but they had got far ahead of me, and I could see or hear nothing of either of them. I stumbled through some intervening, lumber-filled rooms, still meeting nobody, when the sound of voices, a man's and a woman's, in angry, hot discussion, came faintly to my ears. Scrambling along in the direction whence they came, I was shocked and alarmed to hear, rising above the voices, a loud swishing and whirring which I knew came from the big mash-tun. The mashing of the malt, which goes on night and day while this particular process lasts, was now, I knew, in progress. The enormous tun, the sight of which had appalled me before, was now mixing the grain with its rows of long steel claws. The horrible fancy which had come into my head when I looked down at the huge tun when it was empty, with its sharp teeth lying idle, returned to me with redoubled force, now that I felt sure the angry voices came from the tun-room.

As I hurried on under the bare rafters, between heaped up barrels and the huge distilling vessels called wash-backs, my fears grew stronger until, when I tottered into the tun-

room itself, I was hardly able to bear without shrieking the sight which met my eyes.

In the wooden gallery above the huge mash-tun two figures were struggling, almost silently. The roar of the seething mass of grain and water in the yawning vesse. underneath drowned the noise of their shuffling feet. Through a dusty sky-light above enough light came for me to distinguish that the two figures bent and swayed together from side to side, now close against the wall, now hanging over the rail. Then stifled, gurgling sounds came from the woman's lips, and I knew that her mouth was gagged by her assailant's hand.

"Help! Help!" I shrieked. "Mary! Mary!"

I dashed towards the wooden ladder which led to the gallery, and sprang up it like a cat. Only to be too late. As I reached the top rung the man, leaning panting over the gallery rail, stood alone; and a piercing woman's shriek came up from the great tun beneath, as the great steel teeth threw up torn fragments of the dying woman's clothing.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"MARY! Mary!" I wailed out, as I sank on the floor of the gallery, overcome by the awful sound of a woman's death-cry.

For I knew there was no hope. One glance down into that tossing, seething liquid, at the rows of shining steel fangs that crossed the great tun from side to side, up and down, up and down, never pausing an instant in their work, told me that no human being, falling in there, could live. My thoughts now turned to the wretch who had murdered her. There he stood, still leaning over the little railing, looking down at the body of his already silent victim, and deaf, as it seemed, to my cries.

Suddenly he seemed to remember where he was; and springing erect, he turned with a staggering step towards the ladder, on the top rung of which I was crouching.

"Murderer!" I shrieked with all the force of my lungs, as I clung to him like a tigress, hanging with the whole weight of my body on one of his arms, in the wild hope of detaining him till someone should hear me and come to seize him. He did not utter a word, but struggled to free himself from me, dealing blows on my head and arms with his disengaged hand. But I clung on like a leech, still uttering my wild cries, my voice ringing above the sound of the roaring mass in the tun, and echoing in the rafters overhead. Then, while I struggled, some sound or some movement recalled to me the touch of the man whom I had found in the attics, and whose face I had seen and failed to recognize.

"Who are you? Who are you?" I cried frantically. "Is it Hilary Gold? Who is it?"

The man made no answer. Renewing his efforts to free himself with greater violence than ever, he struck me a blow on the head which half stunned me, and then, when I relaxed my hold a little, tore my hands off his arm and flung me down. Luckily for me, we had got further along the gallery during the struggle, so I was not thrown down the ladder, but only on to the boards. I heard the man's rapid footsteps as he ran down the steps, and then for a few moments my head got confused, and although I did not faint, I forgot where I was.

There was a dreadful singing in my ears when at last I staggered up to my feet and remembered the horrible tragedy I had just witnessed. I crawled down the wooden steps with tottering feet and aching head; my brain seemed to be spinning round and round, and everything I touched seemed to be slipping away from me. And all the while one horrible memory possessed me, torturing, maddening me. My Mary was dead, lying there in that hissing, seething mass a few yards from me. The thought suddenly spurred me on to quicker movement. Groping, blundering on, obliged to stop from time to time to remember which way to turn, I got at last to the top of the iron staircase which led to the principal entrance of the distillery. I heard voices below, men's voices, and I saw the gleam of a lantern swinging in somebody's hand.

"Help!" I called out feebly, and the voices ceased. "Help!" I repeated. "Come quickly, quickly. Miss Smith—has been—murdered!"

There were shouts and the noise of men's footsteps as they raced up the iron staircase, to the rail of which I was clinging, still dizzy and half blind. Hopkins, the night-watchman, was the foremost man. He supported me, saying in an agitated voice:

"You don't mean it, miss, surely you don't mean it!"

"It is true, true. The tun-room—the great tun!" I gasped. "So, I am all right; go."

Without another word Hopkins and the under watch man who was with him left me and ran off. When I had recovered a little, I dragged myself back towards the tun-room, which had now a ghastly fascination I could not resist. Hopkins and three other men were there, crowding round a shapeless object on the floor. Hopkins heard my step, and, springing at me, gently led me away. The machinery which worked the tun had been stopped, and there was now a dead silence in the place, broken only from time to time by a hushed, awe-struck whisper from one of the men standing round the dead woman.

Hopkins wouldn't listen to either my questions or my explanations; I wasn't well enough to talk then, he said; it would all have to be examined into to-morrow.

"But, Hopkins," said I, "you must tell me one thing. Did any man pass out of the building while you were downstairs near the door?"

He would give me no answer at first, trying to put me off with promises to "talk it out" with me next day. But I insisted on having just this one reply.

"Well," he admitted reluctantly, "nobody passed out except just Miss Smith's intended, Mr. Gold."

"Ah!" I almost shrieked.

"Why, you don't go for to suspect him sure—ly!" said the watchman.

But I said nothing. This information gave one more turn to the fantastic kaleidoscope of horrors which had shifted before my dazzled eyes since my arrival at the distillery.

I let Hopkins lead me back into the house, where all was quiet. Not an inkling of the tragedy had yet reached the household. Mrs. Camden had retired to her room; the servants were all in their own wing. I crept to Mr. Marshall's door and knocked, at first softly.

There was no answer, and I repeated my knock more

loudly, and yet a third and fourth time. At last he answered from the bed, in the half-startled, half-stupid tone of one roused suddenly from sleep.

"Eh! What! What is it?"

"Come, come! Something dreadful, horrible has happened," I said in a hissing whisper.

I heard him get out of bed, and in another minute he came to the door in his dressing-gown, evidently not yet half awake.

"Something happened!" he echoed sleepily.

But the next moment he caught sight of my face.

"Why, child, what is the matter with you? You've hurt yourself," he said with concern, as I leaned, trembling, against the wall.

"It isn't that, it isn't that. I don't know how to tell you!" I stammered. "But oh, you would have to hear to-morrow, and it's better you should hear it from me. Poor—Mary——"

I broke down. Mr. Marshall was angrily alert on the instant.

"You don't mean to say they have been playing those tricks on her again!"

"Oh no, no. Worse, much worse than that! How can I tell you? How can I?"

Mr. Marshall came a little way out into the corridor.

"Good gracious, Georgie, you frighten me," said he. "Quick, child, has anything happened to her? Where is she?"

He made a step forward in the direction of her room. I stopped him with a gesture of despair.

"Oh no, not in there. She is dead. She has been murdered!"

"Murdered! Mary!"

He staggered back, and over his face there came a strange, wild look, as if the thing he heard was utterly past comprehension.

"Yes, yes, it is true, it is true," I gasped out hoarsely. "She went through into the distillery, and—someone went after her. I followed, and I heard a struggle—up in the gallery above the great mash-tun. Then there was a shriek, and she was thrown in. Oh! I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it! I can hear her cry still!"

I covered my face with my hands. Mr. Marshall listened, as still and white as a dead man.

"Who was it?" he asked at last in a low fearful voice "who—killed her?"

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know. But—Mr. Marshall—the only man who was seen to leave the distillery afterwards was——"

"Who?" asked Mr. Marshall, in a harsh, croaking voice, fixing upon me eyes that seemed suddenly on fire with eager anxiety.

"Hilary Gold," I whispered.

"Ah!"

He turned away from me, with a strange look on his face which I did not understand.

"Oh, Mr. Marshall, you don't think—do you think——"

I stopped. He passed his hand over his forehead, from which the perspiration was rolling down in great beads.

"I will see him to-morrow," he said, almost like a man in a dream, slowly, deliberately, in a dull, measured voice. "I will leave the house early, before it is light, and I will not rest till I have found and questioned him."

"But you are not well enough to go!" I objected. "And this dreadful, dreadful thing has made you worse. Besides, of course, if it was he, he would not tell the truth!"

"I shall go, all the same," said Mr. Marshall. "He will not be able to deceive *me*."

At that moment there was a sound at the lock of the door from the distillery and Hopkins burst through. But not before Mr. Marshall, with, as I thought, a cowardly fear,

easy to forgive, of hearing more horrible details thrust upon him, had retreated into his own room. The night-watchman came through, with a look of grave determination on his little wizened face. He knocked sharply at Mr. Marshall's door.

"Mr. Marshall, sir," he said in his dry thread of a voice, "I want to speak to you. I won't keep you a moment, sir."

"What is it?" asked Mr. Marshall, in a voice which was faint and weak with emotion. "If it is about this awful tragedy concerning my poor niece, spare me just to-night."

"He is ill," I whispered to Hopkins pleadingly. "And the shock has been too much for him."

But Hopkins spared no one. In exactly the same dry tone as ever, not heeding my supplication, but merely waiting until I was silent, he went on, with another rap at the door—

"If you please, sir, it's absolutely necessary that you should see the body."

I uttered a low cry, and turned away, sick at heart and miserable beyond words. Hopkins, after waiting at Mr. Marshall's door for the answer he failed to get, came up to me and spoke in a voice fuller of kindly feeling for my distress than I could have thought possible in the dry little man.

"Look 'ere," he said persuasively. "Look 'ere, miss. This is a bad job, but it's got to be gone through with. It ain't no good making no bones about it. There's a lot more unpleasantness to come out before we've done with it, so you'd better make up yer mind as it won't be no birthday tea-party in the 'ouse for the next fortnight—no, nor yet afterwards for some time to come."

"But it is of no use making people suffer more than they need, so why should a man who is almost an invalid just now be dragged out to see a horrible sight? He is going to do the best he can; to-morrow morning he is going to hunt out——"

"'Unt out who?" said Hopkins more drily than ever, seeing that I stopped.

"Someone who may be able to throw some light upon the affair," said I cautiously,

It was no business of mine to implicate anybody to a third person without proof. But Hopkins received this speech with an extraordinarily knowing expression breaking over his face.

"Ho!" said he. And then he added as if to himself, "And to-morrer's Doncaster races."

Without another word he turned on his heel and went back quickly into the distillery.

I thought that he must have gone suddenly mad.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

I COULD not go to bed. I hung about the corridor for some time listening and fancying that I heard the voices of the men in the distillery. At last, instead of going to my own room, I crept into that of my poor friend. I left the door open, so that the light from the gas in the corridor streamed faintly into the room, showing me the different objects on the dressing table which she had last used, the open ivory pin-box, the little tortoiseshell hand mirror. From commonplace they had all become sacred, and I hovered over them with the horror I had felt giving way for the first time to a tender pain which allowed the tears to flow from my eyes. Presently I slid down on to the floor, buried my face in the little sofa, and sobbed with all my heart.

I sobbed until my head ached unbearably, so that I could scarcely raise it in my hands, and until I was half blind and half deaf. Then I heard the door close. I sprang to my feet, the throbbing pain in my temples causing me to cry out as I did so.

"Who's there?" I called aloud.

For answer I heard a moan in a woman's voice.

I was not frightened; I was too miserable to feel any emotion so acute as alarm. I stood quite still, and, listening intently, asked:

"Who is it?"

Then a light was struck, and I saw a woman's form, candle in hand, coming towards me.

Then, indeed, terror seized upon me, such terror as I had never before felt in my life. For this woman approaching

me with faltering, unsteady steps, with wide open, wild eyes and breath that came in sobs was Mary, Mary whom I could have sworn that I saw flung over the gallery-rails into the revolving machinery in the tun-room, whose death-cry I believed I had heard, whose mangled body I had caught sight of on the floor.

I am not superstitious, but I hung back for a few moments, not crying out, but examining every feature of the woman before me with doubtful eyes. At last I stretched out my hand and touched hers, which was icily cold.

"Mary," I whispered hoarsely, "is it you, really you?"

"I scarcely know myself," answered the poor girl in a low, broken voice.

And letting me take the candlestick from her she sank upon the sofa. For some minutes we sat together side by side without exchanging another word. Mary seemed benumbed by some great shock; while I was too much overwhelmed by the feeling that I had more horrors to hear to enjoy even a feeling of relief at my friend's apparently miraculous escape.

At last, however, one extraordinary circumstance struck me with sudden force.

"Your clothes are quite dry!" I said.

Mary bent her head in assent and comprehension.

"It was not I who was thrown in," she said in a dull voice.

"Not you! Who was it then?"

"Then, with sudden apprehension, I sprang up, drawing a deep breath.

"The woman! Dora Selton!" I gasped out.

Mary clasped her hands.

"I was there," she whispered hoarsely. "I could not see, but I heard. I heard you cry out too. I heard you say 'Mary' and I knew what you thought, but I seemed to be paralyzed, and could not call back to you. I had

gone into the works to try to find this poor woman ; you had said she would be there. I knew she could explain a great deal of this mystery if she would, and I meant to make it worth her while. But when I found her, she was struggling with this man, reproaching him, threatening him. And before I had recovered myself, the end came, and she was killed, and I did not know by whom."

"Do you know now? Do you guess?" whispered I into her ear, as she bent down her face upon her hands.

"I don't know, I don't know; I don't want to think," she answered vehemently.

After a long pause I made a hazardous remark.

"You know—that—Hilary Gold was about?"

"Yes. He had followed me into the distillery, and insisted on speaking to me. I reproached him with caring for this woman, this Dora Selton, and he seemed amazed, and swore solemnly that he had not seen her half a dozen times, and that she had represented herself to him as a friend of mine. He said I had been tricked, and he left me in a passion of indignation, and said that he must see his guardian, Uncle Charles, at once."

"But he didn't, did he?"

"No, I refused to let him come into the house to make a disturbance at that time of night, and he left me, still furious, vowing that I cared more for the meanest creature in my employment than I did for him."

"And you don't know where he went then?"

"No. I thought he was going out by the distillery entrance."

"And you don't think——?"

Mary knew what I meant and she shuddered.

"I don't know, oh, I don't know. Don't make me think, don't make me guess."

The poor girl was evidently kept on the rack by her own thoughts ; and I, having nothing encouraging to say to her, just sat by her silently, chafing her cold hands in mine.

I slept with her that night, neither of us daring to be left alone. The next morning we overslept ourselves, and when we got downstairs we learned that Mr. Marshall had gone away by an early train. He had left affectionate little notes both for Mary and me, telling her that he should soon be back to enjoy her hospitality again, and me that he was going to sift to the bottom the mystery of the night before.

From this I guessed more certainly than before in what direction his suspicions pointed. For my own part, I knew that poor Mary's doubts of Hilary were causing her such intolerable torture, that I had made up my mind to seek him out on my own account, and not to rest until I had heard his version of the story.

I had learnt Hilary's address from Mary, and was ready to start soon after breakfast, when an unexpected difficulty sprang up. A police-officer came into the house from the distillery, to continue the inquiries he had begun there, and not only had we to answer fully all his detailed interrogations, concerning the events of the previous evening, but it was with great difficulty that he was induced to allow me to leave the house at all. However, I got away at last, and reached Hilary's lodgings without incident. Then I was informed by the landlady that Mr. Gold was out. He had gone, she believed, to Doncaster Races.

I remembered the mysterious mention of Doncaster made by Harry Hopkins the night before. It must be then, as Mr. Marshall had once half hinted to me, that Hilary was a devotee of the race-course, and that this was the explanation of his financial ruin.

I suppose it would have seemed to a person of calm mind the decision of a madwoman that I instantly took. But I was racked with impatience, and could not wait. I would follow him to Doncaster myself, and there, in the midst of his vicious dissipations, I would confront Hilary

Gold, and bring him to book. I had been to "The Oaks" and to the Epsom Spring Meeting, driving down comfortably in the Marshalls' carriage, so I knew just enough to understand that to make my way about a racecourse by myself would be no easy or pleasant task. But my zeal was so much stronger than my discretion that I did not hesitate to trust to luck and to start on my journey.

It was by this time getting late in the day, and all the "specials" had gone. So I went up quite comfortably, without any crowding, and should have congratulated myself upon the fact but for a counterbalancing disadvantage. I was in a slow train; and as it drew near Doncaster, having already suffered a delay further south, it was shunted so frequently to make way for returning "specials," that I began to see there was little chance of my meeting Hilary, unless he should have decided to stay in the town for the following day's racing.

When we reached Doncaster I found the platform crowded with people, noisy, clamorous, red-faced, not over sober and decidedly rough. They were making a rush in a compact body for every train as it ran into the station, and I narrowly escaped being thrown down on my back as I struggled to leave the carriage. It was clear that the races were over for that day, and that my best chance of meeting Hilary lay in waiting about the station; as I pushed and edged my way through the crowd round to the up-platform and waited by a doorway, where I had a good view of the approaching stream. The crowd was pouring in rather less thickly as I took up my stand, but before long there was an onrush so thick that I despaired of being able to find out any single person. On they came, walking, running, driving, hot, dusty, vociferous. A swarm of light-coated betting-men dashed through the doors in front of me, forcing me to stand back to avoid being knocked down. I could distinguish no one in the rush.

But suddenly, above the noisy laughter, I heard a voice I knew, loud, angry, and fierce, crying with savage emphasis :

“There he is, the scoundrel !”

It was Hilary Gold's voice ; I could not see him, but I knew he had passed through the doors and I followed with the surging crowd on to the platform.

A train for London had just come in ; there was a rush in which I was borne forward and almost crushed against the side of a carriage. As I struggled back I caught sight of Hilary. He was some paces behind me in the crowd ; and with a face convulsed with rage, he was trying to get at one of the group of dust-coated betting men who had entered the station so noisily. I watched him ; I was so jammed in I could do nothing else. Just as the man he was struggling to reach set his foot on the carriage-step, Hilary seized him by the shoulder and dragged him backwards with a sullenly muttered oath. As the man felt himself dragged back, he turned his head sharply, and stared at his assailant. At that moment I caught sight of his face.

Grown white in a moment, haggard, wide-eyed, distorted, it was the same face that had turned upon me on the night when I seized Mary's unknown enemy on the distillery staircase.

CHAPTER XXV.

I WAS so overwhelmed by the passionate excitement into which this second sight of the strange man's face threw me, that for a few moments I saw nothing distinctly. The crowd still pushed and surged. In a sort of haze I saw, through the scrambling, fighting throng, half-a-dozen strong men's arms thrust forth from the carriage at the door of which the strange man stood. Someone gave Hilary a great blow in the chest which sent him staggering backwards, the man whom he had seized was drawn by his friends into the compartment, and the door was closed. A few seconds later the train moved slowly out of the station.

On to the platform they still poured, shouting, aggressive, jubilant men, weary, downcast, silent men; the load the train had taken out scarcely seemed to diminish their numbers. I was able to watch Hilary, who stood with a stern and resolute face, evidently hardly conscious of the mob surrounding him. And as I watched, my thoughts concerning him changed, my doubts of him grew weaker.

One thing was certain! He had not come to Doncaster that day, as I had supposed, in the callous determination to enjoy a favorite dissipation. If he had even come to drown remorse, he had not succeeded. There was anger, unhappiness, steady resolution in every line of his dark face. His dress, too, was utterly unlike that of the typical racing man—utterly unlike, for instance, that of the man he had seized and who had escaped him. He was in dark, heavy-looking clothes, on which the dust of the road and of

the race-course lay in deep white furrows. When a movement in the crowd gave me an opportunity I went up to him and touched his arm. He did not seem to notice me.

"Mr. Gold," I said.

He started and looked round. There was no guilt on his face, only a great surprise.

"You here, Miss Oliver! Not—not alone, surely!"

"Yes," said I, feeling shy and uncomfortable, and not at all carrying out my part of threatening avenger.

"Why, what on earth— Excuse me, but—did you come here to meet—to find someone?"

"Yes," said I very shyly and meekly.

"Ah!" No thought of the truth entered his mind evidently. He added very quietly: "So did I."

There was a pause. The hustling crowd threw us nearer together. I, with my face close under his, looked straight into his eyes.

"Who was that man?" I asked abruptly.

The frown gathered more blackly on the young man's face.

"Do you mean to say you don't know?" said he brusquely.

I trembled and did not answer. I could hardly tell what the fear was that began to gather round my heart.

"No, I don't know who it was."

"You have never seen him before, I suppose?"

"Only once."

Hilary looked down at me with a penetrating expression. After a few moments' silence he said quietly:

"Pray that you may never see him again then."

I shrank away as far as I could, which was not many paces in that throng. At that moment another surging movement in the crowd announced the approach of a second train for London. Hilary elbowed his way to me.

"You had better let me see you back to town," he said

shortly ; " you would not find the return journey by yourself very pleasant, I'm afraid."

Indeed I was thankful to accept his escort, for the flushed faces and coarse speech of my destined fellow-travelers had frightened all the courage out of me. Somehow the thought that I was receiving a kindness from a suspected murderer never crossed my mind. They say that a woman has some mysterious instinct by which she jumps to a right conclusion which it takes a man hours of reasoning to arrive at. I suppose it was that instinct which made me now feel certain that, whoever was the murderer of Dora Selton, it was not Hilary Gold.

With great difficulty he got me safely into a compartment of the train, and with greater difficulty still secured a place in it for himself. It was a most unpleasant journey back to town. There were eleven passengers in the space intended for six, and they were chiefly of the kind that only travels first-class when the guards are too busy to be over particular. They sang comic songs which I would rather not have heard ; and they talked a curious slang which I was glad I did not understand. Hilary at first kindly tried to make conversation for me, but soon had to give it up amid the babble. Of course we could not approach serious subjects until, after a weary, weary while, the train at last steamed into King's Cross Station. It was past ten o'clock.

In my head had been beating, through all the din and fatigue of the journey, the one thought that if I brought Hilary down to Mary's house the whole mystery would be cleared up, and my poor girl's belief in her lover would prove to be justified. Even at the risk of laying bare secrets which I began to dread to touch, there would be a certain good gained in easing Mary's mind and securing her a devoted adherent. So I turned to the young man as soon as we got out of the train, and asked if he would accompany me to Mary's. He hesitated, however.

"I am sure," I went hurriedly, "that we have done you some injustice, I especially perhaps."

"I know you have," said he shortly.

"Perhaps you don't know all that happened down at the distillery last night," I said, trembling. "If you will come down with me now, late as it is, I am sure Mary will see you, and you can comfort her. My poor girl wants comforting, I assure you, after some scenes she has gone through lately."

Instead of looking sad or sympathetic at these words, however, Hilary's face became convulsed with rage. He clenched his hands, and glared out before him as if at some detested enemy.

"I can't go down with you," he said shortly. "I have some business to do first."

"Business! To-night?"

"Yes, to-night, at once. I am going about it now."

"Let me go with you," said I.

He looked down at me and laughed. I don't know whether he saw that a little lingering suspicion of him urged me not to let him out of my sight now that I had once effected his capture, or whether he proposed to be revenged upon me for my evil thoughts of him. Certainly, however, there was something sardonic in the tone of his answer—

"Come with me by all means if you like. But I warn you that you won't enjoy yourself."

I was not expecting enjoyment that evening, so I said I would go with him, and we got into a hansom. I did not hear the direction he gave the driver, but I felt uneasy soon after we started, when I found that we were taking the road to Bayswater.

When we drew up at the door of Mr. Marshall's house, I began to tremble so violently that Hilary, turning to me sharply, suggested leaving me in the cab.

"No—o," said I with my teeth chattering, and I got out clumsily, staggering against the wheel.

It was now nearly eleven o'clock.

"Has Mr. Marshall come home yet?" asked Hilary of the man-servant who opened the door.

It was an old servant of the family, and he shook his head knowingly as he answered—

"Yes, sir, and he's got his racing humor on."

"I can't help that. I have to see him on important business."

"Won't it wait, sir? He's going away for a day or two, and he's in a great hurry, I know."

"Ah!" ejaculated Hilary shortly. "I must see him," he added. And he turned to the dining-room door.

"Won't you go upstairs to the drawing-room, sir?" asked the man.

"No."

The idea in Hilary's mind evidently was that if he remained so near the front door Mr. Marshall would not be able to get away without seeing him, as, if he was pressed for time, he might try to do. I followed him into the dining-room, agitated by a thousand uneasy feelings.

Mr. Marshall had been at the races! And this on the day after almost being a witness to a terrible murder! I could not understand it.

Hilary and I stood still without looking at each other. The moments dragged on like hours until at last we heard a very slight noise on the staircase outside. Hilary was out in the hall in a moment. I heard Mr. Marshall's voice.

"My dear fellow, I really can't stop to talk to you now. I've got to catch the midnight express for——"

"You have something to settle with me first. Come in here."

Mr. Marshall came in. He was dressed in a travelling

suit, and looked flushed and excited. He caught sight of me, and held out his hand; he seemed relieved by my presence.

"Ah, Georgie, you here!" he cried with almost an exaggeration of his habitual cheery tones.

I gave him my hand, which was cold and trembling. Hilary's voice, speaking in hard and resolute tones, made his guardian turn to him.

"You have no time to waste, you know," he said, "better come to business. I had a talk with Mary last night, the talk you tried to prevent our having."

"I prevent!"

"Oh, let us have done with hypocrisy now. I can do you no harm. You are her uncle, and so we must hush up your knaveries for the sake of the family. We all know that."

I listened, thunderstruck, to these accusations.

Hilary went on.

"But you shall keep your smug face for the people who don't know you now. You shall not take in these two silly girls any longer. You used my money on your vices, and told me you had spent it all on Mary and her girlish whims and extravagances. You took advantage of my admiration for her to shut my mouth; but when you found that she stood between you and your brother's money, you worked by every devilish means to keep us apart. To the wretched woman, Dora Selton, of whom you were tired, but could not rid yourself, you promised money if your brother's fortune should come to you. And when she found out the conditions by which the fortune might come to you, and hung about Mary's house, distrustful, dangerous, you persuaded these girls that it was through me she came there. I had never seen her in my life until she came up to me a few days ago at the Temple Station, said she was a friend of Miss Smith's, that she recognized me

as one also, and asking me how she was and what had become of her. It was a ruse to get Mary's address."

Mr. Marshall seemed to wait for something more. But Hilary stopped, as if he had come to the end of his indictment.

"A very circumstantial story, my dear boy, but lacking confirmation," he said with assumed levity. "I'm sure my little Georgie here doesn't think me capable of all these high crimes and misdemeanors."

But a horrible suspicion was seizing upon me, stopping my breath. For as I looked at him full in the face, returning his anxious look into mine, I fancied I saw, for the first time, in his bland face, a faint but hideous resemblance to the man I had seized upon the iron staircase of the distillery, whom I had seen again at Doncaster Station that day.

At sight of the horror in my face, the terrible resemblance deepened. The cheeks grew more haggard, the eyes wilder, the lines about the mouth more pinched and drawn. I drew a long, sobbing breath.

"It was you who played the tricks to frighten Mary and send her mad!"

As I uttered these words, with the shadow of a worse horror creeping over my face, the likeness on Mr. Marshall's to the countenance I had twice seen deepened yet again: it became vivid, complete.

With a piercing shriek I could not restrain I drew back shuddering.

"Then it was *you* who murdered Dora Selton!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

AND LAST.

My cry had brought a fourth person into the room: it was Tom. As the wild words of accusation escaped my lips I heard a groan of shame and anguish from the poor lad which rent my heart. He stood near the door, white to the lips, and seemed unable to speak or move. I don't know how Hilary took the announcement, the first he had heard of the murder. We all stood there so still, that Mr. Marshall's panting breath sounded loud in the dead silence. I dared not look in his face again. It was he who moved first. He walked, with a step which even then betrayed no agitation, towards the door.

"You're going away? To leave the country?" asked Hilary in a hoarse voice.

"Yes. I am going to leave the country," answered Mr. Marshall in a tone which was almost that of unconcern.

We let him leave the room, the young men making way for him.

"Good-bye, Mr. Marshall," I whispered. But my voice was so weak and low that he did not hear my unhappy, remorseful farewell.

When he had left the room, and gone, as we could tell by the sounds, towards his study, the young men looked at each other.

"Tom," said Hilary, "ought you to let him go—in there—by himself?"

Tom gave almost a sob.

"I don't know, I don't know—what I ought to do!"

He put his hands to his face, overcome by grief and shame and doubt. Hilary gently led him to the door.

opened it, and gave him a light push in the direction of the study.

It was too late. Before he could take two steps through the hall we heard the sound we had all deep down in our hearts feared, yet expected to hear. It was not loud, that sound; it was deadened, muffled, altogether insignificant if one had not known what it implied.

I don't know quite what happened then to Tom, or to Hilary, or to me. But I heard afterwards that Tom found his father dead in his chair, with a revolver on the floor at his feet.

It was Hilary who took me away, hurrying me out of the house before Mrs. Marshall and the rest could come round me and ask me questions, as he feared they would do. We traveled down to Battersea, scarcely exchanging a word, except that I tried brokenly to apologize for my doubts of him. He would not hear this.

"There were cleverer brains than yours or mine working against me, you know," he said. "If Mr. Marshall hadn't been such a slave to gambling, there wouldn't have been a solicitor in London to equal him in ability."

This was a revelation to me, explaining a great deal that had been obscure before. We did not pursue the subject, and we reached Mary's home with scarcely the interchange of a dozen more words.

Mary herself let us in. I saw from the first glance she exchanged with her lover, that her last doubts of him were at rest. She held out one hand to him and one to me with a very grave, sad face.

"I have something to tell you," she began at once, "which will perhaps not surprise you, Hilary, but which will go far to breaking poor Georgie's heart."

I guessed that she had in some way discovered the truth about the murder.

"I have been talking to Hopkins, the night-watchman," she said.

This confirmed my belief.

"Then you know—" I began.

Mary then saw by my face that I knew something too.

"If I don't absolutely know, I guess—who murdered Dora Selton."

We knew it too, she saw that.

"Tell me," she presently whispered, "is he out of the country?"

There was a long pause. I think before Hilary spoke she had guessed the truth.

"Yes," he said gently, pressing her hands in his. "He is out of reach of us all now."

Then we all went into the house very quietly, and presently Hopkins came through from the distillery, and knocking at the drawing-room door, asked permission to speak to us. He had seen Hilary and me come in at the gate, and had guessed, from seeing us walking amicably but silently together, that we brought important news.

When we told him what the news was, he spoke outright the thought which had been hovering unbidden in all our minds.

"Shot hisself? And a jolly good job too! There's more than one man about this 'ere place guessed as it was 'im, let alone me; and it 'ud ha' been sure to ha' leaked out at the inquest. And a pistol shot is better than a rope, if only for the credit of the family."

This was frank cynicism, but we could not deny the truth of it. Hopkins went on:

"He took me in for a long time, he did. Not having seen *as* Mr. Marshall, when he told me he was a 'tec come to look after the 'ciseman I let him have the run of the

place o' nights without any questions. But when he was obliged to come down here as Mr. Marshall, although he kept so close, saying he was a invalid, I got a squint at him the fust evenin' as cooked his goose."

"You never let us know!" cried I.

"No, miss, you was too thick with him to listen. Besides, things would ha' come to a pretty pass when I let out anything to hurt the Marshalls. That's all I 'ad to say, ma'am."

And pulling his front hair respectfully to Mary, and rather less ceremoniously to Hilary and me, the honest little Cockney left us and returned to his own domain.

One thing more we learnt from Mary. She had been awake when the chloroformed cloth was thrown over her face, and against the faint light that came through the blind she had recognized her uncle's figure. The sight had overwhelmed her with horror, had roused her suspicions of other things, and had caused that change in her manner which I had attributed to doubts of me.

It was with a quiet joy in the re-establishment of our mutual confidence amid all the horror of these discoveries, that Hilary left us, and we retired for the night.

It was not until the two inquests were over, and we were breathing again with relief that the whole of the circumstances had not been made publicly known, that Tom came down one evening to see us.

He seemed utterly crushed by the blows which had fallen thick and fast on his family. Following his father's suicide had come the discovery that he was financially a ruined man. The extravagant expenses of his passion for racing, and gambling of all kinds, had brought him some time since to the verge of bankruptcy, which he had staved off by appropriating the fortune of his ward, Hilary, and by other more than questionable practises. Mary's fortune he had not been able to touch, owing to his brother's

astuteness in appointing the lynx-eyed Ibbetson co-trustee.

"So I am going abroad," Tom ended, in a hard, dry tone, when he had told me these things, as we stood at the window together, looking out upon the river, which looked dreary under a mist of drizzling rain.

"Oh, Tom!" I whimpered.

"Yes," he went on more decidedly than before, "my mother is going back to live with her father, and she takes the younger ones with her. But I can't bear the shame of it. And it's such an awful come-down; so I'm going."

"That's all you care about, I suppose, just the 'come-down,' as you call it. It's only vanity after all," said I bitterly.

I was saying nasty things, but all the while I felt that my heart was breaking.

"That's all, I suppose," said he drily.

But I couldn't bear it any longer.

"Oh, Tom, if you go, you must and shall take me with you," I cried, with the tears trickling fast down my nose. "You won't have any money, and that's where my accomplishments will come in. Think what miserable tarts they'd make you, Tom, in cheap lodgings, and how it would be chop, steak—steak, chop, day after day, and burnt at that!" I cried, piling up the agony. "And I can darn and sew, and if I were to try I believe I could even make men's clothes."

But the prospect of being dependent on my tailoring brought no joy to Tom. He shook his head as he interrupted me.

"No," he said, obstinately. "You think it's a fine thing to make a sacrifice of yourself, and you'd always be throwing it at my head. I shan't take you."

"Well," said I, "I give you the choice of that or one other alternative. You shall either marry me and go ~~abroad~~, or marry me and stay at home."

"What! And face it out, when everybody knows—everybody must know, that I'm the son of a fraudulent trustee, of a——"

"Sh!" said I, putting my hand over his mouth, "everybody knows enough to pity, not to blame you. And if they knew as much as I do—how you took the blame upon yourself of those cruel tricks, when I am certain you had never dreamed of having anything to do with them——"

Tom started.

"No, that's true," he said. "When you saw that torn glove in my hand I saw by his face that he was at the bottom of it. He must have taken my gloves from the hat-stand the night before, instead of his own, and have put them back without noticing or troubling about their being torn."

"But it was noble of you to take the blame!"

"No, it wasn't. I was frightened. I didn't know, when I once learnt that, what else he might have been up to. And it was better I should be blamed than he. You know how much I always thought of the gov'nor."

His voice broke; I took his hand and put it round my shoulder. And he never said a word to me for a very long time.

But he must have been thinking; for the next thing he said was:—

"I think we'll live at Richmond to start with. It's a Coekney place, but then it's cheap, and near the river. And it won't be such a very long pull-up to old Ibbetson's office."

From which speech I gathered several things. The first and supremely important one was that he meant to marry me all the time. And the second was that his father's partner had had the discrimination to offer the young fellow another chance in life.

No weddings were ever before so mouselike in their quietness as Mary's and mine. I was married on a Thursday, in brown. And on the following Tuesday, without any carriage, or guests, or presents, or even a cake, there was celebrated the marriage of the greatest "catch" of that London season—Pretty Miss Smith.

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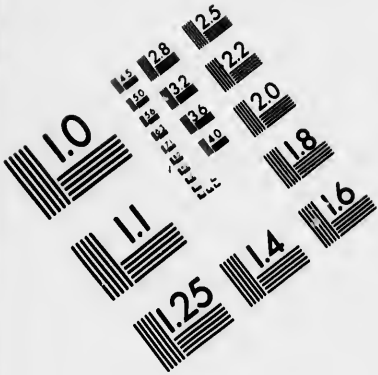
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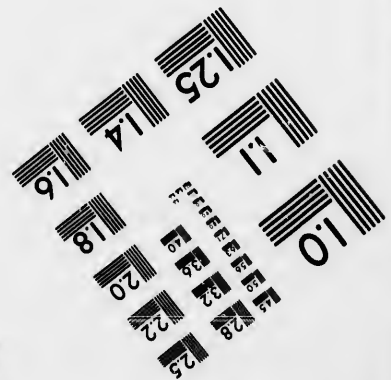
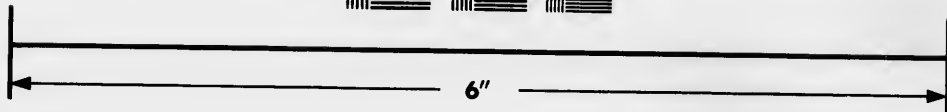
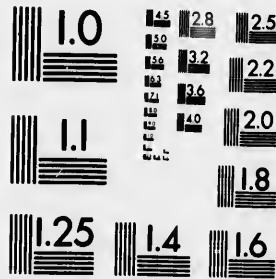
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