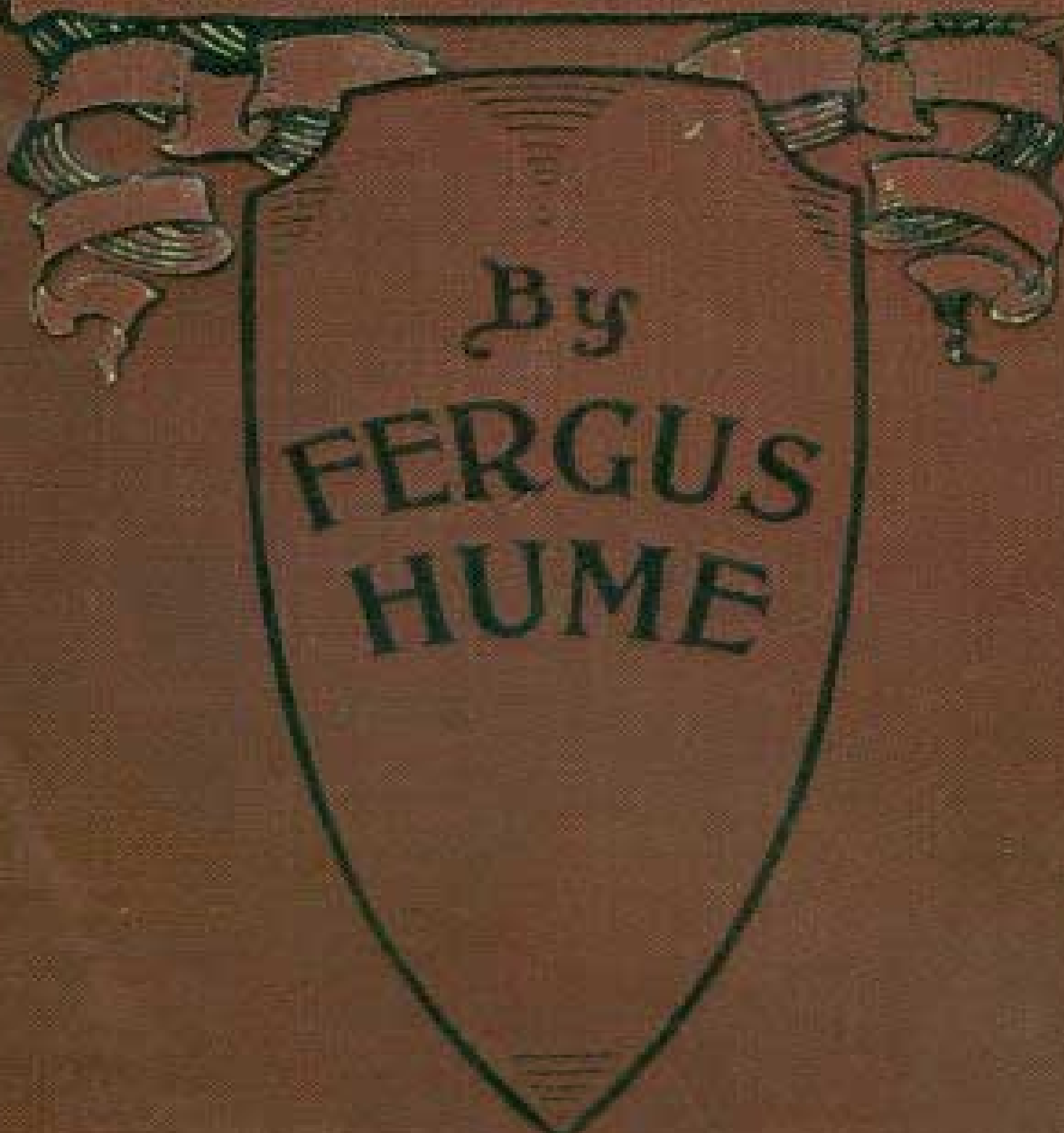


A COIN OF EDWARD VII



By
FERGUS
HUME

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A DETECTIVE STORY

BY

FERGUS HUME

AUTHOR OF

**"THE MYSTERY OF A HANSOM CAB"; "THE PAGAN'S
CUP";**

**"CLAUDE DUVAL OF 95"; "THE RAINBOW FEATHER,"
ETC.**

G. W. DILLINGHAM COMPANY

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CHAPTER I

THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Two old ladies sat in the corner of the drawing-room. The younger—a colonial cousin of the elder—was listening eagerly to gossip which dealt with English society in general, and Rickwell society in particular. They presumably assisted in the entertainment of the children already gathered tumultuously round the Christmas tree, provided by Mr. Morley; but Mrs. Parry's budget of scandal was too interesting to permit the relaxing of Mrs. McKail's attention.

"Ah yes," said Mrs. Parry, a hatchet-faced dame with a venomous tongue and a retentive memory, "Morley's fond of children, although he has none of his own."

"But those three pretty little girls?" said Mrs. McKail, who was fat, fair, and considerably over forty.

"Triplets," replied the other, sinking her voice. "The only case of triplets I have met with, but not his children. No, Mrs. Morley was a widow with triplets and money. Morley married her for the last, and had to take the first as part of the bargain. I don't deny but what he does his duty by the three."

Mrs. McKail's keen grey eyes wander to the fat, rosy little man who laughingly struggled amidst a bevy of children, the triplets included. "He seems fond of them," said she, nodding.

"Seems!" emphasised Mrs. Parry shrewdly. "Ha! I don't trust the man. If he were all he seems, would his wife's face wear that expression? No, don't tell me."

Mrs. Morley was a tall, lean, serious woman, dressed in sober grey. She certainly looked careworn, and appeared to participate in the festivities more as a duty than for the sake of amusement. "He is said to be a good husband," observed Mrs. McKail doubtfully. "Are you sure?"

"I'm sure of nothing where men are concerned. I wouldn't trust one of them. Morley is attentive enough to his wife, and he adores the triplets—so he says; but I go by his eye. Orgy is written in that eye. It can pick out a pretty woman, my dear. Oh, his wife doesn't look sick with anxiety for nothing!"

"At any rate, he doesn't seem attentive to that pretty girl over there—the one in black with the young man."

"Girl! She's twenty-five if she's an hour. I believe she paints and puts belladonna in her eyes. I wouldn't have her for my governess. No, she's too artful, though I can't agree with you about her prettiness."

"Is she the governess?"

Mrs. Parry nodded, and the ribbons on her cap curled like Medusa's snakes. "For six months Mrs. Morley has put up with her. She teaches the Tricolor goodness knows what."

"The Tricolor?"

"So we call the triplets. Don't you see one is dressed in red, another in white, and the third in blue? Morley's idea, I believe. As though a man had any right to interest himself in such things. We call them collectively the Tricolor, and Anne Denham is the governess. Pretty? No. Artful? Yes. See how she is trying to fascinate Ware!"

"That handsome young man with the fair moustache and——"

"The same," interrupted Mrs. Parry, too eager to blacken character to give her friend a chance of concluding her sentence. "Giles Ware, of Kingshart—the head of one of our oldest Essex families. He came into the estates two years ago, and has settled down into a country squire after a wild life. But the old Adam is in him, my dear. Look at his smile—and she doesn't seem to mind. Brazen creature!" And Mrs. Parry shuddered virtuously.

The other lady thought that Ware had a most fascinating smile, and was a remarkably handsome young man of the fair Saxon type. He certainly appeared to be much interested in the conversation of Miss Denham. But what young man could resist so beautiful a woman? For in spite of Mrs. Parry's disparagement Anne was a splendidly handsome brunette—"with a temper," added Mrs. McKail mentally, as she eyed the well-suited couple.

Mrs. Parry's tongue still raged like a prairie fire. "And she knows he's engaged," she snorted. "Look at poor Daisy Kent out in the cold, while that woman monopolizes Ware! Ugh!"

"Is Miss Kent engaged to Mr. Ware?"

"For three years they have been engaged—a family arrangement, I understand. The late Kent and the late Ware," explained Mrs. Parry, who always spoke thus politely of men, "were the greatest of friends, which I can well understand, as each was an idiot. However, Ware died first and left his estate to Giles. A few months later Kent died and made Morley the guardian of his daughter Daisy, already contracted to be married to Giles."

"Does he love her?"

"Oh, he's fond of her in a way, and he is anxious to obey the last wish of his father. But it seems to me that he is more in love with that black cat."

"Hush! You will be heard."

Mrs. Parry snorted. "I hope so, and by the cat herself," she said grimly. "I can't bear the woman. If I were Mrs. Morley I'd have her out of the house in ten minutes. Turn her out in the snow to cool her hot blood. What right has she to attract Ware and make him neglect that dear angel over there? See, yonder is Daisy. There's a face, there's charm, there's hair!" finished Mrs. Parry, quite unconscious that she was using the latest London slang. "I call her a lovely creature."

Mrs. McKail did not agree with her venomous cousin. Daisy was a washed-out blonde with large blue eyes and a slack mouth. Under a hot July sky and with a flush of color she would have indeed been pretty; but the cold of winter and the neglect of Giles Ware shrivelled her up. In spite of the warmth of the room, the gaiety of the scene, she looked pinched and older than her years. But there was some sort of character in her face, for Mrs. McKail caught her directing a glance full of hatred at the governess. In spite of her ethereal prettiness, Daisy Kent was a good hater. Mrs. McKail felt sure of that. "And she is much more of the cat type than the other one is," thought the observant lady, too wise to speak openly.

However, Mrs. Parry still continued to destroy a character every time she opened her mouth. She called the rector a Papist; hinted that the doctor's wife was no better than she should be; announced that Morley owed money to his tradesmen, that he had squandered his wife's fortune; and finally wound up by saying that he would spend Daisy Kent's money when he got it. "If it ever does come to her," finished this amiable person.

"Did her father leave her money?" asked Mrs. McKail.

"He!" snapped the other; "my dear, he was as poor as a church mouse, and left Daisy only a hundred a year to live on. That is the one decent thing about Morley. He did take Daisy in, and he does treat her well, though to be sure she is a pretty girl, and, as I say, he has an eye."

"Then where does the fortune come from?"

"Kent was a half-brother who went out to America, and it is rumored that he made a fortune, which he intends to leave to his niece—that's Daisy. But I don't know all the details of this," added Mrs. Parry, rubbing her beaky nose angrily; "I must find out somehow. But here, my dear, those children are stripping the tree. Let us assist. We must give pleasure to the little ones. I have had six of my own, all married," ended the good lady irrelevantly.

She might have added that her four sons and two daughters kept at a safe distance from their respected parent. On occasions she did pay a visit to one or the other, and usually created a disturbance. Yet this spiteful, mischief-making woman read her Bible, thought herself a Christian, and judged others as harshly as she judged herself leniently. Mrs. McKail was stopping with her, therefore could not tell her what she thought of her behavior; but she privately determined to cut short her visit and get away from this disagreeable old creature. In the meantime Mrs. Parry, smiling like the wicked fairy godmother with many teeth, advanced to meddle with the Christmas tree and set the children by the ears. She was a perfect Atê.

Giles said as much to Miss Denham, and she nervously agreed with him as though fearful lest her assent should reach the ears of Mrs. Parry. "She has no love for me," whispered Anne. "I think you had better talk to Daisy, Mr. Ware."

"I prefer to talk to you," said Giles coolly. "Daisy is like her name—a sweet little English meadow flower—and I love her very dearly. But she has never been out of England, and sometimes we are at a loss what to talk about. Now you?"

"I am a gipsy," interrupted Anne, lest he should say something too complimentary; "a she-Ulysses, who has travelled far and wide. In spite of your preference for my conversation, I wish I were Daisy."

"Do you?" asked Ware eagerly. "Why?"

Anne flushed and threw back her head proudly. She could not altogether misunderstand his meaning or the expression of his eyes, but she strove to turn

the conversation with a laugh. "You ask too many questions, Mr. Ware," she said coldly. "I think Daisy is one of the sweetest of girls, and I envy her. To have a happy home, a kind guardian as Mr. Morley is, and a——" She was about to mention Giles, but prudently suppressed the remark.

"Go on," he said quietly, folding his arms.

She shook her head and bit her lip. "You keep me from my work. I must attend to my duties. A poor governess, you know." With a laugh she joined the band of children, who were besieging Morley.

Giles remained where he was, his eyes fixed moodily on the ground. For more than five months he had fought against an ever-growing passion for the governess. He knew that he was in honor bound to marry Daisy, and that she loved him dearly, yet his heart was with Anne Denham. Her beauty, her brilliant conversation, her charm of manner, all appealed to him strongly. And he had a shrewd suspicion that she was not altogether indifferent to him, although she loyally strove to hide her true feelings. Whenever he became tender, she ruthlessly laughed at him: she talked constantly of Daisy and of her many charms, and on every occasion strove to throw her into the company of Giles. She managed to do so on this occasion, for Giles heard a rather pettish voice at his elbow, and looked down to behold a flushed face. Daisy was angry, and looked the prettier for her anger.

"You have scarcely spoken to me all night," she said, taking his arm; "I do think you are unkind."

"My dear, you have been so busy with the children. And, indeed," he added, with a grave smile, "you are scarcely more than a child yourself, Daisy."

"I am woman enough to feel neglect."

"I apologize—on my knees, dearest."

"Oh, it's easy saying so," pouted Daisy, "but you know Anne——"

"What about Miss Denham?" asked Giles, outwardly calm.

"You like her."

"She is a very charming woman, but you are to be my wife. Jealous little girl, can I not be ordinarily civil to Miss Denham without you getting angry?"

"You need not be so *very* civil."

"I won't speak to her at all if you like," replied Ware, with a fine assumption of carelessness.

"Oh, if you only wouldn't," Daisy stopped—then continued passionately, "I wish she would go away. I don't like her."

"She is fond of you, Daisy."

"Yes. And a cat is fond of a mouse. Mrs. Parry says——"

"Don't quote that odious woman, child," interrupted Ware sharply. "She has a bad word for everyone."

"Well, she doesn't like Anne."

"Does she like anyone?" asked Giles coolly. "Come, Daisy, don't wrinkle your face, and I'll take you out for a drive in my motor-car in a few days."

"To-morrow! to-morrow!" cried Daisy, her face wreathed in smiles.

"No. I daren't do that on Christmas Day. What would the rector say? As the lord of the manor I must set an example. On Boxing Day if you like."

"We will go alone?"

"Certainly. Who do you expect me to ask other than you?"

"Anne," said Daisy spitefully, and before he could reply she also moved away to join the children. Giles winced. He felt that he was in the wrong and had given his little sweetheart some occasion for jealousy. He resolved to mend his ways and shun the too fascinating society of the enchantress. Shaking off his moody feeling, he came forward to assist Morley. The host was a little man, and could not reach the gifts that hung on the topmost boughs of the tree. Giles being tall and having a long reach of arm, came to his aid.

"That's right, that's right," gasped Morley, his round face red and shining with his exertions, "the best gifts are up here."

"As the best gifts of man are from heaven," put in Mrs. Parry, with her usual tact.

Morley laughed. "Quite so, quite so," he said, careful as was everyone else not to offend the lady, "but on this occasion we can obtain the best gifts. I and Ware

and Mrs. Morley have contributed to the tree. The children have their presents, now for the presents of the grown-ups."

By this time the children were gorged with food and distracted by many presents. They were seated everywhere, many on the floor, and the room was a chaos of dolls, trumpets, toy-horses, and drums. The chatter of the children and the noise of the instruments was fearful. But Morley seemed to enjoy the riot, and even his wife's grave face relaxed when she saw her three precious jewels rosy with pleasure. She drew Anne's attention to them, and the governess smiled sympathetically. Miss Denham was popular with everyone save Daisy in that happy home.

Meantime Giles handed down the presents. Mrs. Morley received a chain purse from her affectionate husband; Mrs. Parry a silver cream-jug, which she immediately priced as cheap; Mrs. McKail laughed delightedly over a cigarette-case, which she admitted revealed her favorite vice; and the rector was made happy with a motor-bicycle.

"It has been taken to your house this evening," explained Morley. "We couldn't put that on the tree. Ha! ha!"

"A muff-chain for Daisy," said Giles, presenting her with the packet, "and I hope you will like it, dear."

"Did you buy it?" she asked, sparkling and palpitating.

"Of course. I bought presents both for you and Miss Denham. Here is yours," he added, turning to the governess, who grew rosy, "a very simple bangle. I wish it were more worthy of your acceptance," and he handed it with a bow.

Daisy, her heart filled with jealousy, glided away. Giles saw her face, guessed her feeling, and followed. In a corner he caught her, and placed something on her finger. "Our engagement ring," he whispered, and Daisy once more smiled. Her lover smiled also. But his heart was heavy.

CHAPTER II

AN ANONYMOUS LETTER

After the riot of the evening came the silence of the night. The children departed amidst the stormy laughter of Morley, and it was Anne's task to see that the triplets were put comfortably to bed. She sat in the nursery, and watched the washing and undressing and hair-curling, and listened to their joyous chatter about the wonderful presents and the wonderful pleasures of that day. Afterwards, when they were safely tucked away, she went down to supper and received the compliments of Morley on her capability in entertaining children. Mrs. Morley also, and in a more genuine way, added her quota of praise.

"You are my right hand, Miss Denham," she said, with a smile in her weary blue eyes. "I don't know what I shall do without you."

"Oh, Miss Denham is not going," said the master of the house.

"Who knows?" smiled Anne. "I have always been a wanderer, and it may be that I shall be called away suddenly."

It was on the tip of Morley's tongue to ask by whom, but the hardening of Anne's face and the flash of her dark eyes made him change his mind. All the same he concluded that there was someone by whom she might be summoned and guessed also that the obeying of the call would come as an unwilling duty. Mrs. Morley saw nothing of this. She had not much brain power, and what she had was devoted to considerations dealing with the passing hour. At the present moment she could only think that it was time for supper, and that all present were hungry and tired.

Hungry Anne certainly was not, but she confessed to feeling weary. Making some excuse she retired to her room, but not to sleep. When the door was locked she put on her dressing-gown, shook down her long black hair, and sat by the fire.

Her thoughts were not pleasant. Filled with shame at the knowledge of his treachery towards the woman he was engaged to marry, Giles had kept close to Daisy's side during supper and afterwards. He strove to interest himself in her

somewhat childish chatter, and made her so happy by his mere presence that her face was shining with smiles. Transfigured by love and by gratified vanity, Daisy looked really pretty, and in her heart was scornful of poor Anne thus left out in the cold. She concluded that Giles loved her best after all, and did not see how he every now and then stealthily glanced at the governess wearily striving to interest herself in the breezy conversation of Morley or the domestic chatter of his wife. In her heart Anne had felt a pang at this desertion, although she knew that it was perfectly justifiable, and unable to bear the sight of Daisy's brilliant face, she retired thus early.

She loved Giles. It was no use blinking the fact. She loved him with every fibre of her nature, and with a passion far stronger than could be felt for him by the golden-haired doll with the shallow eyes. For Giles she would have lost the world, but she would not have him lose his for her. And, after all, she had no right to creep like a serpent into the Eden of silly, prattling Daisy. In her own puny way the child—for she was little else—adored Giles, and as he was her affianced lover it would be base to come between her and her god. But Anne knew in her heart that Giles loved her best. If she did but lift her hand he would leave all and follow her to the world's end. But lift her hand she would not. It would be too cruel to break the butterfly Daisy on such a painful wheel. Anne loved sufficiently to be large and generous in her nature, and therefore broke her own heart to spare the breaking of another woman's. Certainly Giles was as unhappy as she was; that was patent in his looks and bearing. But he had forged his own chains, and could not break them without dishonor. And come what may, Giles would always love her best.

Anne's meditations were disturbed by a knock at the door. Glancing at the clock, she saw it was close on midnight, and wondering who wished to see her at so late an hour, she opened the door. Daisy, in a blue dressing-gown, with her golden hair loose and her face flushed, entered the room. She skipped towards Anne with a happy laugh, and threw her arms round her neck.

"I could not sleep without telling you how happy I am," she said, and with a look of triumph displayed the ring.

Anne's heart beat violently at this visible sign of the barrier between her and Giles. However, she was too clever a woman to betray her emotion, and examined the ring with a forced smile.

"Diamonds for your eyes, rubies for your lips," she said softly. "A very pretty

fancy."

Daisy was annoyed. She would rather that Anne had betrayed herself by some rude speech, or at least by a discomposed manner. To make her heart ache Daisy had come, and from all she could see she had not accomplished her aim. However, she still tried to wring some sign of emotion from the expression or lips of the calm governess.

"Giles promised me a ring over and over again," she said, her eyes fixed on Anne. "We have been engaged for over six months. He asked me just before you came, although it was always an understood thing. His father and mine arranged the engagement, you know. I didn't like the idea at first, as I wanted to make my own choice. Every girl should, I think. Don't you?"

"Certainly," Anne forced herself to say, "but you love Mr. Ware."

Daisy nodded. "Very, very much," she assented emphatically. "I must have loved him without knowing it, but I was only certain when he asked me to marry him. How lucky it is he has to make me his wife!" she sighed. "If he were not bound ——" Here she stopped suddenly, and looked into the other woman's eyes.

"What nonsense!" said Anne good-humoredly, and more composed than ever. "Mr. Ware loves you dearly. You are the one woman he would choose for his wife. There is no compulsion about his choice, my dear."

"Do you really think so?" demanded the girl feverishly. "I thought—it was the ring, you know."

"What do you mean, Daisy?"

"He never would give me the ring, although I said it was ridiculous for a girl to be engaged without one. He always made some excuse, and only to-night—— But I have him safe now," she added, with a fierce abruptness, "and I'll keep him."

"Nobody wants to take him from you, dear."

"Do you really think so?" said Miss Kent again. "Then why did he delay giving me the ring?"

Anne knew well enough. After her first three meetings with Giles she had seen the love light in his eyes, and his reluctance to bind himself irrevocably with the

ring was due to a hope that something might happen to permit his choosing for himself. But nothing had happened, the age of miracles being past, and the vow to his dead father bound him. Therefore on this very night he had locked his shackles and had thrown away the key. Anne had made it plain to him that she could not, nor would she, help him to play a dishonorable part. He had accepted his destiny, and now Daisy asked why he had not accepted it before. Anne made a feeble excuse, the best she could think of.

"Perhaps he did not see a ring pretty enough," she said.

"It might be that," replied Daisy reflectively. "Giles has such good taste. You did not show me what he gave you to-night."

Miss Denham would rather not have shown it, but she had no excuse to refuse a sight of the gift. Without a word she slipped the bangle from her wrist—Daisy's jealous eyes noted that she had kept it on till now—and handed it to the girl.

"Oh, how sweet and pretty!" she cried, with artificial cordiality. "Just a ring of gold with a coin attached. May I look?" And without waiting for permission she ran to the lamp.

The coin was a half-sovereign of Edward VII., with three stones—a diamond, an amethyst, and a pearl—set in a triangle. A thin ring of gold attached it to the bangle. Daisy was not ill pleased that the gift was so simple. Her engagement ring was much more costly.

"It's a cheap thing," she said contemptuously. "The coin is quite common."

"It will be rare some day," said Anne, slipping the bangle on her wrist. "The name of the King is spelt on this one 'Edwardus,' whereas in the Latin it should be 'Edvardus.' I believe the issue is to be called in. Consequently coins of this sort will be rare some day. It was kind of Mr. Ware to give it to me."

Daisy paid no attention to this explanation. "An amethyst, a diamond, and a pearl," she said. "Why did he have those three stones set in the half-sovereign?"

Anne turned away her face, for it was burning red. She knew very well what the stones signified, but she was not going to tell this jealous creature. Daisy's wits, however, were made keen by her secret anger, and after a few moments of thought she jumped up, clapping her hands.

"I see it—the initials of your name. Amethyst stands for Anne and Diamond for

Denham."

"It might be so," replied Miss Denham coldly.

"It is so," said Daisy, her small face growing white and pinched. "But what does the pearl mean? Ah, that you are a pearl!"

"Nonsense, Daisy. Go you to bed, and don't imagine things."

"It is not imagination," cried the girl shrilly, "and you know that well, Anne. What right have you to come and steal Giles from me?"

"He is yours," said Anne sharply. "The ring——"

"Oh, yes, the ring. I have his promise to marry me, but you have his heart. Don't I know. Give me that bangle." And she stretched out her hand with a clutching gesture.

"No," said Anne sternly, "I shall keep my present. Go to bed. You are overtired. To-morrow you will be wiser."

"I am wise now—too wise. You have made Giles love you."

"I have not; I swear I have not," said Anne, beginning to lose her composure.

"You have, and you love him; I see it in your face. Who are you to come into my life and spoil it?"

"I am a governess. That is all you need to know."

"You look like a governess," said Daisy, insultingly. "I believe you are a bad woman, and came here to steal Giles from me."

"Daisy!"—Anne rose to her feet and walked towards the door—"I have had quite enough of your hysterical nonsense. If you came here to insult me in this way, it is time you went. Mr. Ware and I were complete strangers to one another when I came here."

"Strangers! And what are you now?"

"Friends—nothing more, nothing less."

"So you say; and I daresay Giles would say the same thing did I ask him."

Anne's face grew white and set. She seized the foolish, hysterical little creature

by the wrist and shook her. "I'll tell you one thing," she said softly, and her threat was the more terrible for the softness, "I have black blood in my veins, for I was born at Martinique, and if you talk to Giles about me, I'll—I'll—kill you. Go and pray to God that you may be rid of this foolishness."

Daisy, wide-eyed, pallid, and thoroughly frightened, fled whimpering, and sought refuge in her own room. Anne closed the door, and locked it so as to prevent a repetition of this unpleasant visit. Then she went to open the window, for the air of the room seemed tainted by the presence of Daisy. Flinging wide the casement, Anne leaned out into the bitter air and looked at the wonderful white snow-world glittering in the thin, chill moonlight. She drew several long breaths, and became more composed. Sufficient, indeed, to wonder why she had behaved in so melodramatic a fashion. It was not her custom to so far break through the conventions of civilization. But the insults of Daisy had stirred in her that wild negro blood to which she had referred. That this girl who had all should grudge her the simple Christmas present made Anne furious. Yet in spite of her righteous anger she could not help feeling sorry for Daisy. And, after all, the girl's jealousy had some foundation in truth. Anne had given her no cause, but she could not deny that she loved Giles and that he loved her. To end an impossible situation there was nothing for it but flight.

Next day Anne quite determined to give Mrs. Morley notice, but when she found that Daisy said nothing about her visit, she decided to remain silent. Unless the girl made herself impossible, Anne did not see why she should turn out of a good situation where she was earning excellent wages. Daisy avoided her, and was coldly polite on such occasions as they had to speak. Seeing this, Anne forbore to force her company upon the unhappy girl and attended to her duties.

These were sufficiently pleasant, for the three children adored her. They were not clever, but extremely pretty and gentle in their manners. Mrs. Morley often came to sit and sew in the schoolroom while Anne taught. She was fond of the quiet, calm governess, and prattled to her just as though she were a child herself of the perfections of Mr. Morley and her unhappy early life. For the sake of the children she forbore to mention the name of their father, who from her account had been a sad rascal.

Giles came sometimes to dine, but attended chiefly to Daisy. Anne was content that this should be so, and her rival made the most of the small triumph. Indeed, so attentive was Giles that Daisy came to believe she had been wrong in suspecting he loved the governess. She made no further reference to Anne, but

when Miss Denham was present narrowly watched her attitude and that of Ware. Needless to say she saw nothing to awaken her suspicions, for both Giles and Anne were most careful to hide their real feelings. So far the situation was endurable, but it could not continue indefinitely. Anne made up her mind to leave.

On the day before New Year she was wondering what excuse she could make to get away when an incident happened which set her duty plainly before her and did away with all necessity for an excuse. It occurred at breakfast.

The little man was fond of his meals, and enjoyed his breakfast more than any other. He had the most wonderful arrangement for keeping the dishes hot—a rather needless proceeding, as he was invariably punctual. So were Mrs. Morley and Anne, for breakfast being at nine o'clock they had no excuse for being late. Nevertheless, Daisy rarely contrived to be in time, and Morley was much vexed by her persistent unpunctuality. On this occasion she arrived late as usual, but more cheerful. She ever greeted Anne with a certain amount of politeness.

"There's a letter for you," said Morley, "but if you will take my advice you will leave it until breakfast is over. I never read mine until after a meal. Bad news is so apt to spoil one's appetite."

"How do you know the news will be bad?" asked Daisy.

"Most news is," replied Morley, with a shade on his usually merry face. "Debts, duns, and difficulties!" and he looked ruefully at the pile of letters by his plate. "I haven't examined my correspondence yet."

Anne said nothing, as she was thinking of what arrangement she could make to get away. Suddenly she and the others were startled by a cry from Daisy. The girl had opened the letter and was staring at it with a pale face. Anne half rose from her seat, but Mrs. Morley anticipated her, and ran round to put her hand on the girl's shoulder. "Daisy, what is the matter?"

"The—the—letter!" gasped Daisy, with chattering teeth. Then she cast a look full of terror at the astonished Anne. "She will kill me," cried the girl, and fell off the chair in a faint.

Morley hastily snatched up the letter. It was unsigned, and apparently written in an uneducated hand on common paper. He read it out hurriedly, while Anne and Mrs. Morley stood amazed to hear its contents.

"Honored Miss," read Morley slowly, "this is from a well-wisher to say that you must not trust the governess, who will kill you, because of G. W. and the Scarlet Cross."

Anne uttered a cry and sank back into her chair white as the snow out of doors. "The Scarlet Cross," she murmured, "again the Scarlet Cross."



CHAPTER III

A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR

Later in the day Mr. Morley called the three women into his library to have a discussion regarding the strange letter and its stranger accusation. Daisy had recovered from her faint, but was still pale and obviously afraid of Anne. The governess appeared perfectly composed, but her white face was as hard as granite. Both Morley and his wife were much disturbed, as was natural, especially as at the moment Anne had refused any explanation. Now Morley was bent on forcing her to speak out and set Daisy's mind at rest. The state of the girl was pitiable.

The library was a large square apartment, with three French windows opening on to a terrace, whence steps led down to a garden laid out in the stiff Dutch style. The room was sombre with oak and heavy red velvet hangings, but rendered more cheerful by books, photographs, and pictures. Morley was fond of reading, and during his ten years' residence at The Elms had accumulated a large number of volumes. Between the bookcases were trophies of arms, mediæval weapons and armor, and barbaric spears from Africa and the South Seas, intermixed with bows and clubs. The floor was of polished oak, with here and there a brilliantly colored Persian praying-mat. The furniture was also of oak, and cushioned in red Morocco leather. Altogether the library gave evidence of a refined taste, and was a cross between a monkish cell and a sybarite's bower.

"Well, Miss Denham," said Morley, his merry face more than a trifle serious, "what have you to say?"

"There is nothing I can say," replied Anne, with composure, "the letter has nothing to do with me."

"My dear," put in Mrs. Morley, much distressed, "you cannot take up this attitude. You know I am your friend, that I have always done my best for you, and for my sake, if not for Daisy's, you must explain."

"She won't—she won't," said Daisy, with an hysterical laugh.

"I would if I could," replied Anne, talking firmly, "but the accusation is

ridiculous. Why should I threaten Daisy?"

"Because you love Giles," burst out the girl furiously.

"I do not love Mr. Ware. I said so the other night."

"And you said more than that. You said that you would kill me."

"Miss Denham," cried Morley, greatly shocked, "what is this?"

"A foolish word spoken in a foolish moment," said Anne, realizing that her position was becoming dangerous.

"I think so too," said Mrs. Morley, defending her. "It so happened, Miss Denham, that I overheard you make the speech to Daisy, and I told my husband about it the next morning. We decided to say nothing, thinking—as you say now—that it was simply a foolish speech. But this letter"—she hesitated, then continued quickly, "you must explain this letter."

Anne thought for a moment. "I can't explain it. Some enemy has written it. You know all about me, Mrs. Morley. You read my credentials—you inquired as to my former situations at the Governess Institute where you engaged me. I have nothing to conceal in my life, and certainly I have no idea of harming Daisy. She came to my room and talked nonsense, which made me lose my temper. I said a foolish thing, I admit, but surely knowing me as you do you will acquit me of meaning anything by a few wild words uttered in a hurry and without thought."

"Why did you make use of such an expression?" asked Morley.

"Because I was carried out of myself. I have a strain of negro blood in me, and at times say more than I mean."

"And your negro blood will make you kill me," cried Daisy, with an expression of terror. "I am doomed—doomed!"

"Don't be a fool, child," said Morley roughly.

"She is a trifle hysterical," explained Mrs. Morley, comforting the girl, who was sobbing violently.

"Mr. Morley," said Anne, rising, "I don't know who wrote that letter, or why it should have been written. Mr. Ware and I are friends, nothing more. I am not in love with him, nor is he in love with me. He has paid me no more attention than

you have yourself."

"No, that is true enough," replied Morley, "and as Giles is engaged to Daisy I don't think he is the man to pay marked attention to another woman."

"Ah! Giles is all right," cried Daisy angrily, "but she has tempted him."

"I deny that."

"You can deny what you like. It is true, you know it is true."

"Daisy! Daisy!" said Morley persuasively, whereupon she turned on him like a little fury.

"Don't you defend her. You hate me as much as she does. You are a——"

"Stop!" said Mrs. Morley, very pale. "Hold your tongue, Daisy. My husband has treated you in the kindest manner. When your father died you were left penniless. He took you in, and both he and I have treated you like our own child. Ungrateful girl, how can you speak so of those who have befriended you?"

"I do. I shall. You all hate me!" cried Daisy passionately. "I never wanted your help. Giles would have married me long ago but for Mr. Morley. I had no need to live on your charity. I have a hundred a year of my own. You brought that horrid woman down to steal Giles from me, and——"

"Take her away, Elizabeth," said Morley sharply.

"I'll go of my own accord," cried Daisy, retreating from Mrs. Morley; "and I'll ask Giles to marry me at once, and take me from this horrid house. You are a cruel and a wicked man, Mr. Morley, and I hate you—I hate you! As for you"—she turned in a vixenish manner on Anne—"I hope you will be put in gaol some day. If I die you will be hanged—hanged!" And with a stamp of her foot she dashed out of the room, banging the door.

"Hysteria," said Morley, wiping his face, "we must have a doctor to see her."

"Miss Denham," said the wife, who was weeping at the cruel words of the girl, "I ask you if Daisy has ever been treated harshly in my house?"

"No, dear Mrs. Morley, she has always received the greatest kindness both from you and your husband. She is not herself to-day—that cruel letter has upset her. In a short time she will repent of her behavior."

"If she speaks like this to Mrs. Parry, what will happen?" moaned the poor woman, wringing her hands.

"I'll have Mrs. Parry in court for libel if she says anything against us," said Morley fiercely. "The girl is an hysterical idiot. To accuse her best friends of—pshaw! it's not worth taking notice of. But this letter, Miss Denham?"

"I know nothing about it, Mr. Morley."

"Humph! I wonder if Daisy wrote it herself."

"Oliver!" cried Mrs. Morley in amazement.

"Why not? Hysterical girls do queer things at times. I don't suppose Mrs. Parry wrote it, old scandal-monger as she is. It is a strange letter. That Scarlet Cross, for instance." He fixed an inquiring eye on Anne.

"That is the one thing that makes me think Daisy did not write the letter. I fancied myself she might have done it in a moment of hysteria and out of hatred of me, but she could not know anything of the Scarlet Cross. No one in Rickwell could know of that."

"The letter was posted in London—in the General Post Office."

"But why should any one write such a letter about me," said Anne, raising her hands to her forehead, "and the Scarlet Cross? It is very strange."

"What is the Scarlet Cross?" asked Mrs. Morley seriously.

"I know no more than you do," replied Anne earnestly, "save that my father sometimes received letters marked with a red cross and on his watch-chain wore a gold cross enamelled with scarlet."

"Did your father know what the cross meant?" asked Mrs. Morley.

"He must have known, but he never explained the matter to me."

"Perhaps if you asked him now to——"

"My father is dead," she said in a low voice; "he died a year ago in Italy."

"Then this mystery must remain a mystery," said Morley, with a shrug. "Upon my word, I don't like all this. What is to be done?"

"Put the letter into the hands of the police," suggested his wife.

"No," said Morley decisively; "if the police heard the ravings of Daisy, Heaven knows what they would think."

"But, my dear, it is ridiculous," said Mrs. Morley indignantly. "We have always treated Daisy like one of ourselves. We have nothing to conceal. I am very angry at her."

"You should rather pity her," said Anne gently, "for she is a prey to nerves. However, the best thing to be done is for me to leave this place. I shall go after the New Year."

"I'm sure I don't know what the children will do without you," sighed the lady; "they are so fond of you, and I never had any governess I got on better with. What will you do?"

"Get a situation somewhere else," said Anne cheerfully, "abroad if possible; but I have become a bugbear to Daisy, and it is best that I should go."

"I think so too, Miss Denham, although both my wife and I are extremely sorry to lose you."

"You have been good friends to me," said Miss Denham simply, "and my life here has been very pleasant; but it is best I should go," she repeated, "and that letter, will you give me a copy, Mr. Morley?"

"Certainly, but for what reason?"

"I should like to find out who wrote it, and why it was written. It will be a difficult matter, but I am curious to know who this enemy of mine may be."

"Do you think it is an enemy?" asked Mrs. Morley.

Anne nodded. "And an enemy that knows something about my father's life," she said emphatically, "else why was mention made about the Scarlet Cross? But I'll learn the truth somehow, even if I have to employ a detective."

"You had much better leave the matter alone and get another situation, Miss Denham," said Morley sagely. "We will probably hear no more of this, and when you go the matter will fade from Daisy's mind. I'll send her away to the seaside for a week, and have the doctor to see her."

"Dr. Tait shall see her at once," said Mrs. Morley, with more vigor than was usual with her. "But about your going, Miss Denham, I am truly sorry. You have been a good friend to me, and the dear children do you credit. I hope we shall see you again."

"When Daisy is married, not before," replied Anne firmly; "but I will keep you advised of my address."

After some further conversation on this point the two women left the library. Daisy had shut herself in her room, and thither went Mrs. Morley. She managed to sooth the girl, and gave her a sedative which calmed her nerves. When Daisy woke from sleep somewhere about five she expressed herself sorry for her foolish chatter, but still entertained a dread and a hatred of Anne. The governess wisely kept out of the way and made her preparations for departure. As yet the children were not told that they were to lose her. Knowing what their lamentations would be like, Mrs. Morley wisely determined to postpone that information till the eleventh hour.

There was to be a midnight service at the parish church in honor of the New Year, and Anne determined to go. She wanted all the spiritual help possible in her present state of perplexity. The unhappy love that existed between her and Giles, the enmity of Daisy, the anxiety of the anonymous letter—these things worried her not a little. She received permission from Mrs. Morley to go to the midnight service.

"But be careful Daisy does not see you," said she anxiously.

"Is Daisy going also?"

"Yes. Giles is coming to take her in his motor-car."

"I hope she will say nothing to him about the letter."

"I'll see to that. She is much quieter and recognizes how foolish she has been. It will be all right."

Morley was much upset by the state of affairs. But a few days before and life had been all plain sailing, now there was little else but trouble and confusion. His ruddy face was pale, and he had a careworn expression. For the most part of the day he remained in his library and saw no one. Towards the evening he asked his wife not to bring the triplets to the library as usual, as he had to see some one on business. Who it was he refused to say, and Mrs. Morley, having no curiosity, did

not press the question.

After dinner the visitor arrived—a tall man muffled in a great-coat against the cold, and wearing a thick white scarf round his throat. He was shown into the library and remained with Mr. Morley till after nine. About that time Anne found occasion to go into the library in search of a book. She had not heard the prohibition of Morley, and did not hesitate to enter without knocking, supposing that no one was within.

Meantime Daisy dressed herself very carefully in expectation of Ware's arrival. He was to take her for a ride in his motor before Church, and then they were to go to the service together. There was plenty of snow on the ground, but the nights were always bright with moonlight. Daisy had a fancy for a moonlight ride, and Giles was willing to humor her. She expected him about ten, and descended shortly after nine to watch for him from the drawing-room window.

Outside it was almost as light as day, and the white sheet of snow threw back a reflection of the moonlight. Daisy gazed eagerly down the avenue, where the leafless trees rocked in the cutting wind. Unexpectedly she saw a tall man come round the corner of the house and walk swiftly down the avenue. She knew from Mrs. Morley that there was a visitor in the library, and wondered why he had elected to leave by the window, as he must have done to come round the house in this way. Being curious, she thought she would tell Mr. Morley of what she had seen, and went in search of him.

At the door of the library she had just laid her hand on the handle when it suddenly opened, and Anne came out. Her face was white and drawn, her eyes were filled with fear, and she passed the astonished girl in a blind and stumbling fashion as though she did not see her. Daisy saw her feebly ascend the stairs, clutching the banisters. Wondering at this, Miss Kent entered the room. Morley was standing by the window—the middle window—looking out. It was open. He started and turned when Daisy entered, and she saw that he was perturbed also.

"What is the matter?" she asked, coming forward.

"Nothing. What should be the matter?"

Morley spoke shortly and not in a pleasant tone. "I thought that Anne, that Miss Denham, looked ill," said Daisy.

"Don't you think you had better leave Miss Denham alone, Daisy, seeing the

mischief you have caused? She has been weeping herself blind here."

"Well, that letter——"

"Oh, that letter is rubbish!" interrupted Morley scornfully. "Miss Denham is a simple, kind woman, and you should take no notice of anonymous correspondence. However, she is going away to-morrow. I have just paid her her wages."

"I am glad she is going," said Miss Kent doggedly; "I am afraid of her. You think she is an angel; I don't."

"I don't think anything about her; but I do think you are a very hysterical girl, and have caused a great deal of unnecessary trouble. Miss Denham is not in love with Ware, and it is only your absurd jealousy that would accuse her of such a thing. Besides, this morning you behaved very badly to my wife and myself. You must go away for a time till we can get over your ungrateful words and conduct."

"I am very sorry," said Daisy humbly, "but it was Anne who disturbed me, and that letter. I was afraid."

"Then you admit that we have behaved well?"

"You are my best friends."

"Thank you. And now may I ask what you want?"

"I came to tell you that I am going to church. I thought you were engaged."

"So I was; but my visitor is gone."

"I know; he went out by that window. I saw him going down the avenue. Who is he?"

"A friend of mine. That is all you need to know. Did you think it was some one who had to do with the anonymous letter?"

"No, no!" Daisy seemed to be thoroughly ashamed of herself. "But you must admit that the letter was strange."

"So strange that you had better say nothing about it. Don't mention it to Giles."

"Why not?"

"Because I will find occasion to tell him myself. I at least will be able to explain without showing jealousy of poor Miss Denham."

"I won't say anything," replied Daisy, with a toss of her head, "but you are all mad about Anne Denham. I don't believe she is a good woman. What is the matter with her now? She seems ill."

"For Heaven's sake don't ask me any further questions," said Morley irritably. "What with your conduct of this morning and other things with which you have no concern I am worried out of my life."

Daisy took the hint and walked away. When she got outside the library she came to the conclusion that Morley's visitor was a bailiff, and that was why he had been shown out by the window. Decidedly her guardian was in a bad way financially speaking.

"I shall marry Giles and get away from them all," said the grateful Daisy. "They may be sold up, and my hundred a year will not keep me. What a mercy that Giles is so rich and loves me! No, he does not love me," she said vehemently to herself. "It is that woman. But he is engaged to me, and I'll marry him if only to spite her."



CHAPTER IV

THE CHURCHYARD

To Daisy that drive in the motor-car was like an exquisite dream. Her frivolous, shallow soul was awed by the vast white waste gleaming mysteriously in the moonlight as the car sped like a bird along the silent roads. There was not a cloud in a sky that shone like tempered steel; and amidst the frosty glitter of innumerable stars the hard moon looked down on an enchanted world. With Giles' hand on the steering gear and Daisy beside him wrapped in a buffalo rug, the machine flew over the pearly whiteness with the skimming swiftness of the magic horse. For the first time in her life Daisy felt what flying was like, and was content to be silent.

Giles was well pleased that the Great Mother should still her restless tongue for the moment. He was doing his duty and the will of his dead father, but his heart ached when he thought of the woman who should be by his side. Oh that they two could undertake this magical journey together, silent and alone in a silent and lonely world. He made no inquiries for Anne, and Daisy said nothing. Only when the car was humming along the homeward road to land them at the church did she open her mouth. The awe had worn off, and she babbled as of old in the very face of this white splendor.

"Anne's going away," she said abruptly.

For the life of him Giles could not help starting, but he managed to control his voice and speak carelessly. "Ah, and how is that?" he asked, busy with the wheel.

"She is going to-morrow. I suppose she is tired of the dull life here."

"I expect she is," replied Ware curtly.

"Are you sorry?"

Giles felt that she was pushing home the point and that it behooved him to be extra careful. "Yes, I am sorry," he said frankly. "Miss Denham is a most interesting woman."

"Does that mean——"

"It means nothing personal, Daisy," he broke in hastily; then to change the subject, "I hope you have enjoyed the ride."

"It is heavenly, Giles. How good of you to take me!"

"My dear, I would do much more for you. When we are married we must tour through England in this way."

"You and I together. How delightful! That is if you will not get tired of me."

"I am not likely to get tired of such a charming little woman."

Then he proceeded to pay her compliments, while his soul sickened at the avidity with which she swallowed them. He asked himself if it would not be better to put an end to this impossible state of things by telling her he was in love with Anne. But when he glanced at the little fragile figure beside him, and noted the delicacy and ethereal look in her face, he felt that it would be brutal to destroy her dream of happiness at the eleventh hour. Of himself he tried to think not at all. So far as he could see there was no happiness for him. He would have to go through life doing his duty. And Anne—he put the thought of her from him with a shudder.

"What is the matter, Giles? Are you cold?" asked Daisy.

"No; I expect a white hare is loping over my grave."

"Ugh! Don't talk of graves," said Daisy, with a nervous expression.

"Not a cheerful subject, I confess," said Giles, smiling, "and here we are in the very thick of them," he added, as the motor slowed down before the lych-gate.

Daisy looked at the innumerable tombstones which thrust themselves up through the snow and shivered. "It's horrible, I think. Fancy being buried there!"

"A beautiful spot in summer. Do you remember what Keats said about one being half in love with death to be buried in so sweet a place?"

"Giles," she cried half hysterically, "don't talk like that. I may be dead and buried before you know that a tragedy has occurred. The cards say that I am to die young."

"Why, Daisy, what is the matter?"

She made no reply. A memory of the anonymous letter and its threat came home vividly to her as she stepped inside the churchyard. Who knew but what within a few days she might be borne through that self-same gate in her coffin? However, she had promised to say nothing about the letter, and fearful lest she should let slip some remark to arouse the suspicions of Giles, she flew up the path.

Already the village folk were thronging to the midnight service. The bells were ringing with a musical chime, and the painted windows of the church glittered with rainbow hues. The organist was playing some Christmas carol, and the waves of sound rolled out solemnly on the still air. With salutation and curtesy the villagers passed by the young squire. He waited to hand over his car to his servant, who came up at the moment, breathless with haste. "Shall I wait for you, sir?"

"No, take the car to the inn, and make yourself comfortable. In an hour you can return."

Nothing loth to get indoors and out of the bitter cold, the man drove the machine, humming like a top, down the road. The sky was now clouding over, and a wind was getting up. As Giles walked into the church he thought there was every promise of a storm, and wondered that it should labor up so rapidly considering the previous calm of the night. However, he did not think further on the matter, but when within looked around for Daisy. She was at the lower end of the church staring not at the altar now glittering with candles, but at the figure of a woman some distance away who was kneeling with her face hidden in her hands. With a thrill Giles recognized Anne, and fearful lest Daisy should be jealous did he remain in her vicinity, he made his way up to his own pew, which was in the lady chapel near the altar. Here he took his seat and strove to forget both the woman he loved and the woman he did not love. But it was difficult for him to render his mind a blank on this subject.

The organ had been silent for some time, but it now recommenced its low-breathed music. Then the choir came slowly up the aisle singing lustily a Christmas hymn. The vicar, severe and ascetic, followed, his eyes bent on the ground. When the service commenced Giles tried to pay attention, but found it almost impossible to prevent his thoughts wandering towards the two women. He tried to see them, but pillars intervened, and he could not catch a glimpse of either. But his gaze fell on the tall figure of a man who was standing at the lower end of the church near the door. He was evidently a stranger, for his eyes

wandered inquisitively round the church. In a heavy great-coat and with a white scarf round his throat, he was well protected against the cold. Giles noted his thin face, his short red beard, and his large black eyes. His age was probably something over fifty, and he looked ill, worried, and worn. Wondering who he was and what brought him to such an out-of-the-way place as Rickwell at such a time, Giles settled himself comfortably in his seat to hear the sermon.

The vicar was not a particularly original preacher. He discoursed platitudes about the coming year and the duties it entailed on his congregation. Owing to the length of the sermon and the lateness of the hour, the people yawned and turned uneasily in their seats. But no one ventured to leave the church, although the sermon lasted close on an hour. It seemed as though the preacher would never leave off insisting on the same things over and over again. He repeated himself twice and thrice, and interspersed his common-place English with the lordly roll of biblical texts. But for his position, Giles would have gone away. It was long over the hour, and he knew that his servant would be waiting in the cold. When he stood up for the concluding hymn he craned his head round a pillar to see Daisy. She had vanished, and he thought that like himself she had grown weary of the sermon, but more fortunate than he, she had been able to slip away. Anne's place he could not see and did not know whether she was absent or present.

Giles wondered for one delicious moment if he could see her before she left the church. Daisy, evidently wearied by the sermon, had gone home, there was no one to spy upon him, and he might be able to have Anne all to himself for a time. He could then ask her why she was going, and perhaps force her to confess that she loved him. But even as he thought his conscience rebuked him for his treachery to Daisy. He fortified himself with good resolutions, and resolved not to leave his seat until the congregation had dispersed. Thus he would not be tempted by the sight of Anne.

The benediction was given, the choir retired with a last musical "Amen," and the worshippers departed. But Giles remained in his seat, kneeling and with his face hidden. He was praying for a strength he sorely needed to enable him to forget Anne and to remain faithful to the woman whom his father had selected to be his wife. Not until the music of the organ ceased and the vergers came to extinguish the altar candles did Giles venture to go. But by this time he thought Anne would surely be well on her homeward way. He would return to his own place as fast as his motor could take him, and thus would avoid temptation. At the present moment he could not trust to his emotions.

Outside the expected storm had come on, and snow was falling thickly from a black sky. The light at the lych-gate twinkled feebly, and Giles groped his way down the almost obliterated pathway quite alone, for every one else had departed. He reached the gate quite expecting to find his motor, but to his surprise it was not there. Not a soul was in sight, and the snow was falling like meal.

Giles fancied that his servant had dropped asleep in the inn or had forgotten the appointed hour. In his heart he could not blame the man, for the weather was arctic in its severity. However, he determined to wend his way to the inn and reprove him for his negligence. Stepping out of the gate he began to walk against the driving snow with bent head, when he ran into the arms of a man who was running hard. In the light of the lamp over the gate he recognized him as Trim, his servant.

"Beg pardon, sir, I could not get here any sooner. The car——" The man stopped and stared round in amazement. "Why, sir, where's the machine?" he asked, with astonishment.

"In your charge, I suppose," replied Ware angrily. "Why were you not here at the time I appointed?"

"I was, begging your pardon, sir," said Trim hotly; "but the lady told me you had gone to see Miss Kent back to The Elms and that you wanted to see me. I left the car here in charge of the lady and ran all the way to The Elms; but they tell me there that Miss Daisy hasn't arrived and that nothing has been seen of you, sir."

Ware listened to this explanation with surprise. "I sent no such message," he said; "and this lady, who was she?"

"Why, Miss Denham, sir. She said she would look after the car till I came back, and knowing as she was a friend of yours, sir, I thought it was all right." Trim stared all round him. "She's taken the car away, I see, sir."

The matter puzzled Giles. He could not understand why Anne should have behaved in such a manner, and still less could he understand why the car should have disappeared. He knew well that she could drive a motor, for he had taught her himself; but that she should thus take possession of his property and get rid of his man in so sly a way perplexed and annoyed him. He and Trim stood amidst the falling snow, staring at one another, almost too surprised to speak.

Suddenly they heard a loud cry of fear, and a moment afterward an urchin—one of the choir lads—came tearing down the path as though pursued by a legion of fiends. Giles caught him by the collar as he ran panting and white-faced past him.

"What's the matter?" he asked harshly. "Why did you cry out like that? Where are you going?"

"To mother. Oh, let me go!" wailed the lad. "I see her lying on the grave. I'm frightened. Mother! mother!"

"Saw who lying on the grave?"

"I don't know. A lady. Her face is down in the snow, and she is bleeding. I dropped the lantern mother gave me and scudded, sir. Do let me go! I never did it!"

"Did what?" Giles in his nervous agitation shook the boy.

"Killed her! I didn't! She's lying on Mr. Kent's grave, and I don't know who she is."

He gave another cry for his mother and tried to get away, but Giles, followed by Trim, led him up the path. "Take me to the grave," he said in a low voice.

"I won't!" yelped the lad, and tearing his jacket in his eagerness to escape, he scampered past Trim and out of the gate like a frightened hare. Giles stopped for a moment to wipe his perspiring forehead and pass his tongue over his dry lips, then he made a sign to Trim to follow, and walked rapidly in the direction of Mr. Kent's grave. He dreaded what he should find there, and his heart beat like a sledge-hammer.

The grave was at the back of the church, and the choir boy had evidently passed it when trying to take a short cut to his mother's cottage over the hedge. The snow was falling so thickly and the night was so dark that Giles wondered how the lad could have seen any one on the grave. Then he remembered that the lad had spoken of a lantern. During a lull in the wind he lighted a match, and by the blue glare he saw the lantern almost at his feet, where the boy had dropped it in his precipitate flight. Hastily picking this up, he lighted the candle with shaking fingers and closed the glass. A moment later, and he was striding towards the grave with the lantern casting a large circle of light before him.

In the ring of that pale illumination he saw the tall tombstone, and beneath it the figure of a woman lying face downward on the snow. Trim gave an exclamation of astonishment, but Giles set his mouth and suppressed all signs of emotion. He wondered if the figure was that of Anne or of Daisy, and whether the woman, whomsoever she was, was dead or alive. Suddenly he started back with horror. From a wound under the left shoulder-blade a crimson stream had welled forth, and the snow was stained with a brilliant red. The staring eyes of the groom looked over his shoulder as he turned the body face upwards. Then Giles uttered a cry. Here was Daisy Kent lying dead—murdered—on her father's grave!



CHAPTER V

AFTERWARDS

Never before had any event created such a sensation in the village of Rickwell. From the choir boy and his mother the news quickly spread. Also Giles had to call in the aid of the rector to have the body of the unfortunate girl carried to The Elms. In a short time the churchyard was filled with wondering people, and quite a cortege escorted the corpse. It was like the rehearsal of a funeral procession.

Mrs. Morley had gone to bed, thinking the two girls might be reconciled in church and come home together. Her husband, not so sanguine, had remained in the library till after midnight, ready to play the part of peace-maker should any fracas occur. He appeared in the hall when poor dead Daisy was carried through the door, and stared in surprise at the spectacle.

"Great heavens!" he cried, coming forward, his ruddy face pale with sudden emotion. "What is all this?"

Giles took upon himself the office of spokesman, which the rector, remembering that he had been engaged to the deceased, tacitly delegated to him.

"It's poor Daisy," he said hoarsely. "She has been——"

"Murdered! No. Don't say murdered!"

"Yes, we found her lying on her father's grave, dead; a knife-thrust under the left shoulder-blade. She must have died almost instantaneously."

"Dead!" muttered Morley, ghastly white. And he approached to take the handkerchief from the dead face. "Dead!" he repeated, replacing it. Then he looked at the haggard face of Ware, at the silent group of men and the startled women standing in the doorway, where the rector was keeping them back.

"Where is her murderess?" he asked sharply.

"Murderess!" repeated Giles angrily. "What do you mean?"

"Mean? Why, that Miss Denham has done this, and——"

"You are mad to say such a thing."

"I'll tax her with it to her face. Where is she? Not at home, for I have been waiting to see her."

"She's run way on Mr. Ware's motor-car," volunteered Trim, only to be clutched violently by his master.

"Don't say that, you fool. You can't be sure of that, Mr. Morley," he added, turning to the scared man. "Make no remark about this until we can have a quiet talk about it."

"But I say——"

"You can say it to the police officer in the morning."

"She'll have escaped by that time," whispered Trim to his master.

Giles saw the danger of Anne—supposing her to be guilty, as the groom thought her—and made up his mind at once.

"Go home, Trim, and saddle a couple of horses. We'll follow the track of the car, and when we find it——"

"You'll never find it," put in Morley, who had been listening with all his ears. "The falling snow must have obliterated any wheel-marks by this time. When did this occur?"

"I don't know," replied Giles coldly. "And instead of chattering there, you had better have the—the—" he stammered, "the body taken into some room and attended to. Poor Daisy," he sighed, "what an end to your bright young life!"

Here Mr. Drake, the rector, thought it necessary to assert himself, and waved aside the throng.

"All you men and women, go to your homes," he said. "Nothing can be done to-night, and——"

"The car might be followed," said a voice.

"And the car will be followed," said Giles, pushing his way to the door. "Come, Trim, we'll ride at once. Did no one see the car pass out of the village?"

No one had seen it, as most of the villagers had been inside the church and the

rest in their homes.

There was some talk and suggestions, but Ware, with a nod to Morley, took a hasty departure and disappeared into the stormy night.

"He might track the car," said the rector.

"He won't," replied Morley bitterly; "he'll lead Trim on a wrong scent. He liked Miss Denham too well to let her drop into the hands of the police."

"Then you really think she did it?" asked Drake, horrified.

"I am perfectly certain," was the reply. "Come into the library, and I'll show you what evidence I have."

Meantime the hall was cleared of the eager listeners, and all present went to their homes less to sleep than to argue as to the guilt or innocence of Anne. The body of the girl was taken to her bedroom, and poor scared Mrs. Morley, roused from her bed to face this tragedy, did all that was needful, assisted by two old women, who remained behind to offer their services. This was all that could be done till dawn, and Mrs. Morley, thinking of the dead Daisy and the missing Anne, wept till the first streaks of daylight. As yet her limited understanding could not grasp the horror of the thing.

Morley conducted Mr. Drake to the library. He related how his wife had heard Anne threaten to kill Daisy, produced the anonymous letter, detailed Daisy's accusation that the governess was in love with Ware, and finally pointed out the damning fact of the flight. The rector was quite convinced by this reasoning that Anne was guilty.

"And now I come to think of it," he said, stroking his shaven chin, "Miss Kent was in church."

"Yes, so was Miss Denham; but I don't think they sat together, as they were on the worst possible terms. Did you see Daisy?"

Drake nodded. "She went out when I was half-way through my sermon. I remember that I felt a little annoyed that she should leave when I was doing my best to inculcate good habits for the year in my congregation. She must have gone to pray at her father's grave, and there——" Drake stopped with sudden terror in his eyes.

"And there Miss Denham stabbed her. Ware said the wound was beneath the left shoulder-blade. That looks as though Daisy was struck from behind. I can see it all," cried Morley, with a shudder. "The poor child praying by her father's grave, and the stealthy approach of that woman armed with a——"

"Ah!" interposed Drake, "there you are. We have not yet found the weapon; and after all, Morley, the evidence is purely circumstantial. We do not know for certain that Miss Denham is the guilty person."

"Why did she fly, then?" demanded Morley fiercely. "If she were innocent—if she had not left the church until the others did—she would have returned, and now been in bed. But from what Trim says she fled on Ware's motor-car."

"Humph! She can't get far on that. Such a night, too."

And the rector walked to the window to watch the still falling snow.

Morley shook his head. "Miss Denham knows the country for miles and miles, and Ware taught her how to drive the motor. I shouldn't be surprised if she got away after all, in spite of the weather."

Drake looked uneasy, and placed himself before the fire with a shiver. He rather admired Miss Denham, and could not yet bring himself to believe that she was guilty. Even if she were, he cherished a secret hope that she might escape the police. It was terrible to think that one woman should be dead, but it was more awful to look forward to the trial, condemnation, and hanging of the other.

"I blame Ware a good deal for this," continued Morley gloomily. "He openly admired Miss Denham, and encouraged her to flirt with him. A rash thing to do to one who has negro blood in her veins. I expect passion carried her beyond herself."

"How do you know she has negro blood?"

"She said so herself."

"Did you know that when you engaged her?"

"I never engaged her at all, Drake. My wife did. I must say that Miss Denham's credentials were good. She had been governess in an Italian family, and ha! ——" He stopped suddenly, and started up. "In Italy she might have procured a stiletto. From the nature of the wound—which is small and deep—I should think

it was inflicted with such a weapon."

"How do you know that the wound is small and deep?"

"My wife told me when she came to the door that time. You did not hear her. She says the wound is quite small. In that case it must be deep, or the death would not have occurred so suddenly."

Drake shook his head. "We don't know that it did occur suddenly."

Morley contradicted this angrily. "If Daisy had not died at once she would have had time to shriek, and the cry would have been heard in the church."

"I doubt it. The people were deeply interested in my sermon."

The other man shrugged his shoulders. It was scarcely worth while arguing this point with the rector. He relapsed into a brown study, until roused to reply to a question asked by his guest.

"Have you ever seen a stiletto?" asked Drake.

"I have one here," replied Morley, running his eye along the wall; "one that I got in Italy myself. It was said to have belonged to Lucrezia Borgia. I wonder where it is."

"Rather difficult to discover it amidst all these weapons, Mr. Morley. Good heavens! what is the matter?"

He might well ask. His host was clutching his arm in a vice-like hold, and was pointing to a certain part of the wall whereon hung a pair of ancient pistols, a crusader's shield, and an old helmet.

"The stiletto was there. It is gone!" gasped Morley.

"Impossible. Who can have taken it?"

"Miss Denham! Miss Denham! Oh, and you believe her to be innocent!" cried the other. "She came into this very room at nine o'clock, or a little after. I was outside on the terrace seeing a visitor off. She was alone in the room for a time. She must have taken the weapon."

"No, no; why should she have?"

"Because she intended to murder my poor Daisy. It was all arranged in her black

heart. Drake," he added solemnly, "I have done my best to believe that woman innocent. I defended her against Daisy, and my wife defended her also. We tried to believe that she had no ill intention, and see—see what comes of it. She steals the stiletto, and kills the child in the most brutal manner. I swear to hunt her down. I swear——!"

The rector caught down the uplifted hand which Morley was raising to the heavens. "Be yourself," he said sternly; "there is no need for a man to call upon God to witness a blood-thirsty oath. If the woman is guilty, let her be punished. But give her the benefit of the doubt. Appearances are against her, I admit. All the same, she may be able to prove her innocence."

"You might as well talk to the wind as to me. She is a murderess; I'll do my best to have her hanged."

Morley spoke with such vehemence that Drake looked closely at him. He wondered if the man had any grudge against Anne Denham that he spoke of her with such bitterness. Certainly her crime was a terrible one, and she deserved to be condemned. But it would only be fair that she should be first tried. Morley, on the contrary, had already judged her, without waiting to hear what she had to say in her own favor.

"Well, Mr. Morley, there is nothing more to be said," he remarked coldly, for he disliked this melodrama; "we must wait till the police come in the morning. Meanwhile I shall go to my home and get some sleep."

"I can't sleep with that in the house," replied Morley, abruptly rising; "I'll go with you."

"Where?"

"To the churchyard—to the grave. I intend to look for the weapon. It may have been left there—tossed aside by the assassin after the crime."

"But the night is dark—the snow is falling. You will not be able to do anything. Be advised, and——"

"No. I'll come with you now. If I find nothing, it is all the better for her. If I do ——" He shook his hand again fiercely.

Drake argued no longer, seeing that the man's brain was in such a state that it was best to humor him. They went out together, but at the church-gate Drake

excused himself and retired to his home. He had no wish to see Morley groping amongst the graves like a ghost. Pausing until the little man disappeared into the gloom, the rector went to his house, wondering at the sudden change in Morley's character. He had been a light-hearted and rather frivolous creature; fond of gaiety and overflowing with the milk of human kindness. Now he was fierce and savage enough for a Caliban. "He must have loved that poor girl very dearly," sighed Drake, "but I can't believe that such a charming woman as Miss Denham committed so cruel a crime. There is some mystery about this," and in this last speech he was right. There was a mystery about the death, and a much deeper one than a shallow man like the rector could fathom.

All through the long night Mrs. Morley watched by the dead. She had placed candles on either side of the bed, and laid a cross on the poor child's breast. Drake was quite shocked when he saw this Papistical arrangement. But it afterwards came out that Mrs. Morley had been educated in a convent, and had imbibed certain notions of the Romish ritual for the dead that, her memory reviving, made her act thus, in spite of her openly confessed belief in the communion of the English Church. While she was thus sitting and weeping, Morley looked in. He was wild and haggard, but in his eyes glared a triumphant expression which terrified his wife. She did not dare to move. He crossed the room, and looked at the body. "You shall be avenged, my dear," he said solemnly, and before Mrs. Morley could recover from her surprise and denounce this ill-chosen moment for a visit, he wheeled round and disappeared.

He did not retire either, no more did the servants, who were collected in the kitchen steadying their nerves with tea. So it happened that when Giles, weary, wet, and worn, rode up to the door in the morning on a jaded beast, he was met by Morley.

"Have you caught her?" asked the man.

Giles dismounted and threw the reins to a groom. "No. Trim went one way and I another. Where he is I don't know, but my horse gave in, and I returned." He entered the house. "Where is the body?" he asked.

"Up in the room it occupied during life," said Morley; "but come into the library, I have something to show you."

Ware followed and sank wearily into a chair. He could scarcely keep his eyes open. Nevertheless he started up wide awake when his host spoke. "Miss Denham killed Daisy," said Morley. "She took a stiletto from the wall yonder,

and here it is." He produced it with a dramatic wave.

"Where did you find it?"

"Beside the grave—on the spot of the murder."



CHAPTER VI

THE CASE AGAINST ANNE

The contradictory qualities of Mrs. Parry's nature came out strongly in connection with the Rickwell tragedy. When Miss Denham was prosperous the old woman had nothing but bad to say of her, now that she was a fugitive and generally credited with a crime, Mrs. Parry stood up for her stoutly. She made herself acquainted with all details, and delivered her verdict to Mrs. Morley, on whom she called for the express purpose of giving her opinion.

"I never liked the woman," she said impressively, "she was artful and frivolous; and to gain admiration behaved in a brazen way of which I thoroughly disapproved. All the same, I do not believe she killed the girl."

"But the evidence is strongly against her," expostulated Mrs. Morley.

"And how many people have been hanged on evidence which has afterwards been proved incorrect?" retorted Mrs. Parry. "I don't care how certain they are of her guilt. In my opinion she is an innocent woman. I am glad she has escaped."

"I am not sorry myself," sighed the other. "I was fond of Anne, for she had many good points. But Mr. Steel says——"

"Who is Mr. Steel?"

"The detective who has charge of the case."

"I thought the police from Chelmsford had it in hand."

"Of course, Mr. Morley sent for the police the morning after poor Daisy's death. That is three days ago. To-morrow the inquest is to be held. I suppose they will bring a verdict against poor Miss Denham."

"Ha!" said Mrs. Parry, rubbing her nose, "and my greengrocer is on the jury. Much he knows about the matter. But this Steel creature. Where does he come from?"

"Mr. Morley sent to London for him. He has a private inquiry office, I believe."

"No such thing," contradicted Mrs. Parry, "he is from Scotland Yard. A genuine detective—none of your makeshifts."

"I thought you knew nothing about him?"

"Nor did I till this minute. But I now remember seeing his name in connection with the theft of Lady Summersdale's diamonds. He caught the thief in a very clever way. Steel—Martin Steel, I remember now. So he has the case in hand. Humph! He won't accuse Anne Denham, you may be sure of that. He's too clever."

"But he is convinced of her guilt," said the other triumphantly.

"Then the man's a fool. I'll see him myself."

Mrs. Parry did so the very next day after the inquest had been held and the verdict given. She possessed a small, neat cottage on the outskirts of Rickwell, standing some distance back from the high road. Seated at her drawing-room window, she could see all those who came or went, and thus kept a watch over the morals of the village. This window was called "Mrs. Parry's eye," and everyone sneaked past it in constant dread of the terrible old lady who looked through it. Beyond Mrs. Parry's cottage were the houses of the gentry and the church; therefore she knew that Steel would pass her house on the way to The Elms, where he would doubtless go to report himself to Morley. To be sure Morley was to be at the inquest, but Mrs. Parry took no account of that. He and the detective would certainly return to The Elms to compare notes.

Also there was another chance. Steel might go on to see Ware at his place, which was a mile beyond the village. Giles had caught a cold after his midnight ride and search for the missing motor, and since then had been confined to his bed. His deposition had been taken down in writing, for the benefit of the jury, as he could not be present himself. Since he was deeply interested in the matter, Steel would probably go and tell him about the inquest. Mrs. Parry therefore posted herself at the window about twelve and waited for the detective.

At half-past twelve she saw him come along, having on the previous day made herself acquainted with his personality. He was a dapper pert little man, neat in his dress, and suave in his manners. Not at all like the detective of fiction as known to Mrs. Parry. There was no solemnity or hint of mystery about Mr. Steel. He would pass unnoticed in a crowd, and no one would take him for a bloodhound of the law. He did not even possess the indispensable eagle eye, nor

did he utter opinions with the air of an oracle. In fact, when Mrs. Parry captured him and lured him into her parlor, she was exceedingly disappointed with his appearance. "No one would even take you for a detective," said she brusquely, whereat Steel laughed cheerily.

"All the better for me, ma'am. Folk speak more freely when they don't know my business. But you will excuse me," he added, glancing at his watch, "I am in a hurry. You say you know something about this matter?"

It was on this pretence that Mrs. Parry had got him into her house, else he would not have wasted his time on her. She had therefore to make good her words, but had not the slightest chance of doing so.

"I know that Anne Denham is innocent," was all that she could say, but said it with the air of one who settles a difficult matter once and for all.

"On what grounds, ma'am?"

"On no grounds, save those of my own common sense."

"You have no evidence to——?"

"I have the evidence of my own eyes. You haven't seen the woman. I have. She is not the kind of person who would act so."

"The jury take a different view," said Steel dryly. "They have brought in a verdict of wilful murder against her."

"Fools! But what can you expect from a parcel of tradesmen? I wish to hear on what grounds they made such idiots of themselves."

Steel was somewhat taken aback by this coolness. "You must really excuse me," said he, rising, "but I have to see Mr. Ware."

"All in good time, Steel," said the old lady coolly. "You might do worse than spend an hour with me. There is precious little going on in this parish I don't know of. I might be able to help you in your search."

"After this woman?" Steel shook his head. "I don't think so. I expect she has escaped to foreign parts."

"Oh, I know all about that. I made Trim tell me. You know Trim, of course. He was a groom once."

"Isn't he a groom now?"

"Well"—Mrs. Parry rubbed her nose—"you might call him an engineer. When Ware started a motor-car Trim refused to let anyone else attend to his young master but himself. He was the servant of old Ware, and thinks it is his duty to look after the son—not but what it's needed," added Mrs. Parry spitefully; "but Trim learned how to work the car, and so he is what you might call an engineer."

"All very interesting ma'am, but I have an appointment."

"It will keep," replied Mrs. Parry suavely. "You had better wait, Steel. I have something to show you."

"In connection with the case?"

"In connection with Miss Denham."

"What is it? Show it to me."

"All in good time, Steel. I must first know what you think of the matter."

"I think that this woman is guilty."

"Oh, you do, do you. Humph! And I thought you clever. How easily one can be deceived! However, you can sit down and tell me your grounds for this preposterous belief."

Steel hesitated. In all his career—and it had been a varied one—he had never met before with anyone like this determined old dame. She took possession of him in the calmest way, and was evidently bent upon pumping him dry before he left the house. As a rule Steel was not a man to be pumped, but after some reflection he concluded that it was just as well to use a sprat to catch a mackerel. In plain English, he determined, with reservations, to gratify Mrs. Parry's curiosity, so that he might get a sight of what she had to show him. If he were reticent, she would show him nothing; whereas if he told her all about the evidence at the inquest—and that was public property—she would certainly open her mind to him. Moreover, Steel knew the value of having a gossip like Mrs. Parry to aid him in gaining knowledge of the neighborhood. Finally, he saw that she was a shrewd, matter-of-fact old person, and for the sake of making his work easy it would be as well to conciliate her. He therefore sat down with a cheerful air, and prepared himself for an interesting conversation.

"I shall be perfectly candid with you," said he, taking out his notes. "These are the memoranda I made at the inquest."

"Humph! You have a bad memory I see. I," said Mrs. Parry, with emphasis, "I carry all I know in my head. Go on."

Steel detailed the facts of the case. He related the threat of Anne against Daisy overheard by Mrs. Morley; read out a copy of the anonymous letter; emphasized the presence of Anne in the library for the few minutes Morley was absent, when she would have had time to secure the stiletto; and explained how Morley had found the very weapon near the scene of the crime. Then he continued to relate what took place in church during the midnight service.

"Martha James," said he, "was sitting not far from Miss Kent. The corner was rather dark——"

"The whole church is badly lighted," interrupted Mrs. Parry. "I never could bear smelly kerosene lamps."

"The corner was dark," resumed Steel patiently, "and Martha, as she says, having a headache, was rather inattentive to the sermon. She saw a man near the door—a tall man, with a great-coat and a white scarf. She couldn't see his face plainly. He slipped along the wall during the sermon, when the attention of everyone was fixed on the preacher, and—as Martha saw—slipped a scrap of paper into the hand of Miss Kent. She started, and bending towards a near lamp, read the paper."

"Did anyone else see her read it?"

"No. She placed the paper in her prayer-book, and so contrived to read it without exciting suspicion. Martha saw the action, because she was well placed for observation."

"And couldn't mind her own business. I know Martha James. Go on."

"After a few minutes Miss Kent seemed to grow faint, and slipped out of the church. Another witness—Samuel Gibbs—says that as she brushed past him she murmured that she felt unwell. However, she went out."

"And the tall man also?"

"No. He remained for another ten minutes. Martha James watched him, because

she could not think why he did not follow Miss Kent after giving her the paper."

"Of course, Martha thought of something bad," sniffed Mrs. Parry; "no doubt she believed that the two had arranged to meet. So the tall man went out ten minutes afterwards. What about Anne?"

"She was a few pews behind, and apparently inattentive, but a small girl called Cissy Jinks——"

"A most precocious child," interpolated the lady.

"She is smart," admitted Steel. "Well, she declares that Miss Denham was watching the tall man all the time. Whether she saw him give the paper to Miss Kent no one seems to know; I think myself she must have done so, if she was as watchful as Cissy Jinks declares. Moreover, she followed the tall man when he went out."

"Immediately?"

"Five minutes afterwards."

"Ha! Then it was a quarter of an hour before she followed Daisy. Humph! Didn't Trim see them come out of the church?"

"The groom? No, he was at the lych-gate with the car, and the snow was falling fast; besides, the night was so dark that he could see nothing. The first intimation he had of Miss Denham was when she came through the lych-gate to tell him that his master was with Miss Kent on the way to The Elms and wished to see him. Trim followed, and left her in charge of the car. When he was gone she went off, leaving the body of the girl behind her. The case is dead against her."

"As you make it out, it certainly is," said Mrs. Parry scathingly. "But what about the tall man—what became of him?"

"He has vanished, and no one seems to know anything about him."

"Ha!" said the old lady, with satisfaction; "well, I can enlighten you on that point. He was the man who called to see Mr. Morley, and who left just before Anne entered the library."

"Are you sure Morley said nothing about that?"

"Morley can hold his tongue when necessary," said the old lady dryly. "Yes, that

was the man. The footman at The Elms told me that Mr. Morley's visitor wore a great-coat and a white scarf."

"The same dress," murmured Steel, "and the man was afterwards in church. He passed a note and went out apparently to see Miss Kent. I must question Mr. Morley about him. I wonder if he went away in the motor also."

"Of course he did," replied Mrs. Parry calmly. "Anne was watching him, according to Cissy Jinks, and she followed him five minutes later. It would seem that she knew him, and after he killed Daisy helped him to escape."

"What do you say," asked Steel, wrinkling his brows, "that this man killed Miss Kent?"

"The evidence is nearly as strong against him as against Anne. He was in the library also and might have obtained the stiletto. It was he who lured Daisy out of the church. He was five minutes absent before Anne followed—quite long enough for him to kill the poor girl."

"It sounds feasible, I admit," said the detective thoughtfully; "but even if this is true, it incriminates Miss Anne. She helped him to escape, according to your theory. She must, therefore, have known about the murder, and that makes her an accessory after the fact. In any case she should be arrested."

"But not hanged," insisted Mrs. Parry. "I am sure she did not kill the girl. As for the man, she had a strong reason to get him out of the way, but that does not say she knew of the crime."

"I don't see what other reason she could have had," said Steel. "I daresay you are right, and that this stranger did go with Miss Denham on the car. What a pity no one saw them!"

"Did no one see the car?"

"No, it was found overturned in a hedge, near Tilbury."

"I know," said Mrs. Parry, not liking to have her omniscience questioned; "Trim told me. He came on the car by chance. It was quite cold—the furnace was extinguished. It must have been abandoned for some time when he came across it. I wonder where the pair went then."

"You seem certain that the stranger was with Miss Denham."

"Yes, I am quite satisfied on that point. Tilbury—ha! they were making for Tilbury. Did you inquire there?"

Steel nodded. "I could find no trace of them. No one saw them, or rather her, for I asked only after Miss Denham. It is my opinion that they must have got on board some ship, and have escaped to foreign parts. I could not learn of any ship having left that night, though. Well, that is all the evidence, Mrs. Parry, and you can see for yourself that the case against Miss Denham is almost conclusive."

"All the same, I believe she is innocent," insisted the old lady; "it was the man who committed the crime. Ask Morley about him."

"Do you think he knows anything?"

"Not of the murder; but he must know the man's name. And now as you have been so frank with me I'll show you what I promised. Do you remember the anonymous letter and the reference to the Scarlet Cross?"

"Yes. Miss Denham said that her father—who is now dead—wore a red-enamelled cross on his watch-chain."

"I know. Mrs. Morley told me so. Now see here." Mrs. Parry opened her left hand, which for some time she had kept clenched. In her palm lay a small gold cross enamelled red.

"Where did you get that?" asked Steel, astounded.

"Mrs. Bates, the pew-opener, found it in the church and brought it to me. It was found near the spot where the stranger stood."

"What?" Steel started to his feet.

"Ah, you are beginning to see now!" said the old lady. "Yes, Steel, you may well look. Anne is innocent. On the evidence of this cross I believe that her father is not dead. He was the stranger; he killed Daisy, and because he was her father Anne aided him to escape."



CHAPTER VII

OLIVER MORLEY

In due time the body of Daisy Kent was buried. Her remains were laid by those of her father in the very churchyard about which she had complained to Giles a short time before the tragedy of her death. Ware being still ill, did not attend the funeral, but a large concourse of people from all parts of the county followed the coffin to the grave.

Morley was the chief mourner, and looked haggard, as was natural. Poor Mrs. Morley remained at home and wept. She did little else but weep in those days, poor soul!

When Mr. Drake had finished the service, and the grave was filled up, the crowd dispersed. There was a great deal of talk about the untimely death of the girl and the chances of her murderess being caught. Everyone believed that Anne was guilty; but as Steel had kept his own counsel and Mrs. Parry held her tongue, no mention was made of the tall man.

The chatter of Cissy Jinks and Martha Gibbs certainly seemed to inculcate him in the matter, but only the villagers talked of this especial point. It never reached the ears of the reporters, and did not get into the papers. But the journals gave a good deal of space to the affair, and hinted that it was what the French call "un crime passionnal." Still, no paper was daring enough to hint at Giles and his presumed connection with the tragedy. It was merely stated that he had been engaged to the deceased girl, and felt her death so deeply, as was natural, that he had taken to his bed. Of course, this was an embellishment of facts, as Ware was simply laid up with an attack of pneumonia. But for the benefit of the public the journalists ascribed it to romantic and undying love. Giles, who was a matter-of-fact young Englishman, did not see these descriptions, or he would have been much disgusted at the sickly sentimentality.

Meantime no news was heard of Anne. It was not known that the tall stranger had been with her, for several people had seen the car passing on its way to Tilbury. It was a lucky thought that had made Trim take that particular direction, and merely by chance that he had stumbled on the motor overthrown in a hedge.

Evidently an accident had occurred, but no one was near at the time, as it took place some little distance from Tilbury and in a lonely part. But it was conjectured that the two occupants had proceeded on foot to Tilbury. A boatman was found who related that he had taken a lady and gentleman across to Gravesend, and that the gentleman walked a trifle lame. They landed on the Gravesend shore, and here the boatman lost sight of them. It was the lady who paid his fare, and he said that she appeared to be quite calm. He did not see the face of the man, but described that of Anne and her dress also. There was no doubt but what she was the fugitive.

However, here the trail ended. Once in Gravesend, and all trace of the pair was lost. Steel made inquiries everywhere, but without success. The two might have got away in a ship, but this he could not learn. The night was foggy and dark, and no ship had gone out of the river, according to the boatmen. Steel could discover nothing, and resolved to throw up the case. But at the eleventh hour he stumbled on a clue, and followed it up. The result of his inquiries made him return at once to Rickwell, where he sought out Mr. Morley.

The little man had sent his wife and family away from The Elms, as the atmosphere of the house was melancholy in the extreme. Mrs. Morley, not averse to more cheerful surroundings, elected to go to Brighton with the triplets, and took two servants with her. Morley remained behind with a reduced staff, and promised to join her later. He desired to wait until he could see the detective. His wish was speedily gratified, for three days after the departure of his wife Steel made his appearance. Morley received him in the library.

"How do you do, sir?" said the detective, as they shook hands. "I am glad to see that you are looking better."

"I am getting over the shock," replied the other, "now that the poor child is buried; there is no use mourning further. I have sent my wife and family to Brighton and propose to follow myself in a day or so."

"I am lucky to have caught you, then?"

"What? Have you found any clue?"

"I think so. It is connected with the Scarlet Cross."

Morley, who was warming his hands over the fire, looked round eagerly, and his eyes flashed.

"I thought there was something in that reference. You remember the letter, Steel?"

"Yes. And I showed it to Mrs. Parry."

"To that meddlesome old woman. Why?"

"It's too long a matter to go into. But it was just as well I did. She gave me this little ornament."

Morley turned over the enamelled cross and examined it carefully. "Humph! It is the kind of thing Miss Denham said was worn by her dead father."

"Exactly. Well, Mr. Morley, either the father is dead as she told you and that cross was worn by a stranger, or the man who called to see you here was the father."

"How do you make that out? What do you mean?" said Morley, and his face exhibited genuine amazement.

For answer Steel related what Mrs. Parry had told him about the discovery of the cross, and how she had put two and two together.

"And now, sir, you must see that in some way this stranger is connected with the crime. He called to see you. May I ask what you know of him?"

"Absolutely nothing," replied the other emphatically. "Wait! I must show you something." He rose and went to his desk. "Of course, I am telling you my private business," he added, opening a drawer, "so don't please speak about it."

"If it has nothing to do with the murder I won't; but if——"

"Pshaw! that is all right, I know as much about these things as you do. However, we can talk of that later. Meantime cast your eye over that," and he placed a document on the table.

"A judgment summons for five hundred pounds," said Steel, with a whistle. "Did he serve this?"

"Yes," replied Morley, returning to his seat with a gloomy face. "You will see that it is dated three days before he came to me. I have outrun the constable, and have the greatest difficulty in keeping my head above water. This man—I don't know his name—said that he came from those solicitors——"

"Asher, Son, and Asher," read out the detective.

Morley nodded. "Of twenty-two, St. Audrey's Inn. A firm of sharpers I call them. The money has certainly been owing a long time, but I offered to pay off the sum by degrees. They refused, and insist upon immediate payment. If they would only wait until the war is over, my South African shares would go up and there would be a chance of settling the matter. But they will not wait. I expect a bankruptcy notice next."

"I am very sorry for you, Mr. Morley, and of course, I shall not betray the confidence you have placed in me; but the point is, what is the name of the man who served this?"

"I don't know; I never asked him his name. He entered by the front door and served this here. I sent him out by the window, so that the servants should not see him again. He had the look of a sheriff's officer, and one can't be too careful here. I believe Mrs. Parry pays my servants to tell her what goes on in my house. I didn't want her to learn about this summons."

"I can easily understand that," replied the detective; "and I see now why you let the man out by the window. You left the room with him?"

"Yes. I didn't say anything much at the inquest beyond that he was a visitor, and I was relieved when I found that no questions were asked. But I walked with him to the end of the terrace and saw him go down the avenue. Then I returned to this room, and found Miss Denham waiting by the desk. I asked her what she wanted. She asked for her wages, as she was leaving the next day. I had no ready money, and promised to see to it before she departed. Then she went out, and shortly afterwards Miss Kent came in to say she had seen the man go down the avenue. She asked me who he was, and I was rather short with her, poor creature!" and Morley sighed.

"I wonder why the man went to church."

"I can't say that; but I can guess that when he knew who Daisy was he wanted to speak to her."

"What about?" asked Steel eagerly.

"About me and the summons. You see, Steel, there is a half-uncle of Daisy Kent's who went to Australia. He said that if he made his fortune he would leave the money to her. Whether he is dead or alive I don't know, but certainly she did

not get any money left to her. Powell's solicitors are Asher, Son, and Asher——"

"Powell? I thought the uncle would be called Kent, unless, of course, he was uncle by the mother's side."

"I said half-uncle," said Morley dryly. "Powell is his name—William Powell—and his solicitors are those who issued that judgment summons. I expect the clerk wanted to tell Daisy about my position and warn her against lending me money. As though I should have asked the girl for sixpence!"

"I don't see why this clerk should warn Miss Kent."

"Well, you see, Daisy had a hundred a year, and they pay it to her. As she might one day be an heiress, I suppose they think it as well to keep an eye on her. This man could not have known that Daisy was in church, and may have just gone there to kill time. But when he saw her and knew who she was, I daresay he wrote that note asking her to come outside and be told all about me."

"It might be so. Was the note found?"

"Not to my knowledge. But you should know, being a detective."

"I'm not omniscient," replied Steel good-humoredly; "it is only in novels that you get the perfect person who never makes a mistake. Well, to resume. I don't see why the clerk should have killed Miss Kent."

"He did not kill her," insisted Morley. "I was in the room with him from the time he entered by the door to the time he left by that middle window. He had no chance of stealing the stiletto. Now Miss Denham had, for she was in the room alone for a few moments."

"But why should she have taken the clerk with her on the car? If she killed the girl her object must have been to escape herself?"

"I can't explain. Perhaps this clerk saw the crime and hoped to make money out of it. Had he given the alarm he wouldn't have gained any reward. So I suppose he mounted the car with her, so that she should not escape him."

"A wild theory."

"It's the only one I can think of," responded Morley; "but if you want to know more of this man go up to Asher, Son, and Asher. I daresay they will be able to give you his history."

"And the Scarlet Cross?"

"I know nothing about that. I did not even notice if the man had such a cross on his chain. In fact," added Morley frankly, "he was too shabby and poverty-stricken to have a chain. I think Anne Denham killed Daisy; you think this man did, and——"

"Pardon," protested Steel. "I have not yet made up my mind. But the two fled together, and there must be some reason for that."

"If so, it will be found in the past history of both, or either. You know where to look for the man. I can get from my wife the address of the Governesses' Institute where she engaged Miss Denham. That is all I can do, unless I take up the case myself."

Steel looked up with a laugh. He was copying the address of the solicitors from the summons, but could not help pausing to reply to this egotistical remark. "Why, Mr. Morley, what do you know of such work?" he asked, bantering.

"Much more than you would give me credit for. Did you ever hear of—by the way, this is another of my secrets I am telling you, so please don't repeat it."

"Are you going to say that you were in the profession?"

"I am. You may have heard of Joe Bart."

"I should think so," said Steel quickly. "He had a splendid reputation, and was much thought of. But he retired before I came to London. I was in the country police for a long time. But"—he started up—"you don't mean to say that——"

"That I am Joe Bart?" interrupted Morley, not ill-pleased. "Yes, I do. I retired over ten years ago, more fool I. You see, Steel, I grew wearied of thief-catching, and as I had a chance of marrying a widow with money, I took the offer and retired. But"—he looked at the summons—"the game wasn't worth the candle. I have had nothing but trouble. Still, I am devoted to my wife and her children."

"And you have forgotten your former glory," said Steel enthusiastically; "surely not. That Hatton Garden jewel robbery, the man with the red coat who committed the Lichfield murder, and——"

"I remember them all," said Morley, with gentle melancholy. "I have a full report of all the cases I was engaged in yonder"—he nodded to a distant shelf.

"Sometimes I take those volumes down and think what an ass I was to retire."

"But see here, Mr. Morley. You are hard up; you want money. I am sure they would be glad to have you back at the Yard. Why not recommence your detective life with searching out this case?"

Morley, late Joe Bart, shook his head. "There is no difficulty about this case to tempt me," he said. "Anne Denham killed the girl. But I must say I should like to find out about this clerk, and why he went off with her. Still, it is useless for me to become a detective again. In the first place my wife would not like it, and in the second I have lost my keen scent. I am rusty—I am laid on the shelf. No, no, Steel, you look after this matter yourself. Any advice I can give you I shall, but don't tempt the old dog out of his kennel."

Steel looked admiringly at his host. Bart had been a celebrated detective in his day, although not one of the best. Still, he had made a reputation on two or three cases, which entitled him to respect. "I should be proud to work with you, Mr. Morley."

"Well, well," said Morley, rather pleased, "we'll see. At present I must put my wits to work to get money to prevent my being made a bankrupt. Now don't give me away, Steel."

"I'll say nothing. I suppose your wife knows that you were——"

"Of course. But she made me promise to give it up. Therefore you see I can't take up the life again. But my advice to you—if you care to take it—is to look after the governess, and leave the clerk alone. She is guilty; he is not."

"I'll look after both," said Steel firmly, "after both Mr.—Bart."

Morley laughed. "Report to me all you do," he said, and this Steel willingly promised.



CHAPTER VIII

THE IRONY OF FATE

Giles was slowly recovering from his illness, but as yet was unable to leave his room. It was now over a month since the death of Daisy, and during that time all matters connected therewith had been reported to the invalid. Thus he knew of the funeral, of the verdict of the jury, and of the search that was being made for Anne. Trim, who nursed his young master—and he would not allow any one else to do so—day by day, related all that was taking place. The man himself quite believed that Miss Denham was guilty, but he did not offer this opinion to Ware, knowing how keenly Giles felt the untoward tragedy.

The young squire could not bring himself to believe that Anne was guilty. Appearances were against her, and he could not conceive what excuse she could make for her flight with the lawyer's clerk. If she were innocent, she had gone the best way to work up a feasible case against her. But Giles was so deeply in love with her that the blacker became her character in the mouths of the general public, the more persistently he held to the belief that it was whiter than snow. Had he been able he would have followed her, in order to persuade her to return and face the worst with a frank story of the events of that terrible night. But he was chained to his bed, and even had he been sufficiently well, he could not have traced her whereabouts. Steel had called to explain his doings, but not even he could guess where Anne was to be found. And Giles rejoiced that this should be so.

"What's the news this morning, Trim?" he asked languidly.

"Mr. Morley has come to see you, sir. He is waiting below."

"I thought he had gone to Brighton with his wife and family?"

"He did go some days back," assented Trim, "but he returned, sir—so he says—especially to see you."

"How very good of him! Ask him to come up."

"Are you strong enough, Master Giles?"

"Yes, you old tyrant. I hope to be up and about in a week."

Trim shook his grey head. He was rather a pessimist, and did not believe in too sudden recoveries, insisting that such did not last.

"You'll have a relapse, sir, and be worse than ever."

Ware laughed, knowing Trim's ways, and motioned him out of the room. When the old servant left, grumbling that his master should be disturbed, Giles began to wonder what had brought Morley back from Brighton. Perhaps he had come to speak of Daisy and her untimely end; but he had already, on a previous occasion, said all that was to be said about that matter. Ware sincerely mourned Daisy, for in a way he had been fond of her. Still, he could not but confess that a marriage between them would have been a mistake, and that drastic as was the cutting of the Gordian knot, it relieved him from an impossible position. His love for Anne would always have stood between himself and the unfortunate girl, and her jealousy would have ruined both their lives. Certainly he saw no chance of making Anne his wife, seeing that she was a fugitive and accused of a terrible crime. Nevertheless, since he had not to marry Daisy, the situation was less difficult. But Ware, his heart aching for the woman he loved, found cold comfort in this reasoning.

Morley entered, looking ruddy and cheerful, quite his old self, in fact. Evidently the sea air and the change had assuaged his grief to a considerable extent, and Giles could not help remarking cynically on his quick recovery. "I thought you were fond of Daisy," he said reproachfully.

"I was, and so was my wife," answered Morley, taking a seat beside the bed. "But what's done can't be undone, and I have been trying to get over my sorrow. But in spite of my looks, Ware, I have my bad moments. And you?"

"I sincerely mourn for the poor girl. It is terrible that she should be cut off so suddenly. But I am just as sorry for Miss Denham, if not more sorry. It is those who are left behind that suffer most, Morley."

"Humph!" said the little man thoughtfully, "then you *did* love Miss Denham?"

"Morley"—Giles started up on his elbow—"what do you mean?"

"I am simply repeating what Daisy said."

"She had a monomania on the subject," said Ware uneasily. "I never gave her

any cause for jealousy."

"Would you have married her had she lived?"

"Certainly," said Ware coldly. "I promised my father that the daughter of his old friend should be my wife."

"I am sure you would have acted honorably," said Morley gravely, "but it is just as well that you did not marry the girl. I think she had some reason to be jealous of Miss Denham."

Ware groaned. "I tried my best to——" He broke off with a frown. "This is my private business, Morley. You have no right to pry into these things."

Morley shrugged his shoulders. "As you please. I shall say no more. But I don't expect you'll see Miss Denham again."

"I don't expect I shall. Please leave her name out of this conversation."

"For the moment I am agreeable to do so. But as I believe her to be guilty, I must ask you a question or two."

"I shall answer no questions," responded Giles violently. "Miss Denham is innocent."

"Then why did she fly?"

"I don't know. If I can only find her, I shall ask her to come back and face the worst. She can explain."

"She will have to when she is caught. How do you propose to find her, Ware?"

"I don't know. Wait till I am on my feet again."

"Well," said Morley cheerfully, "I'll give you a clue—the Scarlet Cross."

"Rubbish! There's nothing in that in spite of the anonymous letter. What do you know about the matter?"

"Only what Steel told me. He found a boatman at Gravesend who declared that on the day of the crime—Steel gave him the date—a small steam yacht was lying in the river off the town. It was called *The Red Cross*. The next morning it was gone. The night was foggy, and no one saw it leave its moorings. It simply vanished. What do you make of that, Ware?"

"Nothing at all. What has this yacht to do with Miss Denham?"

"Can't you see? The anonymous letter referred to a Scarlet Cross. Such an ornament was picked up in the church, and the boat was called——"

"*The Red Cross*—not *The Scarlet Cross*," interrupted Ware.

"Only a difference of shade," said Morley ironically. "But I am certain that Miss Denham with her companion went on board that yacht. I can't think how else they escaped."

"Why should this lawyer's clerk have gone on board?"

"That's what Steel is trying to find out. I expect he will make inquiries of Asher, Son, and Asher's office. But the name of the yacht, the fact that Miss Denham made for Gravesend, where it was lying, and its appearance and disappearance within twenty-four hours during which the crime was committed shows me that she fled and that she is guilty."

Ware restrained himself with a violent effort. "Oh," he said ironically, "then you believe that Miss Denham arranged that the yacht should be at Gravesend, ready for her flight, after the death of Daisy."

"It looks like that," assented Morley. "I believe myself that the crime was premeditated."

"And was the fact of my car being at the church gate premeditated?" asked Ware angrily.

"Why not? Miss Denham knew that your car was coming for you after the service."

"Morley, I admit that things look black, but she is not guilty."

"Humph! You love her."

"That has nothing to do with it."

"As you will. Let us say no more on the subject. I wish to tell you why I came."

"It is sure to be a more disagreeable subject," retorted Giles; then felt compunction for the rude speech. "I beg your pardon, Morley, I am a perfect bear. But this illness has made me peevish, and the events of the last few weeks have rendered my brain irritable. Forgive my bad temper."

"Oh, that's all right, Ware," replied his visitor heartily. "I can always make allowances for invalids. You'll be your old self again shortly."

"I shall never be myself again," replied Giles gloomily.

It was on the tip of Morley's tongue to make some fresh reference to Anne. But he knew that such a remark would only exasperate the invalid; and, moreover, Giles looked so ill and worried that Morley generously refrained from adding to his troubles. "Let us come to business," he said, taking some papers out of his breast coat-pocket. "Since you were engaged to Daisy I thought it right that you should be made aware of a communication I have received from Asher, Son, and Asher."

"About the summons you told me of?" asked Ware wearily. He did not take much interest in Morley's affairs.

"No. I have managed to compromise that. The solicitors have accepted payment in instalments. In this instance they write to me officially as Daisy's guardian. She has come into five thousand a year, Ware."

Giles opened his eyes and sat up in bed excitedly.

"Do you mean to say that her half-uncle Powell is dead?"

Morley nodded. "Very ironical, isn't it?" he said. "She was always talking and hoping for the money, and now when it comes she is unable to enjoy it. What tricks Fate plays us to be sure!"

"Poor girl!" sighed Giles; "how often have we discussed the prospect of her being an heiress! I always told her that I had enough for both, but she hankered after having money in her own right."

"Look at the papers," said Morley, handing them to the young man, "and you will see that Powell died over four months ago in Sydney. His solicitors arranged about the estate in the colony of New South Wales, and then communicated with Asher as Powell had advised them before he died. There is a copy of the will there."

"So I see. But tell me the chief points in it. I feel too tired to wade through all this legal matter."

"Well, the money was left to Daisy, and failing her it goes to a man called

George Franklin."

"H'm! He has come in for his kingdom very speedily, thanks to the death of poor Daisy. Who is he?"

Morley glanced at a letter. "He was the brother-in-law of Mr. Powell—married Powell's sister who is dead. I don't know if there is any family. Asher's firm doesn't know the whereabouts of Franklin, but they are advertising for him. The five thousand a year goes to him without reservation."

"Why did they tell you all this?"

"I really can't say, unless it is because I was Daisy's legal guardian. I wish she had come in for this money, Ware, for I do not say but what I shouldn't have been glad of a trifle. And if Daisy had lived she would have paid me something. Certainly as I did what I did do out of sheer friendship with her father, I have no right to demand anything, but when Franklin hears of my circumstances I hope he will lend me some money to get me out of my difficulties."

"It all depends upon the kind of man he turns out to be. But I always thought, Morley, that it was your wife to whom Kent left his daughter. She was an old friend of his."

"Quite so; but Kent appointed me guardian, as Mrs. Morley refused to be legally bound. I am sure I did my duty," added the little man, with sudden heat.

"I am sure you did. You behaved like a father to her, and I am sorry she did not live to repay you." Giles thought for a moment or so, then added, "I was engaged to Daisy, and I am rich. Let me help you, Morley."

"No, thanks. It is good of you to suggest such a thing, but I am a very independent man. If this Franklin will do anything, I don't mind accepting a thousand from him; otherwise—no, Ware."

Giles admired the bluff way in which Morley said this. He knew well that for a long time Morley and his wife had done all they could for Daisy Kent, and that both of them deserved great praise. He suggested that Mrs. Morley might be induced——

"No," interrupted his visitor, "my wife wants nothing. She has her own money, and ample means."

"Then why don't you ask for her help?"

"My dear Ware, I married Mrs. Morley because I loved her, and not for her money. All her property is settled on herself, and I have not touched one shilling of it. She would willingly help me, but I have refused."

"Isn't that rather quixotic on your part?"

"Perhaps," responded Morley, with some dryness; "but it is my nature. However, I see that I am tiring you. I only came to tell you of this irony of fate, whereby Daisy inherited a fortune too late to benefit by it. I must go now. My wife expects me back in Brighton to-morrow."

"When do you return to The Elms?"

"In a month. And what are your movements?"

Ware thought for a few minutes before he answered. At length he spoke seriously.

"Morley, I know you are prejudiced against Miss Denham."

"I think she is guilty, if that is what you mean, Ware."

"And I say that she is innocent. I intend to devote myself to finding her and to clearing up this mystery."

"Well, I wish you good luck," said Morley, moving towards the door; "but don't tell me when you find Miss Denham. If I come across her I'll have her arrested."

"That's plain enough. Well, since you are her declared enemy, I shall keep my own counsel." He raised himself on his elbow. "But I tell you, Morley, that I shall find her. I shall prove her innocence, and I shall make her my wife."

Morley opened the door.

"The age of miracles is past," he said. "When you are more yourself, you will be wiser. Good-bye, and a speedy recovery."

As the visitor departed Trim entered with the letters. He was not at all pleased to find Giles so flushed, and refused to hand over the correspondence. Only when Ware began to grow seriously angry did Trim give way. He went grumbling out of the room as Giles opened his letters. The first two were from friends in town asking after his health; the third had a French stamp and the Paris postmark.

Ware opened it listlessly. He then uttered an exclamation. On a sheet of thin foreign paper was the drawing in pencil of a half-sovereign of Edward VII., and thereon three circles placed in a triangle, marked respectively "A," "D," and "P." Below, in a handwriting he knew only too well, was written the one word "Innocent."

"Anne, Anne!" cried Ware, passionately kissing the letter, "as though I needed you to tell me that!"

And it was not till an hour later that he suddenly remembered what a narrow escape he had had from putting Morley on the track of Anne Denham. Had Morley seen that letter——?

"Paris," murmured Giles, "I'll go there."



CHAPTER IX

A STRANGE DISCOVERY

The offices of Asher, Son, and Asher were situated in a dark, narrow street in the City, which led down to the river. In former days the place might have been respectable, and then the original Asher had set up his official tent in the neighborhood; but civilization had moved westward, and Terry Street was looked on askance by fashionable solicitors. Nevertheless the firm of Asher continued to dwell in the dingy office, where their progenitors had slaved for close on a hundred years. It was quite good enough, thought the present head of the firm, for such well-known lawyers.

The firm did a good old-fashioned business, eminently respectable and safe. None of the three partners was a sharper, as Morley asserted; but as the firm had issued a judgment summons against the master of The Elms, he could scarcely be expected to think well of them. Old Mr. Asher rarely came to the office, preferring his country house and melon beds, and the business was conducted by the son and the other Asher, who was a cousin. Both these gentlemen were over forty, and in spite of a modern education were decidedly old-fashioned. There was something in the musty air of the Terry Street office that petrified them into old men before their due time. The three clerks who sat in the outer rooms were also elderly, and the sole youthful creature about the place was the office boy, a red-haired imp who answered to the name of Alexander. His surname was Benker, but was not thought sufficiently dignified for use in so sedate a place of business.

With some difficulty Steel found this musty haunt of the legal Muse, and sent up his name to the senior partner with a request for an interview. Alexander, whistling between his teeth, led him into a frowzy apartment lined with books and tin boxes, and furnished with a green baize-covered table heaped with legal papers, three chairs, and a mahogany sofa of the Early Victorian period. Mr. Asher, the son, might have belonged to the same epoch, in spite of his age, so rusty and smug did he look. His face was clean-shaven with the exception of side-whiskers; his hair was thin on the top and sparse on the sides, and he was dressed in a suit of solemn black, with a satin tie to match. In fact, he was the

typical lawyer of melodrama, and Steel was surprised to find so ancient a survival in these modern days. But when they began to talk Asher proved to be quite able to hold his own, and was not at all fossilized in brain, whatever he might be in appearance. He knew not only the name of Steel, but all about the case and Steel's connection therewith. He referred in feeling terms to Daisy's death.

"A very charming girl, Mr. Steel," said the young-old lawyer. "On several occasions she has been here to draw her little income. It is sad that she should have met with her death at the hands of a jealous woman at the very time she was about to enjoy a legacy of five thousand a year."

"You don't say so!" cried Steel, who had heard nothing of this.

"Ah! Mr. Morley never informed you of the fact."

"Well, no, he didn't; but then, I have not seen him for over a week. I believe he is at Brighton with his wife. Who left this money to the late Miss Kent?"

"A relative of hers who died lately in Australia."

"And failing her who inherits?"

Mr. Asher reflected. "I don't know that you have any right to ask that question," he said, after a pause.

"Pardon me," replied the detective. "Miss Kent was murdered. I fancied that the money might have something to do with the commission of the crime."

"No, Mr. Steel. I read the evidence given at the inquest. Jealousy was the motive of the crime, and Miss Denham is guilty."

"I am somewhat of that way of thinking myself, Mr. Asher. And on the face of it there is no other way of accounting for the murder. Nevertheless it is just as well to look at the matter from all sides. The crime may be connected with the question of this fortune. You may as well tell me what I wish to know. I'll keep my mouth closed."

"Are you going to accuse our client of the crime?" asked Asher dryly. "I fear you will waste your time if you do. Since you look at the matter in this way, I don't mind speaking about what after all is not your business."

"That is as it may be," returned Steel enigmatically.

Asher passed this remark over. "Failing Miss Kent, the five thousand a year goes to George Franklin, a brother-in-law of the testator. We lately received a letter from him, informing us that he intended to claim the money."

"How did he know that he would inherit?"

"We advertised for him. He is quite unaware of the death of Miss Kent, and I daresay thinks Mr. Powell left the fortune to him direct."

"You can't be certain of his ignorance. However, let us give him the benefit of the doubt. Where did he write from?"

"From Florence, in Italy, where he has lived for four years. He will be in London next week, and if you want to see him——"

"I'll think of it," interrupted Steel. "There may be no need to trouble Mr. Franklin. At present I am searching for this clerk of yours, who went off with Miss Denham."

The lawyer raised his eyebrows with manifest surprise. "A clerk of ours, Mr. Steel? I don't quite follow you."

"I refer to the man who served a judgment summons on Mr. Morley."

"A boy served that," explained Asher. "The boy who showed you in."

Steel stared hard at the solicitor, trying to understand why he had made such a statement. "But that is absurd," he remarked. "I know that nothing was said at the inquest about the matter, as Mr. Morley did not wish it to be known that he was in such difficulties. But a tall man, with a reddish beard, dressed in a great-coat, with a white scarf, served the summons. Afterwards he went to the midnight service in the parish church, and lured Miss Kent outside by means of a note, which we cannot find. From what I have gathered this man went with Miss Denham in Mr. Ware's motor-car. He fled with her, and I fancy he must be either the assassin or an accessory after the fact."

Asher heard all this with extreme surprise. When Steel concluded he touched the bell. Alexander responded with his usual cheerful and impudent air. His master addressed him with some severity. "What about that summons which was served by you on Mr. Morley, of Rickwell?" he demanded.

The lad grew crimson to his ears, and looked at the floor much embarrassed. "I

served it all right, sir," he mumbled.

"You served it," struck in Steel, with emphasis. "That is quite untrue. A tall man with a red beard served it."

"Alexander, tell the truth. What does this mean?"

The boy began to sob, and drew his coat-sleeve across his eye with a snuffle. "I thought it was all right," he said, "or I should not have given it to him."

"The summons! You gave it to someone to serve?"

"Yes, sir. To Mr. Wilson, mother's lodger."

"Is he tall? Has he a pale face and a red beard?" asked Steel.

"He has, sir. He's been with mother six months, and was always kind. When I got the summons he said that he was going into the country, and would serve it on Mr. Morley."

"Alexander," said Asher in an awful tone, "I gave you money for your railway fare to go to Rickwell. What have you done with that money, wretched boy?"

"I went to the Hippodrome with another boy," wept Alexander. "I thought as I'd take the holiday, as you'd think I was in the country. Please, sir, I'm very sorry, but I thought Mr. Wilson was all right."

"Did Mr. Wilson come back to say that all was right?" demanded Steel sharply.

"No, sir, he didn't. Mother and I ain't set eyes on him since he went away to serve the summons. I was afraid to tell you, sir," he added to his master, "'cause I knew I'd done wrong. But I hope you won't be hard on me, sir."

"Alexander," said Mr. Asher, "you have disgraced a most respectable office, and can no longer continue in it. You have spent money, you have wasted time, both given to you for a certain purpose. For the sake of your mother, who is a hard-working woman, I shall not take any legal steps. But from this day you cease to be in our employment. Your wages for the week shall be confiscated, since you have made free with my money. At five to-day, Alexander, you leave this place forever."

"Oh, sir—please, sir—I didn't——"

"Alexander, I have spoken. You can depart."

With a howl the boy went out of the room, and sat weeping in the outer office for at least ten minutes. He was wondering what he should say to his mother, for she was a terrible woman, with a short temper and a hard hand. His fellow-clerks demanded what was the matter, but Alexander had sense enough to keep his own counsel. All he said was that the governor had discharged him, and then he wept afresh.

While thus employed Steel made his appearance. He had been discussing the matter with Asher, and had proposed a course of action in connection with the delinquent to which Asher agreed. He advanced to the weeping Alexander and lifted him from his seat by the collar.

"Come, young man," said he, "take me home to your mother at once."

"Oh, Lor'," cried Alexander, "she'll give me beans!"

"You deserve the worst beating she can give you," said Steel severely, while the clerks grinned. "However, you must come with me. Where do you live?"

"Warder Street, Lambeth," snuffled Alexander, and urged by the hand on his collar, went out of the office with the detective.

"We'll take a hansom," said Steel, and shortly was ensconced in one with the miserable Alexander.

As a rule a ride in a hansom would have been a joy to Master Benker, but he was too much afraid of the meeting with his mother to take any pleasure in the treat. However, he relied on the promise of the detective that he would sooth the maternal ire, and managed to reply fairly well to the questions Steel asked. These referred to Mr. Wilson.

"Who is he?" demanded the detective.

"Mother's lodger," replied Alexander; "he's been with her six months, and mother thought a deal of him. He was kind to me."

"Ah! Was he well off?"

"I don't know. He paid his rent regular, but he wore shabby clothes, and was always out. I only saw him at night when I came home from the office."

"Did he ask you many questions about the office?"

"Oh, yes. He said he wished me to get on—that I was a smart boy, and a credit to my mother."

"So you are," answered Steel genially. "I'm sure she'll give you a proof of her approval to-day. Now don't cry, boy." Steel shook Alexander, and then demanded suddenly, "You copy all the letters, do you not?"

"Yes, I do," answered Master Benker, wondering why this was asked.

"And you read them sometimes?"

"Nearly always. I like to know what's going on. Mr. Wilson said I should make myself acquainted with everything."

"I'm sure he did," muttered Steel ironically. "Did you read any letter saying that Miss Kent had inherited a fortune? Miss Daisy Kent, who lived with Mr. Morley at Rickwell?"

Alexander thought for a moment. "Yes, I did. It was a letter to some lawyers in Sydney."

"Did you tell Mr. Wilson about it?"

"Yes, sir. He was always talking about people coming in for money, and I said that a girl called Miss Kent had come in for five thousand a year."

"I thought so. When did you tell Mr. Wilson this?"

"Three days after Christmas."

"Before he offered to serve the summons?"

"Why, I hadn't got the summons then," said Alexander. "Mr. Asher gave it to me the day before New Year. I said I was going into the country to Rickwell, for Mr. Wilson asked me what I was making myself smart for. He said he'd take the summons, and that I could go to the Hippodrome with Jim Tyler."

"Which you did on your employer's money. You are a smart lad, Alexander. What did your mother say?"

"Mother was out when I came home with the summons, and after Mr. Wilson said he'd take it I didn't say anything to her."

"Then she thought that on the day before the New Year you were at the office as

usual?"

"Yes," snuffled Master Benker, "she did. Oh, Lor'!" as the cab stopped before a tidy house in a quiet street, "here we are."

"And there is your mother," said the detective cheerfully, as a severe face appeared at the white-curtained window.

Alexander wept afresh as Steel paid the cabman, and positively howled when the door opened and his mother—a lean woman in a black dress, with a widow's cap—appeared. He would have run away but that Steel again had a hand on his collar.

"Alexander," cried his mother harshly, "what have you been doing?"

"Nothing very dreadful, ma'am," interposed Steel. "It will be all right. Let me in, and I'll speak for my young friend."

"And who may you be, sir?" demanded Mrs. Benker, bristling.

"A personal friend of Mr. Asher's."

On hearing this dreaded name Mrs. Benker softened, and welcomed Steel into a neat parlor, where he seated himself in a horsehair mahogany chair of the most slippery description and related what had happened. Alexander stood by and wept all the time. He wept more when his mother spoke.

"I expected it," she said in quiet despair; "that boy is the bane of my life. I'll speak to you shortly, Alexander. Go to your room and retire to bed."

"Oh, mother! mother!" cried Master Benker, writhing at the prospect of a thorough whipping.

"Go to your room, Alexander, and make ready," repeated the widow, with a glare, and the boy retired slowly, wriggling and snuffling. When his sobs died away and an upstairs door was heard to close with a bang, Mrs. Benker addressed herself to Steel.

"I hope you will induce Mr. Asher to overlook this," she said, clasping a pair of lean, mittened hands; "I am so poor."

"I'll do my best," responded Steel; "that is, if you will give me some information about your late lodger, Mr. Wilson."

"Why should I do that?" asked Mrs. Benker suspiciously.

"Because Mr. Asher wishes to know all about him. You see, your son allowed Mr. Wilson to serve this summons, and it is necessary that Mr. Asher should learn where he is."

"That's only fair; but I don't know. Mr. Wilson has not returned here since he left on the day before New Year."

"Did he leave any luggage behind him?"

"No, sir, he didn't." Mrs. Benker paused, then continued, "I'll tell you exactly how it occurred, if Mr. Asher will make some allowance for the wickedness of that wretched boy of mine."

"I'll see what can be done, and use my influence with Mr. Asher."

"Thank you, sir," said the widow gratefully. "Well, sir, I was absent all the last day of the year, as I was seeing a married daughter of mine in Marylebone. Mr. Wilson was in the house when I left at ten in the morning, but said nothing about going away. When I returned at six in the evening I found that he was gone bag and baggage, and that he had left his rent on the table. Also a note saying that he was suddenly called away and would not return."

"Have you the note?" asked Steel, thinking it just as well to have some specimen of Wilson's handwriting.

Mrs. Benker shook her head. "I burnt it," she replied; "it was only written in pencil and not worth keeping. I must say that Mr. Wilson always behaved like a gentleman, although I saw little of him. He was queer in his habits."

"How do you mean—'queer'?"

"Well, sir, I hardly ever saw him in the daytime, and when I did he usually kept his blinds down in his room, as he suffered from weak eyes. Even when he saw Alexander in the evening he would hardly have any light. Then sometimes he would lie in bed all the day, and be out all the night. At other times he would stay at home the whole of the twenty-four hours. But he always paid his rent regularly, and gave little trouble over his food. Yes," added Mrs. Benker, smoothing her apron, "Mr. Wilson was always a gentleman. I will say that."

"Humph!" thought Steel, taking all this in eagerly. "A queer kind of gentleman,"

he added aloud. "Did you know anything else about him, Mrs. Benker?"

"No, sir." She drew herself up primly. "I never pry—never."

"Did any one call to see Mr. Wilson?"

"No one. All the time he was here not one person called."

"Did he receive any letters?"

"No. Not one letter arrived."

"Queer," murmured Steel. "What newspaper did he take?"

"The *Morning Post*. Also he took the *World*, *Truth*, *Modern Society*, and *M. A. P.* He was fond of the fashionable intelligence."

"Oh, he was, was he? Would you have called him a gentleman?"

"He always paid his rent duly," hesitated Mrs. Benker, "so far he was a perfect gentleman. But I have lived as a lady's maid in the best families, sir, and I don't think Mr. Wilson was what you or I would call an aristocrat."

"I see. So you were a lady's maid once. In what families?"

Mrs. Benker was not at all averse to relating her better days, and did so with pride. "I was with the Countess of Flint, with Mrs. Harwitch, and with Lady Susan Summersdale."

"Ha!" said Steel, starting. He remembered that Morley had been concerned with Lady Summersdale about the robbery of her jewels. "Did you tell Mr. Wilson this?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. We had long talks about aristocratic families."

She repeated several tales she had told Wilson, and Steel asked her many questions. When he took his leave he asked a leading one: "Did Mr. Wilson wear a red cross as an ornament?"

"On his watch-chain he did," said Mrs. Benker, and Steel departed very satisfied with his day's work.



CHAPTER X

ON A FRESH TRAIL

If Giles Ware had not been desperately in love and desperately anxious to find Anne Denham, he would scarcely have gone to Paris on such a wild-goose chase. The postmark on the letter showed that she was, or she had been, in the French capital; but to find her in that immense city was like looking for a haystack in a league-long desert. However, Ware had an idea—foolish enough—that some instinct would guide him to her side, and, therefore, as soon as he recovered sufficiently to travel he crossed the Channel with Trim. He left Rickwell about three weeks after his interview with Morley. Time enough, as he well knew, for Anne to change her place of residence. But he trusted to luck.

For quite a fortnight he explored the city, accompanied by the faithful old servant. Trim had sharp eyes, and would be certain to recognize Anne if she came within eyesight. But in spite of their vigilance and observation, the two saw no one even distantly resembling Anne. Certainly if Giles had gone to the authorities, who take note of all who come and go, he might have been more successful. But knowing that Anne was wanted by the English police, he did not dare to adopt this method. He was forced to rely entirely on himself, and his search resulted in nothing.

"It ain't no good, Master Giles," said Trim for at least the tenth time; "we've lost the scent somehow. Better go back to London. I don't want you to be ill over here, sir, with nothing but foreign doctors to look after you."

"I shan't leave Paris until I am certain that she is not in the place," declared Ware resolutely.

"Well, sir, I don't know how much more certain you wants to be. We've tramped them bullyvards and Chamy Elizas till our feet are near dropping off. You're looking a shadow, Master Giles, if you'll excuse an old man as nursed you when you were a baby. She ain't here. Now I shouldn't be surprised if she were in London," said Trim wisely.

"What, in the very jaws of the lion? Nonsense!"

"Oh, but is it, sir? I always heard it said by them as knows that the jaws of the lion is the very last place any one expects to find them." Trim did not state what "them" he meant. "If she went back to Rickwell she would be safe, especially if she laid up in some cottage and called herself a widder."

"Trim, you've been reading detective novels!"

"Not me, sir; I ain't got no time. But about this going back——"

"We'll go back to-morrow, Trim," said Ware, with sudden resolution. And Trim joyfully departed to pack.

It just struck Giles that after all Trim might be right, and that having thrown the police off the scent by going abroad in the yacht, Anne might return to London. She might be there now, living in some quiet suburb, while the police were wasting their time corresponding with the French authorities. Moreover, Ware thought it would be just as well to learn what Steel was doing. He had charge of the case and might have struck the trail. In that case Giles wanted to know, for he could then avert any possible danger from Anne. And finally he reflected that he might learn something about Anne's friends from the people at the Governesses' Institute where Mrs. Morley had engaged her. If she returned to London it was not impossible that she might have gone to hide in the house of some friend. Any one who knew Anne could be certain that she was not guilty of the crime she was accused of, and would assuredly aid her to escape the unjust law. So thought Giles in his ardor; but he quite forgot that every one was not in love with Anne, and would scarcely help her unless they were fully convinced of her innocence, and perhaps not even then. Most people have a holy horror of the law, and are not anxious to help those in danger of the long arm of justice.

However, Giles reasoned as above and forthwith left Paris for London. He took up his quarters in the Guelph Hotel, opposite the Park, and began his search for Anne again. Luckily he had obtained from Mrs. Morley the number of the Institute, which was in South Kensington, and the day after his arrival walked there to make inquiries. It was a very forlorn hope, but Ware saw no other chance of achieving his desire.

The Institute was a tall red-brick house, with green blinds and a prim, tidy look. He was shown into a prim parlor and interviewed by a prim old lady, who wore spectacles and had a pencil stuffed in the bosom of her black gown. However, she was less prim than she looked, and had a cheerful old ruddy face with a twinkling pair of kindly eyes. In her heart Mrs. Cairns admired this handsome

young man who spoke so politely, and was more willing to afford him the desired information than if he had been elderly and ugly. Old as she was, the good lady was a true daughter of Eve, and her natural liking for the opposite sex had not been crushed out of her by years of education. Nevertheless when she heard the name of Anne she threw up her hands in dismay.

"Why do you come here to ask about that unfortunate girl?" she demanded, and looked severely at Giles. Before he could reply she glanced again at his card, which she held in her fingers, and started. "Giles Ware," she read, drawing a quick breath. "Are you——"

"I was engaged to the young lady who was killed," said Ware, surprised.

Mrs. Cairns' rosy face became a deep red. "And you doubtless wish to avenge her death by finding Miss Denham?"

"On the contrary, I wish to save Miss Denham."

"What! do you not believe her guilty?"

"No, Mrs. Cairns, I do not. Every one says she killed the girl, but I am certain that she is an innocent woman. I come to ask you if you can tell me where she is."

"Why do you come to me?" Mrs. Cairns went to see that the door was closed before she asked this question.

"I thought you might know of her whereabouts."

"Why should I?"

"Well, I admit that there is no reason why you should—at least, I thought so before I came here."

"And now?" She bent forward eagerly.

"Now I think that if she had come to you for refuge she would get help from you. I can see that you also believe her guiltless."

"I do," said Mrs. Cairns in a low voice. "I have known Anne for years and I am certain that she is not the woman to do a thing like this. She would not harm a fly."

"Then you can help me. You know where she is?"

Mrs. Cairns looked at his flushed face, at the light in his eyes. In her shrewd way she guessed the secret of this eagerness. "Then you love her," she said under her breath. "You love Anne."

"Why do you say that?" asked Giles, taken aback. He was not prepared to find that she could read him so easily.

"I remember," said Mrs. Cairns to herself, but loud enough for him to hear, "there was a Society paper said something about jealousy being the motive of the crime, and——"

"Do you mean to say that such a statement was in the papers?" asked Ware angrily, and with a flash of his blue eyes.

"It was in none of the big daily papers, Mr. Ware. They offered no explanation. But some Society reporter went down to Rickwell; to gather scandal from the servants, I suppose."

"Off from Mrs. Parry," muttered Giles; then aloud, "Yes?"

"Well, this man or woman—most probably it was a woman—made up a very pretty tale, which was printed in *The Firefly*."

"A scandalous paper," said Ware, annoyed. "What did it say?"

"That you were in love with Anne, that you were engaged to Miss Kent, and that to gain you as her husband Anne killed the girl."

"It's a foul lie. I'll horsewhip the editor and make him put in an apology."

"I shouldn't do that if I were you, Mr. Ware," said the old lady dryly. "Better let sleeping dogs lie. I don't believe the whole story myself—only part of it."

"What part, Mrs. Cairns?"

"That part which says you love Anne. I can see it in your face."

"If I can trust you——"

"Certainly you can. Anne is like my own child. I believe her guiltless of this terrible crime, and I would do anything to see her righted. She did not kill the girl."

"No, I believe the girl was killed by a nameless man who came to Rickwell from some firm of solicitors. I don't know why he murdered the poor child, no more than I can understand why Anne should have helped him to escape."

"You call her Anne," said Mrs. Cairns softly.

Giles flushed through the tan of his strong face.

"I have no right to do so," he said. "She never gave me permission. Mrs. Cairns, I assure you that there was no understanding between Miss Denham and myself. I was engaged by my father to Miss Kent, and we were to be married. I fell in love with Miss Denham, and I have reason to believe that she returned my love."

"She told you so?"

"No, no! She and I never said words like that to one another. We were friends; nothing more. Miss Kent chose to be jealous of a trifling gift I gave Miss Denham at Christmas, and there was trouble. Then came an anonymous letter, saying that Anne wished to kill Daisy."

"A letter, and said that?" exclaimed Mrs. Cairns in surprise. "But I can't understand it at all. Anne had no enemies, so far as I know. No one could hate so sweet a girl. Her father——"

"Did you know her father?" asked Ware quickly.

"No; but she often spoke of him. She was fond of her father, although he seems to have been a wandering Bohemian. He died at Florence."

"I wonder if he really did die."

"Of course. He—but it's a long story, Mr. Ware, and I have not the time to tell it to you. Besides, there is one who can tell you all about Anne and her father much better than I can. The Princess Karacsay. Do you know her?"

"I have seen the name somewhere."

"Probably on a programme," said Mrs. Cairns composedly. "Oh, don't look so astonished. The Princess is really a Hungarian aristocrat. She quarrelled with her people, and came to England with very little money. To keep herself alive she tried to become a governess. Afterwards, having a beautiful voice, she became a concert singer. I hear she is very popular."

"How should she know about Anne—I mean Miss Denham?"

"Because if there is any woman to whom Anne would go in her distress, it would be the Princess. She met Anne here while she was a governess, and the two became great friends. They were always together. I do not know where Anne is, Mr. Ware. She did not come to me, nor has she written; but if she is in England the Princess will know."

"Do you think she would tell me?" asked Giles eagerly.

"I really don't know. She is romantic, and if she learned that you loved Anne she might be inclined to help you. But that would depend upon Anne herself. How is she disposed towards you?"

For answer Giles related the episode of the foreign letter, with the drawing of the coin and the one word "Innocent." Mrs. Cairns listened quietly, and nodded.

"Evidently Anne values your good opinion. I think you had better tell all this to the Princess." She hastily wrote a few lines. "This is her address."

"Oh, thank you! Thank you!"

"And, Mr. Ware," added the old lady, laying a kind hand on his arm, "if you hear about Anne, come and tell me. I hope with all my soul that you will be able to save the poor child."

"If human aid can prove her innocence, you can depend upon me," was Ware's reply. And taking leave of Mrs. Cairns, he left the Institute with his heart beating and his head in the air.

Giles was glad that his good fortune had led him to meet this true friend of the woman he loved. He was also glad that he had been so open with her about his passion, else she might not have sent him to the Princess Karacsay. As the name came into his mind he glanced down at the paper, which he still held. The address of Anne's friend was "42, Gilbert Mansions, Westminster." Giles resolved to lose no time in looking her up. She would be able to tell him where Anne was, and also might be able to explain the mystery of Anne's life in general, and her conduct at Rickwell in particular.

For there was some mystery about Miss Denham. Ware was quite certain on that point. She had said that her father was dead, and circumstances pointed to the fact that her father was alive and was the nameless man who had appeared and

disappeared so suddenly. Then there was the strange episode of the anonymous letter, and the queer reference therein to the Scarlet Cross. Also the fact that the yacht in which Anne had fled was called *The Red Cross*. All these things hinted at a mystery, and such might in some indirect way be connected with the death of Daisy Kent. Anne had not killed her; but since she had aided the murderer to escape she must have condoned the crime in some way. Ware shuddered as he looked at the matter in this light. What if Anne knew something about the matter after all? The next moment he put the thought from him with anger. Anne was good and pure, and her hands were clean from the stain of blood. Such a woman would not—could not commit a crime either directly or indirectly. When he saw her he would ask for an explanation, and once she opened her mouth all would be made plain.

Arguing thus with himself, Giles wrote a letter to the Princess Karacsay and asked for an interview. He mentioned that he had seen Mrs. Cairns and that the old lady had furnished him with the address. Also, he said that his wish in seeing the Princess was to ask for the whereabouts of Miss Denham. Having despatched this note, Giles felt that he could do no more until he received a reply.

But he was too restless to remain quiet. It occurred to him that he might look up Steel and learn what fresh discoveries had been made in connection with the Rickwell crime. He went to New Scotland Yard and asked for the detective, but learned to his surprise and vexation that the man was out of town and was not expected back for a week. No one could say where he had gone, so Giles had to satisfy himself with leaving a card and promising to call again.

The next day he received a note from the Princess Karacsay asking him to come the next evening at nine o'clock. She said nothing about Anne, nor did she volunteer any information. She simply appointed an hour and a place for the interview and signed herself Olga Karacsay. Giles felt that she had been intentionally curt, and wondered if she intended to give him a civil reception. After some thought he decided that she meant to be kind, although the note read so coldly. He would go, and perhaps during the interview she might be persuaded to help him. After all, she must know that he had been engaged to marry the dead girl, and fancied—as Mrs. Cairns had done—that he wished to have Anne arrested.

The following evening he arrayed himself with particular care and drove in a hansom to Westminster. The cab stopped before a great pile of brick buildings near the Abbey, and when Giles had dismissed it he entered a large and well-

lighted hall with a tessellated pavement. Here a porter volunteered, on ascertaining his business, to conduct him to the door of the Princess Karacsay's flat, which was on the first floor.

Giles was admitted by a neat maid-servant, who showed him into a picturesque drawing-room. A tall woman in evening dress was standing beside the window in the twilight. Giles thought her figure was familiar and recognized the turn of her head. He uttered a cry.

"Anne," he said, stretching his arms. "Anne, my dearest!"



CHAPTER XI

PRINCESS KARACSAY

Even as he spoke the room was flooded with the light of the electric lamps. The woman by the window turned and came forward smiling. With a feeling of bitter disappointment Giles recoiled. It was not Anne. He had been deceived by a chance resemblance.

"I can quite understand your mistake," said the Princess Karacsay. "It is not the first time that I have been taken for my friend."

Indeed, she was very like Anne, both in figure and face. She had the same dark hair and dark eyes, the same oval face and rich coloring. But her expression was different. She was more haughty than Miss Denham, and there was less simplicity in her manner. Even as Ware looked at her the likeness seemed to vanish, and he wondered that he should have made such a mistake. But for the twilight, the turn of her head, and her height, together with the way in which she carried herself, he would not have been deceived.

"One would take you for Miss Denham's sister," he said when seated.

The Princess smiled oddly. "We are alike in many ways," she replied quietly. "I look upon Miss Denham as my second self. You called me Anne when you mistook me for her," she added, with a keen glance.

"I have no right to do so, Princess, but——" He hesitated, not knowing how to choose his words. She saw his perplexity and smiled.

"I quite understand, Mr. Ware."

"Anne—I mean Miss Denham—has told you about me?"

"I have not seen her for months, Mr. Ware, not since that terrible event which has made a fugitive of her."

Giles was bitterly disappointed, and his face showed his feelings. From what Mrs. Cairns had said he was certain that the Princess would be able to help him, and here she confessed an ignorance of Anne's whereabouts. Nevertheless Ware

still hoped. He thought that not knowing his real errand, she was feigning ignorance for the sake of her friend's safety. "I am sorry she has not spoken to you about me," he remarked, "for then you would know that I wish her well."

"Oh, I know that. Anne—I may as well call her Anne to you, Mr. Ware—wrote to me from Rickwell several times. She told me all about you. But I have not seen her since the death of your fiancée. I have no idea where she is now."

"I thought—and Mrs. Cairns thought—that she would come to you in her distress, or at least communicate her whereabouts."

"She has done neither, and I do not know where to address a letter."

"What is to be done?" said Giles half to himself and much distressed.

Princess Karacsay rose and glanced at the clock with a laugh. "Oh, if we talk, something may come of our putting our heads together," she said. "Meantime we can make ourselves comfortable. Here are coffee and cigarettes, Mr. Ware. Would you prefer a cigar?"

"No, thank you, Princess. These look very good."

"Both coffee and cigarettes are Turkish," said she, handing him a cup and afterwards a cigarette. "I get them from a cousin of mine who is an attaché at Constantinople. Come now." She lighted a cigarette for herself and sat down on an amber divan near Ware's chair. "Let us talk before my friend arrives."

"I beg your pardon, Princess, I hope my coming——"

"No, no," she explained hurriedly. "I asked my friend to meet you."

"Indeed." Giles was much surprised. "I did not know we had a mutual friend."

The Princess nodded and blew a cloud of smoke. "At ten o'clock you shall see him. I won't tell you who he is. A little surprise, Mr. Ware."

Ware looked at her sharply, but could make nothing of the enigmatic smile on her face. She was undeniably a very beautiful woman as she lounged amongst the amber-tinted cushions, but in her dress and general looks there was something barbaric. She wore a dinner dress of mingled scarlet and black, and many chains of sequins which jingled with her every movement. As Ware's eyes met her own she flashed a languorous look at him, and a slow smile wreathed her full red lips. Giles could not help admiring her, but he had a feeling that she

was not altogether to be trusted. It behove him to be wary in dealing with this superb tigress. Yet, as another thought crossed his mind, he smiled involuntarily.

"Why do you smile, Mr. Ware?" asked the Princess. She spoke the English language admirably, and with but a little foreign accent.

"Pardon," replied Giles, still smiling, "but Mrs. Cairns told me that at one time you aspired to become a governess. I can't imagine you teaching children."

"Ah, you have no imagination—no Englishman has. Children are fond of me—very fond." She cast another look at his handsome face, and added with emphasis, "I can make any one I choose fond of me."

"I quite believe it, Princess. You have woman's imperial sceptre—beauty."

"A charming compliment," responded she, her mood changing, "but we are not here to exchange compliments. So you love Anne?"

"With all my heart and soul," he replied fervently.

His hostess appeared rather disconcerted by this reply. "You are a miracle of chivalry, my dear Mr. Ware," she said dryly. "But is it not rather a large heart you have to love two women at the same time?"

"I understand what you mean," answered Ware quietly, "but my engagement to Miss Kent was purely a family arrangement. I loved Anne—I still love her. All the same, I would have married Miss Kent had she not been murdered."

"You are very obedient, Mr. Ware."

"And you very satirical, Princess. I could explain, but there is no need for me to do so. I want to find Anne. Can you help me?"

"Not at present, but I may be able to do so. Of course, you don't believe that she killed your fiancée?"

"Certainly not. I think the crime was committed by the man with whom she fled."

"A tall man with a red beard and hair and black eyes?"

"Yes, yes. Do you know him? Who is he?"

"I have had him described to me," responded the Princess calmly, "but I know

nothing about him."

"Is he a friend of Anne's?"

"That I don't know."

She quietly selected another cigarette, lighted it, and looked with a serene smile at her visitor. Giles was annoyed. "We don't seem to be getting on with our business, Princess," he said roughly.

"What is our business?" she demanded, looking at him through half-closed eyes. Her scrutiny made Giles uncomfortable, and he shifted his seat as he answered.

"Mrs. Cairns said you could tell me about Anne."

"So I can. What do you want to know, Mr. Ware?"

"Who is she? Who was her father? Is he dead or alive? What do you know about the Scarlet Cross, and——" He stopped, for the Princess had opened her eyes to their fullest extent.

"The Scarlet Cross. You know about that also?" she asked.

"Of course I do. There was an anonymous letter——"

"I have seen the letter, or at least a copy."

"Indeed," said Ware, much astonished, "and an enamelled cross——"

"I have seen the cross also."

"It appears to me, Princess, that you know everything about the case."

She glanced again at the clock, and smiled as she replied, "I am a friend of Anne's, Mr. Ware. I daresay you would like to know who told me all these things. Well, you shall be enlightened at ten o'clock. Meantime I can tell you all I do know about Anne and her father."

"You will speak freely?" he asked mistrustfully.

"Absolutely. You—you—" she hesitated—"you love Anne." She gave him a searching look. "Yes, I see you do. I can speak openly. Will you have another cup of coffee? No! Another cigarette. Ah, there is the box. A match. Now."

"Now," said Giles eagerly, "what about Anne?"

"What about myself first of all, Mr. Ware. I am a Hungarian. I quarrelled with my people and ran away. Finding myself stranded in London with very little money, I tried to get a post as a governess. I went to Mrs. Cairns, and thus became acquainted with Anne. We became great friends. She told me everything about herself. When I knew her history we became greater friends than ever. I was a governess only for a year. Then someone heard me sing, and——"—she shrugged her beautiful shoulders—"but that is quite another story, Mr. Ware. I am a concert-singer now, and it pays me excellently."

"I am very pleased with your success, Princess. But Anne?"

She flashed a rather annoyed look at him. "You are scarcely so chivalrous as I thought, Mr. Ware," she said coldly. "No, say nothing; I quite understand. Let us talk of Anne. I will tell you her history." She re-lighted her cigarette, which had gone out, and continued, "Her father was a gambler and a wanderer. He lived mostly on the Continent—Monte Carlo for choice. Anne's mother"—here the Princess paused, and then went on with an obvious effort—"I know nothing of Anne's mother, Mr. Ware. She died when Anne was a child. Mr. Denham brought up his daughter in a haphazard way."

"Was his name really Denham?"

"So Anne told me. I had no reason to think that it was otherwise. He was a gentleman of good family, but an outcast from his people by reason of his reckless folly. I also am an outcast," said she pleasantly, "but merely because I am strong-minded. I am not foolish."

"No, Princess," said Giles, looking keenly at her, "I should certainly not call you foolish."

"But I can be foolish on occasions," said she quickly, and flushed as she glanced at him, "like all women. But Anne—I see we must get back to Anne. Well, she, having better moral principles than her father, grew wearied of their wandering life. She decided to become a governess. Mr. Denham put her to school at Hampstead—a sister of Mrs. Cairns keeps the school, and that is why Anne is so intimate with Mrs. Cairns—and when her education was finished she took a situation in Italy. There she remained some years. Afterwards she rejoined her father for a time. He died at Florence—typhoid fever, I believe—and Anne found herself alone. She returned to England, and assisted by Mrs. Cairns, took various situations. She always returned to Mrs. Cairns when out of an engagement. It was on one of these occasions that I met her. We have been

friends for a long time, Mr. Ware. Then Anne was engaged by Mrs. Morley, and—and the rest you know. There is no more to be said."

"Is that all?" said Giles, disappointed by this bald narrative.

The Princess shrugged her shoulders, and throwing aside her cigarette, leaned back with her hands behind her head. "What would you, Mr. Ware? Anne is a good woman. Good women never have any history."

"Can you tell me anything about the Scarlet Cross?"

"Anne never spoke of such a thing to me. But my friend may be able to tell you. Ah!"—the Princess raised her head as a ring came to the door—"there is my friend. Before his time, too. But we have finished our conversation, Mr. Ware."

"For the present, yes."

She looked at him suddenly. "But certainly," she said in her vivacious way, "you must come and see me again. We will have much to talk of. You love music. I will sing to you, and——" Here she broke off to greet a new-comer, much to the relief of Giles, who was beginning to feel uncomfortable. "How do you do, Mr. Steel?"

With an exclamation Ware rose. It was indeed Steel who stood before him looking as round and rosy and cheerful as ever. "You are surprised to see me, sir," he said, with a twinkle.

"I am very much surprised. I went to see you yesterday——"

"And found that I was out of town. So I was, so I am supposed to be, but the telegram of the Princess here told me that she expected you this evening, so I left my country business and came up."

"You see," said the Princess, sitting down again amongst her cushions, "you see, Mr. Ware, I told you we had a mutual friend. Now you know how I am so well acquainted with the case," and she laughed.

"The Princess," explained Steel, seeing Giles' astonishment, "read all about the case. Being a friend of Miss Denham's and seeing that I had charge of the matter, she sent for me. We have talked over the case, and I have received much assistance from Miss—I mean from this very clever lady, the Princess Karacsay," and Steel bowed.

"But," stammered Ware, still puzzled, "you believe Miss Denham to be guilty. Surely the Princess will not——"

"No, no!" came from the divan in the deep-toned voice of the woman. "Anne is my friend. I would not help him to arrest her."

"The fact is," said Steel easily, "I have changed my opinion, Mr. Ware, and I think Miss Denham is innocent. The man who killed Miss Kent is called Wilson."

"Wilson. And who is Wilson, and why did he kill her?"

"I don't know who Wilson is," replied Steel. "I am trying to find out. I am not quite certain why he killed her, but I am beginning to suspect that it was on account of this inherited money. I told you that, Princess," he added, turning to the divan.

"Yes, Mr. Steel. And I said then, I say now, I do not agree."

"If you would be more explicit," said Ware, feeling helpless.

Steel took no notice of him for the moment. "Then if it's not the money I don't know what the motive can be." He turned to Ware. "See here, sir. This Wilson, whomsoever he may be, lived with the mother of Asher's office-boy—he was her lodger. The boy told him about the money coming to Miss Kent. Afterwards the lad had a summons given him to serve on Morley. Wilson offered to take it, and did so. He removed his effects from Mrs. Benker's house—she's the mother of the lad—and went down to Rickwell. You know what happened there. Now if he didn't kill Miss Kent on account of the money, why did he ask the office-boy about the matter?"

Giles shook his head. "I can't say," he said, "no more than I can explain why Miss Denham helped him to escape."

"Well,"—Steel scratched his chin—"I have an idea about that. But you must not be offended if I speak plainly, Mr. Ware."

"I shall be offended if you speak evil of my friend Miss Denham." This was from the Princess, who raised herself up with her eyes flashing angrily. "I will not have it," she said.

"Then am I to say nothing?" asked Steel ironically.

"Nothing against Miss Denham," put in Giles.

"You are both rather difficult to deal with," remarked Steel, with a shrug. "However, I'll explain, and you can draw your own inferences. It seems from what Mrs. Benker said that Mr. Wilson was mostly out all night and in all day. Also he was frequently absent for a long time. He likewise took much interest in Society newspapers and in the movements of the aristocracy. He also wore on his chain an ornament—a red-enamelled cross, in fact."

"What!" cried Giles, with a start, and he noted that the Princess started likewise, and that her face grew pale.

"He wore a red-enamelled cross," repeated Steel imperturbably, "on his watch-chain. Mrs. Benker had been in the service of the late Lady Summersdale when the diamonds of that lady were stolen. She remembered that a red-enamelled cross had been found in the safe whence the jewels were taken. Wilson was amused at this. He said that the cross was the emblem of a charitable society from which he received a weekly sum. Well"—he hesitated and looked at his listeners—"that clue came to an end. I lost sight of Wilson. I then went to look for *The Red Cross*—the yacht, I mean!"

"What has the yacht to do with Wilson?" asked Ware angrily.

"If you remember, sir, I told you that Wilson was the man who served the summons on Mr. Morley, and who, as I believed, killed Miss Kent. He afterwards fled with Miss Denham and went on board the yacht. Is not that the case, sir?"

"So far as I can judge, it is," muttered Giles reluctantly.

"Well, then," went on Steel triumphantly, while the Princess—as Giles observed—listened intently, "I looked after that yacht. I could not find her, but I am looking for her now. That is why I am in the country. I came up this morning from Deal, and I go back there to-morrow. I find, sir, that this yacht puts in at various places every now and then."

"Most yachts do."

"Yes, sir. But while most yachts are at anchor in a place does a burglary invariably occur? No, sir, wait," for Giles had sprung to his feet. "Lady Summersdale's place was on the seashore. Her diamonds were stolen. At the time this yacht was at anchor in the bay. A red cross was found in the safe. The boat is called by that name. Several times I find that when the yacht has been at a certain place a burglary has occurred. This man Wilson wears a red cross on his watch-chain. Now, sir, I believe that he is one of a gang of burglars—that the cross is a sign. This explains his interest in the Society papers. He wants to find out where the best swag is to be found, and——"

"But what has all this to do with my friend Anne?" cried the Princess.

Steel shrugged his shoulders. "I say nothing," he replied. "You can draw your own inferences."

"Do you mean to say that Miss Denham——"

"I say nothing," interrupted Steel, catching up his hat. "Mr. Ware, I am at your service when you want me. Princess!" He bowed and went out.

As the outer door closed Giles and his hostess looked at one another. "The man's a foul liar," burst out Giles furiously.

"Yes." The woman was very pale. "Still, my friend Anne once told me——"

"Told you what?"

"What I will tell you if you come again," she said under her breath, and suddenly left the room. She did not return.

CHAPTER XII

MRS. PARRY'S TEA

Six months had passed away since the death of Daisy. The grass was now green above her grave. Where she had fallen there had she been buried beside her father, and the villagers often talked of the tragedy, and pointed out to strangers the spot where it had taken place. But she who had killed the girl—they still considered Anne guilty—had never been brought to justice. From the day she had fled on Ware's motor-car nothing had been heard of her.

No one troubled about the dead girl. Daisy had not been very popular during her life, and now that she was gone her name was scarcely mentioned. For a time Mrs. Morley had placed flowers on the green mound, but after her return from Brighton had desisted. The grass grew long, and the path beside the grave green. A tombstone of white marble had been erected by Giles, and already that was becoming discolored. Daisy and her resting-place were forgotten. The poor child might have been dead a hundred years instead of six months. Only the tale of her death remained as a fireside legend, to be amplified and improved upon as the years went by.

After that one sensation life went on in Rickwell very much as it had always done. Morley and his wife returned to The Elms, and instead of having a new governess the triplets went to school. Mrs. Morley never spoke of Anne or Daisy, and seemed to grow no more cheerful than before even in the perfect summer weather. She still looked pale and subdued, and her eyes still had in their watery depths an anxious expression. Everyone said that she was regretting the death of Daisy and the wickedness of Anne; but others remarked that she had looked just as haggard and worn before as after the tragedy. Mrs. Parry gave it as her opinion that the poor lady had a secret sorrow, and tried by skilful questioning to learn what it was. But either Mrs. Parry was not clever enough or Mrs. Morley had no secret to reveal, for the scandalmonger learned nothing. The only thing that Mrs. Morley said was that she missed her girls. Whereupon Mrs. Parry told her that she ought to be ashamed of herself, seeing that the three were getting a good education. However, this did not seem to console Mrs. Morley much, for she wept copiously in her usual fashion.

The good old lady returned to her cottage very much disgusted. It was rather a dull time for her, as she had heard no news for a long time. Everyone was so well-behaved that there was no scandal going, and Mrs. Parry began to think that she ought to pay a visit to town. Her cousin, Mrs. McKail, had already gone back to New Zealand with a fearful opinion of English Society, for Mrs. Parry had blackened the country just as though she had been a pro-Boer.

Then one day her little maid, who was called Jane, and had the sharpest ears of any one in the village, brought in breakfast with the remark that Mr. Ware had returned. Mrs. Parry sat up in bed, where she always partook of the first meal of the day, and looked excited.

"When did he arrive, Jane? How does he look? What does he say?"

Jane, being experienced, answered these questions categorically.

"He came last night, mum, with Trim, and looks a shadder of hisself, but said as he was glad to be home again, and what was the news."

"Ho!" said Mrs. Parry, rubbing her nose with a teaspoon, "wants to hear the news, does he? I'll ask him to tea to-morrow—no, to-day. You can take a note up to his place, Jane."

"Yes, mum," replied Jane, who was friendly with Giles' housekeeper.

"And don't let me hear that you've been gossiping with the servants, Jane," snapped Mrs. Parry, who was unusually cross in the morning, and looked an ogress without her wig. "I hate gossip. You have two ears and one mouth, Jane; that means you should listen twice as much as you speak."

"Yes, mum," replied Jane, who had long since taken the measure of her mistress's foot. Then she went to the door, and was recalled to be told that the cook was to make a cake. She was going again, and had to return for instructions about some particular tea. Then there was the silver to be especially polished, and various other matters to be gone into, until Jane's head was whirling and her feet ached. She went down to the kitchen and told the cook that the old vinegar bottle was more fractious than usual. If only Mrs. Parry had heard her! But she thought Jane was afraid of her, whereas Jane was meek to her face and saucy behind her back. The old lady heard all the gossip in the neighborhood, but she never knew the remarks that were made in her own kitchen.

However, it thus came about that Giles received a civil note from Mrs. Parry,

asking him to come to afternoon tea. His first thought was to refuse, but he then reflected that if he wanted to learn all that had taken place during his absence, Mrs. Parry was the very person who could tell him. He knew she was an old cat, and had a dangerous tongue. Still, she was much better than a newspaper, being, as her enemies said, more spicy. He therefore accepted the invitation, and appeared in the little parlor about five. He had been for a ride, and having put his horse up at the inn, asked the old lady to excuse his dress. Mrs. Parry did so with pleasure.

Giles was a splendid figure of a man, and looked a picture in his trim riding-dress. The old dame had an eye for a fine man, and cast an approving glance at his shapely legs and slim figure. But she frowned when her eyes rose to his face. It was thinner than she liked to see; there was not the old brave light in his eyes, and his fair moustache had lost the jaunty curl, which, to her romantic mind, had made him such a gallant lover.

Giles was one of the few persons Mrs. Parry did not abuse, for his good looks and many courtesies had long since won her foolish old heart, although she would never confess to it. But then, Mrs. Parry was softer than she looked.

"Who had been taking the heart out of you, Ware?" she asked in her gentlemanly way, which Giles knew and had often laughed at.

"No one," he answered gloomily, "unless you call Fate some one."

"I call Anne Denham some one," she replied coolly, "so you haven't found her yet, poor soul!"

"No; I have looked everywhere. She has vanished like a bubble."

"It is just as well. You couldn't possibly marry her and bring her back to Rickwell as your wife."

"Why not? She is innocent. You said yourself that she was."

"And I believe it. I have stood up for her all through. All the same, Ware, there would be a scandal if she came back as Mrs. Ware."

"I don't care two straws for that," said Giles, flinging back his head.

"No," she replied dryly, "I know that. You're an obstinate man, as any one can see with half an eye. Well, I'm glad to see you again. Sit down in the armchair

yonder and tell me what you have been doing all these months. No good, if your face is the index of your mind."

Ware laughed, and sitting down managed to stow his long legs out of the way—no easy matter in the little room. Then he accepted a cup of excellent tea from Mrs. Parry and some of her celebrated cake.

He did not reply immediately, as he did not want to tell her the truth. She had too long a tongue to be told anything which it was necessary to keep secret. He put her off as he best could with a general answer.

"I have just been going to and fro."

"Like Satan," sniffed Mrs. Parry. "He's your model, is he? So you have been searching for Anne. Where?"

"In Paris and in London. But I can't find her."

"She doesn't want you to find her," replied the old lady. "If she did, you would stand face to face with her soon enough."

"That goes without the speaking," retorted Ware. "However, my adventures would not amuse you, Mrs. Parry. Suppose you tell me what has been going on in these parts?"

"As if I knew anything of what was going on," said Mrs. Parry.

Giles laughed.

It was a fiction with Mrs. Parry that she never interfered with other people's business, whereas there was not a pie within miles into which she had not thrust her finger. But he knew how to start her tongue.

"The Morleys, what about them?"

"No change, Ware. The Tricolor has gone to school—I mean the three children—although I can't get out of the habit of calling them by that ridiculous name. Mrs. Morley is as dismal as ever, and seems to miss Anne very much."

"As well she might. Anne was a good friend to her. And Morley?"

"He has found a new friend," said Mrs. Parry triumphantly, "a man called Franklin."

"George Franklin!" cried Ware, startled, for he had heard all about the fortune from Steel. "He is the man who inherited the five thousand a year that Powell left to Daisy. Steel, the detective, told me, and, now I think of it, Morley told me himself when I was ill."

"It's the same man, Ware. He has been here two months, and has taken the Priory."

"That's a cheerful place," said Giles. "Why, it has been standing empty for three years."

"I know. The last tenants left because they said it was haunted."

"Rubbish! And by what?"

"By a white lady. She wanders up and down the park, wringing her hands. But this Franklin evidently does not believe in ghosts, for he has been there these two months, and never a word from him."

"What kind of a man is he?"

"A tall man, with very black eyes, and a black beard. No," added Mrs. Parry, correcting herself, "I am wrong. He had a beard when he first came, and now has shaved it off."

"Have you seen much of him?"

"Hardly anything. Morley is the only person with whom he is intimate in any degree. He hardly ever comes out, and when people call he is not at home. Why the man should have five thousand a year I can't make out. He does no good with it."

"Any family? a wife?"

"There is a daughter, I understand, but she is an invalid, and keeps to her room or to the grounds. Weak in the head I should say, seeing how secluded her father keeps her."

"Have you seen her?"

"Yes, I came on her unexpectedly one day—or rather one evening. A short girl, with red hair and a freckled face. She looks a fool, and was dressed in all the colors of the rainbow. I don't wonder he—I mean Franklin—keeps her out of

sight."

"Humph!" said Ware, rather astonished by the extent of Mrs. Parry's information, "did the servants tell you all this?"

"There are no servants," retorted Mrs. Parry, with scorn. "The man is a mean creature. You may not believe me, Ware, but he has only three people to do the work of that huge house."

"Then there are three servants?"

"Some people might call them so," retorted Mrs. Parry, determined not to give up her point, "but they are a queer lot—not at all like the domestic I have been used to. An old man, who acts as a kind of butler; a woman, his wife, who is the cook; and a brat of fifteen, the daughter I expect, who does the general work. Oh, it's quite a family affair."

"A queer household. Does this man intend to stop long?"

"He has taken the Priory on a seven years' lease."

"And Morley visits him?"

"Yes, and he visits Morley. They are as thick as thieves. Perhaps they may be thieves for all I know."

"Does this man Franklin go about much?"

"Not a great deal, but he occasionally takes a walk into the village. Sometimes he comes to church, and I believe the rector has called. I wish any one but him had taken the Priory. We want company in this dull place. Will you call and see him?"

"I ought to," replied Ware slowly, "seeing that I was engaged to Daisy, who should have had the money. But from what you say I should not think Franklin would care to see me, and certainly he does not seem to be a desirable neighbor."

"He's quite a mistake," snorted Mrs. Parry. "I tried to be friendly, but he gave me to understand that he preferred his books to my company. He's a great reader, I understand."

Evidently the good lady was somewhat sore on the subject, for she shortly changed it for another. First she began to talk of Daisy; secondly, wonder who

had killed her, and why; and thirdly, she made mention of the grave. "There's something queer about that," she remarked, rubbing her nose, a sure sign of perplexity.

"How do you mean, queer?"

"Well——" Mrs. Parry looked thoughtfully at her guest. Then, before replying, she gave him permission to smoke. "I like the scent of a cigar about the place," she said; "it reminds me of the Colonel. He was an awful man to smoke. The one habit I could not break him of."

Giles lighted a cigarette willingly enough, and repeated his question. This time he got an answer that surprised him. "It's this way," said the old lady, taking up her knitting, "for some time the grave was quite neglected."

"No, I gave orders that it should be looked after. I told Drake and my gardener. He's a friend of the sexton's, and I thought there would be no trouble."

"There has been, then," said Mrs. Parry triumphantly. "The sexton and your gardener quarrelled, and have not been on speaking terms for months. Thomas, the sexton, won't let Williams do anything to the grave, and out of spite won't touch it himself, so it went to rack and ruin. The grass is long—or rather was long—and the flowers all gone to seed. A sore wreck, Ware."

"I am most annoyed. I'll see about it to-morrow."

"There is no need. The grave is now as neat as a new pin. The grass is clipped, and fresh flowers were planted a month ago. I never saw a grave better kept. Quite a labor of love."

"And who has done this? Mrs. Morley?"

"Pish!" said the old dame pettishly. "As though that woman had the gumption to do anything. Humph! No one knows who has done it."

"What do you mean?" Ware looked puzzled.

"What I say; I usually do. The grave has been put to rights. At first few people noticed it, because few go into that corner; but one day some imp of a choir boy saw the improvement, and told old Thomas. He came and looked at it, and others came. No one knew who had put it to rights. Then," continued Mrs. Parry impressively, "it was discovered that it was done at night."

"At night?"

"Yes; but no one seems to know by whom or at what time. Every morning some fresh improvement was noted. Some people watched, but saw no one coming. Yet when the watching was dropped there was something fresh done. It may be a brownie," added Mrs. Parry, with a sniff, "but it's a mystery. Even I can't find out the truth."

"It's very strange," said Ware thoughtfully.

"It's worse; it's improper," cried Mrs. Parry in her sternest voice. "I see no reason why such a thing should be done in the darkness of night. Though to be sure," she continued, rubbing her nose, "we have had moonlight lately."

"I must see into this," said Ware, rising.

"You'll find nothing. Everyone has watched, but to no purpose, my friend. Now the idiots talk of ghosts, and what not."

"What do you think yourself?" asked Giles.

"Why, that some one who loved Daisy better than you did has taken pity on her neglected grave, and——"

"Don't!" he cried, wincing. "I did my best to make her happy. The engagement was unfortunate."

"The marriage would have been still more so. It is just as well the poor girl died. No, no, I don't blame you. But Anne——"

"Don't say a word against Anne," he interrupted quickly. Then, before his hostess could reply, he took his leave. "I must be going now."

Mrs. Parry was not at all pleased, but knowing how far she could go, decided that she had reached the limit of his forbearance. With feminine craft she smothered her resentment, and parted from him in the most cordial manner. All the same, she still held to her opinion that Anne was not the wife for her favorite.

Giles went at once to the churchyard to view Daisy's grave. He found everything in good order. The grass was shorn, the flowers were blooming, and the white marble of the stone had been cleansed carefully. Wondering who had performed this labor of love, he returned to get his horse. At the gate of the churchyard a tall man passed him with bent head. As he brushed past the young squire he

raised it suddenly. Giles saw a clean-shaven face, large black eyes, and a sallow complexion. He stood aside to let him pass.

"Rather a nice day," said Ware pleasantly.

"Very," responded the man, and continued his walk.

Giles knew very well that he was the new tenant of the Priory. It was in his mind to speak to him, but on second thoughts he decided to do so on a more propitious occasion. Standing at the gate, he looked thoughtfully after the retiring figure. There was something familiar about it and about the face of the man. His eyes especially aroused a vague recollection in his mind, but he could not, as the saying goes, "put a name to it." But while walking to the inn it suddenly flashed into his brain that this was the man whom he had seen in church on that fatal New Year's Eve.

"It's the clerk," he said breathlessly. "He has shaved his beard. He is Wilson, the man who fled with Anne, who murdered poor Daisy!"

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. BENKER REAPPEARS

The more Giles thought about Franklin, the more he was certain that he was the man for whom search was being made. To be sure there was no distinguishing mark of identification; the evidence that he was one and the same amounted to the facts that he had large black eyes, and that his height and figure resembled the so-called Wilson. Moreover, although other people in the village had seen the clerk, no one but Giles seemed to recognize him. In fact, this recognition was rather due to an instinct than to any tangible reason. But in his own mind he was convinced. He recalled how the man had suddenly removed his scarf as though he were stifling on that night. He remembered the wan face, the dark, anxious face, and the rough red beard and hair.

To be sure Franklin was dark-haired and sallow in complexion; also he was clean-shaved, and even when not—according to Mrs. Parry—had worn a full black beard. But the red hair and whiskers might have been assumed as a disguise. Giles did not know very well how to verify his suspicions. Then he determined to confide in Morley. Steel had told him that the proprietor of The Elms was an ex-detective, and Giles thought that for the sake of avenging Daisy's death he might be induced to take up his old trade. With this idea he called at The Elms.

Morley was delighted to see him and welcomed him in the most cheerful manner. He and Giles were always good friends, and the only subject of contention between them was the question of Anne's guilt. Morley still believed that the governess had committed the crime and asked after her at the outset of the interview.

"Have you found her?" he asked, just as Mrs. Parry had done.

Giles knew quite well of whom he was speaking. "No, I have not," he answered; "and if I had I certainly should not tell you."

"As you please," replied the little man complacently; "you will never see the truth."

"It is not the truth. But see here, Morley, what is the use of our discussing this matter? You believe Miss Denham to be guilty. I am certain that she is innocent. Let the difference between us rest there. Still, if I could prove the innocence of Miss Denham——"

"I should be more than delighted," responded Morley quickly, "and would make all the amends in my power for my unjust suspicions. But you have first to prove them unjust. Believe me, Ware, I admired Miss Denham as much as my wife did, and thought much of her. I defended her from poor Daisy's aspersions, and would have stood her friend all through but for this last act of hers. Well! Well, don't get angry. I am willing to be shown that I am wrong. Show me."

Giles reflected for a moment, then went straight to the point.

"I have been with Steel," he said abruptly, "and he tells me that you have been in the detective line yourself."

Morley nodded. "Quite so," he answered, "although I asked Steel to say nothing about it. I am a private gentleman now, and I don't want my former occupation to be known in Rickwell. A prejudice exists against detectives, Ware. People don't like them, because every one has something to conceal, and with a trained man he or she is afraid lest some secret sin should come to light."

"It may be so, although that is rather a cynical way of looking at the matter. But you are really Joe Bart?"

"Yes. And quite at your service. Only keep this quiet."

"Certainly. I quite appreciate your reasons for wanting the matter kept quiet. But see here, Mr. Morley—I shall call you so."

"It will be better," replied the ex-detective cheerfully, "and I have a sort of right to the name. It was my mother's."

"Very good. Then as Morley why should you not exercise your old skill and help me to find out who killed Daisy?"

"I should be delighted, and what skill remains to me is at your service. But I am rusty now, and cannot follow a trail with my old persistence or talent. Besides, my mind is made up as to the guilt——"

"Yes, yes," interposed Giles hastily, "you think so, but I don't agree with you."

Now listen to what I have to tell you, and I am sure you will think that it was the man who killed Daisy."

"But he had no motive."

"Yes, he had. I'll tell it to you concisely."

Morley looked surprised at Giles' insistence, but nodded without a word and waited for an explanation. Giles related all that he had learned about Wilson, and how Steel had connected him with the supposed clerk who had served the summons on Morley. Then he proceeded to detail Steel's belief that the so-called Wilson was a burglar, and mentioned the fact of the yacht with the strange name. Morley listened in silence, but interrupted the recital with a laugh, when the scarlet cross was mentioned in connection with the robbery at Lady Summersdale's house.

"Steel has found a mare's nest this time," he said coolly. "He knew better than to come to me with such a cock and bull story, although he has imposed very successfully on you and on that Hungarian Princess you talk of. I had the Summersdale case in hand."

"I know. Steel said that you carried it through successfully."

Morley demurred. "I don't know if you can say that I was successful, Ware. It was not one of my lucky cases. I certainly got back the jewels. I found them in their London hiding-place, but I did not catch one of the thieves. They all bolted."

"In *The Red Cross* yacht."

"Oh, that's all rubbish," said Morley frankly; "there were a great many yachts at Bexleigh on that occasion. I don't remember one called *The Red Cross*. And even if one of that name was there, it does not say that it is the same that was off Gravesend the other day."

"Six months ago," corrected Giles gravely; "but how do you account for the fact that wherever that yacht has been burglaries have taken place?"

"I can't account for it, and Steel has yet to prove that there is any connection between the yacht and the robberies. He thinks it a kind of pirate ship evidently. Not a bad idea, though," added Morley musingly; "the goods could be removed easily without suspicion on board a good-looking yacht."

"And that is what has been done."

"It wasn't in the matter of Lady Summersdale's jewels," retorted the ex-detective. "I found those in London, and have reason to believe that they were taken there by train. Besides, there was no connection between the yacht and that robbery."

"Steel said that a scarlet cross was found in the safe, and——"

"And," interrupted Morley, "there you have the long arm of coincidence, Ware. That cross belonged to Lady Summersdale, and was one of the trinkets left behind. If you want proof on this point, you have only to ask Lady——no, I forgot, she is dead. However, I daresay her son or daughter will be able to prove that the cross was hers."

Giles was much disappointed by this explanation, which seemed clear enough. And if any one should know the truth, it would be the man who had taken charge of the case. Failing on this point, Giles shifted his ground.

"Well, Morley," he said, "I am not very anxious to prove this man Wilson a burglar. He is a murderer, I am sure, and the greater crime swallows up the lesser."

"That sounds law," said Morley, lighting a cigar.

"Well, Ware, I don't see how I can help you. This man Wilson, whether he is innocent or guilty, has vanished; and, moreover, his connection, if any, with the Summersdale robbery of ten years ago won't prove him guilty of my poor ward's death."

"I only mentioned that to show his connection with the yacht at Gravesend. But as to this Wilson, I know where he is."

Morley wheeled round with an eager light in his eyes. "The devil you do. Where is he?"

"At the Priory."

"Is this a joke?" cried Morley angrily. "If so, it is a very poor one, Ware. The man who lives at the Priory is my friend Franklin——"

"He is also the man who was in the church on New Year's Eve—the man who killed Daisy, as I truly believe."

Giles went on to state what his reasons were for this belief. All at once Morley started to his feet. "Ah! I know now why something about him seemed to be familiar to me. What a fool I am! I believe you are right, Ware."

"What? That he is this man Wilson?"

"I don't know what his former name was," replied Morley, with a shrug, "but now you mention it I fancy he is the man who served the summons on me."

"You ought to know," said Ware dryly; "you saw him in this room, and in a good light."

"True enough, Ware; but all the time he kept his collar up and that white scarf round his throat. His chin was quite buried in it. And then he had a rough red—wig, shall we say? and a red beard. I didn't trouble to ask him to make himself comfortable. All I wanted was to get him out of the way. But I remember his black eyes. Franklin has eyes like that, and sometimes I catch myself wondering where I have seen him before. He tells me he has lived in Florence these six years and more. I fancied that when I was a detective I might have seen him, but he insisted that he had not been to London for years and years. He originally came from the States. And I was once a detective! Good Lord, how I have lost my old cleverness! But to be sure I have been idle these ten years."

"Then you think Franklin is this man?"

"I think so, but of course I can't be sure. Naturally he will deny that he is, and I can't prove the matter myself. But I tell you what, Ware," said Morley suddenly, "get that woman Wilson lodged with down, and see if she will recognize Franklin as her former lodger. She, if any one, will know him, and perhaps throw him off his guard."

Ware rose. "A very good idea," he said. "I'll write to her at once. I am certain this is the man, especially as he has inherited Daisy's money. He killed her in order to get the fortune, and that was why he kept asking Asher's office boy about money left to people."

"Ah!" Morley looked thoughtful. "So that was the motive, you think?"

"I am sure of it, and a quite strong enough motive for many people," said Ware grimly. "If Mrs. Benker can verify this man, I'll have him arrested. He will have to explain why he came here instead of the office boy, and why he fled on that night."

"Yes, yes!" cried Morley excitedly. "And he might perhaps explain why the governess helped him to escape."

"Ah!" Giles' face fell. "So he might; but if he dares to inculcate her in this crime _____"

"Ware," said Morley, laying his hand on the young man's shoulder, "if I were you I should do nothing rash. Every one thinks that Miss Denham is guilty. If this Franklin is the man who fled with her, he will accuse her to save himself. Certainly there is the motive of the money, but that might be explained away."

"I don't see how it can."

"Nor I; still, there is always the chance. Again, he may take alarm—always presuming he is the man—and fly. I tell you what, Ware, you bring Mrs. Benker down, and take her into the grounds of the Priory. I will arrange that Franklin, without suspecting her or us, shall meet her, accidentally, at some place where we can hide. Then we can overhear if he is the man or not."

"He'll deny that he is."

"Why should he? There is nothing, so far as he knows, that Mrs. Benker can lay hold of. If he is the man he will admit his identity, if not, he will explain who he is. Whereas if we show ourselves and show that we suspect him, he will be on his guard. No, Ware; better let the woman meet him by chance."

"It's a good plan," replied Giles, shaking hands heartily with Morley. "I am delighted that you should co-operate with me. We will yet prove that Anne is innocent."

"I hope so," cried his host, slapping Giles on the back. "Off with you, Ware, to do your part. I'll attend to Franklin. But say no word of our plan to any one. Upon my word," cried he jubilantly, "I feel just as though I were in the profession again." And thus laughing and joking, he sent his visitor away in the best of spirits.

Delighted that he had some one to help him, Giles lost no time in performing his part of the business. He sent a letter to Mrs. Benker, asking her to come down for a couple of days. It was his intention to invite Alexander also, as the boy would also be useful in identifying Franklin as his mother's former lodger; but since leaving Asher's Alexander had been taken up by Steel, who saw in him the makings of a good detective. If Alexander learned anything he would certainly

tell his master, and then Steel would come down to interfere. Ware did not want him to meddle with the matter at present. He wished to be sure of his ground first, and then would ask the assistance of the detective to have Franklin arrested. Of course, he had every confidence in Steel, but for the above reason he determined to keep his present action quiet. Also, Steel was on the south coast, hunting for evidence concerning *The Red Cross* yacht, and would not be pleased at being taken away to follow what might prove to be a false trail. Ware therefore said nothing to Mrs. Benker about what he desired to see her, but simply asked her to come down on a visit.

There was a prospect of his having another visitor, and one he did not much wish to meet. This was the Princess Karacsay. Several times he had called to see her, but she had always put off her promised explanation on some plea or another. Instead of attending strictly to the business which had brought them together, she made herself agreeable to Giles—too agreeable he thought, for he had by this time got it into his head that Olga Karacsay was in love with him. He was not a vain young man, and tried to think that her attentions were merely friendly; but she was so persistent in her invitations and—in the slang phrase—made such running with him, that he grew rather nervous of her attentions. Several times she had proposed to come on a visit to Rickwell, but hitherto he had always managed to put her off. But her letters were becoming very imperative, and he foresaw trouble. It was quite a relief to Giles when the post arrived without a letter from this too persistent and too charming lady. However, she did not trouble him on this especial occasion, and he was thus enabled to give all his time to Mrs. Benker.

That good lady duly arrived, looking more severe than ever and with several new tales about the iniquities of Alexander. She expressed herself greatly obliged to Giles for giving her a day in the country, and got on very well with the old housekeeper. But when Ware told her his reason for asking her, Mrs. Benker grew rather nervous, as she did not think how she could support an interview, and, also, she wanted to know what the interview was for. To some extent Giles had to take her into his confidence, but he suppressed the fact that he suspected Franklin of the crime. He merely stated that Steel—who had introduced Giles to Mrs. Benker—had reason to believe that the so-called Wilson was wanted by the police. All that Mrs. Benker had to do was to see if Franklin was really her former lodger. After much talk and many objections, she consented to do what was wanted.

This was to wander in the park of the Priory and meet Franklin accidentally near

a ruined summer-house, near what was known as the fish-ponds. Morley had arranged that Franklin should meet him there, and was to be late, so as to afford Mrs. Benker an opportunity of speaking to the man. Morley and Ware concealed themselves in the summer-house and saw Mrs. Benker parading the grass. Shortly Franklin arrived, walking slowly, and Mrs. Benker saluted him.



CHAPTER XIV

TREASURE TROVE

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Mrs. Benker to the new-comer, "but I do hope I'm not—— Why"—she changed her tone to one of extreme surprise—"if it ain't Mr. Wilson!"

The man did not move a muscle. Ware, who was watching, was disappointed. At least he expected him to start, but the so-called Wilson was absolutely calm, and his voice did not falter.

"You are making a mistake; my name is Franklin."

"It isn't his voice," muttered the landlady, still staring; "but his eyes are the same."

"May I ask you to go?" said Franklin. "You are trespassing."

Mrs. Benker shook her rusty black bonnet.

"You may change your hair from red to black," she declared, "and you may shave off a ginger beard, but you can't alter your eyes. Mr. Wilson you are, and that I'll swear to in a court of law before a judge and jury. Let them say what they will about me being a liar."

"Of what are you talking, woman?"

"Of you, sir; and I hope I may mention that you were more respectful when you boarded with me."

"Boarded with you!" Franklin stared, and spoke in an astonished tone. "Why, I never boarded with you in my life!"

"Oh, Mr. Wilson, how can you? What about my little house in Lambeth, and the dear boy—my son Alexander—you were so fond of?"

"You are raving."

"I'm as sane as you are," said the landlady, her color rising, "and a deal more

respectable, if all were known. Why you should deny me to my face is more than I can make out, Mr. Wilson."

"My name is not Wilson."

"And I say it is, sir."

Both the man and the woman eyed one another firmly. Then Franklin motioned Mrs. Benker to a seat on a mossy bank.

"We can talk better sitting," said he. "I should like an explanation of this. You say that my name is Wilson, and that I boarded with you."

"At Lambeth. I'll take my oath to it."

"Had your boarder red hair and a red beard?"

"Red as a tomato. But you can buy wigs and false beards. Eyes, as I say, you cannot change."

"Had this Wilson eyes like mine?" asked Frankly eagerly.

"There ain't a scrap of difference, Mr. Wilson. Your eyes are the same now as they were then."

"One moment. Had this man you think me to be two teeth missing in his lower jaw—two front teeth?"

"He had. Not that his teeth were of the best."

Franklin drew down his lip.

"You will see that I have all my teeth."

"H'm!" Mrs. Benker sniffed. "False teeth can be bought."

"I fear you would find these teeth only too genuine," said the man quietly. "But I quite understand your mistake."

"My mistake?" Mrs. Benker shook her head vehemently. "I'm not the one to make mistakes."

"On this occasion you have done so; but the mistake is pardonable. Mrs.—Mrs.—what is your name?"

"Mrs. Benker, sir. And you know it."

"Excuse me, I do not know it. The man who was your lodger, and whom you accuse me of being, is my brother."

"Your brother!" echoed the landlady, amazed.

"Yes, and a bad lot he is. Never did a hand's turn in all his life. I daresay while he was with you he kept the most irregular hours?"

"He did—most irregular."

"Out all night at times, and in all day? And again, out all day and in for the night?"

"You describe him exactly." Mrs. Benker peered into the clean-shaven face in a puzzled manner. "Your hair is black, your voice is changed, and only the eyes remain."

"My brother and I have eyes exactly the same. I guessed your mistake when you spoke. I assure you I am not my brother."

"Well, sir," said the woman, beginning to think she had made a mistake after all, "I will say your voice is not like his. It was low and soft, while yours, if you'll excuse me mentioning it, is hard, and not at all what I'd call a love-voice."

Grim as Franklin was, he could not help laughing at this last remark.

"I quite understand. You only confirm what I say. My brother has a beautiful voice, Mrs. Benker; and much harm he has done with it amongst your sex."

"He never harmed me," said Mrs. Benker, bristling. "I am a respectable woman and a widow with one son. But your brother——"

"He's a blackguard," interrupted Franklin; "hand and glove with the very worst people in London. You may be thankful he did not cut your throat or steal your furniture."

"Lord!" cried Mrs. Benker, astounded, "was he that dangerous?"

"He is so dangerous that he ought to be shut up. And if I could lay hands on him I'd get the police to shut him up. He's done no end of mischief. Now I daresay he had a red cross dangling from his watch-chain."

"Yes, he had. What does it mean?"

"I can't tell you; but I'd give a good deal to know. He has hinted to me that it is the sign of some criminal fraternity with which he is associated. I never could learn what the object of the cross is. He always kept quiet on that subject. But I have not seen him for years, and then only when I was on a flying visit from Italy."

"Have you been to Italy, sir?"

"I live there," said Franklin, "at Florence. I have lived there for over ten years, with an occasional visit to London. If you still think that I am my brother, I can bring witnesses to prove——"

"Lord, sir, I don't want to prove nothing. Now I look at you and hear your voice I do say as I made a mistake as I humbly beg your pardon for. But you are so like Mr. Wilson——"

"I know, and I forgive you. But why do you wish to find my brother? He has been up to some rascality, I suppose?"

"He has, though what it is I know no more than a babe. But they do say," added Mrs. Benker, sinking her voice, "as the police want him."

"I'm not at all astonished. He has placed himself within the reach of the law a hundred times. If the police come to me, I'll tell them what I have told you. No one would be more pleased than I to see Walter laid by the heels."

"Is his name Walter?"

"Yes, Walter Franklin, although he chooses to call himself Wilson. My name is George. He is a blackguard."

"Oh, sir, your flesh and blood."

"He's no brother of mine," said Franklin, rising, with a snarl. "I hate the man. He had traded on his resemblance to me to get money and do all manner of scoundrelly actions. That was why I went to Italy. It seems that I did wisely, for if I could not prove that I have been abroad these ten years, you would swear that I was Walter."

"Oh, no, sir—really." Mrs. Benker rose also.

"Nonsense. You swore that I was Walter when we first met. Take a good look at me now, so that you may be sure that I am not he. I don't want to have his rascalities placed on my shoulders."

Mrs. Benker took a good look and sighed. "You're not him, but you're very like. May I ask if you are twins, sir?"

"No. Our eyes are the only things that we have in common. We got those from our mother, who was an Italian. I take after my mother, and am black, as you see me. My brother favored my father, who was as red as an autumn sunset."

"He was indeed red," sighed Mrs. Benker, wrapping her shawl round her; "and now, sir, I hope you'll humbly forgive me for——"

"That's all right, Mrs. Benker. I only explained myself at length because I am so sick of having my brother's sins imputed on me. I hope he paid your rent."

"Oh, yes, sir, he did that regularly."

"Indeed," sneered Franklin; "then he is more honest than I gave him credit for being. Because if he had not paid you I should have done so. You seem to be a decent woman and——"

"A widow!" murmured Mrs. Benker, hoping that he would give her some money. But this Mr. Franklin had no intention of doing.

"You can go now," he said, pointing with his stick towards an ornamental bridge; "that is the best way to the high-road. And, Mrs. Benker, if my brother should return to you let me know."

"And the police, sir," she faltered.

"I'll tell the police myself," said the man, frowning. "Good day."

Mrs. Benker, rather disappointed that she should have received no money, and wishing that she had said Walter Franklin had not paid her rent, crept off, a lugubrious figure, across the bridge. Franklin watched her till she was out of sight, then took off his hat, exposing a high, baldish head. His face was dark, and he began to mutter to himself. Finally, he spoke articulately.

"Am I never to be rid of that scamp?" he said, shaking his fist at the sky. "I have lived in Italy—in exile, so that I should not be troubled with his schemes and rascalities. I have buried myself here, with my daughter and those three who are

faithful to me, in order that he may not find me out. And now I hear of him. That woman. She is a spy of his. I believe she came here from him with a made-up story. Walter will come, and then I'll have to buy him off. I shall be glad to do so. But to be blackmailed by that reptile. No! I'll go back to Florence first." He replaced his hat and began to dig his stick in the ground. "I wonder if Morley would help me. He is a shrewd man. He might advise me how to deal with this wretched brother of mine. If I could only trust him?" He looked round. "I wonder where he is? He promised to meet me half an hour ago." Here Franklin glanced at his watch. "I'll walk over to The Elms and ask who this woman, Mrs. Benker, is. He may know."

All this was delivered audibly and at intervals. Giles was not astonished, as he knew from Mrs. Parry that the man was in the habit of talking aloud to himself. But he was disappointed to receive such a clear proof that Franklin was not the man who had eloped with Anne. Even if he had been deceiving Mrs. Benker (which was not to be thought of), he would scarcely have spoken in soliloquy as he did if he had not been the man he asserted himself to be. Giles, saying nothing to his companion, watched Franklin in silence until he was out of sight, and then rose to stretch his long legs, Morley, with a groan, followed his example. It was he who spoke first.

"I am half dead with the cramp," said he, rubbing his stout leg, "just like old times when I hid in a cupboard at Mother Meddlers, to hear Black Bill give himself away over a burglary. Ay, and I nearly sneezed that time, which would have cost me my life. I have been safe enough in that summer-house—but the cramp—owch!"

"It seems I have been mistaken," was all Giles could say.

"So have I, so was Mrs. Benker. We are all in the same box. The man is evidently very like his scamp of a brother."

"No doubt, Morley. But he isn't the brother himself."

"More's the pity, for Franklin's sake as well as our own. He seems to hate his brother fairly and would be willing to give him up to the law—if he's done anything."

"Well," said Ware, beginning to walk, "this Walter Franklin—to give him his real name—has committed murder. I am more convinced than ever that he is the guilty person. But I don't see what he has to do with Anne. Her father is certainly

dead—died at Florence. Ha! Morley. Franklin comes from Florence. He may know—he may have heard."

Morley nodded. "You're quite right, Ware. I'll ask him about the matter. Humph!" The ex-detective stopped for a moment. "This involuntary confession clears George Franklin."

"Yes. He is innocent enough."

"Well, but he inherited the money," said Morley. "It's queer that his brother, according to you, should have killed the girl who kept the fortune from him."

"It is strange. But it might be that Walter Franklin intended to play the part of his brother and get the money, counting on the resemblance between them."

"That's true enough. Yet if George were in Italy and within hail, so to speak, I don't see how that would have done. Why not come to The Elms with me and speak to Franklin yourself? He will be waiting for me there."

"No," answered Ware after some thought, "he evidently intends to trust you, and if I come he may hold his tongue. You draw him out, Morley, and then you can tell me. Mrs. Benker——"

"I'll say nothing about her. I am not supposed to know that she is a visitor to Rickwell. He'll suspect our game if I chatter about her, Ware. We must be cautious. This is a difficult skein to unravel."

"It is that," assented Giles dolefully, "and we're no further on with it than we were before."

"Nonsense, man. We have found out Wilson's real name."

"Well, that is something certainly, and his brother may be able to put us on his track. If he asks about Mrs. Benker, say that she is a friend of my housekeeper. You can say you heard it from your wife."

"I'll say no more than is necessary," replied Morley cunningly. "I learned in my detective days to keep a shut mouth. Well, I'll be off and see what I can get out of him."

When Morley departed at his fast little trot—he got over the ground quickly for so small a man—Giles wandered about the Priory park. He thought that he might meet with the daughter, and see what kind of a person she was. If weak in the

head, as Mrs. Parry declared her to be, she might chatter about her Uncle Walter. Giles wished to find out all he could about that scamp. He was beginning to feel afraid for Anne, and to wonder in what way she was connected with such a blackguard.

However, he saw nothing and turned his face homeward. Just as he was leaving the park on the side near the cemetery he saw something glittering in the grass. This he picked up, and was so amazed that he could only stare at it dumb-founded. And his astonishment was little to be wondered at. He held in his hand a half-sovereign with an amethyst, a diamond, and a pearl set into the gold. It was the very ornament which he had given Anne Denham on the night of the children's party at The Elms—the coin of His Most Gracious Majesty King Edward VII.



CHAPTER XV

AN AWKWARD INTERVIEW

The discovery of the coin perplexed Giles. It was certainly the trinket attached to the bangle which he had given Anne. And here he found it in the grounds of the Priory. This would argue that she was in the neighborhood, in the house it might be. She had never been to the Priory when living at The Elms, certainly not after the New Year, when she first became possessed of the coin. He decided, therefore, that at some late period—within the last few days—she had been in the park, and there had lost the coin. It would, indeed, be strange if this trifling present which he had made her should be the means of tracing her to her hiding-place.

And that hiding-place was the Priory. Giles felt sure of this. If she was in the neighborhood and walking about openly, she would be discovered and arrested. Therefore she must be concealed in the house. She had gone off with Walter Franklin, and here she was under the wing of his brother George. The case grew more mysterious and perplexing as time went on. Giles did not know which way to turn, or what advantage to reap from this discovery.

Certainly, if he could get into the Priory and search the house, he might discover Anne. Or, it might be, that if he confided in Franklin and told him of his love for Anne, the man might tell the truth and let him have an interview. But the matter took some thinking out. He decided to let it remain in abeyance at present. After kissing the coin—had it not been Anne's?—he slipped it into his waistcoat-pocket and returned home.

Here a surprise, and not a very agreeable one, awaited him. He reached his house just in time to dress for dinner, and found a letter, which had been delivered by hand. It was from Olga Karacsay, and announced that she and her mother were stopping at the village inn. She asked Giles to come over that evening, as she wished to introduce him to the elder Princess. Ware was vexed that this inopportune visit should have taken place at the moment. He did not wish to be introduced to Olga's mother, and had more to do than to chatter French to a foreign lady. However, being naturally a most polite young gentleman, he could not refuse the request, and after dinner proceeded to the village.

Morris, the landlord of "The Merry Dancer"—which was the name of the inn—was a burly man, and usually extremely self-important. On this night he excelled himself, and looked as swollen as the frog in the fable. That two Princesses should stay in his house was an honor which overwhelmed him. To be sure, they were foreigners, which made a difference; still, they had titles, and plenty of money, and for all Morris knew—as he observed to his flustered wife—might be exiled sovereigns. Morris received Giles in his best clothes, and bowed himself to the ground.

"Yes, Mr. Ware, their Highnesses are within—on the first floor, Mr. Ware, having engaged a salon and two bedrooms."

"I didn't know you had a salon, Morris!" said Giles, his eyes twinkling.

"For the time being I call it such," replied the landlord grandly. "My daughter is a French scholar, Mr. Ware, and called the sitting-room by that name. Me and Mrs. Morris and Henrietta Morris wish to make their Highnesses feel at home. Allow me to conduct you, sir, to the salon of their Highnesses. The garkong is engaged with the dejune, along with the femmie de chambers, who also waits."

"You are quite a French scholar, Morris."

"Henrietta Morris, my daughter—or I should say, mon filly—has instructed me in the languidge, sir. This way to the salon, sir," and Morris marshalled the way with the air of a courtier of Louis XIV.

Giles entered the sitting-room, which was pretty and quaint but extremely unpretentious, bubbling over with laughter.

Olga came forward, and catching sight of his face, laughed also as she shook hands with him.

"I see you know the jest," she said.

"Morris informed me of it as soon as I entered his door. Why have you come down to this dull place, Princess?"

"Ah, no"—she made a pretty gesture of annoyance—"you must to-night call me Olga——"

"I should not think of taking such a liberty," said Giles quickly.

Olga pouted. "Then, Mademoiselle Olga," said she, "my mother you must call

the Princess Karacsay. Will you allow me, Mr. Ware, to present you to my mother?"

She led the young man forward, and he found himself bowing to a stout lady, who at one time must have been beautiful, but in whom age had destroyed a great amount of her good looks. She was darker than her daughter, and had a languid, indolent air, which seemed to account for her stoutness. Evidently she never took exercise. Her face was still beautiful, and she had the most glorious pair of dark eyes. Her hair was silvery, and contrasted strangely with her swart face. One would have thought that she had African blood in her. She wore a yellow dress trimmed with black lace, and many jewels twinkled on her neck and arms and in her hair. Her tastes, like her appearance, were evidently barbaric. In this cold, misty island she looked like some gorgeous tropical bird astray.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Ware," she said in soft, languid tones, yet with a kind of rough burr; "my daughter has often talked of you." Her English was very good, and there was little trace of a foreign accent. Yet the occasional lisp and the frequent roughness added a piquancy to her tones. Even at her age—and she was considerably over fifty—she was undeniably a fascinating woman: in her youth she must have been a goddess both for looks and charm. Olga was regal and charming, but her mother excelled her. Giles found himself becoming quite enchanted with this Cleopatra of the West.

"You have been long in England, Princess?" he asked.

"But a week. I came to see Olga. She would have me come, although I dislike travelling. But I am fond of Olga."

"It is more than my father is," said Olga, with a shrug; "he would not come. I suppose he thinks that I have disgraced him."

"My dear child," reproved her mother, "you know what your father's opinion is about this wild life you lead."

"A very hard-working life," retorted her daughter; "singing is not easy. For the rest, I assure you I am respectable."

"It is not the life for a Karacsay, my dear. If you would only come back to Vienna and marry the man your father——"

"I choose for myself when I marry," flashed out Olga, with a glance at the

uncomfortable Giles. "Count Taroc can take another wife."

The Princess, seeing that Giles found this conversation somewhat trying, refrained from further remark. She shrugged her ample shoulders, and sipped her coffee, which she complained was bad. "You do not know how to make coffee here," she said, unfurling a fan, "and it is cold, this England of yours."

"Princess, to-night is warm!" expostulated Ware.

"Nevertheless I have had a fire made up," she answered, pointing with her fan to the end of the room; "the landlord was so surprised."

"He no doubt considered it to be an eccentricity of Her Highness," said Olga, with a laugh; "a cigarette, mother?"

The Princess took one languidly, and moved her chair closer to the fire. The night—to Giles—was quite hot, and he could scarcely bear the stifling heat of the room. Windows and doors were closed, and the fire flamed up fiercely. Also some pastiles had been burnt by Olga, and added a heavy, sensuous scent to the atmosphere. Ware could not help comparing the room to the Venusberg, and the women to the sirens of that unholy haunt. Which of the two was Venus he did not take upon himself to decide.

"I am used to the tropics," explained the Princess, puffing blue clouds of smoke. "I come from Jamaica; but I have been many years in Vienna, and in that cold Hungary," she shivered.

"Ah, now I see, Princess, why you speak English so well," said Giles, and he might also have added that he now guessed why she was so Eastern in appearance and so barbaric in her taste for crude, vivid colors. She had negro blood in her veins he decided, and Olga also. This would account for the fierce temperament of the latter.

"I left Jamaica when I was twenty-two," explained the Princess, while her daughter frowned. For some reason Olga did not seem to approve of these confidences. "Prince Karacsay was travelling there. He came to my father's plantation, and there he married me. I am sorry I did not marry someone in Jamaica," she finished lazily.

"My dear mother," broke in her daughter petulantly, "you have always been happy in Vienna and at the Castle."

"At the castle, yes. It was so quiet there. But Vienna, ach! It is too gay, too troublesome."

"You don't like noise and excitement, Princess?"

She shook her imperial head with the gesture of an angry queen.

"I like nothing but rest. To be in a hammock with a cigarette and to hear the wind bend the palms, the surf break on the shores. It is my heaven. But in Hungary—no palms, no surf. Ach!" She made a face.

"You are different to Mademoiselle Olga here," said Ware, smiling.

"Quite different," cried Olga, with a gay laugh. "But I am like my father. He is a bold hunter and rider. Ah, if I had only been born a man! I love the saddle and the gun. No wonder I got away from the dull Society life of Vienna, where women are slaves."

"I like being a slave, if rest is slavery," murmured her mother.

"Would not your father let you ride and shoot, Mademoiselle Olga?"

"Ah yes, in a measure. But he is an Austrian of the old school. He does not believe in a woman being independent. My mother, who is obedient and good, is the wife he loves."

"The Prince has been very kind to me. He does not trouble me."

"He wouldn't let the air blow too roughly on you, mother," said Olga, with a scornful laugh. "He is a descendant of those Magyars who had Circassian slaves, and adores them as playthings. I am different."

"You are terribly *farouche*, Olga," sighed the elder woman. "Your father has forgiven you, but he is still annoyed. I had the greatest difficulty in getting his permission to come over here."

"He doubtless thinks you will be able to bring me back to marry Count Taroc," replied Olga composedly, "but I stay." She looked at Giles again, as if he were the reason she thus decided. To change the conversation he stood up.

"I fear I fatigue you ladies," he said, looking very straight and handsome. "You will wish to retire."

"Certainly I retire," said the Princess. "But my daughter——"

"I shall stop and talk with Mr. Ware."

"Olga!" murmured her mother, rather shocked.

"I fear I have to go," said Giles uneasily.

"No. You must stop. I have to talk to you about Anne."

"Who is this Anne?" asked the Princess, rising lazily.

"No one you know, mother. A friend of Mr. Ware's. Now you must retire, and Katinka shall make you comfortable."

"You will not be long, Olga? If your father knew—"

"My father will not know," broke in her daughter, leading the elder woman to the door. "You will not tell him. Besides," (she shrugged), "we women are free in England. What would shock my father is good form in this delightful country."

The Princess murmured something to Giles in a sleepy tone, and lounged out of the room bulky but graceful. When she departed and the door was closed, Olga threw open the windows. "Pah!" she said, throwing the pastiles out of doors, "I cannot breathe in this atmosphere. And you, Mr. Ware?"

"I prefer untainted airs," he replied, accepting a cigarette.

"The airs of the moors and of the mountains," she exclaimed, drawing herself up and looking like a huntress in her free grace. "I also. I love wide spaces and chill winds. If we were in the Carpathians, you and I, how savage our life would be!"

"An alluring picture, Princess."

"I am not Princess at present. I am Olga!"

"Mademoiselle Olga," he corrected. "And what about Anne?"

She appeared annoyed by his persistence. "You think of nothing but that woman," she cried impetuously.

"Your friend, mademoiselle."

"Ach! How stiffly you stay that! My friend! Oh, yes. I would do much for Anne, but why should I do all?"

"I do not understand, mademoiselle."

With a strong effort she composed herself, and looked at him smiling. "Is it so very difficult to understand?" she asked softly.

"Very difficult," replied Ware stolidly.

"None so blind as those who won't see," muttered Olga savagely.

"Quite so, mademoiselle." He rose to go. "Will you permit me to retire?"

"No! I have much to say to you. Please sit down."

"If you will talk about Anne," he replied, still standing. "From what you said at our first interview, she evidently knows something of the Scarlet Cross, and _____"

"I don't know what she does know. She was always careful."

"I thought she spoke freely to you."

"Oh, as a woman always does speak to one of her own sex. With reservations, Mr. Ware. Still, I could tell you something likely to throw some light on the mystery."

"If you only would."

"It would not lead you to her hiding-place."

"What if I knew it already, mademoiselle?"

She stood before him, her hands clenched, her breathing coming and going in quick, short gasps. "You can't know that."

"But *you* do," he said suddenly.

"I may, or I may not," she replied quickly; "and if you know, why not seek her out?"

"I intend to try."

"To try! Then you are not sure where she is?" said Olga eagerly.

"Before I answer that, mademoiselle, I must know if you are my friend or Anne's —enemy," and he looked at her straightly.

"You have put the matter—the position in the right way. I am your friend and Anne's—no, I am not her enemy. But I won't give her to you. No, I won't. You must guess that I——"

"Mademoiselle," he interrupted quickly, "spare yourself and me unnecessary humiliation. You know that I love Anne, that I love no one but her. I would give my life to find her to prove her innocence."

"Even your life will not bring her to you or save her from the law. Giles"—she held out her arms—"I love you."

"The heat of the room is too much for you. I will go."

"No!" She flung herself between him and the door. "Since I have said so much, I must say all. Listen! I have been making inquiries. I know more about the Scarlet Cross and Anne's connection with it than you think. Her fate is in my hands. I can prove her innocence."

"And you will—you will!"

"On condition that you give her up."

"I refuse to give her up," he cried angrily.

"Then she will be punished for a crime she did not commit."

"You know that she is innocent."

"I can prove it, and I shall do so. You know my price."

"Olga, do not speak like this. I would do much to save Anne——"

"And you refuse to save her," she replied scornfully.

"I refuse to give her up!"

"Then I shall do so—to the police. I know where she is."

"You do—that is why you are down here."

"I did not come here for that, but to see you. To make my terms. I love you, and if you will give her up, I shall save her——"

"I can save her in spite of you," said Giles, walking hastily in the door. "Your presence here confirms a fancy that I had. I can guess where Anne is, and I'll save her."

"You will bring her to the light of day and she will be arrested. I alone can save her."

"You will. Oh, Olga, be your better self, and——"

"You know my price," she said between her teeth.

"I can't pay it—I can't."

"Then you must be content to see her ruined."

"You are a devil!"

"And you are most polite. No; I am a woman who loves you, and who is determined to have you at any cost."

"Can you really save Anne?"

"I can."

"Will you give me time to think?"

A flash of joy crossed her face. "Then I am not so indifferent to you as you would have me suppose," she said softly.

"You are not so—no, no! I can't say it! Give me time! give me time!" He opened

the door.

"Wait, wait!" she said, and closed it again. "I will give you two days. Then I return to London. If I have your promise, Anne shall be set free from this accusation. If you tamper in the meantime with her—for you may know where she is—I'll have her arrested at once."

"I will do nothing," he said in muffled tones.

"Swear! swear!" She placed her hands on his shoulders.

Giles stepped back to free himself. "I will swear nothing," he said in icy tones. "I take my two days." So saying he opened the door, but not quickly enough to prevent her kissing him.

"You are mine! you are mine!" she exclaimed exultingly. "Let Anne have her liberty, her good name. I have you. You are mine!—mine!"

"On conditions," said Giles cruelly, and went away quickly.



CHAPTER XVI

THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS

Giles left "The Merry Dancer" quite determined to deceive Olga if it were possible. No faith should be kept with such a woman. She had power, and she was using it unscrupulously for selfish ends. Moreover, come what might, Giles could not bring himself to make her his wife. He loved Anne too deeply for that. And then he began to ask himself if he were not selfish also, seeing that he would not lose his own gratification to save the woman he loved. Nevertheless, he could not contemplate giving up Anne with equanimity, and set his wits to work in order to circumvent the treacherous Olga.

In the first place he now felt certain that Anne was in the neighborhood, and, as he shrewdly suspected, in the Priory. The discovery of the coin and the presence of Olga in the village made him certain on this point. In some way or another she had got to know of Anne's whereabouts, and had come here to make capital of her knowledge. If he consented to surrender Anne and make Olga his wife, she would probably assist Anne to escape, or else, as she asserted, clear her of complicity in the crime.

On the other hand, should he refuse, she would then tell the police where the unfortunate governess was to be found. It might be that Anne could save herself. But seeing that she had fled immediately after the murder, it would be difficult for her to exonerate herself. Also, the reason she had then to take the guilt upon her own shoulders might again stand in the way of her now clearing her character. Nothing was left but to marry Olga and so free Anne, or seek Anne himself. Ware determined to adopt the latter course as the least repugnant to his feelings.

But Olga was no mean antagonist. She loved Giles so much that she knew perfectly well that he did not love her, and this knowledge taught her to mistrust him. As her passion was so great she was content to take him as a reluctant husband, in the belief that she, as his wife, would in time wean him from his earlier love. But she was well aware that, even to save Anne, he would not give in without a struggle.

This being the case, she considered what he would do. It struck her that he would see if he could get into the Priory, for from some words he had let fall she was convinced that he thought Anne was concealed therein. Olga had her own opinion about that; but she had to do with his actions at present and not with her own thoughts. For this reason she determined to watch him—to be in his company throughout the time of probation.

Thus it happened that before Giles could arrange his plans the next day—one of which entailed a neighborly visit to Franklin—Olga made her appearance at his house, and expressed a desire to see his picture gallery, of which she had heard much. Her mother, she said, was coming over that afternoon to look at the house, which, as she had been told, was a model of what an English country-house should be.

Giles growled at this speech, being clever enough to see through the artifices of Mademoiselle Olga.

"The house is as old as the Tudors," he expostulated; "your mother should look at a more modern one."

"Oh, no," replied Olga sweetly. "I am sure she will be delighted with this one; it is so picturesque."

"I am afraid that I promised to pay a visit this afternoon."

"Ah, you must put it off, Mr. Ware. When two ladies come to see you, you really cannot leave them alone."

"If the next day will do——"

"I don't think it will. My mother and I leave the next day. She is due in town to a reception at the Austrian Embassy."

Ware made other excuses, but Olga would listen to none of them. She stopped all the morning and looked at the pictures, but she never referred to their conversation of the previous night. There was a tacit understanding between them that it should remain in abeyance until the time given for the reply of Giles was ended. Still, Ware could not forget that burning kiss, and was awkward in consequence.

Not so Olga. She was quite cool and self-possessed, and although alone with him for close on two hours, did not show the least confusion. Giles, much disgusted,

called her in his own mind "unmaidenly." But she was not that, for she behaved very discreetly. She was simply a woman deeply in love who was bent on gaining her ends. Considering the depth of her passion, she restrained herself very creditably when with the man she loved. Giles now saw how it was that she had defied her family and had taken her own way in life.

"I won't stop to luncheon," she said, when he asked her; "but I and my mother will come over at three o'clock." It was now close on two. "I am sure we shall have a pleasant afternoon."

Giles tried to smile, and succeeded very well, considering what his feelings were at the moment. If he could only have behaved brutally, he would have refused the honor of the proposed visit, but it is difficult to be rude to a charming woman bent upon having her own way. Ware kicked as a man will, but ended in accepting the inevitable.

Olga returned to the inn, and found the Princess seated on the sofa fanning herself violently. Mrs. Morris was in the room, fluttering nervously as she laid the cloth for luncheon. Olga looked at her mother. "Did you take your walk?" she asked.

The Princess nodded. "I am very warm," she said.

"What do you think now?" asked her daughter impatiently.

"I think that you are a very clever woman, Olga," replied the Princess; "but I am too hungry to talk just now. When I have eaten and am rested we can speak."

"But just one word. Am I right?"

"Perfectly right."

This conversation was conducted in French, and Mrs. Morris could make nothing of it. Even if she had known the sense she would not have understood what it meant. However, Olga and her mother reverted to English for the benefit of the landlady, and chatted about their proposed visit to Ware's mansion. After that came luncheon. Shortly after three mother and daughter were with Giles. He received them with composure, although he felt quite otherwise than composed. The Princess pronounced him a charming young man.

"And what a delightful place you have here!" she said, looking at the quaint Tudor house, with its grey walls and mullion windows. "It is like a fairy palace."

The Castle"—she meant her husband's residence in Styria—"is cruel-looking and wild."

"It was built in the Middle Ages," said Olga. "I don't think any one was particularly amiable then."

"I would rather have stayed in Jamaica," sighed the Princess. "Why did I ever leave it?"

Olga, who always appeared annoyed when her mother reverted to her early life, touched the elder woman's elbow. The Princess sighed again, and held her peace. She had a fine temper of her own, but always felt that it was an effort to use it. She therefore usually gave in to Olga. "It saved trouble," she explained.

But her good temper did not last all the afternoon, and ended in disarranging Olga's plans. After a hearty afternoon tea on the lawn the Princess said that she did not feel well, and wished to go home. Olga demurred, but Giles, seeing the chance of escape, agreed that the Princess really was unwell, and proposed to send them back to the inn in his carriage. Princess Karacsay jumped at the offer.

"It will save me walking," she declared fretfully, "and I have done so much this morning."

"Where did you go?" asked Giles, wondering that so indolent a woman should exert herself on such a hot day.

"To some woods round a place they call the Priory."

"To the Priory!" he exclaimed, astonished. "Do you know Mr. Franklin?"

"My mother said the woods round the Priory," explained Olga, with an annoyed glance at the elder lady. "She did not enter."

"No," said the Princess, "I did not enter; I do not know the man. Oh, my dear Olga, do come back. I don't feel at all well."

"I will order the carriage," said Giles, rising.

"And you will come back with us?"

"Really, you must excuse me, Mademoiselle Olga," he answered; "but even a country squire has his work to do."

And with that he hurried away. In half an hour he had the satisfaction of seeing

the carriage roll down his avenue with a very disappointed young lady frowning at the broad back of the coachman. Then he set about seeing what he could do to circumvent her.

It was too late to call on Franklin, as it was nearly six o'clock. Still, Ware thought he would reconnoitre in the woods. It was strange that the elder Princess should have been there this morning, and he wondered if she also knew of Anne's whereabouts. But this he decided was impossible. She had only been a few days in England, and she would not likely know anything about the governess. Still, it was odd that she should have taken a walk in that particular direction, or that she should have walked at all. Here was another mystery added to the one which already perplexed him so greatly.

However, time was too precious to be wasted in soliloquizing, so he went off post-haste towards the woods round the Priory. Since he wished to avoid observation, he chose by-paths, and took a rather circuitous route. It was nearly seven when he found himself in the forest. The summer evenings were then at their longest, and under the great trees there was a soft, brooding twilight full of peace and pleasant woodland sounds. Had he gone straight forward, he would have come on the great house itself, centred in that fairy forest. But this was the last thing he wished to do. He was not yet prepared to see Franklin. He looked here and there to see if any human being was about, but unsuccessfully. Then he took his way to the spot where he had found the coin of Edward VII. To his surprise he saw a girl stooping and searching. At once he decided that she was looking for the lost coin. But the girl was not Anne.

Looking up suddenly she surveyed him with a startled air, and he saw her face plainly in the quiet evening light. She had reddish hair, a freckled face, and was dressed—as Mrs. Parry had said—in all the colors of the rainbow. Giles guessed at once who she was, and bowed.

"Good evening, Miss Franklin," he said, lifting his hat, "you seem to be looking for something. Can I assist you?"

The damsel looked at him sternly and scowled. "You're trespassing," she said in rather a gruff voice.

"I fear that I am," he answered, laughing; "but you'll forgive me if I assist you in your search, won't you?"

"Who are you?" questioned Miss Franklin, quite unmoved by this politeness. "I

never saw you before."

"I have just returned from London. My name is Ware."

"Ware!" echoed the girl eagerly. "Giles Ware?"

"Yes. Do you know my name?"

She took a good look at him, and seemed—he was vain enough to think so—rather to soften towards him. "I have heard Mrs. Morley speak of you," she declared bluntly.

"Ah! You have not heard a lady speak of me?"

Miss Franklin stared. "No, I never heard a lady talk of you," she replied, with a giggle. "What lady?"

"The lady who is stopping in your house."

Her eyes became hard, and she assumed a stony expression. "There is no lady in the house but myself."

"Not a lady who lost what you are looking for?"

This time she was thrown off her guard, and became as red as her hair. She tried to carry off her confusion with rudeness. "I don't know what you're talking of," she said, with a stamp and a frown! "you can just clear away off our land, or I'll set the dogs on you."

"I see. You keep dogs, do you? Bloodhounds probably?"

"How do you know that?" asked Miss Franklin, staring. "Yes, we do keep bloodhounds, and they will tear you to pieces if you don't go."

"You seem to forget that this is a civilized country," said Giles quietly. "If you set your dogs on me, I shall set the police on you."

"The police!" She seemed startled, but recovered herself. "I don't care for the police," she declared defiantly.

"You might not, but Walter Franklin might."

"Who is he? Never heard of him."

"Never heard of your uncle?" said Giles, and then wondered how he could let her

know that he had heard it without confessing to the eavesdropping. It suddenly occurred to him that Franklin had—he supposed—on the previous day made a confidant of Morley. This supposition he took advantage of. "Mr. Morley told me that your father had mentioned his brother."

The girl started and thought for a moment. "Oh, you mean Uncle Walter," she said, after a pause. "Yes, but we never talk of him."

This little speech did not ring quite true. It seemed as though the girl wished to back up the saying of her father, whether she believed it or not. "Is that why you pretended ignorance?" he asked.

"That was why," replied Miss Franklin, with brazen assurance.

She was lying. Giles felt certain of that, but he could not bring the untruth home to her. He suddenly reverted to the main object of his interview, which had to do with the possibility of Anne being in the Priory.

"What about that coin you are looking for?"

"I am looking for no coin," she replied, quite prepared for him. "I lost a brooch here. Have you found it?"

"Yes," replied Giles, his eyes watchfully on her face. "It is an Edward VII. coin in the form of a brooch."

He thought Miss Franklin would contradict this, but she was perfectly equal to the occasion. "You must have found it, since you know it so well. Please give it to me."

"I have left it at home," he answered, although it was lying in his pocket-book, and that next his heart. "I will give it to you to-morrow if you tell me from whom you got it."

"I found it," she confessed, "in the churchyard."

"Ah!" A sudden light flashed into the darkness of Ware's mind. "By the grave of that poor girl who was murdered?"

"I don't know of any murdered girl," retorted Miss Franklin, and looked uneasy, as though she were conscious of making a mistake.

"Yes you do, and you know the lady who cleans the stone and attends to the

grave. Don't deny the truth."

Miss Franklin looked him up and down, and shrugged her clumsy shoulders. "I don't know what you are talking about," she declared, and with that turned on her heel. "Since you will not take yourself off like a gentleman, I'll go myself"; and she went.

"Don't set the bloodhounds on me," called out Giles. But she never turned her head; simply went on with a steady step until she was lost in the gloom of the wood.

Giles waited for a time. He had an idea that she was watching. By-and-by the feeling wore off, and knowing by this time that he was quite alone, he also departed.

He was beginning to doubt Franklin, for this girl had evidently something to conceal. He was sure that Anne was being sheltered in the house, and that it was Anne who cleaned the gravestone. Perhaps George Franklin was giving her shelter since she had helped his rascal of a brother to escape. Thus thinking, he went through the wood with the intention of going home. A glance at his watch told him it was after eight.

Suddenly it occurred to him that it would be a good time to pay a visit to the graveyard and see if anything new had been done to the grave. All the people were within doors at this hour, and the churchyard would be quiet. Having made up his mind, he walked in the direction of the church and vaulted the low wall that divided that graveyard from the park. He saw Daisy's grave. Bending over it a woman. She looked up with a startled cry. It was Anne Denham.



CHAPTER XVII

PART OF THE TRUTH

For a moment the lovers stared at one another in the luminous twilight. The meeting was so strange, the place where it took place so significant of the trouble that had parted them, that both were overcome with emotion. Anne was as white as the marble tombstone, and looked at him with appealing eyes that beseeched him to go away. But having found her Giles was determined not to lose her again, and was the first to find his tongue.

"Anne!" said he, and stepped towards her with open arms.

His voice broke the spell which held her chained to the ill-omened spot, and she turned to fly, only to find herself on his breast and his dear voice sounding entreatingly in her ears.

"Anne," he said in a hoarse whisper, "you will not leave me now?"

After a brief struggle she surrendered herself. There was no danger of any one coming to the churchyard at this hour, and since they had met so unexpectedly, she—like the tender, sweet woman she was—snatched at the blissful moment. "Giles," she murmured, and it was the first time he had heard her lips frame his name. "Giles!"

Again there was a silence between them, but one of pure joy and transcendental happiness. Come what might, nothing could banish the memory of that moment. They were heart to heart and each knew that the other loved. There was no need of words. Giles felt that here was the one woman for him; and Anne nestled in those beloved arms like a wild bird sheltering from storm.

But the storm which buffeted her wings would tear her from this refuge. The passionate delight of that second of Eden passed like a shadow on the sun dial. From heaven they dropped to earth, and parted once more by a hand-breath, stared with haggard looks at one another. The revulsion was so great that Anne could have wept; but her sorrow was so deep that her eyes were dry. For the gift of the world she could not have wept at that hour.

But she no longer felt an inclination to fly. When she saw how worn and thin her lover looked, she knew that he had been suffering as much as she had, and a full tide of love swelled to her heart. She also had lost much of her beauty, but she never thought of that. All she desired was to comfort the man that loved her. She felt that an explanation was due to him, and this she determined to give as far as she could without incriminating others.

Taking his hand in her own, she led him some little distance from the grave of Daisy; and they seated themselves on a flat stone in the shadow of the church, and a stone's throw from the park wall. Here they could converse without being seen, and if any one came they could hear the footsteps on the gravelled path, and so be warned. And throughout that short interview Anne listened with strained attention for the coming step. At the outset Giles noted her expectant look and put his arm round her.

"Dearest, do not fear," he said softly. "No one will come; and if any one does I can save you."

"No," she replied, turning her weary eyes on him. "I am under a ban. I am a fugitive from the law. You cannot save me from that."

"But you are innocent," he said vehemently.

"Do you believe that I am, Giles?"

"Do I believe it? Why should you ask me such a question? If you only knew, Anne, I have never doubted you from the first. Never! never!"

"I do know it," she said, throwing her arms round his neck. "I have known all along how you believed in my innocence. Oh, Giles, my darling Giles, how shall I be able to thank you for this trust?"

"You can, Anne, by becoming my wife."

"Would you marry me with this accusation hanging over me?"

"I would make you my wife at this moment. I would stand beside you in the dock holding your hand. What does it matter to me if all the foolish world think you guilty? I know in my own heart that you are an innocent woman."

"Oh, Giles, Giles!" Then her tears burst forth. She could weep now, and felt the better for that moment of joyful relief. He waited till she grew more composed,

and then began to talk of the future.

"This can't go on for ever, Anne," said he decisively; "you must proclaim your innocence."

"I can't," she answered, with hanging head.

"I understand. You wish to protect this man. Oh, do not look so surprised. I mean with the man you fled with—the man Wilson."

"I don't know any one called Wilson."

"Anne!"—he looked at her keenly—"I implore you to tell me the truth. Who is this man you fled with to Gravesend—with whom you went on board the yacht?"

"Is that known?" she asked in a terrified whisper.

"Yes. A great deal is known."

"Portia never told me that," she murmured to herself.

"Who is Portia?"

"She lives at the Priory, and——"

"I see. She is the red-haired, freckle-faced girl—the daughter of Mr. Franklin. Morley told me that. Portia! What a stately name for that dreadful young person!"

"But indeed, Giles, she is a good girl, and has been a kind friend to me," explained Anne eagerly. "She told me all about you, and how you believed in my innocence."

"Ah!" exclaimed Giles, "then that was why she seemed so pleased to hear my name. I met her in the park just now, Anne——"

"You met her in the park?" Anne half rose to go. He drew her down.

"Yes, dearest. But don't be alarmed. She will never think that we have met. She was looking for this." And Giles took out the coin.

Anne gave a cry of delighted surprise. "Oh," she said, taking it eagerly, "I thought I had lost it forever. And you found it, Giles?"

"I found it," he replied gravely. "It was that discovery which made me believe that you were in the neighborhood. And then when Olga——"

"Olga." Anne looked at him suddenly. "Do you know her?"

"Very well. She is your friend."

"My best friend. She loves me like a sister."

Giles could have told her that the sisterly love was not to be trusted, but she had so much trouble that he could not find it in his heart to add to her worries. Besides, time was slipping by, and as yet he knew nothing of the truth of the matter.

"Tell me why you fled with that man," he asked.

"Giles, I will tell you all," she replied earnestly, "but on your part let me hear what is being done about the death of poor Daisy. It will set my mind at rest. You see how I have taken care of her grave, dear. Were I guilty would I do that?"

"I never thought you guilty," he repeated impatiently. "How many times have I to say that?"

"As many as you can bring your mind to repeat," she replied. "It is sweet to think that you love me so well, that you can refuse to believe evil of me in the face of the evidence against me."

"Anne, Anne, why did you fly?"

"Tell me how the case stands against me and what you have discovered," she asked in a composed voice, and with a visible effort to command her feelings. "And I shall tell you all that I can."

As time was precious Giles did not lose a moment. He plunged into the story of all that had taken place, from his interview with Mrs. Parry to the finding of the coin which had first given him his clue to the whereabouts of Anne. Also he touched lightly upon the visit of Olga to Rickwell, but was careful not to allude to her feelings towards him. Since Anne believed the woman to be her friend, he wished her to remain in that belief. He was not the one to add to her sorrows. And even when she was cleared of the charge and became his wife Ware determined that he would never speak of Olga's treachery. For her own sake he knew that the Hungarian would be silent.

Anne listened in silence to his recital, and when he ended drew a sigh of relief. "It might have been worse," she said.

"I don't see how it could be," replied Ware bluntly. "Morley will insist that you are guilty, and Steel thinks so too. I must admit that he wavers between you and this man you fled with. Come now, Anne, tell me all."

"I shall not have much time," she said hurriedly. "I dare not let Mr. Franklin know that I have met you. If I am not back in the Priory soon, he will send Portia to look for me."

"You can tell me much in ten minutes. Who is the man?"

"My father," she replied in a low voice.

Giles could hardly speak for surprise. "But your father is dead?"

"I thought he was," said Anne. "I have believed it these many months. But when I saw him in Mr. Morley's library on that night I knew that he still lived."

"But I can't understand how you made such a mistake. Does Morley know?"

She shook her head. "I managed to restrain myself. Mr. Morley knows nothing. Afterwards I went to the church in the hope of meeting my father. He was in church."

"I saw him," said Giles; "but tell me how the mistake occurred."

"My father lived in Florence, and——"

"Is his name Walter Franklin?"

"That is his real name; but he was known in Florence as Alfred Denham."

"You spoke to Olga Karacsay about him under that name?"

"Yes, because I did not know until lately that his name was Walter Franklin. Nor did I know that George Franklin, who inherits Daisy's money, was his brother."

"So George Franklin is your uncle and Portia your cousin?"

"Yes; but let me go on. My father lived in Florence. I was often away from home, as I was engaged as a governess. I came to England and met Olga at the Institute. I procured an engagement in London; it was the one I had before Mrs.

Morley engaged me. I received news that my father was ill of typhoid fever. I hurried at once to Florence. He not only was dead, but he was buried, so I was informed by Mark Dane."

"Who is Mark Dane?"

"He was my father's secretary."

"One moment, Anne. Your uncle stated that he was the man who lived in Florence, and that your father being a scamp lived in England. On account of Walter George resided abroad."

"That is quite true. But Walter—I may speak of my father so for the sake of clearness—used to come sometimes to Florence. George never knew that he was there, thinking that he was in London. I learned all this lately. At the time my father and I lived in Florence I knew nothing of the relationship between George and Walter. My father knew that if Daisy died his brother would inherit the money, and he kept a watch on George so as to see if he would come into the property. But I knew nothing of this, neither did Mark, although he was deep in my father's confidence. Well, as I say, my father was supposed to have died. I expect another corpse was buried in his place. Mark no doubt agreed to the fraud, whatever was the reason. But I have not seen Mark since immediately after the death, and can't get an explanation. I saw him in Florence, and he told me that my father was dead and buried. Since then I have not seen him."

"So you returned to England, thinking your father was dead?"

"Certainly. He left me a little money. I went back to my situation. Afterwards I came down here. On that New Year's Eve I entered the library and saw my father speaking to Mr. Morley. I disguised my feelings, as I was certain he did not wish to be recognized. But the shock was so great that I nearly fainted. I went up to my room, and afterwards to church to see my father. He was there, as you know. I saw him pass a paper to Daisy. She went out ten minutes later; he followed. I wished to see him, and I was curious to know why he had come to Rickwell and had let me think he was dead. Shortly afterwards I went outside. It was snowing fast. I could not see my father or Daisy. Suddenly I came across my father. He was beside the grave of Mr. Kent. Daisy was lying on the ground. He gasped out that she was dead, and implored me to save him."

"Do you think he killed her?"

"No. Afterwards he denied that he did. But at the time I believed that he was guilty. I saw that he would be arrested, and in a frenzy of alarm I cast about for some means to save him. I remembered your motor-car was waiting at the gates. I sent Trim away on an errand——"

"I know, I know! You deceived him!"

"To save my father," replied Anne quietly. "I got the car in this way and went off with my father. He told me to go to Gravesend, where he had a yacht waiting. Near Gravesend the car upset. We left it on the roadside and walked to Tilbury. A boatman ferried us across the river, and we went on board the yacht."

"Did you know your father was the owner of the yacht?"

"No, I did not. He said that it belonged to a friend. We departed in the yacht and went to a French port, then on to Paris."

"And it was from Paris that you sent me the drawing of the coin."

"Yes; I knew that appearances were against me, and could not bear to think that you should believe me guilty. I did not dare to send any letter, but I knew you would recognize the drawing of the Edward VII. coin, and so sent it as you saw."

"How long did you stay in Paris?"

"For some weeks. Then we went to Italy, to Florence."

"Wasn't your father recognized?"

"No; he had altered his appearance. He gave me no reason at first for doing this, but afterwards told me that he was engaged in a political conspiracy, something to do with the Anarchists."

"Is the red cross the symbol of some society?"

"I can't say. He refused to explain the mystery of the cross to me. I admit fully, Giles, that I cannot understand my father. His ways are strange, and he leads a most peculiar life. Afterwards George Franklin, my uncle, came to England and inherited the property. My father sent me to him with an explanation. My uncle refused to believe that I was guilty, and gave me shelter in his house until such time as my character could be cleared. I came over and have been hiding in the Priory ever since. I was so sorry for poor Daisy and for her unexpected death that I came to see after her grave. I found it neglected, and thus went to clean it,

as you see. Portia, my cousin, has been very good to me. I have stayed in all day and have walked out in the evening. No one knows that I am here. No one will ever know unless you tell."

"I tell? Anne, what do you take me for? I will keep quiet until I can clear your character, and make you my wife."

"You must not see me again."

"No," sighed Giles, "it will not be wise. But can't you tell me who killed Daisy, and thus clear yourself?"

Anne shook her head.

"I wish I could. But my father declares that he came out to see the girl, and found her already dead on the grave face downwards. She had been killed during the time he waited behind. He saw that there was a danger of his being accused of the crime, since he had asked her to leave the church. Thus it was that he lost his presence of mind and called on me to save him. I did so on the impulse of the moment, and thus it all came about."

"Where is your father now?"

Anne thought for a moment.

"I would tell you if I knew," she said seriously, "as I know you will not betray him. But I don't know where he is. Since I have been here I have not heard a word from him."

"Your uncle?"

"If my uncle knew, he would hand my father over to the police. He hates him; but he is always kind to me."

"Anne, I wonder if your uncle killed Daisy to inherit the money?"

"No; he was in Italy at the time. I am sure of that."

"Has your father any suspicion who killed Daisy?"

"No. He says he has not."

"Why did he ask her to leave the church? And how did he manage it?"

"He wished to speak to her about George Franklin, who would inherit the money if she died. I believe he intended to warn her that George was dangerous, for he hates my uncle."

"Did your father know that the money had been left at the time?"

"No. It was only because he was on the spot that he wished to see Daisy. He wrote on a scrap of paper that he wished to see her about the money, and she came out."

"She was always eager after that miserable money," said Ware sadly. "But your father did know that Powell was dead at the time, Anne." And he told her of his discoveries in connection with the office boy. "So you see your father was in England masquerading as Wilson," he finished.

"Yes," said Anne, with a shudder, "I see now. But he told me nothing of this. Indeed, I can't understand my father at all."

"Do you know the meaning of the Scarlet Cross?"

"No; he refuses to tell me. He won't say why he pretended to be dead; and in every way he is most mysterious. But I am fond of my father, Giles, although I know he is not a good man. But he did not kill Daisy; I am sure of that. And even at the time I thought he had done so I saved him. After all he may be as bad as possible; but he is my father, and I owe him a daughter's affection."

Giles would have argued this, but at the moment Anne started to her feet. She heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and without a word to Giles she flew over the low wall and darted across the park. He was too astonished by this sudden departure to say a word. He had lost her again. But he knew where she was after all.



CHAPTER XVIII

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

Giles left the churchyard slowly, with his brain in a whirl. Anne had departed in hot haste, taking shelter in her hiding-place, and he dare not follow unless he wanted it to be discovered. He never knew who it was, whose footsteps had startled her away. When she left him he remained for quite ten minutes where he was, in a kind of dazed condition. The footsteps were not heard now. So intent had he been upon Anne's flight, and on the amazing things she had told him, that he had not noticed when they ceased. Then it occurred to him that they had retreated—just as though a person had been listening and had hastily gone away. But of this he could not be sure. All he did know was that when he rounded the corner there was not a soul in sight. And nothing remained but to go home.

Olga and her mother did not put in an appearance on this night, so Giles had ample time to think over his meeting with Anne. He did not see how he could help her, and the story she had related bewildered, instead of enlightening him. After a time he rearranged the details, and concluded that, in spite of all denial, her father was the guilty person, and the crime had been committed for the sake of the Powell money.

"Whether the Scarlet Cross indicates a political society or is the symbol of a thieves' association," said Giles to himself, "I can't say until Steel is more certain of his ground. But this Alfred Denham, or Walter Franklin, or whatever he chooses to call himself, is evidently a bad lot. He has sufficient love for his daughter to keep his iniquities from her, and that is why Anne is so much in the dark. I quite believe that she thinks her father innocent, and saved him on the spur of the moment. But he is guilty for all that."

And then Giles proceeded to work out the case as it presented itself to him. Walter Franklin—as he found it most convenient to call him—was a scoundrel who preyed on society, and who by some mischance had a pure and good daughter like Anne. To keep her from knowing how bad he was—and the man apparently valued her affection—he sent her to be a governess. She believed in him, not knowing how he was plotting to get the Powell money.

Certainly Walter had resided in Florence under the name of Denham. Ware quite believed this, and guessed that he did so in order to keep an eye on his brother George, who was to inherit the Powell money. Probably he knew beforehand that Powell was ill, and so had feigned death that he might carry out his scheme without Anne's knowledge. That scheme was to impersonate his brother; and Giles trembled to think of how he proposed to get rid of George when the time was ripe. He must have intended to murder him, for since he had slain Daisy with so little compunction, he certainly would not stick at a second crime.

However, thus Giles argued, the first step to secure the money was for him to feign death and thus get rid of Anne. Then he came to London, and as Wilson stopped with Mrs. Benker in order to spy on the Ashers through Alexander. As soon as he knew for certain that Powell was dead and that the money was coming to Daisy, he came down to Rickwell on the errand of serving the summons, and then had lured the girl outside of the church to kill her. But for Anne following him, he would have disappeared into the night and no one would have been the wiser.

But the appearance of his daughter in the library upset his plans. She followed him into the church and came out to find him near the dead body. He certainly made an excuse, but Giles believed that such was a lie. If he had confessed to the crime, even Anne might not have stopped with him. But here Giles remembered that at the time of the flight Anne really believed that her father was guilty. At all events he had made use of her to get away, and thus had reached the yacht at Gravesend. It was waiting for him there, in order that he might fly after the crime was committed. Perhaps he intended to walk to Tilbury, and crossing the Thames get on board the yacht before the hue-and-cry was out. Anne hampered his plans in some measure and then, by means of the stolen motor-car, assisted them. Thus the man had got away, and by the murder of the girl had opened the way to George inheriting the money.

"They went to Paris," mused Giles, "then to Florence. I daresay this Walter intended to send Anne away on some excuse and to murder his brother in Florence. Then he could slip into the dead man's shoes, and come to inherit—as George—the property of Powell. Probably George left Florence before Walter arrived, and thus escaped death. He is safe so far, but how long will he be safe?"

Then a terrible thought occurred to Giles. He wondered if Walter had placed his daughter at the Priory so as to have an opportunity of coming to see his brother, and thus seizing his chance of killing him. Anne, innocent as she was of the real

meaning of these terrible schemes, might be a decoy. If her father came, George would be murdered. Walter, who was able to disguise himself with infernal ingenuity, might slip into the dead man's shoes, and thus the money he had schemed for would come to him. Evidently the last act of the tragedy was not yet played out.

The more Giles puzzled over the matter, the more bewildered he became. He could see—as he thought—what had been done, but he could not guess how the last act was to be carried out. Yet Walter Franklin was hiding somewhere waiting to pounce out on his unsuspecting brother, and the second crime might involve Anne still deeper in the nefarious transactions of her father. Finally Giles made up his mind to seek George Franklin at the Priory and tell him what he thought. The man should at least be put on his guard. It may be said that Ware fancied he might be permitted to see Anne as a reward for his kind warning.

Before calling on Franklin he went to see the foreign ladies. To his surprise both had left by the early morning train. There was a note from Olga, which informed him that her mother had insisted on returning to town, finding the country cold and dull. The note added that she—Olga—would be glad to see him at the Westminster flat as soon as he could come to London, and ended with the remark that he had yet to give his answer to her question. Giles was relieved when he read this. Olga was gone, and the two days of probation were extended indefinitely. He might find some way of releasing Anne before he need give this dreadful answer. Again and again did he bless the selfishness of the elder Princess, which had removed the obstacle of Olga from his path.

Meanwhile he put her out of his mind and went on to the Priory. He called in on the way to see Morley, but learned that the little man had gone to town. Mrs. Morley looked more worn and haggard than ever, and seemed about to say something as Giles was taking his leave. However, she held her peace and merely informed him that she missed her children dreadfully. "But I'm sure that is not what she meant to say," thought Ware, as he departed. On looking back he saw her thin white face at the window and concluded—as Mrs. Parry did—that the poor lady had something on her mind.

In due time he arrived at the Priory and was shown into a gloomy drawing-room, where George Franklin received him. Giles apologized for not having called before, and was graciously pardoned.

"And, indeed, I should have called on you, Mr. Ware," said Franklin, "but I am

such a recluse that I rarely go out."

"You call on Mr. Morley, I believe?"

"Yes; he is a cheery man, and won't take no for an answer. I find that his company does me good, but I prefer to be alone with my books."

There were many books in the room and many loose papers on the desk, which Giles saw were manuscripts. "I write sometimes," said Franklin, smiling in his sour way. "It distracts my mind from worries. I am writing a history of Florence during the age of the Renaissance."

"A very interesting period," Giles assured him.

"Yes; and my daughter Portia helps me a great deal. You have met her, Mr. Ware. She told me."

"Yes; we met in the park. She was looking for something, which I found; but I gave it to—to——" Giles hesitated, for he was on dangerous ground. "To another lady," he finished desperately, and waited for the storm to break.

To his surprise the man smiled. "You mean my niece Anne," said he in the calmest way.

"Yes; I do mean Miss Denham. But I did not know that—that——"

"That I wished you to know she was under my roof. Is that it?"

"Yes," stammered Giles, quite at sea. He did not expect this candor.

Franklin rather enjoyed his confusion. "I did not intend to let you know that she was here. It was her own request that you were kept in ignorance. But since you met her——"

"Did you hear of our meeting?"

"Certainly. Anne told me of it directly she came back. Oh, I have heard all about you, Mr. Ware. My niece confessed that you loved her, and from Morley I heard that you defended her."

"Did Morley know that Anne was here?"

"Certainly not. At the outset of our acquaintance he informed me that he believed her to be guilty. I resolved to say nothing, lest he might tell the police."

"Why did you not tell him that she was innocent?" asked Giles hotly.

The man looked grave and smoothed his shaven chin—a habit with him when perplexed. "Because I could not do so without telling an untruth," he said coldly.

Giles started to his feet, blazing with anger. "What!" he cried, "can you sit there and tell me that your own niece killed that poor girl?"

"I have reason to believe that she did," replied Franklin.

"She told me she was innocent," began Ware.

Franklin interrupted. "She loves you too well to say otherwise. But she is—guilty."

"I would not believe that if she told me herself."

"Sit down, Mr. Ware," said Franklin, after a pause. "I'll explain exactly how the confession came about."

Giles took his seat again, and eyed his host pale but defiant. "It is no use your saying anything against Anne. She is innocent."

"Mr. Ware, I believed that when she first came to me. I hate my brother because he is a bad man; but I liked his niece, and when she came to me for shelter I took her in, notwithstanding the enormity of the crime which she was accused of having committed."

"It gained you your fortune," said Ware bitterly.

"I would rather have been without a fortune gained at such a price," answered Franklin coldly; "but I really believed Anne guiltless. She defended her father, but I fancied, since she had helped him to escape, that he had killed the poor girl."

"And he did," cried Giles. "I am sure he did."

"He had no motive."

"Oh yes, to get the money—the five thousand a year."

"You forget. By Miss Kent's death that came to me."

"Your brother would have found means to get it. I believe he will find means

yet."

"I don't understand you. Will you explain?"

Franklin seemed fairly puzzled by Giles' remarks, so the young man set forth the theory he had formed about the murder. At first Mr. Franklin smiled satirically; but after a time his face became grave, and he seemed agitated. When Giles ended he walked the room in a state of subdued irritation.

"What have I done to be so troubled with such a relative as Walter?" he said aloud. "I believe you are right, Mr. Ware. He may attempt my life to get the money; and as we are rather like one another in appearance he may be able to pass himself off as me. Why, there was a woman here who called herself Mrs. Benker. She insisted that I was called Wilson, under which name she knew my brother Walter. So you must see how easily he could impose on every one. I am dark and clean-shaven; he is red-haired and bearded. But a razor and a pot of black dye would soon put that to rights. Yes, he might attempt my murder. But do not let us saddle him with a crime of which he is guiltless. Anne killed the girl. I assure you this is the truth."

"I don't believe it," cried Giles fiercely.

"Nevertheless"—Franklin paused and then came forward swiftly to place a sympathetic hand on the young man's shoulder—"I heard her say so myself. She confessed to me that she had met you, and seemed much agitated. Then she ran out of this room to another. Fearing she was ill, I followed, and found her on her knees praying. She said aloud that she had deceived you, stating that she could not bear to lose your love by proclaiming herself a murderess."

"No, no; I won't listen." Giles closed his ears.

"Be a man, Mr. Ware. Anne is ill now. She confessed the truth to me, and then fled to her bedroom. This morning she was very ill, as my daughter Portia assured me. Portia is out of the house. If you will come with me, you will hear the truth from Anne herself. She is so ill that she will not try to deceive you now. But if she does confess, you must promise not to give her up to the police. She is suffering agonies, poor child!"

"I'll come at once," said Giles bravely, starting to his feet. And it was brave of him, for he dreaded the truth. "If she confesses this, I'll go away and never see her again. The police—ah, you needn't think I would give her up to the police."

But if she is guilty (and I can't believe such a thing of her) I'll tear her out of my heart. But it's impossible, impossible!"

Franklin looked at him with a pitying smile as he hid his face in his hands. Then he touched him on the shoulder and led the way along a passage towards the back part of the house. At a door at the end he paused. "The room is rather dark. You won't see her clearly," he said, "but you will know her by her voice."

"I would know her anyway," cried Giles fiercely, and tormented beyond endurance.

Franklin gave him another glance, as though asking him to brace himself for the ordeal, and then opened the door. He showed small mercy in announcing Ware's coming. "Anne, here is Mr. Ware come to see you. Tell him the truth."

The room was not very large, and was enveloped in a semi-gloom. The blind was pulled down, and the curtains were drawn. The bed was near the window, and on it lay Anne in a white dress. She was lying on the bed with a rug thrown over her feet. When she heard the name of Giles she uttered a cry. "Keep him away!" she said harshly. "Keep him away! Don't let him come!"

"Anne! Anne!" cried Giles, coming forward, his mouth dry, his hands clenched. "Do not tell me that you killed Daisy."

There was a groan and silence, but Anne—so far as he could see—buried her face in the pillow. It was Franklin who spoke. "Anne, you must tell the truth once and for all."

"No, no," she cried, "Giles would despise me."

"Anne," he cried in agony, "did you kill her?"

"Yes," came the muffled voice from the bed. "I found her at the grave. My father was not there. He had missed her in the darkness and the snow. She taunted me. I had the stiletto, which I took from the library, and I killed her. It was my father who saved me. Oh, go away, Giles, go away!"

But Giles did not go. He rose to his feet and stepped towards the window. In a second he had the blind up and the curtains drawn apart. The light poured into the room to reveal—not Anne Denham, but the girl Portia Franklin.



CHAPTER XIX

THE CLUE LEADS TO LONDON

It was indeed Portia. Seeing that she was discovered, she sprang from the bed and faced Giles with a sullen, defiant look on her freckled face. Still standing in the strong light which poured in through the window, Ware looked at the girl satirically.

"You are a very clever mimic, Miss Franklin," said he, "but you rather forgot yourself in that last speech. Anne is of too sensitive a nature to have explained herself with such a wealth of detail."

"You were deceived at first," grumbled Portia, rocking herself.

"Only for a moment," replied Giles. "And now I should like to know the meaning of this masquerade?"

"I also," cried Franklin, in his turn. He was staring at his daughter with a look of profound amazement. "Where is Anne, you wretched girl?"

"She has run away."

"Run away!" exclaimed the men simultaneously.

"Yes. After your finding out last night that she had killed Daisy Kent she was afraid to stop. She knew that you hated her father, and thought you might hand her over to the police. Last night she told me so, and said she would run away. I love Anne, and I let her do as she liked. It was I who let her out," ended Portia, defiantly.

"Anne should not have so mistrusted me," cried Franklin, much perturbed. "Surely I always protected her, and treated her well."

"Ah, but you didn't know till last night that she was guilty."

"No; but for all that——" began Franklin, only to break off. "Where has she gone?" he demanded angrily.

"I don't know. She had some money, and took a small black bag with her. She

said when she got settled she would write here and let me know where she was, on condition that I did not tell you."

"She has every reason to. Poor, miserable girl! to be an outcast, and now to leave her only refuge," he sighed and shook his head. Giles all the time had been watching Portia, whose face bore an expression of obstinacy worthy of a mule. "Did this scheme for Anne's departure include the masquerade you have indulged in?"

"It is my own idea," she retorted defiantly. "Anne wished to get away without my father knowing, so I stopped in her room and pretended to be Anne. The servants were deceived, as I knew exactly how to imitate her voice. I pulled down the blind, so that no one should see who I was. Only you could have guessed the truth."

"How is that?"

"Because you love her."

Giles thought this a strange speech for the heavy-looking girl to make. "Is that an original remark on your part?" he asked.

"No," she confessed candidly; "I suggested to Anne that I should pass myself off as her, and so give her a longer time to get away. She said that I might deceive the servants and my father, but that I could never deceive you, because you loved her. But I had a good try," continued Portia, nodding her red head triumphantly. "When my father spoke your name at the door I thought I would try."

"Well, you have done so only to fail," responded Ware coolly. "For the moment I was deceived, but you forgot how to manage your voice, and, moreover, your explanation was too elaborate. But how is it you dare to confess, as Anne, that she killed the girl?"

"Anne did kill Daisy Kent!"

"She did not."

"Yes, she did. She confessed as much to father last night, and to me also. She asked me to tell you so, that you might forget all about her. I was going over to your place this very day to tell, but when father brought you in I thought I would pretend to be Anne and tell you in that way."

"Anne would have written, and——"

"No, she wouldn't," said Portia, eagerly. "She began to write a letter saying that she was guilty, but afterwards she thought it might fall into the hands of the police, and tore it up. She told me to let you know by word of mouth. All she asks of you is that you will forget that she ever existed."

"Let her tell me that with her own lips," said Giles, groaning.

"Yes, Portia, tell Mr. Ware the place Anne has gone to."

Portia eyed her father with some anger. "How can I tell when I don't know? Anne never said where she was going. I let her out by the back door just before dawn, and she went away. I know no more."

"If she writes, you will let Mr. Ware know."

"I shan't," retorted the girl. "Anne wants him to forget her."

"That is impossible," said Giles, whose face was now haggard with the anguish of the moment; "but you must be my friend, Portia, and tell me. Think how I suffer!"

"Think how she suffers, poor darling!" cried Portia, whose sympathies were all with Anne. "Don't ask me any more. I shan't speak."

And speak she would not, although Giles cajoled and Franklin stormed. Whatever could be said of Portia, she was very loyal to the outcast. There was nothing for it but for Ware to depart. And this he did.

What was the best thing to be done Giles did not very well know. Anne was lost again, and he did not know where to look for her. He could not bring himself to believe that she was guilty, in spite of her confession to Portia and Franklin.

"It's that blackguard of a father of hers over again," he thought, as he tramped moodily through the Priory park. "She is afraid lest his brother—her uncle—should denounce him, and has taken the crime on her own shoulders. Even though he is her father, she should not sacrifice so much for him. But it is just noble of her to do so. Oh, my poor love, shall I ever be able to shelter you from the storms of life?"

There did not seem to be much chance of it at the present moment. Mistrusting her uncle, she had vanished, and would let no one but Portia know of her new

hiding-place. And Portia, as Giles saw, was too devoted to Anne to confess her whereabouts without permission. And how was such permission to be obtained? Anne allowed her uncle to think her guilty in order to save her unworthy father from his fraternal hatred. She had asserted her innocence to Giles, but had apparently, through Portia, tried to deceive him again, so that he might not follow her. "Poor darling!" cries Giles, full of pity, "she wishes to put me out of her life, and has fled to avoid incriminating her father. If she told me the whole truth her father would be in danger, and she chooses to bear his guilt herself. But why should she think I would betray the man? Bad as he is, I should screen him for her dear sake. Oh"—Giles stopped and looked up appealingly to the hot, blue sky—"if I only knew where she was to be found, if I could only hold her in my arms, never, never would I let her go, again! My poor Quixotic darling, shall I ever be worthy of such nobility?"

It was all very well apostrophizing the sky, but such heroics did not help him in any practical way. He cast about in his own mind to consider in which direction she had gone. The nearest railway station to London was five miles away; but she would not leave the district thus openly, for the stationmaster knew her well. She had frequently travelled from that centre as Miss Denham, and he would be sure to recognize her, even though she wore a veil. Anne, as Giles judged, would not risk such recognition.

Certainly there was another station ten miles distant, which was very little used by the Rickwell people. She might have tramped that distance, and have taken a ticket to London from there. But was it her intention to go to London? Giles thought it highly probable that she would. Anne, as he knew from Portia, had very little money, and it would be necessary for her to seek out some friend. She would probably go to Mrs. Cairns, for Mrs. Cairns believed her to be guiltless, and would shelter her in the meantime. Later on a situation could be procured for her abroad, and she could leave England under a feigned name. Giles felt that this was the course Anne would adopt, and he determined to follow the clue suggested by this theory.

Having made up his mind to this course, Giles hurried home to pack a few things and arrange for his immediate departure. Chance, or rather Providence, led him past "Mrs. Parry's Eye" about five o'clock. Of course, the good lady was behind the window spying on all and sundry, as usual. She caught sight of Giles striding along the road with bent head and a discouraged air. Wondering what was the matter and desperately anxious to know, Mrs. Parry sent out Jane to intercept him and ask him in. Giles declined to enter at first; but then it struck him that

since he was in search of information about Anne, Mrs. Parry might know something. Her knowledge was so omniscient that, for all he knew, she might have been aware all the time of Anne's presence at the Priory, but held her tongue—which Mrs. Parry could do sometimes—out of pity for the girl's fate. Giles went in resolved to pump Mrs. Parry without mentioning what he knew of Anne. Supposing she was ignorant, he was not going to be the one to reveal Anne's refuge. And if she did know, Ware was certain that Mrs. Parry would tell him all, since she was aware how deeply he loved the governess. Thus in another five minutes the young man found himself seated in the big armchair opposite the old lady. She was rather grim with him.

"You have not been to see me for ever so long," said she, rubbing her beaky nose. "Your Royal Princesses have taken up too much of your time, I suppose. Oh, I know all about them."

"I am sorry they did not stay for a few days," replied Giles in his most amiable tone. "I wished to introduce them to you."

"You mean present me to them," corrected the old dame, who was a stickler for etiquette. "They are genuine Princesses, are they not?"

"Oh, yes. But they are not royal. Princess Karacsay is the wife of a Magyar noble. She is not an Austrian, however, as she came from Jamaica. The younger, Princess Olga, is——"

"Jamaica," interrupted Mrs. Parry! "Humph! That is where Anne Denham was born. Queer this woman should come from the same island."

"It's certainly odd," replied Giles. "But a mere coincidence."

"Humph!" from Mrs. Parry. "Some folks make their own coincidences."

"What do you mean, Mrs. Parry?"

"Mean? Humph! I don't know if I should tell you."

Giles was now on fire to learn her meaning. Evidently Mrs. Parry did know something, and might be able to help him. But seeing that she was slightly offended with him, it required some tact to get the necessary information out of the old lady. Giles knew the best way to effect his purpose was to feign indifference. Mrs. Parry was bursting to tell her news, and that it would come out the sooner if he pretended that he did not much care to hear it.

"There is no reason why you should tell me," said he coolly. "I know all about the Princess Karacsay. She and her daughter only came down here for a rest."

"Oh, they did, did they, Ware? Humph!" She rubbed her nose again, and eyed him with a malignant pleasure. "Are you sure the elder Princess didn't come down to see Franklin?"

"She doesn't know him," said Giles, trying to be calm. "She took a walk in the Priory woods. I suppose that is how the mistake——"

"I don't make mistakes," retorted Mrs. Parry, with a snort. "I know a new gardener who is employed at the Priory. He told Jane, who told me, that Princess Karacsay, the mother, called on Franklin the other morning and entered the house. She was with him for over an hour. He came to the door to see her off. The gardener was attending to some shrubs near at hand. He could not hear what they said to one another, but declares that Franklin was as pale as a sheet."

"Queer," thought Giles, remembering how the elder lady had denied all knowledge of the man. However, he did not make this remark to Mrs. Parry. "Well, there's nothing in that," said he aloud. "Franklin lived in Italy for many years. He may have met the Princess there."

"True enough." Mrs. Parry was rather discomfited. "There may be nothing in it, and Franklin seems to be decent enough in his life, though a bit of a recluse. I've nothing to say against the man."

Giles thought that this was rather fortunate for Franklin, seeing that Mrs. Parry's tongue was so dangerous. If she ever came to know of his brother Walter, and of the relations between him and George, she would be sure to make mischief. He thought it prudent to say nothing. The less revealed to the good lady the better. However, this attitude did not prevent Ware from trying to learn what Mrs. Parry had discovered with regard to the two Princesses. She told him an interesting detail without being urged.

"Last night about nine I saw one of them out for a walk."

"Princess Olga?" questioned Giles.

Mrs. Parry nodded. "If she is the younger of the two, she is not a bad-looking girl, Ware. She passed my window and went on to look at the church. Rather a strange hour to look at a church."

Giles started. It was about that hour that he had been talking to Anne, and shortly afterwards she had heard the footsteps and had fled. He now believed that Olga must have overheard a portion of the conversation. It was her footsteps which they had heard retreating. At once he remembered Olga's threat, that if he tampered with Anne in the meantime she would have her arrested. This, then, was the reason why Olga had not come to his house again, and why she and her mother had left so suddenly for London. He wondered if the elder Princess knew about Anne, and was assisting her daughter to get the poor girl into the hands of the law. Giles turned pale.

"What's the matter, Ware?" asked Mrs. Parry, sitting up.

"Nothing," he stammered; "but this coincidence——"

"Oh, I simply mean that as Princess Karacsay and Anne both came from Jamaica, it was strange that they should go away to London together. Don't you think so, too? There must be some connection."

Giles started to his feet. "Anne," he said loudly, "do you know that Anne is here?"

"She was here," said Mrs. Parry, with a gratified chuckle; "but where she has been hiding is more than I know. However, I am certain it was Anne I saw this morning on the moor. She was veiled and dressed quietly; but I knew her walk and the turn of her head."

"You must be mistaken," said Giles, perplexed.

"Indeed, I'm not. Trust one woman to know another, however she may disguise herself. I tell you Anne Denham has been here in hiding. I don't believe she left the neighborhood after all. I wonder who took her in," muttered Mrs. Parry, rubbing her nose as usual. "I must find that out."

"But what do you mean by saying Anne went to London with the——"

"I can believe my own eyes and ears, I suppose," snapped the good lady. "I was out at seven o'clock taking a walk. I always do get up early in summer. That is how I keep my health. I have no patience with those who lie in bed, and——"

"But what did you see?"

"Don't you be impatient, Ware. I want you to find Anne, as I believe she is guiltless and has suffered a lot unjustly. While you have been on a wild-geese chase she has been here all the time. If I had only known I should have told you; but I didn't, worse luck."

"I know you are my friend," said Giles, pressing her hand. "And you can help me by saying where Anne has gone to."

"Oh, my good man, you must find that out for yourself! I believe she has gone to London with those Princesses of yours. At least that fool of a Morris said they left his inn this morning early to go to London. They drove to the Westbury Station. That is the one we hardly ever use down here. The Barnham Station is the nearest."

"Yes! yes! The Westbury is ten miles away. You go across the moor——"

"My good Ware, have I lived all these years in this place without knowing it as well as I know my own nose? Hold your tongue, or I'll tell you nothing. The coachman who drove these Princesses of yours"—Mrs. Parry always used this

phrase disdainfully—"is a new man. Morris hired him from Chelmsford, and he does not know Anne, luckily for her. If it had been the old coachman she might have been in jail by this time. Well, as I say, I was on the moor and saw the carriage coming along. I didn't know that those Princesses were in it till one of them—the younger—got out and stood by the roadside. I was close at hand, and hidden by a gorse bush. She whistled. I tell you, Ware, she whistled. What manners these foreigners have! Three times she whistled. Then some one rose from behind another bush and walked quickly to the carriage. It was Anne. Oh, don't tell me it wasn't," cried Mrs. Parry, vigorously shaking her head. "I knew her walk and the turn of her head. Trust me for knowing her amongst a thousand. Anne Denham it was and none other."

"What happened then?" asked Giles anxiously.

"Why, this Princess Olga embraced and kissed her. Does she know her?"

"Yes. They have been friends for a long time."

"Humph! and Princess Olga's mother comes from Jamaica, where Anne was born," said Mrs. Parry. "Queer. There is some sort of a connection."

"You are too suspicious, Mrs. Parry."

"All the better. But I can see through a stone wall. Believe me, Ware, that if there isn't some connection between those two, I am a Dutchwoman. However, Anne got into the carriage and it drove away."

Giles caught up his hat. "To London," he cried jubilantly. "I know where Anne is to be found now." And to Mrs. Parry's dismay, he rushed out.

CHAPTER XX

MANY A SLIP 'TWIXT CUP AND LIP

But Giles was not destined to go to London as quickly as he thought. He rushed out of Mrs. Parry's cottage, leaving that good lady in a state of frenzied curiosity, and walked rapidly through the village on the road to his own house. On the way he dropped into "The Merry Dancer" to look at an "A B C." Morris, still swelling with importance over his illustrious guests, although these had now left, conducted him into the deserted salon and gave him the guide. While Giles was looking up the first train, Morley, hot and dusty and short of breath, rushed into the room.

"Upon my word, Ware, I think you must be deaf," he said, wiping his perspiring forehead. "I've been running and calling after you for the last five minutes."

"I was buried in my own thoughts," replied Ware, turning the pages of the guide rapidly, "wait a bit."

"I see you are going to London, Ware. What's up?"

By this time Giles noted the earliest train he could catch from Barnham Station, and found he had over an hour to spare. He was not averse to spending a portion of it in Morley's company, for he had much to tell him of what had happened. And the advice of the ex-detective was certain to be good. "I am following Anne," he said.

"Miss Denham." Morley stared. "Then you know——"

"Yes, I know; I met her last night by accident. And you have known all the time."

"Indeed, I know nothing," said the little man. "I was about to say that you know where she is?"

"Franklin did not tell you that she was with him, then?"

"Miss Denham—with Franklin—at the Priory?" Morley looked stupefied.

"She has been there all the time. I remember now. Franklin did not tell you, because he knew that you would give her up to the police."

"He told me nothing," said Morley slowly, "and if he had I should certainly have given her up to the police. Does he think her innocent?"

Giles shook his head gloomily. "He did, but circumstances have happened which have led him to change his opinion. He believes now that she is guilty. But he would never have told you."

"Well, I suppose that is natural. After all she is his niece, and although he hates his brother Walter, he must have some love for Anne, or he would scarcely have taken her in. So she has gone away. Can you tell me where she is to be found?"

"Is it likely that I should?"

Morley laughed in his cheery manner. "No," he replied bluntly, "for I know she has gone to London, and that you are following her."

"Quite so. But London is a large place. You will not find her."

"I could if I followed you," said Morley promptly.

"I should not let you do that."

"Perhaps not. But if I chose I could circumvent you. All I have to do is to wire your description to Scotland Yard and you would be shadowed by a detective from the moment you left the Liverpool Street Station. But you need not be afraid. I don't want to harm Miss Denham. If she crosses my path I'll have her arrested, but I won't go hunting for her."

"I don't trust you, Morley," said Ware quietly.

"You ought to. I have put you on your guard against myself. If my intentions were bad, I should not have told you. But my detective days are over, and Miss Denham can go scot-free for me. But I'll tell you one thing, Ware. She will never be your wife."

"How can you prophesy that?" asked Giles sharply.

"Because you will never be able to prove her innocence. I believe her to be guilty myself, and if she is not, the task of removing the suspicion is an impossible one. I have had many mysterious cases in my day, but this is one of

the most difficult."

"I don't agree with you," said Ware promptly. "The case is perfectly simple. Her blackguard of a father killed Daisy and afterwards intended to kill his brother George and thus get possession of the money. Anne saved him the first time, and to save him now from the hatred of George she has taken his guilt on her own shoulders."

"Who told you all this?"

"It's my theory. And I'll prove the truth of it, Morley, by hunting everywhere for Walter Franklin. When I find him I'll wring a confession out of him."

"I hope you will succeed," said Morley admiringly, "and you ought to for your pluck. So far as I am concerned, I wash my hands of the whole affair. You need not think I'll hunt down Miss Denham. Besides," added Morley, nodding, "I am going away."

"What!" Giles was astonished. "Are you leaving The Elms?"

"In a month's time," replied the little man. "My wife's doing, not mine. She has never got over a certain horror of the house since the murder of that poor girl. I shall sell every stick of furniture and take Mrs. Morley and the children to the United States. She wants to get away from the old life and begin a new one. So do I. Rather a late beginning at my age, eh, Ware?"

"What about your finances?"

"Oh, that's all right," said Morley, jubilantly. "I have settled everything. An old aunt of mine has died and left me a couple of thousand a year. I have paid every debt, and shall leave England without leaving a single creditor behind me. Then Mrs. Morley has her own money. We shall do very well in the States, Ware. I am thinking of living in Washington. A very pleasant city, I hear."

"I've never been there," replied Giles, making for the door, "but I am glad to hear that your affairs are settled. There is no chance of trouble with Asher now."

Morley shook his head with a jolly laugh. "They won't send down another Walter Franklin, if that is what you mean," said he.

"They did not send him down. He came himself."

"Yes. I only spoke generally. Well, I'll be sorry to go, for I have made some

pleasant friends in Rickwell—yourself amongst the number. But my wife insists, so I must humor her. There's Franklin. I shall be sorry to leave him."

"Is he not going also?"

Morley looked astonished. "No. Why should he go? He has the Priory on a seven years' lease. Besides, he likes the place."

"He might go to escape his brother."

"I don't think Walter Franklin will dare to trouble George now. He is innocent of actually committing this crime, but he certainly is an accessory after the fact. He'll keep out of the way."

"Let us hope so for the sake of George. Well, Morley, I must be off."

Giles went home at top speed, and Morley remained at the inn to make inquiries about the Hungarian Princesses. Although he was not now a detective, yet Morley still preserved the instinct which made him ask questions. He heard that the foreign ladies had driven to Westbury, and afterwards strolled round to the stables to see the new coachman. He learned from him about the strange lady who entered the carriage on the moor. The man described her face, for it seemed that she had lifted her veil for a moment when alighting at the station. Morley took all this in, and walked home jubilantly. He knew that Anne was with the Princess Karacsay.

"If these were the old days," he said, "I'd wire to London to have the house of those Hungarian women searched. I wonder what they have to do with the matter? Humph! Anne killed Daisy. Is it worth while to try and trace her?"

This speech was made to Mrs. Morley, and the pale woman gave a decided negative. "Let poor Anne go, Oliver," she said beseechingly; "I loved her, and she had much good in her."

"Still, I'm all on fire to follow up the clue," said Morley.

"You promised to leave the detective business alone."

"Quite right; so I did," he answered. "Well, I'll do what you wish, my dear. Anne Denham can go free for me. I said the same thing to Ware, although he won't believe me. But I should like to know what that Princess Karacsay has to do with the matter."

He worried all that evening, and finally went to see Franklin about the matter. But he got scanty satisfaction from him. Franklin denied that Anne had ever been in his house, and told Morley to mind his own business. If the ex-detective's wife had not been present, and if this conversation had not taken place in her presence, Franklin might have been more easy to deal with. But the presence of a third party shut his mouth. So Morley could do nothing, and made no attempt to do anything.

Had Giles known of this it might have set his mind at rest, for he could not get out of his head that he was being followed. At the Liverpool station he alighted about ten o'clock, and looked everywhere in the crowd to see if he was being observed. But his fears were vain, for he could distinguish no one with any inquiring look on his face, or note any person dogging his footsteps. He stepped into a cab and ordered the man to drive to St. John's Wood. But at Baker Street he alighted and dismissed the cab. He had only a hand-bag with him, and, carrying this, he took the underground train to High Street, Kensington. When he arrived there he drove in another cab to his old hotel, "The Guelph," opposite the Park. When alone in his bedroom Giles smoked a complacent pipe. "If any one did try to follow me," he said to himself, "he must have missed me when I took the underground railway."

It was close on half-past eleven when he ended his wanderings, too late to call at the Westminster flat. But Giles thought that Olga would never think he had traced her flight with Anne, and would not do anything till the morrow, probably not before twelve o'clock. He was up early, and went off to New Scotland Yard to see Steel. He did not intend to tell him about Anne, thinking that the detective might arrest her if he knew of her whereabouts. But he desired to know if Steel had discovered anything in connection with the Scarlet Cross. Also, since Steel knew Olga so well, he might be able to explain why she had come down with her mother to Rickwell, and why the elder Princess had called on Franklin. He half thought that Olga, keeping her promise, had brought Anne to London to have her taken in charge by Steel. But on second thoughts he fancied that Olga would keep Anne as a hostage, and not deliver her up if he—Giles—agreed to become her husband. Thus thinking he went to see Steel.

The detective was within, and saw Giles at once. He looked very pleased with himself, and saluted Ware with a triumphant smile.

"Well, sir," he said, "I have found out an astonishing lot of things."

"About the murder?" asked Ware apprehensively.

"No." Steel's face fell. "That is still a mystery, and I expect will be one until that woman—I mean that young lady—is found."

"Do you mean Miss Denham?" demanded Ware stiffly.

"Yes. Do you know where she is?"

Giles shook his head. He was not going to betray Anne to her enemy, as Steel in his detective capacity assuredly was. "I wish I did," he said. "I have been at Rickwell trying to find out things. I'll tell you of my discoveries later. Meantime _____"

"You want to hear about mine," cried the detective eagerly and full of his subject. "Well, the murder can wait. I'll get to the bottom of that, Mr. Ware. But I am now quite of your opinion. Miss Denham is innocent. This man Wilson killed the girl."

"I knew that Walter Franklin was guilty," cried Ware.

"I said Wilson," was Steel's reply.

"I forgot; you don't know about Wilson alias Franklin. I'll tell you later. Go on, Steel. I'm all attention."

"Oh! So his real name is Franklin. I never knew that," said Steel, drawing his hand down his chin. "Well, Mr. Ware, I have been to all the ports in the kingdom, and I have learned that wherever that yacht—she's a steam yacht—*The Red Cross* has been, burglaries have been committed. At last I managed to lay my hand on a member of the gang, and made him speak up."

"What gang?"

"A gang of burglars headed by the man I call Wilson and your Franklin—the Scarlet Cross Society. They own that yacht, and steam from port to port committing robberies. A splendid idea, and Wilson's own."

Then he unfolded to the astonished Giles a long career of villany on the part of the said Wilson. The young man shuddered as the vile category of crime was unrolled. It was horrible that such a wretch as Walter Franklin should be the father of Anne. But for all her parent's vices, Giles never swerved from the determination to marry the girl. He was not one of those who think that the sins

of the father should be visited on the child.

"What is the name of the man who confessed all this?" asked Giles.

"Mark Dane."

Ware started. That was the name of the man Anne had mentioned as her father's secretary. However, he said nothing, and when Steel requested him to tell all he knew about Wilson, he related everything save that he was Anne's father. Steel listened attentively, chin on hand. When Giles finished he nodded.

"I'll go down and see this brother," he remarked. "If he hates the man whom we think committed the crime so much, he will be anxious to assist us in securing him. I wonder why that governess helped Wilson, or rather Walter Franklin, to escape? Of course, I believe that she is his daughter. Now don't look so angry, Mr. Ware. If you remember, when I talked with you at the Princess Karacsay's I said you could draw your own inferences. That is what I meant." Here the detective stopped and peered into Giles' face. "You don't appear to be so surprised as I thought you would be."

"Are you sure that Miss Denham is Wilson's daughter?"

"No, I am not yet sure. But if I can make this Mark Dane speak further, I'll be certain. He knows all about the matter. Unfortunately he is gone. I caught him at Bournemouth, and after he told me a portion of the truth he managed to get away. It's a long story how he fooled me. I'll tell it to you another time. But the worst of it is," resumed Steel dolefully, "that Dane will warn Wilson and he will get away. All the same, now you have told me Wilson has a brother I may be able to find out something in that quarter. The brother is all right?"

"He is an honest man, if that is what you mean."

"H'm!" said Steel sceptically. "I don't see how there can be any honest member of the Franklin family."

"Do you include Miss Denham?" asked Giles furiously.

"Well, sir, she sails under false colors."

"She can explain that."

"I hope she will be able to when I catch her."

"Steel, I won't stand this!" cried Ware, much agitated.

The detective thought for a moment. "See here, sir," he remarked, "we won't discuss this matter until I have caught Dane."

"How do you hope to catch him?"

"I have laid a trap for him at the Princess Karacsay's flat," said Steel quietly. "Oh, don't look so astonished. This Dane was one of the attendants at some concert where the Princess sang. He fell in love with her, and has been bothering her with letters. I have arranged that he shall call at the flat. I'll be waiting for him."

"It's odd that the Princess should know about this man," said Ware.

Steel looked at him queerly. "It is odd," he said; "and to my mind it is more than a coincidence. Princess Olga is a clever woman. I have to be very careful with her."

"Do you mean to say that she knows anything?" asked Giles.

"I am sure she does. I believe she could explain the whole business; but I can't find out how she came to be connected with it. Well, Mr. Ware, I must be off. When I see Dane and get the truth out of him, I'll see you again. I hope, for your sake, that Miss Denham is not the daughter of this man, but from a few words let drop by Dane I fear she is. At all events, sir, you can set your mind at rest about her being guilty of murder. She is innocent. The father did it."

Giles departed, much comforted by this statement. He knew well enough that Anne was the daughter of Wilson, alias Denham, alias Franklin, and he shuddered again to think of his pure, good Anne being mixed up with a man who was hand and glove with the criminal classes and a criminal himself. However, he put this matter out of his mind for the moment, and drove to the Westminster flat. If Anne was there, he determined to take her away to a place of safety, and defy Steel and Walter Franklin to do their worst.

He went up the stairs, and was told that Mademoiselle Olga was not at home. He was about to inquire after Anne, when the elder Princess, looking pale and anxious, appeared at the door of the drawing-room. She beckoned him in and shut the door.

"Have you seen Olga?" she inquired.

"No, Princess. Is she not with you?"

"She is not," wailed the woman, throwing herself on the couch. "Late last night she went out with Anne. A summons came—some letter—and Anne had to go. Olga insisted on accompanying her. They said they would be back at midnight; but they have not reappeared. I am distracted, Mr. Ware. What shall I do? Where are they?"

"Who was the letter from?"

"I don't know. It was for Anne, and——"

"You call Miss Denham Anne," said Giles abruptly; "and you brought her here. What do you know of her?"

"Everything," said the Princess, sitting up. "In spite of Olga I must tell you the truth. Anne Denham is my daughter!"



CHAPTER XXI

A STORY OF THE PAST

This communication was so extraordinary and unexpected that Giles thought the Princess must be out of her mind. But although overcome with emotion, she was sane enough, and seeing his astonishment repeated her statement that Anne Denham was her daughter. The young man sat down to collect his thoughts.

"Do you mean to say that she is Mademoiselle Olga's sister?"

"Her half-sister," corrected the Princess, sobbing. "I never thought I should find her again, and like this. It's too dreadful!" And in strange contrast to her usual indolent demeanor, she wrung her hands.

Giles was still bewildered. "And you—were you the wife of Walter Franklin?" he stammered helplessly.

"There is no Walter Franklin," replied the woman, drying her eyes and sitting up. "George Franklin is Anne's father. He was my husband."

"But you are the wife of Prince Karacsay."

"Certainly. I eloped with him from Kingstown in Jamaica, and George divorced me. I afterwards married the Prince."

"Then the man at the Priory is your first husband?"

"No!" cried she vigorously. "He is not George Franklin."

"He calls himself so," muttered Ware, quite puzzled.

"Only to keep hold of the money left by Mr. Powell," explained the Princess. "He is really Alfred Denham, who caused all the misery of my married life with George."

"Anne's father."

"No. I tell you he is not Anne's father. George was the father of Anne. He is dead. He died shortly after divorcing me."

Giles felt his heart swell with gratitude to learn that Anne was not connected with——Here he paused, more bewildered than ever. "I don't quite understand, Princess," he said, trying to arrive in his own mind at some solution of this complicated mystery. "Had not your husband a brother called Walter?"

"No. George was an only son."

"Then did Alfred Denham have a brother of that name?"

"No. Don't you understand, Mr. Ware. You have been deceived. Denham, who calls himself by my husband's name pretends to be Anne's father, was the man who went down to Rickwell."

"The man whom Anne helped to escape."

"Yes. Under the belief that he is her father, poor child."

"Then there is no Walter Franklin. He is a myth?" The Princess nodded.

"Invented to throw you off the scent."

"And Denham, who calls himself George Franklin, really killed Daisy?"

"I believe he did," declared the Princess fiercely. "That man is one of the most wicked creatures born. He is capable of any crime."

Ware said nothing. His brain refused to take in the explanation. That he should have been so deceived seemed incredible, yet deceived he had been. All this time he had been following a phantom, while the real person was tricking him with masterly ingenuity. "But Anne told me herself that she had an uncle called Walter," said he suddenly.

"Of course! To save the man she believed to be her father."

"Wait! Wait! I can't grasp it yet." Giles buried his face in his hands and tried to think the matter out.

The Princess went to the window and drew aside the curtain. "I see nothing of Anne and Olga," she murmured. "Where can they have got to. Oh, am I to lose her after all?" She paused and came back to the couch. "Mr. Ware," she said, "I will tell you all my sad story, and then you can judge what is best to be done."

"That is best," said Giles, lifting up his worn face. "I am quite in the dark so far. The thing seems to be incredible."

"Truth is stranger than fiction," said the Princess quietly. "That is a truism, but no other saying can apply to what I am about to tell you."

"One moment, Princess. Who found out that Denham was masquerading as your late husband?"

"Olga found it out. I don't know how. She refuses to tell me."

"And she asked you to come over to identify the man?"

"Yes. That was why I went with her to Rickwell. I called on Denham, and saw that he was not my husband."

"I see!" murmured Giles, remembering what the gardener had told Mrs. Parry about the pallor of the so-called Franklin when he came to the door with his visitor. "I am beginning to gather some information out of all this. But if you will tell me the whole story——"

"At once, Mr. Ware. I want your advice and assistance. First you must have some whiskey."

"Not in the morning, thank you."

"You must have it!" she replied, ringing the bell. "What I have said already has upset you, and you will require all your courage to hear the rest."

"Anne," said Giles anxiously.

"My poor child. I fear for her greatly. No! Don't ask me more. So long as Olga is with her I hope that all will be well. Otherwise——" She made a quick gesture to silence him, for the servant entered to receive orders.

So Giles was provided with some whiskey and water, which the Princess made him drink at once. She had thrown off her languor, and was as quick in her movements as he usually was himself. The discovery of Denham's masquerade, the doubts about Anne's safety had roused her from her indolence, and she had braced herself to act. A more wonderful transformation Giles could scarcely have imagined. Shortly he was ordered to smoke. The Princess lighted a cigarette herself, and began abruptly to tell her tale. It was quite worthy of a melodramatic novelist.

"I was born in Jamaica," she said, speaking slowly and distinctly, so that Giles

should fully understand. "My father, Colonel Shaw, had retired from the army. Having been stationed at Kingstown, he had contracted a love for the island, and so stopped there. He went into the interior and bought an estate. Shortly afterwards he married my mother. She was a quadroon."

Giles uttered an ejaculation. He remembered that Anne had stated she had negro blood in her veins, and now saw why Princess Karacsay and her daughter had such a love for barbaric coloring. Also he guessed that Olga's fierce temperament was the outcome of her African blood.

The Princess nodded. She quite understood his interruption.

"You can see the negro in me," she said quietly. "In Jamaica that was considered disgraceful, but in Vienna no one knows about the taint."

"It is not a taint in England, Princess—or in the Old World."

"No! Perhaps not. But then"—she waved her delicate hand impatiently—"there is no need to discuss that, Mr. Ware. Let me proceed with what I have to tell you. When I was eighteen I married George Franklin. He was a young planter of good birth, and very handsome in looks."

"Anything like Denham?" asked Ware quickly.

The Princess blew a contemptuous cloud of smoke. "Not in the least, Mr. Ware. George was good-looking. What Denham is, you can see for yourself. Denham was George's foster-brother," she explained.

"And his evil genius," added Giles. "I am beginning to understand."

The Princess flushed crimson, and her whole body trembled with passion. "He ruined my life," she cried, trying to restrain her emotion. "If I could see him hanged, I should be pleased. But such a death would fall far short of the punishment he deserves."

"Has Denham negro blood in him?"

"Yes. He is a degree nearer the negro than I am. George was a native of Jamaica, and very rich. When his mother died he was quite a baby, and Denham's mother nursed him. Thus he became Denham's foster-brother, and the two boys grew up together. Powell tried all he could to neutralize the bad influence of Denham, but it was useless. George was quite under Denham's thumb."

"Powell! The man who left the money to Daisy? Was he in Jamaica?"

The Princess nodded. "For a time," she said, "George was at an English public school—Rugby, I fancy. He met Powell there, and the two became much attached. There was also another boy called Kent."

"Daisy's father?"

"Yes. George, Powell, and Kent were inseparable. They were called the Three Musketeers at school. Afterwards George lost sight of Kent, but Powell came out to Jamaica to stop with George. That was before and after my marriage. Denham was ruining my husband body and soul, and in pocket. Powell tried to remonstrate with George, but it was no use. Denham was the overseer, and George would not dismiss him. Then Powell returned to England. Afterwards when he heard from me that George was completely ruined, he wrote about the money."

"Did he say he would leave the money to George?"

"Not exactly that. He said that Kent was ruined also, and explained that if he could make a fortune he would leave it equally divided between George and Kent, as he did not intend to marry himself."

"But he did not leave his money equally divided," said Giles.

"No. But at that time Kent was not married, and Powell had not gone to Australia to make his money. Whether he liked Kent better than George I don't know, but, as you are aware, he left the money first to Daisy—knowing that Kent was dead—and afterwards, should she die, to George and his descendants."

"Then the money which Denham holds as Franklin is rightfully Anne's?"

"Yes. Now you are beginning to see. But don't be in too much of a hurry. I want to tell you how my elopement came about."

Ware nodded, and composed himself to listen. The Princess resumed.

"I was happy at first with George. I really was in love with him, and for two years we were devoted to one another. Anne was born, and she drew us still closer together. Then Denham chose to fall in love with me. I repelled him with scorn, but did not tell my husband, as I dreaded lest George, who had a fiery temper, should kill the man. I simply kept Denham at his distance. He vowed to

be revenged, and gradually ruined George. He made him neglect the plantation, and spend more money than he could afford. He induced him to drink, and then George, who had not a very strong will, began to run after other women. I was furious, and told him about Denham. He was so besotted with the creature that he refused to listen to me. Powell tried to stop George's downward course, but without result. Then he was called back to England, and I was left to battle against my enemy alone. My father and mother were both dead, and I could do nothing. Denham constantly inflamed George against me. Our house was like hell."

Here she stopped to draw a long breath and control her emotion. Giles pitied her profoundly, as he guessed how she had suffered. However, he did not interrupt her, and she continued in a few moments.

"Prince Karacsay came to the island. He was travelling for pleasure, and in his own yacht. He fell in love with me. Seeing how miserable I was, he implored me to fly with him. But I would not. I had lost much of my love for George, who, under the bad influence of Denham, treated me so cruelly. But there was my child—my little Anne—to consider. I declined to fly. Our plantation was not far from the seashore. In a creek the Prince had anchored his yacht. Denham was making my husband jealous, and my life became unbearable. Oh!"—she threw up her arms—"not even the years of peace that I have had can obliterate the memory of that terrible time." And she wept.

Still, Ware did not interrupt, thinking it best that she should not be questioned too much. With a great effort she controlled herself, and resumed her pitiful story.

"One night," she went on in a low voice, "the climax came. The Prince had been to dinner. He had to go, because George was so violent. Denham had got my husband to drink, and his paroxysms of anger became terrible. The Prince wanted to stop to protect me, but I asked him to go. It was a rainy night, a violent thunderstorm was going on. I locked myself in the nursery, to protect myself from the fury of George. He came to the door and broke it down." She paused, and her voice leaped an octave. "George turned me out into the rain."

"Great God! Did he go that far?"

She was on her feet by this time pacing the room.

"He turned me out into the stormy night. I fled from his fury, drenched with rain.

At the gates of the gardens round the house I met with the Prince. He had been hanging round the place fearful for my life. He implored me to come on board the yacht and stop the night. I was almost distracted with terror and anger. I went." She paused again. "From that moment I was lost."

"It was not your fault," Giles assured her.

"No; it was not my husband's fault either, but the fault of that wicked wretch Denham. He came the next morning, guessing where I had gone in my distress. He brought a note from George, who bade me go with my lover, the Prince. It was a lie. The Prince was no lover of mine then. I demanded to see my child, but George refused. It was all Denham—Denham. George was under the thumb of the wretch. The Prince behaved like an honorable gentleman, and spoke up for me. But it was all of no use. George was determined to have a divorce."

"You mean Denham was determined to have one," corrected Giles.

"Yes, yes. He was the one who ruined me. Then the Prince said he would make me his wife as soon as the decree was pronounced. I agreed. What else could I do? My child was refused to me. I was blamed by every one, and the whole island was against me. I sailed for Europe in Prince Karacsay's yacht. A few months later the decree was pronounced, and he made me his wife. Since then I have been happy—that is as happy as I could be, knowing that my child was lost."

"Did you make inquiries about her?"

"Some years later I did. Then I learned that George, with the child and Denham, had sailed for Europe. The vessel was wrecked. The report said that George Franklin and his child were saved. Denham's name was given as one who was drowned. I rejoiced when I saw that punishment had overtaken my enemy."

"But Denham was not drowned."

"No; it was George who met with that death. Denham, to get what little money remained, took the name of George Franklin. I do not know how he managed to deceive the people of the ship; but he must have done so in some way, to get the false report put in the paper."

"Did Denham not tell you when you unmasked him at Rickwell?"

"He made some sort of explanation, but I think much of it was very false."

"How did you come to discover him?"

"Olga did so. She knew a part of my story. That was why—as perhaps you saw—she was always uneasy when I touched on Jamaica."

"Yes; I remember that, Princess. Well, I must get Mademoiselle Olga to tell me how she discovered all this. But on what terms did you leave Denham?"

"I told him that I would give him a month to make restitution to my daughter Anne, and then if he did not I would inform the police."

"Did he agree?"

"No; the wretch defied me. He told me that Anne had murdered Daisy Kent out of jealousy, and said that if I moved a finger against him he would have her arrested."

"He could not do that without harming himself."

"I don't know," said the Princess wearily; "he is so clever that he seems to do what he likes. I have taken no steps, because I wished to get some advice as to how I should act under the circumstances. For this reason I tell you."

"I will do my best, Princess. But how was it Anne came with you?"

"Olga managed that. She knew Anne was at the Priory. I don't know how. Olga knows much. I wish she and Anne would come back again. I hope nothing has happened."

Even as she spoke the door opened, and Olga entered the room looking haggard and worn out. "Anne!" cried her mother. "Where is Anne?"

"Lost!" replied Olga, dropping exhausted into a chair, "lost!"



CHAPTER XXII

OLGA'S EVIDENCE

Giles saw in the girl almost as great a change as that which had taken place in her mother. Formerly haughty and self-possessed, she was now quite exhausted and broken down. Her dress was muddy and wet and in disorder. She had a grey face and red eyes. Huddled up in the chair, she looked a pitiable object—the ruin of what was once a beautiful woman.

"Anne lost?" cried the Princess, clutching at a chair to steady herself. "Olga, what do you mean?"

Olga did not answer. She closed her eyes and let her umbrella fall with a crash. Giles saw that the girl was quite worn out. Hastily filling a glass with undiluted whiskey, he held it to her lips, and made her drink the whole of it. Shortly the ardent spirit did its work. She sat up and began to talk in a stronger tone; but the excitement was artificial, and would die away soon. Princess Karacsay saw this, and urged her daughter to tell her story quickly before she collapsed, so that the police might be sent in search of Anne.

"The police will never find her," said Olga, with an effort. "She is with Mark Dane. He has taken her away."

"Dane?" echoed Giles. "Denham's secretary?"

Olga looked at him with an inquiring air. "How much do you know?" she asked, bracing herself up.

"As much as your mother could tell me. I know that Anne is your half-sister, and _____"

"Yes." Olga tried to rise, but sank back again. "She is my sister, my dear sister, and I love her with all the strength of my nature."

"Ah," said Ware sadly, "why did you not talk like that when last we met, mademoiselle?"

Olga passed her hand across her forehead. "I was mad, I think. But that is all

over. You need have no fear now, Mr. Ware. My passion for you has spent itself."

"Olga!" cried the Princess, scandalized, "you rave!"

"No," answered her daughter; "I did last time Mr. Ware and I were together, but now I talk sense. Did he not tell?"

"I told nothing," interposed Giles quickly; "and you had better relate when and where you left Anne, so that we can find her."

"I'll do all in my power to save her and bring her back to you, Mr. Ware. I was mad to talk and act as I did; but I have been punished by the loss of Anne."

"Olga!" cried the Princess in desperation, "for Heaven's sake speak reasonably! Why did you go out with Anne last night?"

"There was a note for Anne from Mark Dane, asking her to meet him near the Abbey. She wanted to see him, as he vanished after the supposed death of her father."

"Of Alfred Denham," interrupted the Princess angrily; "I will not have that man called Anne's father."

"Of Denham," said Olga obediently. "Anne wished to learn why her father had acted in so peculiar a way. She could not understand his behavior."

"He is a scoundrel and Anne a saint," said the Princess bitterly. "No wonder she could not understand him. She thinks he is a good man."

"But surely she knows that he killed Daisy Kent," said Giles.

"No," interposed Olga; "she denies that he did. I expect Denham has managed to deceive her in some way."

"Why did you not undeceive her, mademoiselle?"

"It was not yet time," responded the girl quietly, "but my mother told her a portion of the truth."

"Yes. I said that she was my child and that Denham had been impersonating her father, George Franklin."

"Then she can't think Denham a good man now," said Giles.

"I don't know," replied the Princess hopelessly. "He has such power over her. He has been her father so-called for so long that she finds it difficult to believe ill of him."

"To learn the truth was why she insisted on seeing Dane," said the girl. "Dane knew all about Denham, and Anne thought she would make him confess what he knew."

"And did he?"

"That I can't say. I went out with Anne and we walked to the appointed spot. Mark Dane was waiting for us."

"Was he not astonished when he saw you?"

"Why should he be astonished?" asked Olga, looking sharply at Ware.

"Because I understand from Steel that he troubled you with letters."

"You mean that Dane was in love with me. Yes. He was and is."

"Olga," cried her mother again, "do behave yourself."

"Oh, this is too serious to be a mere matter of behavior, mother. I have made use of Dane's love to learn all about the society of the Scarlet Cross, to which Franklin and Dane belong."

"You can tell us that later," said the Princess impatiently. "I want to know how you lost Anne."

"Well, mother, Dane was astonished to see me. He was most respectful, and said that he had a message for Anne from her father——"

"From Denham."

"Yes. Anne mentioned that Denham was not her father, that she had just heard the truth, and Dane was amazed. He hardly knew what to say, but ultimately stammered out some sort of denial. Anne did not give him time to speak. She said that she would see Denham herself, and get to the bottom of the imposture. Then she asked what message he had sent in the character of her father. Dane refused to give it in my presence, so I walked away for ten minutes and left them together. Oh, I was foolish, I know," she added in reply to Ware's exclamation. "But I thought Mark Dane was devoted to me, and would not play any tricks

while I was about. However, I did leave them alone. Anne was not in the least afraid, as she always got on well with Dane and trusted him entirely. When I returned in ten minutes, or it may be more, they were gone."

"Gone!" echoed the Princess, much agitated. "Where?"

"I don't know. I searched everywhere. I went round and round the Abbey. I asked a policeman. They were nowhere to be found. I fancied that they went across to Westminster Bridge, which they could easily do without my seeing them. Anne must have gone of her own accord. She was decoyed by Dane. I don't know why, no more than I know what inducement he held out to lure her away. I searched for hours. Then I asked a policeman about the matter. He told me to go to Scotland Yard. I went and inquired for Steel. He had gone home. I have been walking the streets all night," said Olga, with a haggard look.

"Oh, great heavens!" moaned the Princess, wringing her hands; "what would your father say if he heard?"

"He will never know unless you tell him, mother. I can look after myself easily. No one molested me. I had a cup of coffee at a stall this morning, and went again to see Steel. He has gone out of town."

"To Rickwell?" asked Giles eagerly; then he remembered. "I can't understand. I called to see Steel at midday before I came here, and he was then in his office."

"Well, the official I spoke to about nine o'clock told me that he had gone, leaving a message that he was going out of town, and would not be back for a few days."

"I wonder," began Giles, and then held his peace. It occurred to him that Steel intended to remain until he caught Dane in the trap laid for him in this very flat. The knowledge that the man had decoyed Anne away on the previous night made Giles the more eager that he should be caught. "You will see Anne yet, Princess," he said, for she was crying bitterly.

"Oh, I hope so—I hope so. But where is she?"

"We must ask Dane that."

"How are we to see Dane?" demanded Olga wonderingly.

Ware explained the use made of Olga's name by Steel to trap the man. "I expect Steel will call on you to-day to tell you this," he said cheerfully.

"I am not sorry, and yet I am," said Olga thoughtfully. "I know much about Mark Dane, and want to save him from his bad companions. But I hope Steel won't put him in gaol; that would ruin him entirely. Besides, Steel promised not to have him arrested."

"Promised you?" said Ware, astonished.

"Yes. It was I who told him to look after Dane. I know much about this matter." Then seeing Giles puzzled, she explained, "When I first met Anne I saw that she was like myself in looks. That drew us together. You see it yourself, do you not, Mr. Ware?"

"Yes," replied Giles, "and I often wondered at it. Now, however, that I know you are half-sisters, I wonder no longer."

Princess Karacsay nodded her approval, and Olga continued.

"When I learned that Anne's name was Denham I rather drew back from her. She said that she was born in Jamaica, and, knowing what my mother had said about Denham, I thought Anne was the daughter of my mother's enemy. Afterwards I learned the truth through Dane."

"How did you meet Dane?"

"Well, I knew him by sight long before we spoke. He used to dog Anne and myself. She never saw him. When I described his looks she thought he might be her dead father's secretary—for she then believed her father, Denham, alias Franklin, was dead. She wished to see him, but Dane always kept out of her sight. Then when Anne went to Mrs. Morley he still continued to dog me. He got to know a concert hall where I frequently sang and hired himself there as an attendant. Then he took to sending me love-letters. I was angry at first. Afterwards I wondered if he knew anything about Denham, and thought he must if he really was the secretary, as Anne said. I asked him to come here."

"Olga," said the Princess, "you have behaved badly."

"It has all turned out for the best," responded Olga wearily. She was beginning to show signs of fatigue again, but still kept on with her explanation in the most plucky manner. "Dane came. He is a handsome young fellow and was well dressed. I led him on to talk about Anne. He told me more than he should have done."

"Told you what?"

"That Denham had come in for money and was living at Rickwell. As I knew from Anne about the Powell money, I put two and two together and concluded that Denham was pretending to be Anne's father; that she was really my half-sister; and that her pretended father had really murdered Daisy Kent to get the money as Franklin."

"But how did you know about this?" asked Giles.

"Why," replied Olga, much surprised at his density, "I read the case in the papers. I knew that Anne could not have killed Daisy, and having settled in my own mind that she was not Denham's daughter, from her resemblance to me, I decided that Franklin, who lived at the Priory and had the money, was really my mother's enemy. I sent for my mother. She came over, went down to Rickwell, and recognized Denham. That is all."

"Wait a minute," said Giles quickly, "what about your telling Steel to look after Dane?"

"Well, Mr. Ware, it was this way," she answered. "When you came to me and talked about the Scarlet Cross, I remembered that Dane had such a one on his watch-chain."

"The badge of the gang!"

"Of course, but I did not know that until later. Then Steel came in, if you remember, and hinted that the red cross was the symbol of such a gang. Your talk of the cross being found in the church, and that you thought it was dropped by the criminal set me thinking. I sent for Dane again and tried to find out the truth. At first he refused, saying it was as much as his life was worth to talk."

"And I daresay he is right, mademoiselle. Denham would not stick at a second murder. By the way, did you know he was Wilson?"

"Only when Dane confessed. I gradually got him to be confidential to me, promising that he would not get into trouble. He was so deeply in love with me that he spoke out at last."

"My dear Olga!"

"Well, mother, I knew if I could get at the truth I could save Anne."

The Princess nodded, well pleased. "I am glad you thought of your sister." Olga flushed a deep red and her eyes sought those of Giles. "It was not my sister I thought of, but of myself," she said in a low tone. "You see, mother, I fancied that I might get something if I could prove the innocence of Anne, for I——"

"Is any explanation needed, mademoiselle?" said Giles uneasily.

She paused for a moment and looked at him straightly. "No," she said at length; "that is all over. I think no more explanation need be made. But with regard to Dane. He told me that Denham had come to England to see about the money left to Daisy Kent. He disguised himself as Wilson and lodged at a Mrs. Benker's. Then he went down to Rickwell, and——"

"And murdered Daisy," interposed Giles eagerly.

"So I said, Mr. Ware; but Dane, who seems devoted in a way to Denham, denies that he struck the blow."

"Does he know who did?"

"No. He says Denham doesn't know either."

"Denham's a bigger scoundrel than you think," said Giles, recalling his last conversation at the Priory. "He accuses Anne of murdering the girl."

"He'll have to prove it, then," said Olga coolly, while her mother shrieked. "I'll be able to save Anne, never fear. However, Dane told me that the red cross was the badge of a thieves' gang. Denham had a yacht called *The Red Cross*, which goes from one port to another to take stolen goods on board."

"That's what Steel says."

"Of course. Dane told him when he taxed him with it. The boy, for he is just twenty-five, told me everything."

"And you told Steel," said Ware, rather reproachfully.

"I had to tell Steel, if I wished to save Anne," retorted Olga; "but I asked him to do nothing to imperil the liberty of Mark Dane."

"Did he promise that?"

"Yes. Dane saw him in Bournemouth. I told him to call with a note, which I gave him. Dane did not know why he was sent, and when he discovered that Steel was

a detective, he became afraid. I believe he told something, but he afterwards ran away."

"He doesn't trust you any longer perhaps," said the Princess.

"From his attitude last night I think he does, although he was a trifle reproachful. He will come if Steel has written a letter to call him here in my name. Then I daresay he will be able to explain why he took Anne away."

"Will he do so?"

"Ah! that is what we must find out." Olga paused, then continued. "I wanted Steel to learn all he could from Dane about Denham, as I wish to see that man arrested."

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," cried the Princess.

"I thought of that. Denham tried to ruin your mother."

"And he did—he did!" she said bitterly.

"He tried, or rather he is trying, to ruin Anne also," said Olga. "For these reasons I wish Steel to find evidence against him, so that he may be arrested and made to confess his wickedness. Dane is the one who can tell most about him, and I think Dane will, for since Denham got the Powell money he had not behaved very well."

While they were thus talking a knock came to the door. The servant entered with a card, which she presented on a salver to her mistress. Olga, who was thoroughly worn out, took it languidly, then suddenly became excited. "He is here!" she said. "Mark Dane is here!"

CHAPTER XXIII

MARK DANE

When Olga announced the name of her visitor, the Princess rose to leave the room. She explained that she did not think it was in keeping with the dignity of her position to meet every shady person who called, and added that her daughter was not behaving in a way worthy of her name and princely family. When she departed Olga looked inquiringly at Ware. He swiftly interpreted her look.

"I shall stop," he said promptly. "I am only too anxious to help you."

Olga came forward and took his hand. "And you forgive me?" she asked.

"There is nothing to forgive," he answered, shaking it heartily. "Let us seek for Anne together. I daresay Dane will be able to tell us where she is. I leave you to manage him."

The girl nodded and touched the bell. Shortly the maid showed in a slim young fellow of a somewhat effeminate type. He was clean-shaven and wonderfully pale, with large dark eyes and curly black hair, worn rather long. He was dressed in a grey suit and wore a red scarf tied loosely in a bow. There was something foreign in his looks and dress. At the first sight one would have taken him for an Italian, but when he spoke it was apparent that he was an Englishman.

"Princess!" he said effusively, when he entered. Then catching sight of Giles in the background, he stopped short with a scared look.

"This is a friend of mine, Mark," said Olga, coming forward. "He knows all that there is to be known."

"Oh! And you promised not to say a word," said Dane reproachfully.

She shook her head. "I promised to save you from being arrested, and I shall fulfil my promise. Why have you come here?"

Dane fumbled in his pocket. "Your letter," he said, handing it to her.

Olga took it, glanced at it, and finally passed it to Ware.

"I did not write that letter," she said quietly. "Steel the detective sent it, so as to bring you here. He wishes to resume the conversation you left unfinished at Bournemouth."

"It's a trap!" cried Dane violently, and swung round to the door. But there was no chance of escape in that direction. He opened it to find Steel standing without. The detective stepped into the room and locked the door.

"Now," he said, "we can have some conversation. Princess, I apologize for having used your name unauthorized, but it was the only way to bring this young man into my net."

"Into a net!" said Dane, letting fall his soft hat. "You intend to have me arrested!" His hand went round to the back of his waist. In a moment Steel had flung himself forward, and after a short struggle disarmed him. The knife that the detective had secured was an ugly-looking weapon.

"You are more Italian than the Italians," he said, slipping the knife into his pocket; "but you are not a gentleman to frighten the lady."

"I am not frightened," said Olga promptly; "but I am very tired. I shall retire and leave you two gentlemen to deal with Mark."

Dane sprang forward and caught her dress. He looked terrified. "Do not leave me," he entreated. "You know that I love you, and that for your sake I have betrayed a man who has done much for me. You promised to help me."

"I shall do so," she answered, returning to her seat. "I shall see that you are not arrested, and——"

"Pardon me, Princess, it may be necessary to——"

"Mr. Steel, this man shall not be arrested," she said, stamping her foot.

"If I am," cried Dane resolutely, "I shall say nothing. Only to save myself will I speak."

Ware addressed a few hurried words to the detective, who nodded reluctantly. It was Giles who spoke. "I promise that you shall not be put in gaol, Dane," he said, "but you must tell the truth."

"If I do so I am in danger of my life."

"Then it is not gratitude that keeps you silent?"

"Gratitude!" said Dane, flinging back his head, "what have I to be grateful for? Mr. Franklin——"

"You mean Denham," interposed Olga quickly.

"Denham!" echoed Steel, "that is the father of the governess."

"No," said Giles, "Anne's father is dead. This man Denham pretended to play the part, and she has only lately been undeceived. Also, Mr. Steel, you must know that there is no Walter Franklin. The man at the Priory is the scoundrel you know as Wilson, the head of the Scarlet Cross Society and the murderer of Miss Kent."

"Not that last," interposed Dane, while Steel dropped into a seat transfixed with astonishment. "Denham did not kill her. He does not know who did. He told me so."

"He would tell you anything to save himself," said Olga.

"No," replied Dane, "he tells me all his secrets. At one time I should have died before I revealed them, but Denham has treated me cruelly. I owe him no gratitude. For years I slaved for him. I did all that a man could do for his sake. What reward have I got? He has beaten me like a dog. He has left me to starve. He has delivered me up to those members of our society who hate me. Since he came in for this money——"

"Wrongfully," put in Giles.

"As you say, sir—wrongfully. But since he became George Franklin and a wealthy man, he told me plainly that he washed his hands of me. He gave me a small sum, and sent me to America, promising an annuity. It was not paid. I wrote—I threatened. He laughed at me. So I have come back from America to punish him." He turned to Olga and continued vehemently, "Do you think that I would have told you what I did, Princess, had I not hated the man? No. Not even for the love I bear you would I have done that. You sent me to Mr. Steel at Bournemouth. I knew that he was a detective, and went prepared to tell all about Denham's wickedness, even although I incriminated myself."

"But you did not do so," said Steel dryly; "you ran away."

"And why? Because you mentioned that you suspected Miss Denham of a crime.

I held my tongue until I could see some chance of proving her innocence. Had I told you all I knew then you would have had her arrested, and let her know the shame of the man—her father."

"He is not her father," said Olga again.

"I know nothing about that," replied Dane, sitting down; "he always said that he was her father, and I had no reason to believe otherwise. But I am glad to hear that he is not. She is too good and pure to be the daughter of such a man. I have known her for years. She is an angel. She nursed me through an illness. I would do anything to prove my gratitude for her sake. I held my hand from harming Denham because I thought he was her father, and——"

"You need do so no longer," cried Ware, whose face was bright when he heard this praise of Anne; "she is the daughter of George Franklin, of Jamaica. Denham assumed the name to get the Powell money."

"Then," cried Dane, flinging wide his arms in a most dramatic manner, "all I know you shall know. I turn King's evidence."

"The best way to save your own skin," said Steel dryly; "you are an Irishman, are you not?"

Dane nodded. "Born in New York," said he.

"Humph!" murmured Steel, but so low that only Giles heard him, "all the better. You would betray your own mother if it suited you."

Meanwhile Olga was speaking to the man. "The first thing you have to confess," she said, "is about Miss Denham. Where is she?"

"With Mr. Morley."

Giles uttered an exclamation. "What has he got to do with her?"

"I don't know. He came up to town yesterday evening."

"About nine or ten?" asked Giles quickly. He remembered his feeling of being watched at the Liverpool Street Station.

"Yes," assented Dane, "he came up to see me. He said that he had a message for Miss Denham from her father. Of course I thought then that Denham was really her father. I asked Morley why he did not deliver the message himself, for he

knew that Miss Denham had come to town with the Princess Karacsay."

"How the deuce did he know that?" wondered Giles.

"Well, you see, sir, Mr. Morley was a detective at one time, and he always finds out what he desires."

"True enough," put in Steel, "Joe Bart is very clever."

"He appears to have been extremely so in this case," said Giles dryly.

"Morley told me," continued Mark, "that Miss Denham knew he suspected her of the murder, and she would not let him see her. If she knew he had come to look her up that she would run away thinking he came to have her arrested. He asked me to tell her to come to a rendezvous near the Abbey without mentioning his name. I thought this was reasonable enough, and wrote a letter."

"And I went with Anne," said Olga. "Where did you go?"

"When you left us I told her that Morley had a message from her father. She said nothing to me denying the relationship, but she was afraid of Morley. I told her that he had promised not to do her any harm. She was still doubtful. Then Morley appeared. He had been close at hand, and he explained that Denham was very ill. He wished to see Miss Denham and make reparation for his wickedness. There was no time to be lost, Morley said, and he asked her to come at once. She hesitated for a time, and then went with Morley. She told me to wait till the Princess Olga came back and tell her this."

"Why did you not?"

"Because Morley whispered that I was not to do so. I went away in another direction."

"Then why do you tell now?" asked Ware bluntly.

"I wish to be revenged on Denham," said Dane fiercely. "He treated me like a dog, and he shall be bitten by me. Curse him!"

Olga walked to the door. "I shall go now," she said, seeing that Dane was becoming excited and fearing a scene. "You can tell Mr. Steel and Mr. Ware everything, Mark. When Denham is caught and Anne is free, you shall come to Vienna with me. My father shall take you into his service," and with this she held out her hand to him in a regal manner. Dane kissed it as though it had been

the hand of a queen, and when she was out of the room, turned to the two men with a shining face.

"I am ready to tell you everything," he said.

"And betray those who have done you a kindness," muttered Steel. "You would not be an Irish-American if you didn't. I know the type."

Quite unaware of this uncomplimentary speech, Dane glanced into a near mirror and ran his slim hand through his hair. He cast such a complacent look at his reflection that Giles could not forbear a smile. The man was a compound of treachery, courage, and vanity. He had some virtues and not a few vices, and was one of those irresponsible creatures who develop into Anarchists. But that the Scarlet Cross Society had attracted his talents in the direction of a kind of coast piracy, he would without doubt have been employed in blowing up kings or public buildings. Giles thought with a grim smile that if Olga took this creature to Austria, Prince Karacsay would have some work to keep him in order. Dane was not the man to settle to a dull, respectable existence or to earn his bread without a little excitement. A dangerous man, and the more dangerous from his enormous vanity and utter want of moral principle.

Having made Steel promise not to arrest him, nor to make any use of his revelations to endanger his own liberty, Dane cheerfully proceeded to betray those he had sworn secrecy to. Wicked as was the gang, and evil as was the purpose of its formation, Giles could not help feeling a contempt for the traitor. There should be honor amongst thieves, thought Ware. But Dane did not believe in the proverb, and explained himself quite complacently.

"I met Denham—as he usually called himself many years ago in Italy—at Milan," said Dane; "he had a house there. His daughter—let us call Miss Anne his daughter, although I am glad to hear she is not—lived with him. She was then about fifteen and was at school at a convent. She and I got on very well. I adored her for her beauty and kindness of heart. I was starving for want of money, as my remittances had not arrived from America. Denham took me in. I made myself useful, so there was no charity about the matter."

"Still, he took you in," suggested Giles, "that was kind."

"A kindness to himself," retorted Dane. "I tell you, sir, Denham wanted what he called a secretary and what I called a tool. He found such a one in me. I don't deny that I did all his dirty work, but I had some feeling of gratitude because he rescued me from starvation."

"You contradict yourself, Dane."

"No, sir, I do not," replied the man, with true Irish obstinacy, "but I'm not here to argue about my conduct but to tell you facts."

"Facts we wish to know," said Steel, taking out his note-book.

"And facts I tell," cried Dane vehemently, then resumed in a calmer tone. "Miss Anne was all day at school. Denham never let her know what a devil he was. He was always kind to her. She thought him a good man. Then thinking she might get to know too much, he sent her to a convent for education and removed to Florence. There he called himself George Franklin. He told me that he expected to get money by taking that name."

"Then he admitted that he was not George Franklin," said Giles.

"He never admitted anything. At one time he would say that his real name was George Franklin, at another declare he was really Alfred Denham. But he had so many names in the course of his career," added Dane, with a shrug, "that one more or less did not matter. Besides, he was such a liar that I never believed anything he said."

"Not even about the Powell money?"

"Oh, yes, I believed that. He was always swearing at some girl who stood between him and the money. He mentioned her name once. I was with him in England at the time, and set to work to find out. I learned all about Miss Kent and her engagement to you, Mr. Ware."

"And you know all about the Powell money?"

"Yes. I got the truth out of Denham at last, but he never told Miss Anne; nor did he ever mention Miss Kent's name in her presence; nor did he ever say to me that Miss Anne was not his child. I never thought for a moment she was Franklin's daughter. And for the matter of that," added Dane carelessly, "I did not know if

he was really Denham or Franklin himself."

"But Miss Anne knew nothing of all this?" asked Giles.

"Absolutely nothing. After she went to the Milan convent, Denham would not let her come back to him again. He was afraid lest she should learn what he was and wished to preserve her good opinion. She went out as a governess, and only rarely came home."

"And how did Denham earn his living?"

"Oh, he invented the Scarlet Cross Society. He bought a yacht, and steamed to England from Genoa. For years we put in at different ports, robbed houses and stowed the goods on board. Then we returned to Italy and sold them."

"A clever dodge," murmured Steel. "So that is why the goods were never traced."

"That is why," said Dane, with great coolness. "There was a Jew who took a lot of what we brought. He sold them in the East. But it is too long a story to tell at present. Denham sometimes went to England and sometimes stopped in Florence. When he was away I stayed in his house as George Franklin."

"I see. He wished to prove an *alibi*."

"That's it," said Dane. "He intended to get that money sometime, and wished that when inquiries were made about George Franklin that it could be proved he was in Florence all the time."

"And then when Powell did die?"

"Denham knew as soon as possible. He had a spy in Australia, and had a cablegram sent to him. Then he arranged a pretended death to get rid of Miss Anne. He did not want her to come into his new life. He treated her well, however, for he left her money, and intended to give her an income when he got the money. Another man was buried in place of Denham and he went to England, where he reappeared as George Franklin to claim the money."

"As Wilson, you mean, to kill the girl who stood between him and the fortune," said Steel, raising his eyes.

Dane shook his head. "I know nothing of that," he said. "From the day Denham left Florence my association with him has severed. I saw Miss Anne, told her

about the death of her father, and then went to America. Denham did not pay me my annuity, and I came back to be revenged. I saw him, but he denies having killed the girl. He says he does not know who committed the murder. I have been earning my bread as I best can, waiting for revenge."

"But you had only to threaten to make all this public to make Denham give you what you wished."

"No." Dane looked uneasy. "The fact is he and some one else have a hold over me. I need not tell you what it is, but I had to be silent."

"But now that you speak he has still the hold."

"Yes. But I intend to ruin myself in order to ruin him," cried Dane fiercely, and rose to his feet. "Well, gentlemen, that is all I can tell you at present. I shall go."

To Giles' surprise, Steel made no objection. "You'll come and see me again?" he said, opening the door for Dane.

"Assuredly," replied that young gentleman, and departed.

Giles looked amazed at this permission to depart being given by the detective. "I should have thought it would be to your interest to keep Dane here," he said. "He has not told us everything yet."

"No," replied Steel, closing his book with a snap, "there is one very interesting detail he has not told us. But the next time we meet I'll get it out of him. Here," he touched the book, "there is enough to go on with. I'll go down to the Priory and see the sick Mr. Denham."

"I'll come also and see Anne," said Giles eagerly. "But Dane?"

"He's all right. I have a couple of men waiting outside. He will be followed everywhere. I'll be able to lay hands on him whenever I like. Also I wish to see where he goes. He knows the various hiding-places of this gang, and I want him to be tracked to one of them."

"H'm! Don't you believe his story?"

"Not altogether. He evidently hates Denham with all the virulent hatred of a malicious character. He's a devil, that man Dane. I should not like to incur his enmity. However, we'll make use of him, and then the Princess can take him to Vienna to make trouble there, as he assuredly will."

"What is the especial detail you want to learn?"

"I wish him to explain how he killed Daisy Kent."

"He! Dane! Do you mean to say——?"

"I mean to say that Dane is the murderer," said Steel triumphantly. "That is the reason Denham and this other person (whoever he may be) have a hold over him. If he ruins Denham, he does so at the cost of being hanged."



CHAPTER XXIV

A RAT IN A CORNER

The next day Giles returned to Rickwell with Steel. The detective could not leave town before, as he had to procure a warrant for the arrest of Alfred Denham, alias Wilson, alias George Franklin, and half a dozen other names. The man was to be arrested for various robberies connected with the gang of thieves, of which he was the head. Search was being made by the police for *The Red Cross* yacht, but evidently the gang had taken alarm, for she had disappeared. It was Steel's opinion that she was down Plymouth way, sailing round the Devonshire coast, and the police in that county were on the lookout.

"Once I can get that ship," explained Steel to Giles when in the train, "and their claws will be cut. They have escaped for a long time, so ingenious have their methods been. But I have accumulated a mass of evidence, and have several names known to the police. Yes, and several names of people not known. There are about twenty thieves, professional and amateur, connected with this matter. It is a big affair. But I'll get the yacht, and then Denham. That will be the means of laying bare the whole swindle."

"Which? Denham or the yacht?"

"Each! both! If the police can seize the boat unexpectedly, some incriminating papers are sure to be found on board. And if I can arrest Denham, I'll soon get the truth out of him."

"I don't believe he can tell the truth, even if forced to," said Ware grimly. "You have no idea how that man has cheated me, Steel," and then Giles related the eavesdropping of himself and Morley.

"I don't know how Denham got to know," he continued, "but the tale he told about the invented brother was his own history, and quite deceived me and Morley. Also that soliloquy after Mrs. Benker departed was a masterly conception. It would have cheated any one, let alone me. The man was acting for the benefit of myself and Morley, and knew we were listening. What a clever scoundrel!"

"He's been a little too clever this time," replied Steel; then he began to laugh, but refused to explain why he did so, save in a general way.

"This is the queerest case I was ever in," he said, with a chuckle; "you don't know how queer."

"Well, you explain. I think you are keeping something from me."

"I am," answered Steel readily. "Tit for tat, Mr. Ware. You did a little business on your own account, and said nothing to me. I repay the compliment."

"I was afraid you would arrest Miss Denham."

"You mean Miss Franklin. No, I should not have done that. My investigations into this thieving case have shown me that she is perfectly innocent. She knows nothing about Denham's rascalities, and she certainly did not commit the murder."

"Are you so sure that Dane is the culprit?" asked Giles.

"Yes, I am sure. He was at Gravesend on board that yacht, and when the so-called Wilson came by train from London, Dane rode over from Tilbury on a motor-bicycle. They met on that night, and then I expect Denham induced Dane to murder the girl. Afterwards Dane went back to Tilbury as he came, and Denham induced his daughter to rescue him on your motor."

"But why should he get Anne to do that?"

"Because he saw that he had been wrong in forcing Dane to do what he did. Dane was too hasty. He should have waited till Denham was a safe distance away, and then have executed the deed. As it was I believe that Denham came out to find the girl dead, and knowing he might be accused, lost his head. Otherwise he certainly would not have betrayed himself to Miss Anne. She, believing him to be her father, secured the car and saved him. A very clever woman, Mr. Ware. I hope you will ask me to the wedding."

"How do you know it will ever take place?" asked Giles sadly.

"Because I am sure we shall find Miss Anne in the Priory. I shall arrest Denham, and you can place the lady in charge of some friend, or send her up to her mother, the Princess Karacsay. By the way, how does she come to be the mother?"

"It's a long story. The Princess was married twice, first to George Franklin, of Jamaica, and secondly to Prince Karacsay. But how do you know that when Morley arrived with Anne that Denham did not take fright and fly?"

"I don't think Morley would let him do that. It is probable that Miss Anne would tell him what she knew, and there would be quite enough suspicion excited in Morley's mind to induce him to communicate with me."

"Has he done so?"

"Well, no, he hasn't. But then, he's a detective also, you see, and his professional jealousy, even although he has retired, may induce him to engineer this business himself. But he shan't have the credit of it after all my work," cried Steel vehemently.

Then the detective began to turn over his notes, so as to prepare for the coming interview with Denham. Giles gave himself up to his own thoughts, and rejoiced that he would soon see Anne again. Her character would be cleared, and then she would become his wife. Ware was much relieved that Olga had overcome her foolish fancy for him, but he could not be sure if her cure was permanent. When she excused herself, she was weak and exhausted, and he dreaded lest when she recovered she should begin to persecute him again. But after all, as he reflected, it really did not much matter. The future of Anne was taken out of her hands, and the Princess Karacsay would not permit Olga to play fast and loose with Anne's happiness.

Giles remembered how Olga had told him that Anne was at school at Hampstead, but had not said a word about the convent at Milan. No doubt Anne, when she first came to England, had gone for a few finishing lessons to the Hampstead school, for there she had met Mrs. Cairns. Still, Olga all the time had known much more of Anne's history than she had chosen to tell. And if the Princess Karacsay had not been so candid, Ware doubted very much if Olga would have confessed her relationship with Anne. Yet on second thought he fancied he might be doing the Hungarian sister wrong. In spite of her proposed treachery, she was really fond of Anne, and perhaps would not have delivered her up to the police. In fact, after she brought her mother over to unmask Denham, and had thus made her aware of Anne's existence, she could not do that without provoking her mother's undying enmity. On the whole, Olga was something of a problem, and although Giles wished to think of her as kindly as he could, he determined to see as little of her as was possible after the marriage.

He did not trust her. There was too much of the untamed tigress about the girl.

When the train arrived at Barnham, a trap ordered by Giles was waiting to take them to Rickwell. On the platform Steel was met by a local policeman who seemed to be much excited. "I have acted according to your instructions, sir," he said, touching his helmet.

"Well," said Steel sharply while Giles lingered to listen—for everything the detective said was interesting to him; he still doubted his intentions regarding Anne—"did Mr. Morley bring down Miss Denham?"

"No, sir," was the unexpected answer. "Mr. Morley has not come back since he went up to town two nights ago. He went by the nine train."

"The same train as I went by," interposed Giles.

"Are you sure?" said Steel, and Giles fancied he saw a smile play round his rather full lips.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Morley on the evening he went away called at the Priory and had a quarrel with Mr. Franklin, sir. They came to blows, sir, and Mr. Franklin's leg is broken."

"Then he has not left Rickwell?"

"No, sir. He's laid up with the broken leg and his daughter is nursing him. He's awful bad, I've been told, sir, by Mrs. Parry."

Giles could not help laughing at the introduction of the good lady's name. She seemed to be mixed up with everything. He could not be sorry for Denham, as he was only meeting with his deserts. "But Anne—where can she be?" he asked Steel, as they stepped into the cart.

"I wish I knew," said Steel gloomily. "I had an idea that Morley was playing me false."

"Do you think he is in league with Denham?"

"I am sure of it. That is the portion of the case of which I have not spoken to you. You'll hear what Denham says. Now that Morley has left him in the lurch Denham will reveal Morley's connection with these matters. But Morley has secured a hostage in the person of Miss Anne. He has taken her away somewhere. His wife may know of his whereabouts. After we have seen

Denham we'll speak of her."

"Since when have you had suspicions of Morley?"

"Since I investigated this Scarlet Cross case. I have found one or two of the gang who, like Dane, are willing to turn King's evidence to save themselves. It was one of them called Scott who told me of Dane's coming on the motor-bicycle to Rickwell. But later on you shall hear all. Let me round off the case by arresting Denham." Here Steel scratched his head and smiled ruefully. "But I fear the case will not be finished till Morley is caught, and where am I to look for him? I wish I had had him watched. He has been too clever for me. I might have known. As Joe Bart he was one of the smartest detectives in London."

After this speech Steel began to think, and as he seemed impatient of interruption, Giles said nothing. In due time they arrived at the door of the Priory. It was close on five o'clock. Steel rang the bell, and as he did so a couple of policemen came round the corner for orders. Steel told them to wait in the hall while he saw Denham. "I don't think he can show fight with a broken leg," said Steel grimly.

As he spoke the door opened. Portia with her freckled face swollen with weeping appeared. She did not seem astonished at the sight of the men in uniform. Perhaps she had seen them lurking in the neighborhood and knew what to expect.

"Come in," she said sullenly to Steel and his companion. "My father expects you."

"Who told him I was coming?" asked Steel.

"I don't know," she answered, and led the way up the stairs. On the landing she turned viciously. "If father had not broken his leg, you would not have found us here," she declared.

"I quite believe that," retorted Steel.

"And you needn't have brought those beasts of men," continued the girl, with a glance at the police in the hall. "We are all alone. Dowse and his wife and daughter ran away whenever they heard there was trouble."

"Oh, they are mixed up in this affair also."

"I don't know. I shan't say anything, for I don't know nothing."

She sullenly led the way through a long corridor and opened the door of a sitting-room. Here on a sofa with a small table at his elbow lay Denham. His leg was swathed in bandages, and he wore a loose dressing-gown. As they entered he laid down a book and looked at them. His face was worn, his hair was quite grey, but the brilliance of his eyes were undimmed, and he spoke in a masterful manner.

"Here you are, Steel," he said coolly. "Got the warrant?"

"How do you know I have a warrant?" asked the other, taken aback.

"I knew you would find out the truth the moment Mrs. Franklin, or rather, I should say the Princess Karacsay, discovered me. She has told you all and has put you on my track."

"Dane put me on your track."

"Dane? Well, I'm not surprised. He's a scoundrel. King's evidence, I suppose? I'll defeat him, Steel. Take a seat and I'll tell you all about myself."

Very much surprised at this calmness the two men sat down. Denham waved his daughter out of the room. She was unwilling to go, but a glance sent her away. When she closed the door Denham turned to Giles.

"When you marry Anne, Mr. Ware," said he, "ask her to look after my poor daughter."

"How do you know I shall ever marry Anne?"

"Because you are a determined man. Men like you usually do get their own way. You intend to marry Anne Franklin and you will. But Portia has been good to Anne, and when I am in prison I hope Anne will take care of her."

"I'll see to that," said Giles. "I don't believe that the sins of the father should be visited on the children. Do you know where Anne has got to? She went away with Morley."

At the sound of this name Denham's face grew black. "I wish I knew where Morley is," he said vehemently. "I would give him up to the police with pleasure. On the evening of the day Anne escaped he came here with his wife. When she left he had a quarrel with me, saying I had done wrong in letting Anne go. We

fought, and he threw me down the stairs. My leg is broken, and so I could not get away from the police. Well, I give myself up. It is rather hard after I have done so much to get the money I wanted."

"Even to committing a murder," said Steel.

"No," said Denham decisively; "I did not kill Daisy Kent. She was murdered by—but I'll tell you that later. In the meantime, Mr. Ware, tell me what the Princess told you, and I'll supply the details she doubtless has omitted. Then Steel can follow with his tale."

Giles had no hesitation in complying with this request. He narrated his connection with Olga and the story told by her mother. Also he detailed how he had confided in Morley, thinking him an honorable man. This was the only time when Denham smiled, and he did smile derisively. However, he did not interrupt, but when Giles was finished looked at Steel. That gentleman gave a history of his doings and discoveries. He omitted all mention of Morley. Denham noted this.

"I see you have left something for me to tell," he said. "Well, as I am like a rat in a corner, I must give in. The end has come, and I don't know that I am sorry. I have had a very uneasy life of it since I left Jamaica. And, as usual, it was a woman who ruined me."

"Not the Princess Karacsay," said Giles quickly.

"Yes. You heard her version of the story, now hear mine. She led me on, she behaved badly, she——"

"I don't believe you. I won't listen."

"Very good. Then we will take up the story from the time I came to Milan," replied Denham coolly. "Anne was with me, and I treated her well. She never knew anything of my inner life, and always thought me a good man. I rather prided myself in keeping her in that belief."

"Dane said that you behaved very well," said Steel.

Denham nodded ironically. "I am much obliged for the good opinion of such a scoundrel," he said. "Well, you know how I treated Anne. When she became a governess she left me to follow out my idea of making money. I bought a yacht, and invented the Society of the Scarlet Cross. For a time all went well. Then I

was foolish enough when robbing the safe of Lady Summersdale to drop a cross—a red cross. It was found by Bart—I mean Morley, who was the detective."

"You can call him Bart," said Giles. "Steel told me it was his name."

"I prefer to call him Morley, since by that name I know him best," was Denham's retort. "As I say, he discovered the red cross. He had charge of the case, and he traced me by that ornament. He got to know of the yacht and of the working of the gang. Instead of arresting us all, which he could have done, he agreed to join us."

"I thought so!" cried Steel, slapping his thigh. "I guessed this."

"Did you offer him any inducement?" asked Giles.

"Yes. At first he was bent on breaking up the gang and putting me in jail. But I remembered how Walpole had said that every man had his price. I ascertained Morley's. It was ease and comfort and plenty of money to gamble with."

"Did he gamble?" asked Ware, starting.

"He ruined himself with gambling," replied Denham. "If it had not been for his indulgence in that vice, he would not have joined our society, Mr. Ware. However, he did. I told him of the Powell money, and said that when I got it I would share it with him. Franklin was drowned; I had his papers, and knew all about his life, and there was no difficulty in my proving myself to be the man. I did so, and now have the money."

"But the price of Daisy's death was——"

"I'm coming to that," interrupted Denham impatiently. "Well, Morley joined us. His professional information helped us to improve our business. He made me give back Lady Summersdale's jewels, so that his professional reputation might be preserved. He was highly complimented on getting the swag back," added Denham, smiling ironically, "but the thieves unfortunately escaped."

"And he was hand in glove with the lot of you," said Steel, almost with admiration. "I always said Joe Bart was clever."

"He was too clever for me," said Denham, shifting his position, and sighing with the pain of his leg. However, with iron resolution he continued. "But I'll punish him yet. Well, to make a long story short, Morley retired from the force and

married a widow. She had money. He spent all she had. He got his percentage from our society, and spent that also. He was always gambling, and took runs up to town to lose his money in a private hell he knew of. Afterwards he got into difficulties, and began to yearn for the Powell money. It was because Daisy Kent was to inherit it that he induced her father to appoint him her guardian."

"And for that reason he settled in Rickwell."

"Yes. Kent had known Mrs. Morley for many years, and it was she who was the guardian. When he married Mrs. Morley our friend settled in Rickwell, so that his wife might renew her friendship with Kent and get the girl. It all came about as he designed, and Daisy Kent lived at The Elms. Morley thought he would sell me, and when the girl got the money, by using his influence to induce her to give it to him, I believe he was capable of killing his wife and of marrying Daisy. But that scheme was stopped by the fact that Daisy was engaged to you, Ware."

"I am thankful that she was," said Giles, wiping his face. "What a devil the man is!"

"He is a clever man," replied Denham coolly, "but he was not sufficiently clever to get the better of Daisy Kent. What she found out, or how he treated her, I don't know; but she took a violent hatred to him. He knew she would not give him the money when she got it, and so——"

"Stop!" cried Ware. "Do you mean to say Morley killed the girl?"

"No. I wish I could say so. But he was in his house all the time. He is innocent enough. I'll tell you about that later. At present let me go on with the story. I heard by cable from Australia that Powell was dead, and then I feigned death to get rid of Anne. I came to England, and, as Wilson, heard about the will, and afterwards served the summons."

"Why did you serve the summons?"

"I simply wanted to see Morley without suspicion being excited. I saw him in the library. He told me that he had ordered the yacht to anchor off Gravesend and that Dane was coming to tell him when it was there. He then asked me to kill Daisy Kent, saying I could get the fortune when she was dead."

Denham paused, and wiped his face.

"I don't pretend to be a good man," he said, "but I declined to murder the girl."

While we were arguing Anne entered. When she saw me she nearly fainted, as she thought I was dead. She recognized me."

"Yes," put in Giles, "but she said she didn't speak to you."

"But she did. Morley knew then that she was Franklin's daughter, and, if Daisy died, the rightful owner of the money. I expect that is why he had decoyed her away. Well, I made Anne agree to be silent, promising her an explanation the next day. She left the room. I went away, and afterwards to church. I wished to see Daisy and warn her against Morley. I passed a note saying that I desired to see her about the money. She went out. I followed shortly. It was snowing heavily when I got out. I heard a cry, and rushed in its direction. It came from the grave of Kent. Daisy was lying there dead. I saw a man dash away——"

"Who was he?" asked Steel and Giles simultaneously.

"I believe, from the glimpse I caught, he was Dane."

"I thought so," said Steel triumphantly.

"Yes, Dane killed the girl. I expect Morley put him up to it. I lost my head. I knew that to save himself that Morley would accuse me. I rushed forward. Anne came out. I hurriedly explained, and then——"

"We know," interrupted Giles, "you bolted on my motor-car. Tell us how you got the money."

"Oh, I appeared as Franklin, and saw Asher. I produced my papers, and was put into formal possession of the money. Morley insisted that I should live down here, under his eye. I could not refuse. He has drained me of nearly every penny. Then, when trouble began, he made use of his position here to warn me of what was going on."

"He made a fool of me," said Giles grimly. "I told him everything, and you played that nice little comedy in the park."

"With Mrs. Benker?" Denham smiled. "Yes; and the soliloquy was my own idea. I knew that would impose on you."

"Morley swindled me also," said Steel, with gloom. "Clever man!"

"You said that before," remarked Denham dryly. "However, when Anne's mother appeared I knew the game was up. She made me promise to send Anne to her, so

I had to let her go."

"Why did you blame Anne for the murder?"

"I wanted to stop your prying into matters which did not concern you," snarled the man savagely. "It was you who started all this infernal business. But it's all over. You can arrest me as soon as you like, Steel, and if you can catch Morley I'll willingly stand in the dock beside him."

As he said this the door opened. There was a noise outside. Portia was trying to keep some one back, but the man forced his way past her and into the room. It was Trim, and he presented a letter to his master. "Beg pardon, sir, but I heard you were here, and there's a letter came this morning marked 'Immediate.' I wanted to start for town, but when I heard you were here I came over, and this young woman's been trying to keep me out, to say nothing of them police below."

Giles opened the letter hastily. Something fell with a silvery ring on the floor. Steel picked it up. "What's this?" he asked wonderingly—"a coin with precious stones!"

"Anne's Edward VII. half-sovereign," shouted Giles. "This is from her." The letter, written in pencil, merely said, "Prisoner—yacht—Bilbao."

"Steel," cried Giles, "Morley has taken her to Bilbao! We follow."



CHAPTER XXV

A CATASTROPHE

About noon the next day Steel and Giles were on their way to Bilbao. This prompt following of Morley was due to the fertile resource of Ware. He remembered that a friend of his possessed a yacht which was at present lying in Dover Harbor. The friend, Lord Kingsbridge, fortunately happened to be in London, and Giles wired an appointment. With Steel he went up to Town on that same night and drove at once to the Wanderers' Club, where Kingsbridge was waiting for them. Giles explained the situation, and secured the yacht at once. "The boat is quite ready to start," said Kingsbridge. "All you have to do is to get steam up. I was thinking of going on a cruise myself, and so had *The Firefly* put in order."

"Why not come with us to Bilbao, my lord?"

"Thank you, Mr. Steel, but I have to wait in town for a day or two, and time is everything in this matter. If you take the first morning train to Dover, you ought to be on your way to Spain in the afternoon. When did this other boat start?"

"Yesterday afternoon from Gravesend," said Giles.

"Well, my yacht's a quick one, so I daresay you will be able to catch this other one before she gets to her destination. You'll have bad weather, I fear," said Kingsbridge; "there's a storm getting up."

"I don't care if it blows the world out of the solar system," cried Ware savagely; "I'm going to catch that man."

"And the lady? Well, good luck to you, Ware."

"Thank you, Kingsbridge. I shan't forget your kindness," replied the young man, and departed with Steel in hot haste.

Thus it happened that the two found themselves on board *The Firefly* steaming for Bilbao at top speed. The boat was two hundred tons, yacht measurement, schooner-rigged fore and aft, with powerful engines and twin screws. When all her furnaces were going she could smoke through the water at surprising speed,

and her captain having received instructions from Kingsbridge, drove her south for all she was worth. He was a pleasant young fellow called Calthorpe, and when he heard that the trip was being made to rescue a lady took a personal interest in the affair. He made up his mind to catch *The Red Cross* before she reached Bilbao.

"Is she a fast boat?" he asked when *The Firefly* cleared the Channel.

"Nearly as fast as this craft," replied Mark Dane, who was at his elbow. "She was built for speed."

"H'm," said the captain; "it's stormy weather, and her speed will depend a good deal on the way she is handled. I don't expect she'll do much in the Bay."

Evidently Calthorpe was not going to let his boat be beaten by an outsider. He had never heard of *The Red Cross*, and believed *The Firefly* to be one of the smartest crafts afloat. The weather was dirty, and when the gallant little boat lifted the Atlantic waves they were running mountains high. But Calthorpe drove his vessel sheer through them, and never slackened his speed for all their fury. And now it must be explained how Dane came to be on board. The explanation may be given in his own words to Giles.

"When I left you in London, sir," he said, "I wondered where Morley had taken Miss Anne. From what I knew I guessed that he would not carry her to the Priory at Rickwell. It then struck me that he might use the yacht. Since Steel took up the case she has changed her name and her appearance, for Morley and Denham were both afraid lest she might be found out. The gang of course know nothing of my intention to smash up the organization, and I knew that I could get all information from one of them. I sent a wire to this man—he's called Arden—and received information that the boat was at Gravesend by Morley's orders, under the name of *The Dark Horse*."

"Rather a good name," said Ware, smiling. "Morley is something of a humorist."

"He's a devil!" said Dane fiercely. "I'll tell you my reason for saying so later, sir. I went to Gravesend and found her lying in mid-stream. I went on board and learned that Morley was away, but that the boat was to sail shortly for some unknown destination."

"Where was Morley?"

"Up in town, sir, getting his money together to make tracks. I found Miss Anne

on board. She told me that Morley had suggested they should get to Rickwell by the Gravesend line, and she, not thinking any harm of him and anxious to see Denham and learn the truth about her dead father, agreed. He took her down and drugged her in the train. As an invalid she was taken on board *The Dark Horse* and confined to her cabin. A hag called Mrs. Johns attended to her. I know the old wretch. A regular bad one; but devoted to Morley, who got her out of some trouble."

"Why did you not rescue Miss Anne," said Giles, "and save us this journey, Dane?"

"I couldn't. Mrs. Johns allowed me to see Miss Anne, as she had no reason to suspect me; but she kept guard at the door, and would not let me out of her sight almost. If I had tried to take Miss Anne ashore, she'd have brought the crew on me. They are all Morley's creatures. I should simply have been poleaxed and dropped overboard, while the yacht sailed away. No, sir. I told Miss Anne my difficulty, and asked her to send a line to you at the Priory—where I knew you were—that you might follow. She wrote three or four words——"

"I know," interrupted Giles, "and enclosed the coin."

"She did that, sir, so that you could be sure the message came from her. I posted the letter. Then I went on shore and waited till Morley came back. I learned from Miss Anne that the boat was going to Bilbao, and when she started I came on to the Priory to ask if I could join in the hunt for Miss Anne. Yes," cried Dane, shaking his fist, "and the hunt after that devil Morley."

"Why do you hate him so?" asked Giles, wondering at the man's fierceness and ill-suppressed emotion.

Dane thought for a moment, then answered, with his eyes on the deck, "Morley killed my mother," he said in a low voice. "No, sir, not in the way you think. He killed her by telling her what I was. She was a good woman. She brought me up well, and did her best to make me a decent man. I was well behaved till I went to Italy to study singing, and fell in with Denham. He made me bad. Afterwards Morley made me worse. I have thieved, I have—but what does the catalogue of my crimes matter to you, sir? In a word, Denham and Morley ruined me. I hate them both, but Morley worst of all. Do you think Denham will recover?"

"From his broken leg? Of course he will, and then he will be taken to jail at once. Steel left the warrant behind to be executed, in order that he might come

with me."

"I hope Denham will get a long sentence, sir," said Dane savagely. "He is a bad man. But Morley—nothing short of death will expiate his crime so far as I am concerned. I wanted to reform, sir. Miss Anne was so good to me that I saw how wicked was the life I was living. I wished to reform and return to my mother. Morley heard of this. He followed me to New York, where I was then. I had fled from the gang, saying I would have nothing more to do with the thieving. Morley found me with my mother. He told her what I was." Here Dane paused and sighed. "The blow killed her."

"She died of a broken heart, I suppose?"

"Yes, of a broken heart. Then I went back with Morley to the old life like a whipped dog. But I vowed revenge. I intend to have it now." And he set his teeth determinedly.

Giles was sorry for the young man. He appeared to have some good in him when he felt the death of his mother, and the cause of it, so deeply. But Ware could not help remembering that Dane had murdered Daisy Kent. But for the fact that they relied on Dane to distinguish *The Red Cross* under her disguise, he would not have been allowed to come. But Steel thought it was best to catch Morley first and then have Dane arrested for the crime. He advised Giles to say nothing about it, lest it should arouse the suspicions of Dane. But on board *The Firefly* there was no escape for the man, and after the previous conversation Giles began to wonder if Dane really was guilty, despite the belief of Steel and the evidence of Denham. He resolved to set his doubts at rest.

"Dane," he said, after a pause, "you appear to have much good in you, and the Princess Olga is anxious to save you from yourself. Since you are helping us to break up this gang and catch Morley, who appears to be the arch-criminal, I am willing to do what I can to save you from the law. But there is another crime _____"

"What particular crime do you mean, sir?" asked Dane quietly.

"The murder of Miss Kent."

Dane started. "Do you believe that I had anything to do with that?"

"Why not? You were at Rickwell on the night it was committed."

"I was. I came over from the yacht at Gravesend to tell Morley she was waiting his orders there, and to tell Denham also. He had appointed a meeting there for me. I came on a motor-bicycle. What of that?"

"A man called Scott told Steel that you were in Rickwell."

"I admit it. I know Scott. He has turned King's evidence. It seems to me, sir, that the whole lot of us will be pardoned if we are so anxious to betray one another. But this crime——"

"Denham says you killed the girl."

Dane sprang to his feet with flashing eyes. "I swear by all that I hold most holy that I did not touch the girl," he declared. "I never even set eyes on her. Denham accuses me—yes, because I have told the truth about him. I came on that night and saw Morley and him at the window of the library in Morley's house. When I gave my message about the yacht I returned to Tilbury, and then crossed to the boat. I never killed the girl, by the memory of my mother!"

"You seem to be speaking the truth," said Giles quickly. "Did you enter the library? The girl was killed by a stiletto torn from the trophy of arms near the desk."

"I was not in the library. Morley would not allow me to enter. He and Denham spoke to me on the terrace. When a noise was heard at the door—I believe now it was Miss Anne who was entering—Morley gave me the tip to get away."

"Was the stiletto in its place?"

"I don't know. I never noticed."

"Do you think Morley killed the girl?"

"Either he or Denham," replied Dane decisively; "and I think it was the latter. When I heard of the crime being committed, I saw Mrs. Morley and asked her if her husband was guilty. She denied it, saying that he was in the library all the time. She came down and saw him."

"She might do that to save her husband."

Dane shook his head. "I don't think she was fond enough of him for that, sir," he answered. "She was when he married her; but he treated her so badly—as I was told by Denham—that she grew to hate him. He spent her money, and behaved

like the brute he is. For the sake of her children she said nothing, but she was fond of Miss Kent, and I don't think she would have defended him if a charge of killing the girl had been made."

"Did Mrs. Morley know anything about the gang?"

"No, she knew nothing. Morley always took good care to keep her in ignorance. She knew no more of his secret life than Miss Anne did of Denham's. Both men were very clever in concealing that which they did not want to be known. But you believe that I am innocent of this charge?"

"Yes. You can face Denham when you return and ask him what are his grounds for accusing you."

"If ever I do come back," said Dane gloomily. And the conversation ended for the time being.

Dane made himself very useful on board, and Calthorpe took quite a fancy to him. In addition to his other gifts he proved to be an excellent sailor. It seems that he had run away from home, and had worked for some years before the mast as a common seaman. He now wished to do what he could on board *The Firefly*, and chummed with the crew. So great a favorite did he become with Calthorpe that when he asked to be allowed to steer, the favor was readily granted to him, and he proved very proficient. Certainly Calthorpe did not know he was a suspected murderer and had been a thief, and neither Steel nor Giles said anything about this. Steel, indeed, still held to the belief that Dane was guilty; but Ware laughed at him.

"You said that Miss Anne was guilty," he declared; "then you believed that Denham had struck the blow; now you are convinced that Dane is the criminal. For my part I believe Denham to be guilty."

"He may be," replied Steel, with a shrug. "I am so puzzled over this case that I am prepared for any development. At all events, Denham is being looked after. He can't escape me, whether he is merely a thief or really the murderer we are in search of."

When *The Firefly* got into the Bay of Biscay the weather was worse than ever. Giles was pleased, as Calthorpe told him that there was the better chance of catching *The Dark Horse* before she reached her port of destination. Once on Spanish soil and Giles feared lest Morley should carry Anne off to the

mountains. He was such a scoundrel, and so clever, that it might be possible he had confederates at Bilbao to help him to carry out any scheme he might suggest. Giles wished to catch him before he had time to formulate any new villainy. At all events, Morley would never think that they had tracked him so speedily, or had followed so rapidly. It was unlikely that he would use the yacht to the fullest extent of her steaming powers.

In the centre of the Bay *The Firefly* was caught by the full force of the storm. The wind and waves were terrific, but the gallant little boat proved herself trustworthy. Under a sullen sky, over a dismal grey sea she steamed, her decks streaming with water, and the ship herself rolling terribly.

Calthorpe did not slacken speed, and the boat responded splendidly to his handling. A sharp lookout was kept by all on board for the yacht, as Giles had offered a large reward for the first man who espied the boat. But the difficulty was that none of the crew knew the looks of *The Dark Horse*. However, they were to hail when they saw anything in the shape of a yacht, and there were one or two false alarms. At length, when *The Firefly* was approaching the Spanish coast, Dane, who was on deck with a glass, gave the alarm. It was a misty, grey day, with absence of sun and wind. The ocean was heaving like masses of liquid pitch with an oily look, and the yacht cut sheer through the terrific waves that threatened to overwhelm her. Suddenly a wind rose, there was a blink of sunshine, and about a mile away a bark was seen rolling in the trough of the sea. "There she is!" roared Dane, and every one came on deck.

"Are you sure?" cried Giles, taking the glass.

"Perfectly sure," replied Dane, who was dangerously excited. "Captain, let me handle the wheel as a reward."

Calthorpe gave his assent, as he knew what a good steersman Dane was. He then took his post beside Giles and Steel, who were admitted on to the bridge, and thence directed the ship. Then *The Firefly* made a bee-line for the distant ship.

Steel and Giles had less sense than they should have had; and Dane in his joy at the sight of his prey quite forgot that with a good glass Morley could recognize them all three. It was *The Red Cross*, alias *The Dark Horse*, that was steaming leisurely southward, and doing her best to battle with the strong seas that hammered her newly painted sides. Thus Morley, who had never expected such promptitude, became aware that his foes were at his heels. He saw the detective and Giles on the bridge. But Dane he did not see, being in too much of a hurry

after his first glimpse of the danger to take further interest in those on board *The Firefly*. The result of Morley's decision was that those on the pursuing yacht saw clouds of smoke pouring out of the funnel, and knew that the furnaces were being crammed to suffocation. There was a shout of joy from *The Firefly's* crew, for now the fun was beginning.

"We'll see if she'll beat my boat," said Calthorpe on the bridge.

It was very stormy, and black clouds were racing across a pallid sky. A furious wind had blown the mists into shreds of vapor, and was ripping white spume from the tops of the rearing waves. The vessel in flight soared like a swallow, and slid down into mile-long valleys; but *The Firefly*, having more powerful engines, tore straight through the walls of water that threatened to block her way. She trembled with the vibration of her screws, and in the stormy heaving of the water there was great danger lest her propeller fans should snap. However, the engineer stood with his hand on the throttle-valve, and stopped the spinning of the screws when they emerged.

Much the same tactics were being pursued on board *The Dark Horse*, save that in addition the safety-valve was tied down. The engines worked at furious speed, and the boat leaped like a hunted stag. But the hound on its heels came closer and closer, and those on *The Dark Horse* could hear the roar of the delighted *Firefly* crew. Morley ground his teeth, and fed his furnaces again. Anne came on deck.

"Go below!" he said, and swore at her.

"I shall not," she retorted, and got away from him.

He was not able to pursue, not being in position to leave his post beside the captain. Besides, he thought it mattered very little whether she was seen or not. Ware knew that she was on board, and, moreover, if *The Dark Horse* were overhauled, he would suffer most himself by the capture. It would do him no good to throw Anne overboard, although he felt much inclined to do so if only for revenge.

Calthorpe could well be proud of his boat. She responded gallantly to the strain put upon her, and tore like a mad thing through the waste of waters. She swung 'longside of *The Dark Horse*, Dane steering with flashing eyes and his long hair streaming in the wind. There was less than a quarter of a mile separating the boats. Morley swerved to the right. Dane followed. A pretty bit of steering on the

part of both vessels took place until the winds and waves took command. Then the boats, out of hand, swung together, almost touching. Giles could see Anne. She cried out and stretched her hands.

Suddenly Dane turned the yacht in a circle. Calthorpe shouted to know, with several adjectives, what he was up to. He would have stopped the engines, which were working furiously, but that it was dangerous at the moment. *The Firefly* swung round, and then with the rush of a wounded bull came straight at *The Dark Horse*.

"Hell!" cried Calthorpe, "he's going to ram her."

There was no time to stop the engines, or to reverse them. Those on *The Dark Horse* gave a yell of fear as the larger vessel bore down on their slighter craft. Dane, fairly mad, shouted out abuse to Morley. Another moment and the pursuing yacht struck the other midships, cutting her almost to the waterline. All on board both ships were thrown down. *The Firefly* reeled back. Giles lifted his head to see Anne falling overboard as *The Dark Horse* lurched in the roaring waters. With a cry of terror, he tore a lifebelt from its fastenings and threw himself after her.

After that he could only recollect that he was swimming for dear life and for her, amongst those furious waves. Lifted on the crest of one he saw her some distance away—a white figure against the black water. Then he went sliding down into the liquid valley. How he reached her he did not know; but after a terrific struggle he found her in his arms. He managed to slip the lifebelt over her head, and kept her up with one arm while he kept afloat with the other. She was insensible, but Giles retained all his wits. He caught a glimpse of the ragged, injured bows of *The Firefly* high above him, and saw that Calthorpe was launching a boat. In a few moments it came plunging towards him, and he was hauled on board with Anne. Steel was in the boat, ashy pale.

"Is our boat safe?" gasped Giles.

"Yes. But *The Dark Horse* is going down. Dane has gone overboard."

Suddenly Steel shrieked, and Giles turned to where he pointed. In the trough of the sea *The Dark Horse* was plunging like a colt, rolling like a drunken man. Giles saw Morley; near him Dane with a savage look on his face. Morley, with terror in his eyes, tried to get away, but Dane reached him, flung his arms round him, and with a wild shout both men went down into the furiously bubbling

witch-caldron, never to rise again.

The strain of the whole terrible business was too much for Giles Ware. For the first and last time in his life he fainted. The last recollection he had was of seeing the doomed vessel plunging downwards and a cloud of white steam rising with a terrible roar from her exploding boilers. After that, darkness and insensibility.



CHAPTER XXVI

THE END OF THE TROUBLE

Giles returned to Rickwell within a week, to find that great changes had taken place in the place, even in that little while. After the foundering of *The Dark Horse*, the other yacht had returned to England forthwith. She had not been very badly damaged by Dane's mad act, although her bows had been smashed. Calthorpe, indeed, had been on the point of putting in to the nearest port to refit, but finding that *The Firefly* was still seaworthy he held on until he got back to Dover.

Some of the crew of the lost ship had been picked up. As they were all more or less connected with the Scarlet Cross Society, Steel took charge of them and conducted them to London. Giles accompanied Anne to her mother. The Princess Karacsay received her with open arms, and Olga with many professions of gratitude. "You have undone all the harm I caused," said Olga to Giles.

"Oh, that's all right," he replied. "We are friends now?"

"Friends, and nothing more than friends. I am returning to Vienna with my mother, and have agreed to marry Count Taroc."

Satisfied on this point, Giles went back to Rickwell, leaving Anne to the society of the Princess. Almost as soon as he set foot in his home he was informed of the news by Trim.

"Mr. Franklin is dead," said Trim, with startling abruptness.

"Dead!" echoed Ware astonished. "Was his broken leg the cause?"

"No," replied the old man; "but yesterday he received a telegram, and afterwards took a dose of poison. His daughter is coming here to see you, sir. She heard you were to be here to-day."

Giles wondered why Portia should come to see him, and also why Denham should have committed suicide after receiving a telegram. Trim could not tell him what the telegram was about, so Giles had to wait until the girl chose to call and enlighten him. Perhaps she had a message for him from the dead man

concerning Anne. Meanwhile Trim went on to state that Mrs. Morley was leaving Rickwell.

"She has sold all her furniture and has let The Elms," said Trim. "I saw Morris yesterday, and he tells me she is stopping at 'The Merry Dancer' with her children."

"Does she know of her husband's death?" asked Giles.

"Death, sir. Is Mr. Morley dead?"

"I forgot. You do not know. Yes, Trim. He went down in his yacht, *The Dark Horse*, in the Bay of Biscay."

"Poor woman!" said Trim, looking shocked; "she was so fond of him."

Ware had his own opinion on this point, so made no remark. He turned over the correspondence that had accumulated during his absence, and found a letter from Mrs. Morley written a day or so previous. She said therein that she wished to see him particularly, and that she would call as soon as he returned. She had something most particular to tell him. The word "particular" was underlined. Giles wondered if she intended to tell him some of Morley's rascalities. But then he remembered that, according to Dane, she knew nothing of the double life which her husband had led. Anxious to hear what she had to say, he despatched a note by Trim asking her to come to his house, and offering to go to the inn, should she prefer their conversation to take place there. When Trim departed, Giles proceeded to despatch such business connected with his estates as was necessary.

Hardly had he been an hour engaged in this way when Portia called to see him. She had discarded her rainbow-colored garb, and was clothed in funereal black. When she entered Giles' study he saw that her eyes were red, and her face swollen with weeping. He felt extremely sorry for the poor girl, and privately determined to look after her as Denham had requested. Meantime he did his best to console Portia.

"I am sorry to hear of your father's death," he said sympathetically. Portia looked at him indignantly.

"Why should you say that?" she demanded; "you were not his friend."

"No. I certainly was not. All the same I cannot help regretting that a man with

such great gifts should have wasted them in the way he did, and should have put an end to himself."

"There was nothing else for him to do," said the girl mournfully. "He was to be taken to gaol as soon as his leg was better. The police could not move him immediately, or he would have been put in gaol long ago. But he's dead now, and I'm glad. Whatever you may say of him, Mr. Ware, he was my father, and good to me. Yes, and he was good to Anne also. She'll tell you so."

"I am sure he was," answered Giles gently. "Your father had his good points, Portia. How much of his sad history do you know?"

"I know he had his faults," she replied doggedly, "and that he was very badly treated by that beast Morley. I'm glad Morley is dead."

"How do you know he is?" asked Giles sharply.

"Father got a telegram yesterday from Steel. Steel promised to let him know if Morley was caught, as father hated him so. When the telegram came saying that Morley was drowned, father said that he had nothing left to live for, and that he was quite pleased to die. Then he sent me out of the room and took poison. I came back in an hour," sobbed Portia, "and found him dead. He looked so handsome as a corpse."

Giles shivered at this morbid speech, but made no comment thereon. He saw that Portia knew very little, and was determined in her own mind to know no more. She had elevated her dead father to the rank of a hero, and would not listen to a word against him. Ware thought there must have been a great deal of good in Denham, despite his evil career, seeing that he had gained the good will of both Portia and Anne. But he had no time to talk further to Portia on these points, as a card was brought in to him, and he learned that Mrs. Morley was waiting to see him. He said a few final words to Portia.

"How do you stand?" he asked.

"Anne will look after me," she answered. "I don't suppose you'll be mean enough to put her against me."

"Why should I?" said Giles mildly. "I am only too glad to help you in any way I can. But this money your father——"

"That is all right. Father saw Mr. Asher, the lawyer, and has left his money to

Anne, every penny of it. I get nothing," cried Portia, with a fresh burst of grief; "but I do hope Anne will help me. I'm sure I've always been very good to her, even though she isn't my sister."

"Did your father tell you she wasn't?"

"Yes. He said she was an adopted child. Though why he should have left her all, and me nothing——"

Here Portia wept again.

Ware saw that Denham had arranged with Asher that her father's money should pass to Anne. No doubt he had told the lawyer the whole history of the imposture, and Asher would now take steps to place Anne in possession of her fortune. But Denham had deceived Portia, probably because he wished the girl to think well of him after he was dead. Giles resolved that he would not undeceive the girl.

"I'll see that things are made easy for you," he said. "Are you still at the Priory?"

"There's nowhere else for me to go till I hear from Anne."

"Anne is in town. I'll write to her, and we'll see what can be done."

Portia rose to go, but she expressed no thanks for his kindness. "So you are to marry Anne," she said. "Well, I hope you'll be good to her."

"Don't you think I shall?"

Portia, in spite of her grief, tossed her head. "I don't know," she said; "all men are bad, except my father, who was very, very good," and she looked defiantly at Giles as though challenging contradiction.

But Ware was too sorry for the girl to make any harsh remark. He walked with her to the outer door, and sent her away in a much more cheerful mood. Then he returned to his study, and found Mrs. Morley already seated near his desk. She looked ill and worn, but, in strange contrast to her usual custom, wore a colored gown, and evidently had been trying to dress herself as gaily as possible. She saw the surprised look on Giles' face, and guessed its meaning.

"Yes, Mr. Ware," she said, plucking at her dress, "you see I have my holiday clothes on. Even though Oliver has left me, there is no need for me to go into mourning. No. He has deserted me basely. I am determined to show the world

that I don't care."

"Mrs. Morley, your husband is dead."

"Dead!" She half started from her chair, but sat down again with a white face. Then to Giles' horror she began to laugh. He knew that Morley had been a bad husband to the woman before him, but that she should laugh on hearing of his death, made him shiver. He hastily explained how Morley had met with his fate, and Mrs. Morley not only laughed again, but clapped her gloved hands.

"Dead!" she said quite gleefully. "Ah! he was lucky to the last."

Ware thought that the widow must be off her head to talk like this; but Mrs. Morley was perfectly sane, and her exclamation was perfectly natural, as he soon learned. She enlightened him in her next speech.

"Don't you call a man lucky," she said quietly, "who died like my husband in the clean waves of the sea, instead of being hanged as he deserved?"

"What do you mean?" asked the startled Giles.

"Can't you guess?" She drew a paper out of her pocket. "I came here to give you that, Mr. Ware. The confession of my wicked husband."

"Confession?"

"Yes. You will find it particularly interesting, Mr. Ware. It was my miserable husband who murdered Daisy."

"Never!" gasped Giles, rising aghast. "He was in the library all the time. You told——"

"I know what I told," she answered quickly. "I did so to save my name from shame; for the sake of my children I lied. Oliver did not deserve the mercy I showed him. Base to the last he deserted me. Now he is dead. I am glad to hear it." She paused and laughed. "I shall not change my dress, Mr. Ware."

"Don't, Mrs. Morley," he said, with a shudder.

"Not that name, if you please," she said, and noting her card on the desk she tore it in two. Then opening her case she tore the other cards and scattered them on the floor. "Mrs. Morley is no more. I am Mrs. Warton. That is the name of my first husband—my true husband—the father of my three children. Yes, Mr. Ware,

I have sold my furniture, and let The Elms. To-morrow I leave for the south of France with my children. I land in France as Mrs. Warton, and the old life is gone for ever. Can you blame me?"

"From what I know of Morley I cannot," he stammered. "But what do you know, Mrs. Mor—I mean Mrs. Warton?"

"I know everything. Listen, Mr. Ware. When Oliver married me I was in love with him. I thought he loved me for myself. But it was my money he was after. Some time after our marriage I found that he was a gambler. He lost all my money at cards. Fortunately there was a sum of a thousand a year settled on me which he could not touch, nor was he able to touch the money left to my children. All the rest (and there was a great deal) he wheedled out of me and spent."

"I wonder you did not put an end to him long ago. I mean I should have thought you would separate from the scoundrel."

Mrs. Morley sighed. "I loved him," she said in low tones. "It took me many a long day to stamp that love out of my heart. I did all he wished me to do. I took The Elms and obtained the guardianship of Daisy. I never thought that he had any design in getting me to take her to live with us. I was one of her father's oldest friends and loved the girl. Morley managed the affair in such a manner that I did what he wished without knowing I was being coerced."

"Morley was a very clever man."

"And a wicked man," said his widow, without emotion. "I can only think of the way he behaved to me and mine. Daisy always hated him. I could never get her to like him. I don't know what he said or did to her—he always seemed to me to treat her with kindness—but she had an antipathy to him. He thought when she got the Powell money he would do what he liked with her and it. But when he saw she was hostile to him he determined then on her murder."

"You did not know that at the time?" said Giles breathlessly.

"No. Certainly I did not, or I should have sent the girl away. I am only talking by the light of recent events. When that man came to tell Morley about the death of Powell he knew that Daisy would leave the house and marry you as soon as she got the fortune. He tried to induce Denham when he was in the library to kill Daisy, and took down the stiletto for that purpose. Denham refused. Then there

was a man called Dane, who came with a message. Morley asked him likewise to kill the girl, and was likewise refused. He saw there was nothing for it but to murder Daisy himself. In a day or so it would have been too late, as she would hear about the money and leave the house. Morley took the stiletto and went to the church in the hope of killing her when she came out and was amidst the crowd of people. He hoped to escape unobserved."

"A rash idea!" observed Giles.

"Oh, its safety lay in its rashness," said the widow coldly. "Well, it happened that Denham lured Daisy out of the church and did not follow for some time. Morley looking at the door saw her come out. She waited for a moment and then walked to her father's grave. Morley followed and killed her by stabbing her in the back as she knelt in the snow by the grave. She fell forward with a cry. He would have repeated the blow but that he saw Denham coming. He fled back to the house. I was in the library when he arrived. He made some excuse, and I never thought anything was wrong."

"Had he the stiletto with him?"

"I believe he had, but I did not see it. Afterwards he took the stiletto back to the churchyard and pretended to find it, so that Anne might be accused. Denham never suspected Morley of the crime. Why, I don't know, as any one who knew what I have told you about his offers to Denham and Dane must have guessed that Morley was guilty."

"How did you learn all this?" asked Giles, glancing at the confession which was in Morley's own handwriting.

"At various times. I did not suspect him at first. But one thing led to another and I watched him. I got at his papers and discovered all about the Scarlet Cross, and _____"

"Wait, Mrs. Morley—I mean Warton. Did Morley write that anonymous letter which accused Anne?"

"Yes. He did so, in case it was necessary to kill Daisy. He hoped by hinting beforehand that Anne would be accused. It was Anne's foolish speech to Daisy, saying she would kill her, that gave him the idea. But she meant nothing by it. It was only a few hot words. However, Morley used them to his own end. Well, Mr. Ware, I found out about the thieving gang, and then learned for the first time

the kind of man I had married. My love died out of my heart at once. I took to thinking how I could get away from him. He used to mutter in his sleep, having an uneasy conscience."

"I should think he was too strong a man to have a conscience."

"Well, he muttered in his sleep at all events. From what he said I discovered that he had something to do with the death of Daisy. I accused him, and told him that I knew all about his Scarlet Cross wickedness. He denied the truth of this at first. Afterwards, little by little, I got the truth out of him. I then made him write out that confession and sign it, so that I could save Anne should she be caught. I promised for the sake of my own name and my children not to use the confession unless Anne was taken. That is why Morley ran away with Anne. He fancied that she would continue to bear the blame, and also"—here Mrs. Wharton hesitated and glanced at Giles—"I fancy that Oliver was in love with Miss Denham."

"The scoundrel!" cried Giles furiously.

Mrs. Wharton—as she now called herself—laughed coldly and rose to depart. "I don't think it matters much now," she said. "Anne was not drowned also, was she?"

"No," replied Ware, shuddering; "she is in London, and I hope shortly to make her my wife."

"I wish her all happiness," said Mrs. Wharton, without emotion. "I always liked Anne, and for her sake I secured that confession. That, when published, will vindicate her character. You need have no hesitation in showing it to the police and in letting that detective deal with it as he thinks fit. In a few days I shall be in France under the name of Mrs. Wharton, and the past will be dead to me. Good-bye." She held out her hand.

"Good-bye," answered Giles, shaking it heartily. "I trust you will be happy, Mrs. Wharton."

"I shall be at peace, if nothing else," she replied, and so passed from the room, and out of his life.

Giles showed the confession to Steel, who was delighted that the real culprit had at last been discovered. But he was sorely disappointed at the suicide of Denham. "It spoils the case," he said.

"You are going to bring the matter into court, then," said Giles.

"Of course. I want some reward for my labor, Mr. Ware. I'll break up that gang. I must publish this confession in order to save your future wife from further blame. Not that it will matter much," he added, "for Miss Denham—I should rather say Miss Franklin—has gone to Styria with her mother and half-sister."

"I know," answered Giles quietly. "I join them there in a week."

"Well, Mr. Ware, I congratulate you, and I hope you'll have a good time. You deserve it from the way in which you have worked over this case."

"What about yourself, Steel?"

"Oh, I'm all right. Dane, Morley, and Denham are dead, which is a pity, as they are the chief villains of the play. Still, I'll contrive to punish those others and get some kudos out of the business. And I must thank you, Mr. Ware, for that reward."

"It was Miss Anne's idea," replied Ware. "She will soon be put in possession of her money, and asked me to give you the reward. It is half from her and half from me."

"And I believed her guilty," said Steel regretfully; "but I'll make amends, Mr. Ware. I'll keep her name out of this business as much as I can, consistently with

the evidence."

Steel was as good as his word. The thieves were tried, but Anne was not mentioned in connection with their robberies. As regards the murder, the confession of Morley was made public and every one knew that Anne was guiltless. In fact, she was applauded for the way in which she had helped her supposed father to escape. The papers called the whole episode romantic, but the papers never knew the entire truth, nor that Anne was the daughter of the Princess Karacsay. Not even Mrs. Parry learned as much as she should have liked to learn. But what scraps of information she did become possessed of, she wove into a thrilling story which fully maintained her reputation as a scandal-monger. And she was always Anne's friend, being particularly triumphant over the fact that she had never believed her to be guilty.

"And I hope," said Mrs. Parry generally, "that every one will believe what I say in the future;" which every one afraid of her tongue pretended to do.

Giles and Anne were married from the castle of Prince Karacsay, in Styria. The Prince took a great fancy to Anne Franklin, and learned the truth about her parentage. But this was not made public. It was simply supposed that she was a young English lady who was the intimate friend of Princess Olga. But every one was surprised when the elder Princess at the wedding threw over Anne's neck a magnificent necklace of uncut emerald. "It belonged to your father's mother, dear," whispered the Princess as she kissed the bride.

Olga married Count Taroc, and settled down into the meekest of wives. Giles and Anne heard of the marriage while on their honeymoon in Italy. They had taken a villa at Sorrento and were seated out on the terrace when the letter came, Anne expressed herself glad.

"And you are pleased too, dear," she said to Giles.

"Very pleased," he replied, with emphasis, whereat she laughed.

"I know why you are pleased," she said, in answer to his look. "Olga told me how deeply she was in love with you. But her cure was as quick as her disease was virulent. She never would have harmed me, my dear. Olga was always fond of me—and of you."

Giles flushed and laughed.

"Well, it's all over now," he said, "and I am glad she is married. But let us talk

about yourself. Are you happy after all your troubles, dearest?"

"Very happy, Giles. I regret nothing. Portia, thanks to you, is in a good home. But my poor father——"

"Don't call Denham that, Anne," he said, with a frown.

She kissed it away.

"He was always very good to me," she said. "I tried to save him, as you know. I believed that he had killed Daisy by some mistake. But really, Giles, I did not stop to think. I knew that my—I mean Denham—was in danger of his life, and I could not rest until I had placed him in safety."

"And you defended him afterwards, Anne—that time we met in the churchyard. You quite endorsed his story of the invented Walter Franklin."

"Don't reproach me, Giles. I had promised Denham to say what I did; and not even for your dear sake could I break my word. He was a good man in many ways; but, as you say yourself, it is all over. Let us forget him and his tragic end."

"And Morley's."

Anne shivered. "He was the worst. Oh, what a terrible time I had on board that boat, when I found he was deceiving me. I thought he was taking me to Denham, and I wanted to see what he—I mean Denham—would say to my mother's statement. I thought he might be able to show that he was not so bad as she——"

"Not another word," said Ware, taking her in his arms. "Let us leave the old bad past alone, and live in the present. See"—he took a parcel out of his pocket—"I have had this made for you."

Anne opened the package, and found therein the coin of Edward VII. set as a brooch and surrounded by brilliants.

"Oh, how delightful!" she said, with a true woman's appreciation of pretty things.

"It is the dearest thing in the world to me, save you, Anne," he said. "Twice that coin brought me to you. But for it I should never have been by your side now."

"No!"

She kissed the coin again and fastened it at her throat, where it glittered a pretty, odd ornament.

"You waste your kisses," cried Giles, and took her to his breast.

Transcriber's Note

Inconsistencies in spelling have been retained as in the original.

END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A COIN OF EDWARD VII

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