

A Marriage Tragedy

By Wilkie Collins

Author of *The Dead Secret*, etc., etc.

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Chapter I

IT RAINED all Monday, all Tuesday, all Wednesday, all Thursday. My tutor, who never went out if he could possibly help it, and who cared for nothing so long as he had his books with him, was proof against the miserable weather, and was not even polite enough to agree with me when I complained of it. I, who was reading with him for my college examination, found my spirits so seriously affected by the incessant rain that I resolved, unless the sky cleared at the end of the week, to propose that we should depart forthwith from the little Cumberland watering place which we had unfortunately selected as the place of our temporary abode.

Friday came. The morning began with some gleams of watery sunshine; but toward noon the clouds gathered again, and down came the rain as persistently as ever, just as I had made up my mind to take a holiday, and had got my hat on to go out. In sheer desperation I resolved to adhere to my original intention, let it rain as it might. Leaving my tutor with his eternal books on one side of him, and his eternal snuffbox on the other, I descended to the ground-floor of the inn at which we were staying, and sent for the landlord.

“I have been waiting for the weather, in this horrible climate of yours, four whole days,” I said, “and I mean to wait no longer. Get me a horse, or a gig, or any conveyance you possess, and tell me where I am to go to get rid of the sight of that waste of drab-colored sand in front of the window, and of that changeless strip of dreary gray sea beyond it.”

The landlord—a very intelligent and very good-humored old man—laughed, and said that he had a gig and horse at my disposal, if I was really determined to take a drive in the rain.

“Order the gig,” I answered, “and tell me which direction I am to take. Are there no sights in the neighborhood?”

“No, Sir,” was the unpromising reply. “No sights that I know of.”

“What! no old house anywhere inland!” I exclaimed. “No great family seat in this part of the country that strangers are allowed to see!”

The landlord’s face changed a little, I thought. He looked away from me, and his hand trifled rather uneasily with the curtain of the parlor window at which we were standing.

“The only family house in these parts,” he said, “is Darrock Hall. And that has been an empty house for some years now.”

“A fine, ruinous, dreary old place, no doubt?” I said. “Just the sort of house I should like to see. Order the gig, and send somebody with me to show me the way to Darrock Hall.”

“You would only be disappointed when you got there, Sir,” said the landlord, shaking his head gloomily. “It’s neither a fine place nor an old place. Darrock Hall is nothing but a square stone house, and it wasn’t standing a hundred years ago. So far from the place being at all ruinous, it is now being altered and put into thorough repair. They say there’s a new lead mine been discovered near; and a strange gentleman—one of the sort they call speculators in London—has taken the Hall, and means to work the mine right down under it, as I am told.”

“Well,” I said, “if there is nothing to see at the Hall, I can look at the mine. I must drive somewhere, and I may just as well go there as anywhere else in this rain. How far off is it?”

“Nigh on eleven miles,” said the landlord. “The road goes round about so that no stranger could find it, and the last three miles are all up hill.”

“Is there nobody who could go with me in the capacity of guide?” I asked.

“Nobody who can be spared just now,” replied the landlord, “unless it’s myself. And I—” He stopped, and looked at me doubtfully.

“And you,” I rejoined, finishing the sentence for him, “are not quite young enough to risk getting wet through with impunity?”

“No,” he said. “It’s not that. People who live in Cumberland don’t mind rain. I’ll go in the gig, if you specially wish it. But, to be plain with you, Sir, there isn’t a place in the neighborhood I wouldn’t sooner drive you to than Darrock Hall.”

“Indeed! May I ask why?”

“Well, Sir, when I was a young man I lived in service at that house; and certain things happened there which have made the sight of the place, since that time, not over-pleasant to my eyes. It was a frightful business, Sir; and I was mixed up in it.”

These words made me naturally anxious to know what had happened at the mysterious family mansion. I abstained from giving any expression to my feeling of curiosity; but I suppose my face must have betrayed me, for the landlord pursued the subject of his own accord.

“You mustn’t suppose it is anything I have reason to be ashamed of,” he said. “So far as I am concerned, I came out of the matter with all possible credit and advantage to myself. If that same miserable business hadn’t happened at the Hall, I doubt whether I should ever have had the money to take this inn.”

“Do you mind telling me about it?” I asked. “That is to say, if the circumstances are of a nature to be communicated to a stranger?”

“They could not be kept a secret at the time,” said the landlord; “and there is no need to keep them a secret now—for none of the people who were concerned in the affair are left alive excepting me and one other person living in London. But it is rather a long story, Sir.”

“I shall not think any the worse of it on that account,” said I. “Tell me all about it, and I will put off the drive in the gig, and give up my visit to Darrock Hall.”

The landlord placed a chair for me and took one for himself, apparently very much relieved by the assurance that my last words had conveyed to him. After the usual prefatory phrases of apology for his own defects as a narrator, he began his story, which I shall repeat here, as nearly as possible, in his own words.

The first place I got, when I began life by going out to service, was not a very profitable one. I certainly gained the advantage of learning my business thoroughly, but I never had my due in the matter of wages. My master was made a bankrupt, and his servants suffered with the rest of his creditors.

My second situation, however, amply compensated me for my want of luck in the first. I had the good fortune to enter the service of Mr. and Mrs. Norcross, in which I remained till I changed my station in life, and took this inn. My master was a very rich gentleman. He had the Darrock house and lands in this county, a fine estate also in Yorkshire, and a very large property in Jamaica, which produced, at that time and for some years afterward, a great income. Out in the West Indies he met with a pretty young lady, a governess in an English family, and, taking a violent fancy to her, married her, though she was a good five-and-twenty years younger than himself. After the wedding they came to live in England; and it was at this time that I was lucky enough to be engaged by them as a servant.

I lived with my new master and mistress three years. They had no children. At the end of that period Mr. Norcross died. He was sharp enough to foresee that his young widow would, most likely, marry again; and he bequeathed his property so that it all went to Mrs. Norcross first, and then to any children she might have by a second marriage, and, failing that, to relations and friends of his own. I did not suffer by my master’s death, for his widow kept me in her service. I had attended on Mr. Norcross all through his last illness, and had made myself useful enough to win my mistress’ favor and gratitude. Besides me she also retained her maid in her service—a French woman named Josephine. Even at that time I disliked the foreigner’s wheedling manners, and her cruel, cunning face, and wondered how my mistress could be so fond of her as she was. Time showed that I was right in distrusting this woman. I shall have much more to say about her when I get further advanced with my story.

Meanwhile I have next to relate that my mistress broke up the rest of her establishment, and, taking me and the lady’s maid with her, went to travel on the Continent. Among other wonderful places, we visited Paris, Genoa, Venice, Florence, Rome, and Naples, staying in some of those cities for months together. The fame of my mistress’ riches followed her wherever she went; and there were plenty of gentlemen, foreigners as well as Englishmen, who were anxious enough to

get into her good graces and to prevail on her to marry them. Nobody succeeded, however, in producing any very strong or lasting impression on her; and when we came back to England, after more than two years of absence, Mrs. Norcross was still a widow, and showed no signs of wanting to alter her condition.

We went to the house on the Yorkshire estate first; but my mistress did not fancy some of the company round about, so we moved again to Darrock Hall, and made excursions from time to time in the lake district, some miles off. On one of these trips Mrs. Norcross met with some old friends, who introduced her to a gentleman of their party bearing the very common, uninteresting name of Mr. James Smith. He was a tall, fine young man enough, with black hair, which grew very long, and the biggest, bushiest pair of black whiskers I ever saw. Altogether he had a rakish, unsettled look, and a bounceable way of talking which made him the prominent person in company. He was poor enough himself, as I heard from his servant, but well connected—a gentleman by birth and education, though his manners were so free. What my mistress saw to like in him I don't know; but when she asked her friends to stay with her at Darrock, she included Mr. James Smith in the invitation. We had a fine, gay, noisy time of it at the Hall—the strange gentleman, in particular, making himself as much at home as if the place belonged to him. I was surprised at Mrs. Norcross putting up with him as she did; but I was fairly thunderstruck, some months afterward, when I heard that she and Mr. James Smith were actually going to be married! She had refused offers by dozens abroad, from higher, and richer, and better-behaved men. It seemed next to impossible that she could seriously think of throwing herself away upon such a harebrained, headlong, penniless young gentleman as Mr. James Smith.

Married, nevertheless, they were, in due course of time; and, after spending the honeymoon abroad, they came back to Darrock Hall. I soon found that my new master had a very variable temper. There were some days when he was as easy and familiar and pleasant with his servants as any gentleman could be. At other times some devil within him seemed to get possession of his whole nature. He flew into violent passions, and took wrong ideas into his head, which no reasoning or remonstrance could remove. It rather amazed me, considering how gay he was in his tastes, and how restless his habits were, that he should consent to live at such a quiet, dull place as Darrock. The reason for this, however, soon came out. Mr. James Smith was not much of a sportsman; he cared nothing for indoor amusements, such as reading, music, and so forth; and he had no ambition for representing the county in Parliament. The one pursuit that he was really fond of was—yachting. Darrock was within sixteen miles of a seaport town, with an excellent harbor; and to this accident of position the Hall was entirely indebted for recommending itself as a place of residence to Mr. James Smith.

He had such an untiring enjoyment and delight in cruising about at sea, and all his ideas of pleasure seemed to be so closely connected with his remembrances of the sailing trips he had taken on board different yachts belonging to his friends, that I verily believe his chief object in marrying my mistress was to get the command of money enough to keep a vessel for himself. Be that as it may, it is certain that he prevailed on her, sometime after their marriage, to make him a present of a fine schooner yacht, which was brought round from Cowes to our coast town here, and kept always waiting ready for him in the harbor. His wife required some little persuasion before she could make up her mind to let him have the vessel. She suffered so much from

seasickness, that pleasure sailing was out of the question for her; and, being very fond of her husband, she was naturally unwilling that he should engage in an amusement which took him away from her. However, Mr. James Smith used his influence over her cleverly, promising that he would never go away without first asking her leave, and engaging that his terms of absence at sea should never last for more than a week or ten days at a time. Accordingly, my mistress, who was the kindest and most unselfish woman in the world, put her own feelings aside, and made her husband happy in the possession of a vessel of his own.

While my master was away cruising my mistress had a dull time of it at the Hall. The few gentlefolks there were in our part of the county lived at a distance, and could only come to Darrock when they were asked to stay there for some days together. As for the village near us, there was but one person living in it whom my mistress could think of asking to the Hall; and this person was the clergyman who did duty at the church, one Mr. Meeke. He was a single man, very young, and very lonely in his position. He had a mild, melancholy, pasty-looking face, and was as shy and soft spoken as a little girl—altogether, what one may call, without being unjust or severe, a poor, weak creature, and, out of all sight, the very worst preacher I ever sat under in my life. The one thing he did, which, as I heard, he could really do well, was playing on the fiddle. He was uncommonly fond of music—so much so that he often took his instrument out with him when he went for a walk. This taste of his was his great recommendation to my mistress, who was a wonderfully fine player on the piano, and who was delighted to get such a performer as Mr. Meeke to play duets with her. Besides liking his society for this reason, she felt for him in his lonely position, naturally enough, I think, considering how often she was left in solitude herself. Mr. Meeke, on his side, when he got over his first shyness, was only too glad to leave his lonesome little parsonage for the fine music room at the Hall, and for the company of a handsome, kind-hearted lady, who made much of him and admired his fiddle playing with all her heart. Thus it happened that, whenever my master was away at sea, my mistress and Mr. Meeke were always together, playing duets as if they had their living to get by it. A more harmless connection than the connection between those two never existed in this world; and yet, innocent as it was, it turned out to be the first cause of all the misfortunes that afterward happened.

My master's treatment of Mr. Meeke was, from the first, the very opposite of my mistress'. The restless, rackety, bounceable Mr. James Smith felt a contempt for the weak, womanish, fiddling little parson; and, what was more, did not care to conceal it. For this reason Mr. Meeke (who was dreadfully frightened by my master's violent language and rough ways) very seldom visited at the Hall, except when my mistress was alone there. Meaning no wrong, and therefore stooping to no concealment, she never thought of taking any measures to keep Mr. Meeke out of the way when he happened to be with her at the time of her husband's coming home, whether it was only from a riding excursion in the neighborhood or from a cruise in the schooner. In this way it so turned out that whenever my master came home, after a long or short absence, in nine cases out of ten he found the parson at the Hall. At first he used to laugh at this circumstance, and to amuse himself with some rather coarse jokes at the expense of his wife and her companion. But, after a while, his variable temper changed, as usual. He grew sulky, rude, angry, and, at last, downright jealous of Mr. Meeke. Though too proud to confess it in so many words, he still showed the state of his mind clearly enough to my mistress to excite her indignation. She was a woman who could be led anywhere by anyone for whom she had a regard; but there was a firm spirit within her that rose at the slightest show of injustice or oppression, and that resented tyrannical usage of any

sort perhaps a little too warmly. The bare suspicion that her husband could feel any distrust of her set her all in a flame, and she took the most unfortunate, and yet, at the same time, the most natural way, for a woman, of resenting it. The ruder her husband was to Mr. Meeke, the more kindly she behaved to him. This led to serious disputes and dissensions, and thence, in time, to a violent quarrel. I could not avoid hearing the last part of the altercation between them, for it took place on the garden walk, outside the dining room window, while I was occupied in laying the table for lunch.

Without repeating their words—which I have no right to do, having heard by accident what I had no business to hear—I may say generally, to show how serious the quarrel was, that my mistress upbraided my master with having married from mercenary motives; with keeping out of her company as much as he could; and with insulting her by a suspicion which it would be hard ever to forgive, and impossible ever to forget. He replied by violent language directed against herself, and by commanding her, in a very overbearing way, never to open the doors of the house again to Mr. Meeke. She, on her side, declared, in great anger, that she would never consent to insult a clergyman and a gentleman in order to satisfy the whim of a tyrannical husband. Upon that he called out, with a great oath, to have his horse saddled directly, declaring that he would not stop another instant under the same roof with a woman who had set him at defiance; and warning his wife that he would have her watched in his absence, and would come back, if Mr. Meeke entered the house again, and horsewhip him, in spite of his black coat, all through the village. With those words he left her, and rode away to the seaport where his yacht was lying. My mistress kept up her spirit till he was out of sight, and then burst into a dreadful screaming passion of tears, which ended by leaving her so weak that she had to be carried to her bed like a woman who was at the point of death.

The same evening my master's horse was ridden back by a messenger, who brought a scrap of notepaper with him, addressed to me. It only contained these lines: "Pack up my clothes, and deliver them immediately to the bearer. You may tell your mistress that I sail tonight, at eleven o'clock, for a cruise to Sweden. Forward my letters to the post office, Stockholm."

I obeyed the orders given to me, except that relating to my mistress. The doctor had been sent for, and was still in the house. I consulted him upon the propriety of my delivering the message. He positively forbade me to do so, that night; and told me to give him the slip of paper, and leave it to his discretion to show it to her, or not, the next morning.

The messenger had hardly been gone an hour when Mr. Meeke's housekeeper came to the Hall with a roll of music for my mistress. I told the woman of my master's sudden departure, and of the doctor being in the house. This news brought Mr. Meeke himself to the Hall in a great flutter. I felt so angry with him for being the cause—innocent as he might be—of the shocking scene which had taken place, that I exceeded the bounds of my duty, and told him the whole truth. The poor, weak, wavering, childish creature, flushed up red in the face, then turned as pale as ashes, and dropped into one of the hall chairs, crying—literally crying fit to break his heart! "Oh, William!" says he, wringing his little frail, trembling, white hands, as helpless as a baby. "Oh, William! what am I to do?"

“As you ask me that question, Sir,” says I, “you will excuse me, I hope, if, being a servant, I plainly speak my mind notwithstanding. I know my station well enough to be aware that, strictly speaking, I have done wrong, and far exceeded my duty, in telling you as much as I have told you already. But I would go through fire and water, Sir,” says I, feeling my own eyes getting moist, “for my mistress’ sake. She has no relation here who can speak to you; and it is even better that a servant like me should risk being guilty of an impertinence, than that dreadful and lasting mischief should arise from the right remedy not being applied at the right time. This is what I should do, Sir, in your place. Saving your presence, I should leave off crying, and go back home and write to Mr. James Smith, saying that I would not, as a clergyman, give him railing for railing, but would prove how unworthily he had suspected me by ceasing to visit at the Hall from this time forth, rather than be a cause of dissension between man and wife. If you will put that into proper language, Sir, and will have the letter ready for me in half an hour’s time, I will call for it on the fastest horse in our stables, and, at my own risk, will give it to my master before he sails tonight. I have nothing more to say, Sir, except to ask your pardon for forgetting my proper place, and for making bold to speak on a very serious matter as equal to equal, and as man to man.”

To do Mr. Meeke justice, he had a heart, though it was a very small one. He shook hands with me, and said he accepted my advice as the advice of a friend; and so went back to his parsonage to write the letter. In half an hour I called for it on horseback, but it was not ready for me. Mr. Meeke was ridiculously nice about how he should express himself when he got a pen into his hand. I found him with his desk littered with rough copies, in a perfect agony about how to turn his phrases delicately enough in referring to my mistress. Every minute being precious, I hurried him as much as I could, without standing on any ceremony. It took half an hour more, with all my efforts, before he could make up his mind that the letter would do. I started off with it at a gallop, and never drew rein till I got to the seaport town. The harbor clock chimed the quarter past eleven as I rode by it, and when I got down to the jetty there was no yacht to be seen. She had been cast off from her moorings ten minutes before eleven, and as the clock struck she had sailed out of the harbor. I would have followed in a boat, but it was a fine starlight night, with a fresh wind blowing; and the sailors on the pier laughed at me when I spoke of rowing after a schooner yacht which had got a quarter of an hour’s start of us, with the wind abeam and the tide in her favor.

I rode back with a heavy heart. All I could do now was to send the letter to the post office, Stockholm.

The next day the doctor showed my mistress the scrap of paper with the message on it from my master; and an hour or two after that, a letter was sent to her in Mr. Meeke’s handwriting, explaining the reason why she must not expect to see him anymore at the Hall, and referring to me in terms of high praise, as a sensible and faithful man who had spoken the right word at the right time. I am able to repeat the substance of the letter, because I heard all about it from my mistress, under very unpleasant circumstances so far as I was concerned. The news of my master’s departure did not affect her as the doctor had supposed it would. Instead of distressing her, it roused her spirit, and made her angry; her pride, as I imagine, being wounded by the contemptuous manner in which her husband had notified his intention of sailing to Sweden, at the end of a message to a servant about packing his clothes. Finding her in that temper of mind,

the letter from Mr. Meeke only irritated her the more. She insisted on getting up, and as soon as she was dressed and downstairs, she vented her violent humor on me, reproaching me for impertinent interference in the affairs of my betters, and declaring that she had almost made up her mind to turn me out of my place for it. I did not defend myself, because I respected her sorrows and the irritation that came from them; also, because I knew the natural kindness of her nature well enough to be assured that she would make amends to me for her harshness the moment her mind was composed again. The result showed that I was right. That same evening she sent for me, and begged me to forgive and forget the hasty words she had spoken in the morning, with a grace and sweetness that would have won the heart of any man who listened to her.

Weeks passed after this, till it was more than a month since the day of my master's departure, and no letter in his handwriting came to Darrock Hall. My mistress, taking this treatment of her more angrily than sorrowfully, went to London to consult her nearest relations, who lived there. On leaving home she stopped the carriage at the parsonage, and went in (as I thought, rather defiantly) to say good-by to Mr. Meeke. She had answered his letter, had received others from him, and had answered them likewise. She had also, of course, seen him every Sunday at church, and had always stopped to speak to him after the service. But this was the first occasion on which she had visited him at his house. As the carriage stopped, the little parson came out, in great hurry and agitation, to meet her at the garden gate.

"Don't look alarmed, Mr. Meeke," says my mistress, getting out. "Though you have engaged not to come near the Hall, I have made no promise to keep away from the parsonage." With those words she went into the house.

The French maid, Josephine, was sitting with me in the rumble of the carriage, and I saw a wicked smile on her face as the parson and his visitor went into the house together. Harmless as Mr. Meeke was, and innocent of all wrong as I knew my mistress to be, I regretted that she should be so rash as to despise appearances, considering the situation she was placed in. She had already exposed herself to be thought of disrespectfully by her own maid; and it was hard to say what worse consequences might not happen after that.

Half an hour later we were away on our journey. My mistress [stayed] in London two months. Throughout all that time no letter from my master was forwarded to her from the country house.

When the two months had passed we returned to Darrock Hall. Nobody there had received any news in our absence of the whereabouts of my master and his yacht.

Six more weary weeks elapsed; and in that time but one event happened at the Hall to vary the dismal monotony of the lives we now led in the solitary place. One morning the French maid, Josephine, came down after dressing my mistress, with her face as pale as ashes, except on one cheek, where there was a mark as red as burning fire. I was in the kitchen at the time, and I asked what was the matter.

“The matter!” says she, in her shrill broken English. “Advance a little, if you please, and look with all your eyes at this cheek of mine. What! have you lived so long a time with your mistress, and don’t you know the mark of her hand yet!”

I was at a loss to understand what she meant, but she soon explained herself. My mistress, whose temper had been sadly altered for the worse by the trials and the humiliations she had gone through, had got up that morning more out of humor than usual; and in answer to her maid’s inquiry as to how she had passed the night, had begun talking about her weary, miserable life in an unusually fretful and desperate way. Josephine, in trying to cheer her spirits, had ventured, most improperly, on making a light, jesting reference to Mr. Meeke, which had so enraged my mistress that she turned round sharp on the foreigner, and gave her to use the common phrase—a smart box on the ear. Josephine confessed that the moment after she had done this, her better sense appeared to tell her that she had taken a most improper way of resenting undue familiarity. She had immediately expressed her regret for having forgotten herself, and had proved the sincerity of it by a gift of half a dozen cambric handkerchiefs, presented as a peace offering on the spot. After that, I thought it impossible that Josephine could bear any malice against a mistress whom she had served ever since she had been a girl, and I said as much to her when she had done telling me what had happened upstairs.

“I! Malice!” cries Miss Josephine, in her hard, sharp, snappish way. “And why, and wherefore, if you please? If my mistress smacks my cheek with one hand she gives me handkerchiefs to wipe it with the other. My good mistress, my kind mistress, my pretty mistress! I, the servant, bear malice against her, the mistress! Ah, you bad man, even to think of such a thing! Ah, fie, fie! I am quite ashamed of you!”

She gave me one look—the wickedest look I ever saw—and burst out laughing—the harshest laugh I ever heard from a woman’s lips. Turning away from me directly after, she said no more, and never referred to the subject again on any subsequent occasion. From that time, however, I noticed an alteration in Miss Josephine; not in her way of doing her work, for she was just as sharp and careful about it as ever, but in her manner and habits. She grew amazingly quiet, and passed almost all her leisure time alone. I could bring no charge against her which authorized me to speak a word of warning; but, for all that, I could not help feeling that if I had been in my mistress’ place I would have followed up that present of the cambric handkerchiefs by paying her a month’s wages in advance, and sending her away from the house the same evening.

With the exception of this little domestic incident, which appeared trifling enough at the time, but which led to very serious consequences afterward, nothing happened at all out of the ordinary way during the six weary weeks to which I have referred. At the beginning of the seventh week, however, an event occurred at last. One morning the postman brought a letter to the Hall, addressed to my mistress. I took it upstairs, and looked at the direction as I put it on the salver. The handwriting was not my master’s; was not, as it appeared to me, the handwriting of any well-educated person. The outside of the letter was also very dirty; and the seal a common office seal of the usual lattice-work pattern. “This must be a begging letter,” I thought to myself as I entered the breakfast room and advanced with it to my mistress.

She held up her hand before she opened it, as a sign to me that she had some order to give, and that I was not to leave the room till I had received it. Then she broke the seal and began to read the letter. Her eyes had hardly been on it a moment before her face turned as pale as death, and the paper began to tremble in her fingers. She read on to the end, and suddenly turned from pale to scarlet, started out of her chair, crumpled the letter up violently in her hand, and took several turns backward and forward in the room, without seeming to notice me as I stood by the door. "You villain! you villain! you villain!" I heard her whisper to herself many times over, in a quick, hissing, fierce way. Then she stopped, and said on a sudden, "Can it be true?" Then she looked up, and seeing me standing at the door, started as if I had been a stranger, changed color again, and told me, in a stifled voice, to leave her and come back again in half an hour. I obeyed, feeling certain that she must have received some very bad news of her husband, and wondering, anxiously enough, what it might be. When I returned to the breakfast room her face was as much discomposed as ever. Without speaking a word she handed me two sealed letters. One, a note to be left for Mr. Meeke, at the parsonage; the other, a letter marked "Immediate," and addressed to her lawyer in London, who was also, I should add, her nearest living relation.

I left one of these letters and posted the other. When I came back I heard that my mistress had taken to her room. She remained there for four days, keeping her new sorrow, whatever it was, strictly to herself. On the fifth day the lawyer from London arrived at the Hall. My mistress went down to him in the library, and was shut up there with him for nearly two hours. At the end of that time the bell rang for me.

"Sit down, William," said my mistress when I came into the room. "I feel such entire confidence in your fidelity and attachment that I am about, with the full concurrence of this gentleman, who is my nearest relative and my legal adviser, to place a very serious secret in your keeping, and to employ your services on a matter which is as important to me as a matter of life and death."

Her poor eyes were very red, and her lips quivered as she spoke to me. I was so startled by what she had said that I hardly knew which chair to sit in. She pointed to one placed near herself at the table, and seemed about to speak to me again, when the lawyer interfered.

"Let me entreat you," he said, "not to agitate yourself unnecessarily. I will put this person in possession of the facts; and if I omit anything, you shall stop me and set me right."

My mistress leaned back in her chair and covered her face with her handkerchief. The lawyer waited a moment, and then addressed himself to me.

"You are already aware," he said, "of the circumstances under which your master left this house; and you also know, I have no doubt, that no direct news of him has reached your mistress up to this time?"

I bowed to him, and said I knew of the circumstances so far.

"Do you remember," he went on, "taking a letter to your mistress, five days ago?"

"Yes, Sir," I replied; "a letter which seemed to distress and alarm her very seriously."

“I will read you *that* letter before we say anymore,” continued the lawyer. “I warn you beforehand that it contains a terrible charge against your master, which, however, is not attested by the writer’s signature. I have already told your mistress that she must not attach too much importance to an anonymous letter; and I now tell you the same thing.”

Saying that, he took up a letter from the table and read it aloud. I had a copy of it given to me afterward, which I looked at often enough to fix the contents of the letter in my memory. I can now repeat them, I think, word for word.

“MADAM (it began), —“I cannot reconcile it to my conscience to leave you in total ignorance of your husband’s atrocious conduct toward you. If you have ever been disposed to regret his absence, do so no longer. Hope and pray, rather, that you and he may never meet face to face again in this world. I write in great haste and in great fear of being observed. Time fails me to prepare you as you ought to be prepared for what I have now to disclose. I must tell you plainly, with much respect for you and sorrow for your misfortune, that your husband *has married another wife*. I saw the ceremony performed, unknown to him. If I could not have spoken of this infamous act as an eyewitness, I would not have spoken of it at all.

“I dare not acknowledge who I am, for I believe Mr. James Smith would stick at no crime to revenge himself on me if he ever came to a knowledge of the step I am now taking, and of the means by which I got my information. Neither have I time to enter into particulars. I simply warn you of what has happened, and leave you to act on that warning as you please. You may disbelieve this letter, because it is not signed by any name. In that case, if Mr. James Smith should ever venture into your presence, I recommend you to ask him suddenly what he has done with his *new wife*; and to see if his countenance does not immediately testify that the truth has been spoken by

“YOUR UNKNOWN FRIEND”

Poor as my opinion was of my master, I had never believed him to be capable of such villainy as this; and I could not believe it, when the lawyer had done reading the letter.

“Oh, Sir!” I said; “surely that is some base imposition? Surely it cannot be true?”

“That is what I have told your mistress,” he answered. “But she says, in return, that—”

“That I feel it to be true,” my mistress broke in, speaking behind the handkerchief, in a faint, smothered voice.

“We need not debate the question,” the lawyer went on. “Our business, now, is to prove the truth or the falsehood of this letter. That must be done at once. I have written to one of my clerks, who is accustomed to conducting delicate investigations, to come to this house without loss of time. He is to be trusted with anything, and he will pursue the needful inquiries immediately. It is absolutely necessary, to make sure of committing no mistakes, that he should be accompanied, when he starts on his investigations, by someone who is well acquainted with Mr. James Smith’s

habits and personal appearance; and your mistress has fixed upon you to be that person. However well the inquiry may be managed, it will probably be attended by trouble and delay. It may necessitate a long journey, and it may involve some personal danger. Are you,” said the lawyer, looking hard at me, “ready to suffer any inconvenience and to run any risk for your mistress’ sake?”

“There is nothing I can do, Sir,” said I, “that I will not do. I am afraid I am not clever enough to be of much use. But so far as troubles and risks are concerned, I am ready for anything from this moment.”

My mistress took the handkerchief from her face, looked at me with her eyes full of tears, and held out her hand. How I came to do it I don’t know, but I stooped down and kissed the hand she offered me; feeling half startled, half ashamed at my own boldness the moment after.

“You will do, my man,” said the lawyer, nodding his head. “Don’t trouble yourself about the cleverness or the cunning that may be wanted. My clerk has got head enough for two. I have only one word more to say before you go downstairs again. Remember that this investigation and the cause that leads to it must be kept a profound secret. Except us three, and the clergyman here (to whom your mistress has written word of what has happened), nobody knows anything about it. I will let my clerk into the secret, when he joins us. As soon as you and he are away from the house you may talk about it. Until then, you will close your lips on the subject.”

The clerk did not keep us long waiting. He came as fast as the mail from London could bring him. I had expected, from his master’s description, to see a serious, sedate man, rather sly in his looks and rather reserved in his manner. To my amazement, this practiced hand at delicate investigations was a brisk, plump, jolly little man, with a comfortable double chin, a pair of very bright black eyes, and a big bottle nose of the true convivial red color. He wore a suit of black and a limp, dingy white cravat; took snuff perpetually out of a very large box; walked with his hands crossed behind his back; and looked, upon the whole, much more like a parson of free and easy habits than a lawyer’s clerk. “How d’ye do?” says he, when I opened the door to him. “I’m the man you expect from the office in London. Just say Mr. Dark, will you? I’ll sit down here till you come back; and, I say, young man, if there is such a thing as a glass of ale in the house, I don’t mind committing myself so far as to say that I’ll drink it.”

I got him the ale before I announced him. He winked at me as he put it to his lips. “Your good health,” says he. “I like you. Don’t forget that the name’s Dark; and just leave the jug and glass, will you, in case my master keeps me waiting.

I announced him at once, and was told to show him into the library. When I got back to the hall the jug was empty, and Mr. Dark was comforting himself with a pinch of snuff snorting over it like a perfect grampus. He had swallowed more than a pint of the strongest old ale in the house; and, for all the effect it seemed to have had on him, he might just as well have been drinking so much water.

As I led him along the passage to the library Josephine, the French maid, passed us. Mr. Dark winked at me again, and made her a low bow. “Lady’s maid,” I heard him whisper to himself. “A

fine woman to look at, but a d—d bad one to deal with.” I turned round on him, rather angry at his cool ways, and looked hard at him, just before I opened the library door. Mr. Dark looked hard at me. “All right,” says he. “I can show myself in.” And he knocks at the door, and opens it, and goes in, with another wicked wink, all in a moment.

Half an hour later the bell rang for me. Mr. Dark was sitting between my mistress (who was looking at him in amazement), and the lawyer (who was looking at him with approval). He had a map open on his knee, and a pen in his hand. Judging by his face, the communication of the secret about my master did not seem to have made the smallest impression on him.

“I’ve got leave to ask you a question,” says he, the moment I appeared. “When you found your master’s yacht gone, did you hear which way she had sailed? Was it northward toward Scotland?”

“Yes,” I answered. “The boatmen told me that, when I made inquiries at the harbor.”

“Well, Sir,” says Mr. Dark, turning to the lawyer, “if he said he was going to Sweden he seems to have started on the road to it, at all events. I think I have got my instructions now?”

The lawyer nodded and looked at my mistress, who bowed her head to him. He then said, turning to me.

“Pack up your bag for traveling, William, and have a conveyance got ready to go to the nearest post town.”

“And whatever happens in the future,” added my mistress, her kind voice trembling a little, “believe, William, that I shall never forget this proof you now show of your devotion to me. It is still some comfort to know that I have your fidelity to depend on in this dreadful trial—your fidelity, and the extraordinary intelligence and experience of Mr. Dark.”

Mr. Dark did not seem to hear the compliment. He was busy writing, with his paper upon the map on his knee. A quarter of an hour later, when I had ordered the dogcart, and had got down into the hall with my bag packed, I found him there waiting for me. He was sitting on the same chair which he had occupied when he first arrived, and he had another jug of the old ale on the table by his side.

“Got any fishing rods in the house?” says he, when I put my bag down in the hall.

“Yes,” I replied, astonished at the question. “What do you want with them?”

“Pack a couple in cases for traveling,” says Mr. Dark, “with lines and hooks and fly hooks all complete. Have a drop of ale before you go—and don’t stare, William. I’ll let the light in on you as soon as we are out of the house. Off with you for the rods! I want to be on the road in five minutes.”

When I came back with the rods and tackle, I found Mr. Dark in the dogcart. “Money, luggage, fishing rods, paper of directions, copy of anonymous letter, guidebook, map,” says he, running over in his mind the things wanted for the journey. “All right, so far. Drive off. I took the reins and started the horse. As we left the house, I saw my mistress and Josephine looking after us from two of the windows on the second floor. The memory of those two attentive faces—one so sad and so good, the other so smiling and so wicked—haunted my mind perpetually for many days afterward.

“Now, William,” says Mr. Dark, “when we were clear of the lodge gates, I’m going to begin by telling you what you are. You are a clerk in a bank; and I’m another. We have got our regular holiday, that comes, like Christmas, once a year; and we are taking a little tour in Scotland, to see the curiosities, and to breathe the sea air, and to get a little fishing whenever we can. I’m the fat cashier who digs holes in a drawerful of gold with a copper shovel. And you’re the arithmetical young man who sits on a perch behind me, and keeps the books. Scotland’s a beautiful country, William. Can you make whisky toddy? I can; and what’s more, unlikely as the thing may seem to you, I can actually drink it into the bargain.”

“Scotland!” says I. “What are we going to Scotland for?”

“Question for question,” says Mr. Dark. “What are we starting on a journey for?”

“To find my master,” I answered, “and to make sure if the letter about him is true.”

“Very good,” says he. “How would *you* set about doing that, eh?”

“I should go and ask about him at Stockholm in Sweden, where he said his letters were to be sent.”

“Would you indeed?” says Mr. Dark. “If you were a shepherd, William, and had lost a sheep in Cumberland, would you begin looking for it at the Land’s End, or would you try a little nearer home?”

“You’re attempting to make a fool of me now,” says I.

“No,” says Mr. Dark, “I’m only letting the light in on you, as I said I would. Now listen to reason, William, and profit by it as much as you can. Mr. James Smith says he is going on a cruise to Sweden, and makes his word good, at the beginning, by starting northward toward the coast of Scotland. What does he go in? A yacht. Do yachts carry live beasts and a butcher on hoard? No. Will joints of meat keep fresh all the way from Cumberland to Sweden? No. Do gentlemen like living on salt provisions? No. What follows from these three Noes? That Mr. James Smith must have stopped somewhere, on the way to Sweden, to supply his sea larder with fresh provisions. Where in that case must he stop? Somewhere in Scotland, supposing he did not alter his course when he was out of sight of your seaport. Where in Scotland? Northward on the mainland, or westward at one of the islands? Most likely on the mainland, where the seaside places are largest and where he is surest of getting all the stores he wants. Next, what is our business? Not to risk losing a link in the chain of evidence by missing anyplace where he has put

his foot on shore. Not to overshoot the mark when we want to hit it in the bull's-eye. Not to waste money and time by taking a long trip to Sweden, till we know that we must absolutely go there. Where is our journey of discovery to take us to first, then? Clearly to the north of Scotland. What do you say to that, Mr. William? Is my catechism all correct, or has your strong ale muddled my head?"

It was evident, by this time, that no ale could do that—and I told him so. He chuckled, winked at me, and, taking another pinch of snuff, said he would now turn the whole case over in his mind again, and make sure that he had got all the bearings of it quite clear. By the time we reached the post town he had accomplished this mental effort to his own perfect satisfaction, and was quite ready to compare the ale at the inn with the ale at Darrock Hall. The dogcart was left to be taken back the next morning by the hostler. A post chaise and horses were ordered out. A loaf of bread, a Bologna sausage, and two bottles of sherry were put into the pockets of the carriage; we took our seats and started briskly on our doubtful journey.

"One word more of friendly advice," said Mr. Dark, settling himself comfortably in his corner of the carriage. "Take your sleep, William, whenever you feel that you can get it. You won't find yourself in bed again till we get to Glasgow."

Chapter II

ALTHOUGH the events that I am now relating happened many years ago, and although the persons principally affected by them are dead, with the exception of myself and another, I shall still, for caution's sake, avoid mentioning by name the various places visited by Mr. Dark and myself for the purpose of making inquiries. It will be enough if I describe generally what we did, and if I mention in substance only the result at which we ultimately arrived.

On reaching Glasgow, Mr. Dark altered his original intention of going straight to the north of Scotland, considering it safer to make sure, if possible, of the course the yacht had taken in her cruise along the western coast. The carrying out of this new resolution involved the necessity of delaying our onward journey by perpetually diverging from the direct route. Three times we were sent uselessly to wild places in the Hebrides by false reports. Twice we wandered away inland, following gentlemen who answered generally to the description of Mr. James Smith, but who turned out to be the wrong men as soon as we set eyes on them. These vain excursions—especially the three to the western islands—consumed time terribly. It was more than two months from the day when we had left Darrock Hall before we found ourselves up at the very top of Scotland at last, driving into a considerable seaside town, with a harbor attached to it. Thus far our journey had led to no results, and I began to despair of our making any discoveries. As for Mr. Dark, he never got to the end of his temper and his patience. "You don't know how to wait, William," was his constant remark whenever he heard me complaining. "I do."

We drove into the town toward evening in a modest little gig, and put up, according to our usual custom, at one of the inferior inns. "We must begin at the bottom," Mr. Dark used to say. "High company in a coffee room won't be familiar with us. Low company in a taproom will." And he certainly proved the truth of his own words. The like of him for making intimate friends of total strangers at the shortest notice I have never met with before or since. Cautious as the Scotch are,

Mr. Dark seemed to have the knack of twisting them round his finger just as he pleased. He varied his way artfully with different men; but there were three standing opinions of his which he made a point of expressing in all varieties of company while we were in Scotland. In the first place, he thought the view of Edinburgh from Arthur's Seat the finest view in the world. In the second place, he considered whisky to be the most wholesome spirit in the world. In the third place, he believed his late beloved mother to have been the best woman in the world. It may be worthy of note that, whenever he expressed this last opinion, he invariably added that her maiden name had been Macleod.

Well, we put up at a modest little inn near the harbor. I was dead tired with the journey, and lay down on my bed to get some rest. Mr. Dark, whom nothing ever fatigued, left me to take his toddy and pipe among the company in the taproom.

I don't know how long I had been asleep, when I was roused by a shake on my shoulder. The room was pitch dark, and I felt a hand suddenly clapped over my mouth. Then a strong smell of whisky and tobacco saluted my nostrils, and a whisper stole into my ear:

"William! we have got to the end of our journey."

"Mr. Dark," I stammered out, "is that you? What in Heaven's name do you mean?"

"The yacht put in here," was the answer, still in a whisper, "and your blackguard of a master came ashore—"

"Oh! Mr. Dark," I broke in, "don't tell me that the letter is true!"

"Every word of it," says he. "He was married here, and he was off again to the Mediterranean with Number Two a good three weeks before we left your mistress' house. Hush! don't say a word. Go to sleep again, or strike a light and read, if you like it better. Do anything but come downstairs with me. I'm going to find out all the particulars without seeming to want to know one of them. Yours is a very good-looking face, William, but it's so infernally honest that I can't trust it in the taproom. I'm making friends with the Scotchmen already. They know my opinion of Arthur's Seat; they see what I think of whisky; and I rather think it won't be long before they hear that my mother's maiden name was Macleod."

With these words he slipped out of the room, and left me, as he had found me, in the dark.

I was far too much agitated by what I had heard to think of going to sleep again; so I struck a light, and tried to amuse myself as well as I could with an old newspaper that had been stuffed into my carpetbag. It was then nearly ten o'clock. Two hours later, when the house shut up, Mr. Dark came back to me again in high spirits. "I have got the whole case here," says he, tapping his forehead— "the whole case, as neat and clear as if it was drawn in a brief. That master of yours doesn't stick at a trifle, William. It's my opinion that your mistress and you have not seen the last of him yet."

We were sleeping, that night, in a double-bedded room. As soon as Mr. Dark had secured the door and disposed himself comfortably in his bed, he entered on a detailed narrative of the particulars communicated to him in the taproom. The substance of what he told me may be related as follows:

The yacht had had a wonderful run all the way to Cape Wrath. On rounding that headland she had met the wind nearly dead against her, and had beaten every inch of the way to the seaport town, where she had put in to get a supply of provisions, and to wait for a change in the wind. Mr. James Smith had gone ashore to look about him, and to see whether the principal hotel was the sort of house at which he would like to stop for a few days. In the course of his wanderings about the town, his attention had been attracted to a decent house, where lodgings were to be let, by the sight of a very pretty girl sitting at work at the parlor window. He was so struck by her face that he came back twice to look at it, determining, the second time, to try if he could not make acquaintance with her by asking to see the lodgings. He was shown the rooms by the girl's mother, a very respectable woman, whom he discovered to be the wife of the master and part owner of a small coasting vessel, then away at sea. With a little manœuvring he managed to get into the parlor where the daughter was at work, and to exchange a few words with her. Her voice and manner equaled and completed the attraction of her face. Mr. James Smith decided, in his headlong way, that he was violently in love with her; and, without hesitating another instant, he took the lodgings on the spot for a month certain.

It is unnecessary to say that his designs on the girl were of the most dishonorable kind, and that he represented himself to the mother and daughter as a single man. Aided by his advantages of money, position, and personal appearance, he had anticipated that the ruin of the girl might be effected with very little difficulty; but he soon found that he had undertaken no easy conquest. The mother's vigilance never relaxed, and the daughter's self-possession never deserted her. She admired Mr. James Smith's tall figure and magnificent whiskers; she showed the most flattering partiality for his society; she listened tenderly to his compliments, and blushed encouragingly under his looks of admiration; but, whether it was cunning calculation, or whether it was pure innocence, she seemed absolutely incapable of understanding that his advances toward her were of any other than an honorable kind. At the slightest approach to undue familiarity she drew back with a kind of contemptuous amazement in her face, which utterly daunted and perplexed Mr. James Smith. He had not calculated on that sort of resistance, and he was perfectly incapable of overcoming it. The weeks passed; the month for which he had taken the lodgings expired. Time had strengthened the girl's hold on him till his admiration for her amounted to absolute infatuation; and he had not advanced one step yet toward the execution of the vicious purpose with which he had entered the house.

At this time he must have made some fresh attempt on the girl's virtue, which produced a coolness between them; for, instead of taking the lodgings on for another term, he removed to his yacht in the harbor, and slept on board for two nights. The wind was now fair, and the stores were on board; but he gave no orders to the sailing master to weigh anchor. On the third day the cause of the coolness, whatever it was, appears to have been removed, and he returned to his lodgings on shore. Some of the more curious among the townspeople observed soon afterward, when they met him in the street, that he looked rather anxious and uneasy. The conclusion had probably forced itself upon his mind by this time that he must decide on pursuing one of two

courses. Either he must resolve to make the sacrifice of leaving the girl altogether, or to commit the villainy of marrying her.

Unscrupulous as he was, he hesitated at encountering the risk—perhaps, also, at being guilty of the crime—involved in the last alternative. While he was still in doubt, the father's coasting vessel sailed into the harbor, and the father's presence on the scene decided him at last. How this new influence acted it was impossible to ascertain, from the necessarily imperfect evidence of persons who were not admitted to the family councils. The fact, however, was indisputable, that the date of the father's return and the date of Mr. James Smith's first wicked resolution to marry the girl might both be fixed, as nearly as possible, at one and the same time.

Having once made up his mind to the commission of the crime, he proceeded, with all possible coolness and cunning, to provide against the chances of detection. Returning on board his yacht, he announced that he had given up his intention of cruising to Sweden, and that he intended to amuse himself by a long fishing tour in Scotland. After this brief explanation he ordered the vessel to be laid up in the harbor, gave the sailing master leave of absence to return to his family at Cowes, and paid off the whole of the crew, from the mate to the cabin boy. By these means he cleared the scene, at one blow, of the only people in the town who knew of the existence of his unhappy wife. After that, the news of his approaching marriage might be made public without risk of discovery; his own common name being of itself a sufficient protection, in case the event was mentioned in the local newspapers. All his friends, even his wife herself, might read a report of the marriage of Mr. James Smith, without having the slightest suspicion of who the bridegroom really was.

A fortnight after the paying off of the crew he was married to the merchant captain's daughter. The father of the girl was well known among his fellow townsmen as a selfish, grasping man, who was too sordidly anxious to secure a rich son-in-law to oppose any proposals for hastening the marriage. He and his wife and a few intimate relations had been present at the ceremony. After it had been performed, the newly-married couple left the town at once for a honeymoon trip to the Highland Lakes. Two days later, however, they unexpectedly returned, announcing a complete change in their plans. The bridegroom (thinking, probably, that he would be safer out of England than in it) had been fascinating the bride by his descriptions of the soft climate and lovely scenery of the South. The new Mrs. James Smith was all curiosity to see the shores of Spain and Italy; and, having often proved herself an excellent sailor on board her father's vessel, was anxious to go to the Mediterranean in the easiest way, by sea. Her attached husband, having now no other object in life than to gratify her wishes, had given up the Highland excursion, and had returned to have his yacht got ready for sea immediately. In this explanation there was nothing to awaken the suspicions of the lady's parents. The mother thought her James Smith a model among bridegrooms. The father lent his assistance to man the yacht at the shortest notice, with as competent a crew as could be picked up about the town. Principally through his exertions, the vessel was got ready for sea with extraordinary dispatch. The sails were bent, the provisions were put on board, and Mr. James Smith sailed for the Mediterranean with the unfortunate woman who believed herself to be his wife, before Mr. Dark and myself set forth to look after him from Darrock Hall.

Such was the true account of my master's infamous conduct in Scotland, as it was related to me. On concluding, Mr. Dark intimated that he had something still left to tell me, but declared that he was too sleepy to talk anymore that night. As soon as we were awake the next morning he returned to the subject.

"I didn't finish all I had to say last night, did I?" he began.

"You unfortunately told me enough, and more than enough, to prove the truth of the statement in the anonymous letter," I answered.

"Yes," says Mr. Dark; "but did I tell you who wrote the anonymous letter?"

"You don't mean to say you have found that out!" says I.

"I think I have," was the cool answer. "When I heard about your precious master paying off the regular crew of the yacht, I put the circumstance by in my mind, to be brought out again and sifted a little as soon as the opportunity offered. It offered in about half an hour. Says I to the gauger, who was the principal talker in the room, 'How about those men that Mr. Smith paid off? Did they all go as soon as they got their money, or did they stop here till they had spent every farthing of it in the public houses?' The gauger laughs. 'No such luck,' says he. 'They all went south, to spend their money among finer people than us. When I say all, though, I must make one exception. We thought the steward of the yacht had gone along with the rest; when, the very day Mr. Smith sailed for the Mediterranean, who should turn up unexpectedly but the steward himself? Where he had been hiding, and why he had been hiding, nobody could tell.' 'Perhaps he had been imitating his master, and looking out for a wife,' says I. 'Likely enough,' says the gauger; 'he gave a very confused account of himself, and he cut all questions short by going away south in a violent hurry.' That was enough for me: I said no more, and let the subject drop. Clear as daylight, isn't it, William? The steward suspected something wrong—the steward waited and watched—the steward wrote that anonymous letter to your mistress. We can find him, if we want him, by inquiring at Cowes; and we can send to the church for legal evidence of the marriage as soon as we are instructed to do so. All that we have got to do now is to go back to your mistress, and see what course she means to take under the circumstances. It's a pretty case, William, so far—an uncommonly pretty case, as it stands at present."

We returned to Darrock Hall as fast as coaches and post-horses could carry us. Having from the first believed that the statement in the anonymous letter was true, my mistress received the bad news we brought calmly and resignedly—so far, at least, as outward appearances went. She astonished and disappointed Mr. Dark, by declining to act, in any way, on the information that he had collected for her, and by insisting that the whole affair should still be buried in the profoundest secrecy. For the first time since I had known my traveling companion, he became depressed in spirits on hearing that nothing more was to be done; and although he left the Hall with a handsome present, he left it discontentedly.

"Such a pretty case, William!" says he, quite sorrowfully, as we shook hands in the hall. "Such an uncommonly pretty case! It's a thousand pities to stop it, in this way, before it's half over!"

“You don’t know what a proud lady and what a delicate lady my mistress is,” I answered. “She would die rather than expose her forlorn situation in a public court, for the sake of punishing her husband.”

“Bless your simple heart!” says Mr. Dark, “do you really think, now, that such a case as this can be hushed up?”

“Why not,” I asked, “if we all keep the secret?”

“That for the secret!” cries Mr. Dark, snapping his fingers. “Your master will let the cat out of the bag, if nobody else does.”

“My master!” I repeated, in amazement.

“Yes, your master!” says Mr. Dark. “I have had some experience in my time, and I say you have not seen the last of him yet. Mark my words, William! Mr. James Smith will come back.”

With that startling prophecy Mr. Dark irritably treated himself to a final pinch of snuff, and departed in silence on his journey back to his master in London. His last words hung heavily on my mind for days after he had gone. It was some weeks before I got over a habit of starting whenever the bell was rung at the front door.

Our life at the Hall soon returned to its old, dreary course. The lawyer in London wrote to my mistress to ask her to come and stay for a little while with his wife. But she declined the invitation, being averse to facing company after what had happened to her. Though she tried hard to keep the real state of her mind concealed from all about her, I, for one, could see plainly enough that she was pining and wasting under the bitter injury that had been inflicted on her. What effect continued solitude might have had on her spirits I tremble to think. Fortunately for herself, it occurred to her, before long, to send and invite Mr. Meeke to resume his musical practicing with her at the Hall. She told him—and, as it seemed to me, with perfect truth—that any implied engagement which he had made with Mr. James Smith was now canceled, since the person so named had morally forfeited all his claims as a husband—first, by his desertion of her; and, secondly, by his criminal marriage with another woman. After stating this view of the matter, she left it to Mr. Meeke to decide whether the perfectly innocent connection between them should be resumed or not. The little parson, after hesitating and pondering, in his helpless way, ended by agreeing with my mistress, and by coming back once more to the Hall with his fiddle under his arm. This renewal of their old habits might have been imprudent enough, as tending to weaken the strength of my mistress’ case in the eyes of the world; but, for all that, it was the most sensible course she could take for her own sake. The harmless company of Mr. Meeke, and the relief of playing the old tunes again in the old way, saved her, I verily believe, from sinking altogether under the oppression of the shocking situation in which she was now placed.

So with the assistance of Mr. Meeke and his fiddle, my mistress got through the weary time. The winter passed; the spring came; and no fresh tidings reached us of Mr. James Smith. It had been

a long, hard winter that year, and the spring was backward and rainy. The first really fine day we had was the day that fell on the fourteenth of March.

I am particular in mentioning this date merely because it is fixed forever in my memory. As long as there is life in me I shall remember that fourteenth of March, and the smallest circumstances connected with it. The day began ill, with what superstitions people would think a bad omen. My mistress remained late in her room in the morning, amusing herself by looking over her clothes, and by setting to rights some drawers in her cabinet which she had not opened for some time past. Just before the luncheon hour we were startled by hearing the drawing room bell rung violently. I ran up to see what was the matter, and Josephine, the French maid, who had heard the bell in another part of the house, hastened to answer it also. She got into the drawing room first, and I followed close on her heels. My mistress was standing alone on the hearth rug, with an appearance of great discomposure in her face and manner.

“I have been robbed!” she said, vehemently. “I don’t know when or how. But I miss a pair of bracelets, three rings, and a quantity of old-fashioned lace pocket handkerchiefs.”

“If you have any suspicions, ma’am,” said Josephine, in a singularly sharp, sudden way, “say who they point at. My boxes, for one, are quite at your disposition.”

“Who asked you about your boxes?” said my mistress, angrily. “Be a little less ready with your answer, if you please, the next time I speak.”

She then turned to me, and began explaining the circumstances under which she had discovered her loss. I suggested that the missing things should be well searched for, first; and then, if nothing came of that, that I should go for the constable and place the matter under his direction. My mistress agreed to this plan; and the search was undertaken immediately. It lasted till dinnertime, and led to no results. I then proposed going for the constable. But my mistress said it was too late to do anything that day, and told me to wait at table as usual, and to go on my errand the first thing the next morning. Mr. Meeke was coming with some new music in the evening; and I suspect she was not willing to be disturbed at her favorite occupation by the arrival of the constable.

Dinner was over; the parson came; and the concert went on as usual through the evening. At ten o’clock I took up the tray, with the wine and soda water and biscuits. Just as I was opening one of the bottles of soda water, there was a sound of wheels on the drive outside, and a ring at the bell.

I had unfastened the wires of the cork, and could not put the bottle down to run at once to the door. One of the female servants answered it. I heard a sort of half scream—then a sound of footsteps that were familiar to me.

My mistress turned round from the piano, and looked at me.

“William!” she said. “Do you know that step?”

Before I could answer, the door was pushed open, and Mr. James Smith walked into the room.

He had his hat on. His long hair flowed down under it over the collar of his coat; his bright black eyes, after resting an instant on my mistress, turned to Mr. Meeke. His heavy eyebrows met together, and one of his hands went up to one of his bushy black whiskers, and pulled at it angrily.

“You here again!” he said, advancing a few steps toward the little parson who sat trembling all over, with his fiddle hugged up in his arms as if it had been a child.

Seeing her villainous husband advance, my mistress moved too, so as to face him. He turned round on her at the first step she took, as quick as lightning.

“You shameless woman!” he said. “Can you look me in the face in the presence of that man?” He pointed, as he spoke, to Mr. Meeke.

My mistress never shrank when he turned upon her. Not a sign of fear was in her face when they confronted each other. Not the faintest flush of anger came into her cheeks when he spoke. The sense of the insult and injury that he had inflicted on her, and the consciousness of knowing his guilty secret, gave her all her self-possession at that trying moment. The high spirit that despised him spoke its contempt in every feature of her calm, haughty, unchanging face.

“I say to you again,” he repeated, finding that she did not answer him. “How dare you look me in the face in the presence of that man?”

She raised her steady eyes to his hat, which he still kept on his head.

“Who has taught you to come into a room and speak to a lady with your hat on?” she asked, in quietly-contemptuous tones. “Is that a habit which is sanctioned by your new wife?”

My eyes were on him as she said those last words. His complexion, naturally dark and swarthy, changed instantly to a livid yellow white; his hand caught at the chair nearest to him; and he dropped into it heavily.

“I don’t understand you,” he said, after a moment of silence, looking about the room unsteadily while he spoke.

“You do,” said my mistress. “Your tongue lies, but your face speaks the truth.”

He called back his courage and audacity by a desperate effort, and started up from the chair again with an oath. The instant before this happened I thought I heard the sound of a rustling dress in the passage outside, as if one of the woman servants was stealing up to listen outside the door. I should have gone at once to see whether this was the case or not, but my master stopped me just after he had risen from the chair.

“Order the bed to be made in the Red Room, and light a fire there directly,” he said, with his fiercest look and in his roughest tones. “When I ring the bell, bring me a kettle of boiling water and a bottle of brandy. As for you,” he continued, turning toward Mr. Meeke, who still sat pale and speechless with his fiddle hugged up in his arms, “leave the house, or you won’t find your cloth any protection to you.”

At this insult the blood flew into my mistress’ face. Before she could say anything Mr. James Smith raised his voice loud enough to drown hers.

“I won’t hear another word from you,” he cried out, brutally. “You have been talking like a mad woman—you look like a mad woman—you are out of your senses. As sure as you live I’ll have you examined by the doctors tomorrow. Why the devil do you stand there, you scoundrel?” he roared, wheeling round on his heel to me. “Why don’t you obey my orders?”

I looked at my mistress. If she had directed me to knock Mr. James Smith down, big as he was, I think at that moment I could have done it.

“Do as he tells you, William,” she said, squeezing one of her hands firmly over her bosom, as if she was trying to keep down the rising indignation in that way. “This is the last order of his giving that I shall ask you to obey.”

“Do you threaten me, you mad—?” He finished the question by a word that I shall not repeat.

“I tell you,” she answered, in clear, ringing, resolute tones, “that you have outraged me past all forgiveness and all endurance, and that you shall never insult me again as you have insulted me tonight.”

After saying those words, she fixed one steady look on him, then turned away and walked slowly to the door.

A minute previously, Mr. Meeke had summoned courage enough to get up and leave the room quietly. I noticed him walking demurely away, close to the wall, with his fiddle held under one tail of his long frock coat, as if he was afraid that the savage passions of Mr. James Smith might be wreaked on that unoffending instrument. He got to the door before my mistress. As he softly pulled it open, I saw him start, and I heard the rustling of the gown again in the passage outside.

My mistress followed him into the passage, turning, however, in the opposite direction to that taken by the little parson, in order to reach the staircase that led to her own room. I went out next, leaving Mr. James Smith alone.

I overtook Mr. Meeke in the hall, and opened the door for him.

“I beg your pardon, Sir,” I said, “but did you come upon anybody listening outside the music room when you left it just now?”

“Yes, William,” said Mr. Meeke, in a faint voice. “I think it was the French maid. But I was so dreadfully agitated that I can’t be quite certain about it.”

Had she surprised our secret? That was the question I asked myself, as I went away to light the fire in the Red Room. Calling to mind the exact time at which I had first detected the rustling outside the door, I came to the conclusion that she had only heard the last part of the quarrel between my mistress and her rascal of a husband. Those bold words about the “new wife,” had been assuredly spoken before I heard Josephine stealing up to the door.

As soon as the fire was alight and the bed made, I went back to the music room to announce that my orders had been obeyed. Mr. James Smith was walking up and down, in a perturbed way, still keeping his hat on. He followed me to the Red Room without saying a word. Ten minutes later, he rang for the kettle and the bottle of brandy. When I took them in, I found him unpacking a small carpetbag which was the only luggage he had brought with him. He still kept silence, and did not appear to take any notice of me. I left him for the night without our having exchanged so much as a single word.

So far as I could tell the night passed quietly.

The next morning I heard that my mistress was suffering so severely from a nervous attack that she was unable to rise from her bed. It was no surprise to me to be told that, knowing, as I did, what she had gone through the night before.

About nine o’clock I went with the hot water to the Red Room. After knocking twice, I tried the door, and, finding it not locked, went in with the jug in my hand.

I looked at the bed; I looked all round the room. Not a sign of Mr. James Smith was to be seen anywhere.

Judging by appearances the bed had certainly been occupied. Thrown across the counter- pane lay the nightgown he had worn. I took it up and saw some spots on it. I looked at them a little closer. They were spots of blood.

Chapter III

THE first amazement and alarm produced by this discovery deprived me of my presence of mind. Without stopping to think what I ought to do first, I ran back to the servants’ hall, calling out that something had happened to my master. All the household hurried directly into the Red Room, Josephine among the rest. I was first brought to my senses, as it were, by observing the strange expression of her countenance when she saw the bed gown and the empty room. All the other servants were bewildered and frightened. She alone, after giving a little start, recovered herself directly. A look of devilish satisfaction broke out on her face; and she left the room quickly and quietly, without exchanging a word with any of us. I saw this, and it aroused my suspicions. There is no need to mention what they were, for, as events soon showed, they were entirely wide of the mark.

Having come to myself a little, I sent them all out of the room, except the coachman. We two then examined the place. The Red Room was usually occupied by visitors. It was on the ground floor, and looked out into the garden. We found the window shutters, which I had barred overnight, open, but the window itself was down. The fire had been out long enough for the grate to be quite cold. Half the bottle of brandy had been drunk. The carpetbag was gone. There were no marks of violence or struggling anywhere about the bed or the room. We examined every corner carefully, but made no other discoveries than these.

When I returned to the servants' hall, bad news of my mistress was awaiting me there. The unusual noise and confusion in the house had reached her ears, and she had been told what had happened without sufficient caution being exercised in preparing her to hear it. In her weak, nervous state, the shock of the intelligence had quite prostrated her. She had fallen into a swoon, and had been brought back to her senses with the greatest difficulty. As to giving me or anybody else directions what to do, under the embarrassing circumstances which had now occurred, she was totally incapable of the effort.

I waited till the middle of the day, in the hope that she might get strong enough to give her orders; but no message came from her. At last I resolved to send and ask her what she thought it best to do. Josephine was the proper person to go on this errand; but when I asked for Josephine, she was nowhere to be found. The housemaid, who had searched for her ineffectually, brought word that her bonnet and shawl were not hanging in their usual places. The parlormaid, who had been in attendance in my mistress' room, came down while we were all aghast at this new disappearance. She could only tell us that Josephine had begged her to do lady's maid's duty that morning as she was not well. Not well! And the first result of her illness appeared to be that she had left the house!

I cautioned the servants on no account to mention this circumstance to my mistress, and then went upstairs myself to knock at her door, and ask if I might count on her approval if I wrote, in her name, to her relation the lawyer in London, and if I afterward went and gave information of what had occurred to the nearest justice of the peace. I might have sent to make this inquiry through one of the female servants; but by this time, though not naturally suspicious, I had got to distrust everybody in the house, whether they deserved it or not.

So I asked the question myself, standing outside the door. My mistress thanked me in a faint voice, and begged me to do what I had proposed immediately.

I went into my own bedroom and wrote to the lawyer, merely telling him that Mr. James Smith had appeared unexpectedly at the Hall, and that events had occurred in consequence which required his immediate presence. I made the letter up like a parcel, and sent the coachman with it to catch the mail on its way through to London.

The next thing was to go to the justice of the peace. The nearest lived about five miles off, and was well acquainted with my mistress. He was an old bachelor, and he kept house with his brother who was a widower. The two were much respected and beloved in the county, being kind, unaffected gentlemen who did a great deal of good among the poor. The justice was Mr. Robert Nicholson, and his brother, the widower, was Mr. Philip.

I had got my hat on, and was asking the groom which horse I had better take, when an open carriage drove up to the house. It contained Mr. Philip Nicholson and two persons in plain clothes, not exactly servants and not exactly gentlemen, as far as I could judge.

Mr. Philip looked at me, when I touched my hat to him, in a very grave, downcast way, and asked for my mistress. I told him she was ill in bed. He shook his head at hearing that, and said he wished to speak to me in private. I showed him into the library. One of the men in plain clothes followed us, and sat in the hall. The other waited with the carriage.

“I was just going out, Sir,” I said, as I set a chair for him, “to speak to Mr. Robert Nicholson about a very extraordinary circumstance—”

“I know what you refer to,” said Mr. Philip, cutting me short rather abruptly, “and I must beg, for reasons which will presently appear, that you will make no statement of any sort to me until you have first heard what I have to say. I am here on a very serious and a very shocking errand, which deeply concerns your mistress and you.”

His face suggested something worse than his words expressed. My heart began to beat fast, and I felt that I was turning pale.

“Your master, Mr. James Smith,” he went on, “came here unexpectedly, yesterday evening, and slept in this house last night. Before he retired to rest, he and your mistress had high words together, which ended, I am sorry to hear, in a threat of a serious nature addressed by Mrs. James Smith to her husband. They slept in separate rooms. This morning you went into your master’s room and saw no sign of him there. You only found his nightgown on the bed, spotted with blood.”

“Yes, Sir,” I said, in as steady a voice as I could command. “Quite true.”

“I am not examining you,” said Mr. Philip. “I am only making a certain statement, the truth of which you can admit or deny before my brother.”

“Before your brother, Sir!” I repeated. “Am I suspected of anything wrong?”

“There is a suspicion that Mr. James Smith has been murdered,” was the answer I received to that question.

My flesh began to creep all over from head to foot. I tried to speak again, but the words would not come.

“I am shocked, I am horrified to say,” Mr. Philip went on, “that the suspicion affects your mistress, in the first place, and you, in the second.”

I shall not attempt to describe what I felt when he said that. No words of mine, no words of anybody’s, could give an idea of it. What other men would have done in my situation I don’t

know. I stood before Mr. Philip, staring straight at him, without speaking, without moving, almost without breathing. If he, or any other man, had struck me at that moment, I do not believe I should have felt the blow.

“Both my brother and myself,” said Mr. Philip, “have such unfeigned respect for your mistress, such sympathy for her under these frightful circumstances, and such an implicit belief in her capability of proving her innocence, that we are desirous of sparing her in this dreadful trial as much as possible. For those reasons, I have undertaken to come here with the persons appointed to execute my brother’s warrant—”

“Warrant, Sir! I said, getting command of my voice as he pronounced that word. “A warrant against my mistress!”

“Against her and against you,” said Mr. Philip. “The suspicious circumstances have been sworn to by a competent witness, who has declared on oath that your mistress is guilty, and that you are an accomplice.”

“What witness, Sir?”

“Your mistress’ French maid, who came to my brother this morning, and who has made her deposition in due form.”

“And who is as false as hell,” I cried out passionately, “in every word she says against my mistress and against me.”

“I hope—no, I will go farther, and say, I believe she is,” said Mr. Philip. “But her perjury must be proved, and the necessary examination must take place. My carriage is going back to my brother’s, and you will go in it in charge of one of my men, who has the warrant to take you in custody. I shall remain here with the man who is waiting in the hall; and, before any steps are taken to execute the other warrant, I shall send for the doctor to ascertain when your mistress can be removed.”

“Oh, my poor mistress!” I said. “This will be the death of her, Sir.”

“I will take care that the shock shall strike her as tenderly as possible,” said Mr. Philip. “I am here for that express purpose. She has my deepest sympathy and respect, and shall have every help and alleviation that I can afford her.”

The hearing him say that, and the seeing how sincerely he meant what he said, was the first gleam of comfort in the dreadful affliction that had befallen us. I felt this; I felt a burning anger against the wretch who had done her best to ruin my mistress’ fair name and mine; but in every other respect, I was like a man who had been stunned, and whose faculties had not perfectly recovered from the shock. Mr. Philip was obliged to remind me that time was of importance, and that I had better give myself up immediately on the merciful terms which his kindness offered to me. I acknowledged that, and wished him good morning. But a mist seemed to come over my eyes as I turned round to go away; a mist that prevented me from finding my way to the door.

Mr. Philip opened it for me, and said a friendly word or two which I could hardly hear. The man waiting outside took me to his companion in the carriage at the door, and I was driven away—a prisoner for the first time in my life.

On our way to the Justice's, what little thinking faculty I had left in me was all occupied in the attempt to trace a motive for the inconceivable treachery and falsehood of which the French woman had been guilty. Her words, her looks, and her manner, on that unfortunate day when my mistress so far forgot herself as to strike her, came back dimly to my memory, and led to the inference that part of the motive, at least, of which I was in search might be referred to what had happened on that occasion. But was this the only reason for her devilish vengeance against my mistress? And, even if it were so, what fancied injuries had I done her? Why should I be included in the false accusation? In the dazed state of my faculties, at that time, I was quite incapable of seeking the answer to these questions. My mind was clouded all over, and I gave up the attempt to clear it in despair.

I was brought before Mr. Robert Nicholson that day, and the fiend of a French woman was examined in my presence. The first sight of her face—with its wicked self-possession, with its smooth, leering triumph—so sickened and horrified me that I turned my head away and never looked at her a second time throughout the proceedings. The answers she gave amounted to a mere repetition of the deposition to which she had already sworn. I listened to them with the most breathless attention, and was thunderstruck at the inconceivable artfulness with which she had mixed up truth and falsehood in her charge against my mistress and me.

This was, in substance, what she now stated in my presence:

After describing the manner of Mr. James Smith's arrival at the Hall, the witness, Josephine Durand, confessed that she had been led to listen at the music room door by hearing angry voices inside; and she then described, truly enough, the latter part of the altercation between husband and wife. Fearing, after this, that something serious might happen, she had kept watch in her room, which was on the same floor as her mistress's. She had heard her mistress' door open softly, between one and two in the morning—had followed her mistress, who carried a small lamp, along the passage and down the stairs into the hall—had hidden herself in the porter's chair—had seen her mistress pass on the way that led to the Red Room, with the dagger in the green sheath in her hand—had followed her again, and seem her softly enter the Red Room—had heard the heavy breathing of Mr. James Smith, which gave token that he was asleep—had slipped into an empty room, next door to the Red Room, and had waited there about a quarter of an hour, when her mistress came out again with the dagger in her hand—had followed her mistress again into the hall, where she had put the dagger back in its place—had seen her mistress turn into a side passage that led to my room—had heard her knock at my door, and heard me answer and open it—had hidden again in the porter's chair—had, after awhile, seen me and my mistress pass together into the passage that led to the Red Room—had watched us both into the Red Room and had then, through fear of being discovered and murdered herself, if she risked detection any longer, stolen back to her own room for the rest of the night.

After deposing, on oath, to the truth of these atrocious falsehoods, and declaring, in conclusion, that Mr. James Smith had been murdered by my mistress, and that I was an accomplice, the

French woman had further asserted, in order to show a motive for the crime, that Mr. Meeke was my mistress' lover, that he had been forbidden the house by her husband, and that he was found in the house, and alone with her, on the evening of Mr. James Smith's return. Here again there were some grains of truth cunningly mixed up with a revolting lie, and they had their effect in giving to the falsehood a look of probability.

I was cautioned in the usual manner, and asked if I had anything to say. I replied that I was innocent, but that I would wait for legal assistance before I defended myself. The Justice remanded me; and the examination was over. Three days later my unhappy mistress was subjected to the same trial. I was not allowed to communicate with her. All I knew was that the lawyer had arrived from London to help her. Toward the evening he was admitted to see me. He shook his head sorrowfully when I asked after my mistress.

"I am afraid," he said, "that the horror of the situation in which that vile woman has placed her has affected her brain. Weakened by her previous agitation, she seems to have sunk altogether under this last shock, tenderly and carefully as Mr. Philip Nicholson broke the bad news to her. All her feelings appeared to be strangely blunted at the examination today. She answered the questions put to her quite correctly, but at the same time quite mechanically, with no change in her complexion, or in her tone of voice, or in her manner, from beginning to end. It is a sad thing, William, when women cannot get their natural vent of weeping, and your mistress has not shed a tear since she left Darrock Hall."

But surely, Sir, I said, if my examination has not proved the French woman's perjury, my mistress' examination must have exposed it?"

"Nothing will expose it," answered the lawyer, "but producing Mr. James Smith, or, at least, legally proving that he is alive. Morally speaking, I have no doubt that the Justice before whom you have been examined is as firmly convinced as we can be that the French woman has perjured herself. Morally speaking, he believes that those threats which your mistress unfortunately used, referred (as she said they did, today) to her intention of leaving the Hall early in the morning, with you for her attendant, and coming to me, if she had been well enough to travel, to seek effectual legal protection from her husband for the future. Mr. Nicholson believes that; and I, who know more of the circumstances than he does, believe also that Mr. James Smith stole away from Darrock Hall in the night under fear of being indicted for bigamy. But if I can't find him; if I can't prove him to be alive; if I can't account for those spots of blood on the nightgown, the accidental circumstances of the case remain unexplained—your mistress' rash language, the bad terms on which she has lived with her husband, and her unlucky disregard of appearances in keeping up her intercourse with Mr. Meeke, all tell dead against us—and the Justice has no alternative, in a legal point of view, but to remand you both, as he has now done, for the production of further evidence."

"But how, then, in Heaven's name, is our innocence to be proved, Sir?" I asked.

"In the first place," said the lawyer, "by finding Mr. James Smith; and, in the second place, by persuading him, when he is found, to come forward and declare himself."

“Do you really believe, Sir,” said I, “that he would hesitate to do that, when he knows the horrible charge to which his disappearance has exposed his wife? He is a heartless villain, I know; but sure—”

“I don’t suppose,” said the lawyer, cutting me short, “that he is quite scoundrel enough to decline coming forward, supposing he ran no risk by doing so. But remember that he has placed himself in a position to be tried for bigamy, and that he believes your mistress will put the law in force against him.”

I had forgotten that circumstance. My heart sank within me when it was recalled to my memory, and I could say nothing more.

“It is a very serious thing,” the lawyer went on; “it is a downright offense against the law of the land to make any private offer of a compromise to this man. Knowing what we know, our duty as good citizens, is to give such information as may bring him to trial. I tell you plainly that, if I did not stand toward your mistress in the position of a relation, as well as a legal adviser, I should think twice about running the risk—the very serious risk—on which I am now about to venture for her sake. As it is, I have taken the right measures to assure Mr. James Smith that he will not be treated according to his deserts. When he knows what the circumstances are, he will trust us—supposing always that we can find him. The search about this neighborhood has been quite useless. I have sent private instructions by today’s post to Mr. Dark in London, and with them a carefully-worded form of advertisement for the public newspapers. You may rest assured that every human means of tracing him will be tried forthwith. In the meantime, I have an important question to put to you about the French woman. She may know more than we think she does; she may have surprised the secret of the second marriage, and may be keeping it in reserve to use against us. If this should turn out to be the case, I shall want some other chance of indicting her for perjury. As to her motive, now, for making this horrible accusation, what can you tell me about that, William?”

“Her motive against me, Sir?”

“No, no! not against you. I can see plainly enough that she accuses you because it is necessary to do so to add to the probability of her story—which, of course, assumes that you helped your mistress to dispose of the dead body. You are coolly sacrificed to some devilish vengeance against her mistress. Let us get at that first. Has there ever been a quarrel between them?”

I told him of the quarrel, and of how Josephine had looked and talked when she showed me her cheek.

“Yes,” he said, “that is a strong motive for revenge, with a naturally pitiless, vindictive woman. But is that all? Had your mistress any hold over her? Is there any self-interest mixed up along with this motive of vengeance? Think a little, William has anything ever happened in the house to compromise this woman, or to make her fancy herself compromised?”

The remembrance of my mistress' lost trinkets and handkerchiefs, which later and greater troubles had put out of my mind, flashed back into my memory while he spoke. I told him immediately of the alarm in the house when the loss was discovered.

“Did your mistress suspect Josephine and question her?” he asked, eagerly.

“No, Sir,” I replied. “Before she could say a word Josephine impudently asked who she suspected, and boldly offered her own boxes to be searched.”

The lawyer's face turned red as scarlet. He jumped out of his chair, and hit me such a smack on the shoulder that I thought he had gone mad.

“By Jupiter, William!” he cried out, “we have got the whip hand of that she-devil at last!”

I looked at him in astonishment.

“Why, man alive!” he said, “don't you see how it is? Josephine's the thief! I am as sure of it as that you and I are talking together. This vile accusation against your mistress answers another purpose besides the vindictive one—it is the very best screen that the wretch could possibly set up to hide herself from detection. It has stopped your mistress and you from moving in the matter; it exhibits her in the false character of an honest witness against a couple of criminals; it gives her time to dispose of the goods, or to hide them, or to do anything she likes with them. Stop! let me be quite sure that I know what the lost things are. A pair of bracelets, three rings, and a lot of lace pocket handkerchiefs— is that what you said?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Your mistress will describe them particularly, and I will take the right steps the first thing tomorrow morning. Good evening, William, and keep up your spirits. It shan't be my fault if you don't soon see the French woman in the right place for her—at the prisoner's bar.”

With that farewell he went out. The days passed, and I did not see him again until the period of my remand had expired. On this occasion, when I once more appeared before the Justice, my mistress appeared with me. The first sight of her absolutely startled me—she was so sadly altered. Her face looked so pinched and thin that it was like the face of an old woman. The dull vacant resignation of her expression was something shocking to see. It changed a little when her eyes first turned heavily toward me; and she whispered, with a faint smile, “I am sorry for *you*, William: I am very, very sorry for *you*.” But as soon as she had said those words the blank look returned, and she sat with her head drooping forward, quiet and inattentive, and hopeless, so changed a being that her oldest friends would hardly have known her.

Our examination was a mere formality. There was no additional evidence, either for or against us, and we were remanded again for another week.

I asked the lawyer, privately, if any chance had offered itself of tracing Mr. James Smith. He looked mysterious, and only said in answer, "Hope for the best." I inquired next, if any progress had been made toward fixing the guilt of the robbery on the French woman.

"I never boast," he replied. "But, cunning as she is, I should not be surprised if Mr. Dark and I, together, turned out to be more than a match for her."

Mr. Dark! There was something in the mere mention of his name that gave me confidence. If I could only have got my poor mistress' sad dazed face out of my mind, I should not have had much depression of spirits to complain of during the interval of time that elapsed between the second examination and the third.

On the third appearance of my mistress and myself before the Justice, I noticed some faces in the room which I had not seen there before. Greatly to my astonishment—for the previous examinations had been conducted as privately as possible—I remarked the presence of two of the servants from the Hall, and of three or four of the tenants on the Darrock estate, who lived nearest to the house. They all sat together on one side of the justice room. Opposite to them, and close at the side of a door, stood my old acquaintance Mr. Dark, with his big snuffbox, his jolly face, and his winking eye. He nodded to me, when I looked at him, as jauntily as if we were meeting at a party of pleasure. The French woman, who had been summoned to the examination, had a chair placed opposite to the witness-box, and in a line with the seat occupied by my poor mistress, whose looks, as I was grieved to see, were not altered for the better. The lawyer from London was with her, and I stood behind her chair. We were all quietly disposed in the room in this way, when the Justice, Mr. Robert Nicholson, came in with his brother. It might have been only fancy, but I thought I could see in both their faces that something remarkable had happened since we had met at the last examination.

The deposition of Josephine Durand was read over by the clerk, and she was asked if she had anything to add to it. She replied in the negative. The Justice then appealed to my mistress' relation, the lawyer, to know if he could produce any evidence relating to the charge against his clients.

"I have evidence," answered the lawyer, getting briskly on his legs, "which, I believe, Sir, will justify me in asking for their discharge."

"Where are your witnesses?" inquired the Justice, looking hard at the French woman while he spoke.

"One of them is in waiting, your worship," said Mr. Dark, opening the door near which he was standing.

He went out of the room, remained away about a minute, and returned with his witness at his heels. My heart gave a bound as if it would jump out of my body. There, with his long hair cut short, and his bushy whiskers shaved off—there, in his own proper person, safe and sound as ever, was Mr. James Smith!

The French woman's iron nature resisted the shock of his unexpected presence on the scene with a steadiness that was nothing short of marvelous. Her thin lips closed together convulsively, and there was a slight movement in the muscles of her throat. But not a word, not a sign betrayed her. Even the yellow tinge of her complexion remained absolutely unchanged.

"It is not necessary, Sir, that I should waste time and words in referring to the wicked and preposterous charge against my clients," said the lawyer, addressing Mr. Robert Nicholson. "The one sufficient justification for discharging them immediately is before you at this moment, in the person of that gentleman. There, Sir, stands the murdered Mr. James Smith, of Darrock Hall, alive and well, to answer for himself."

"That is not the man!" cried the French woman, her shrill voice just as high, clear, and steady as ever. "I denounce that man as an impostor! Of my own knowledge I deny that he is Mr. James Smith!"

"No doubt you do," said the lawyer; "but we will prove his identity for all that."

The first witness called was Mr. Philip Nicholson. He could swear that he had seen Mr. James Smith, and spoken to him, at least a dozen times. The person now before him was Mr. James Smith, altered as to personal appearance by having his hair cut short, and his whiskers shaved off but still, unmistakably, the man he assumed to be.

"Conspiracy!" said the French woman, hissing the word out viciously between her teeth.

"If you are not silent," said Mr. Robert Nicholson, "you will be removed from the room. It will sooner meet the ends of justice," he went on, addressing the lawyer, "if you prove the question of identity by witnesses who have been in habits of daily communication with Mr. James Smith."

Upon this, one of the servants from the Hall was placed in the box. The alteration in his master's appearance evidently puzzled the man. Besides the perplexing change already adverted to, there was also a change in Mr. James Smith's expression and manner. Rascal as he was, I must do him the justice to say that he looked startled and ashamed when he first caught sight of his unfortunate wife. The servant, who was used to be eyed tyrannically by him, and ordered about roughly, stammered and hesitated on being asked to swear to his identity.

"I can hardly say for certain, Sir," said the man, addressing the Justice in a bewildered manner. "He is like my master, and yet he isn't. If he wore whiskers and had his hair long, and if he was, saving your presence, Sir, a little more rough and ready in his way, I could swear to him anywhere with a safe conscience."

Fortunately for us, at this moment Mr. James Smith's feeling of uneasiness at the situation in which he was placed changed to a feeling of irritation at being coolly surveyed, and then stupidly doubted in the matter of his identity, by one of his own servants.

"Can't you say in plain words, you idiot, whether you know me, or whether you don't?" he called out, angrily.

“That’s his voice!” cried the servant, starting in the box. “Whiskers or no whiskers, that’s him!”

“If there is any difficulty, your worship, about the gentleman’s hair,” said Mr. Dark, coming forward with a grin, “here’s a small parcel which, I may make so bold as to say, will remove it.” Saying that, he opened the parcel, took some locks of hair out of it, and held them up close to Mr. James Smith’s head. “A pretty good match, your worship!” continued Mr. Dark. “I have no doubt the gentleman’s head feels cooler now it’s off. We can’t put the whiskers on, I’m afraid, but they match the hair; and there they are in the paper (if one may say such a thing of whiskers) to speak for themselves.”

“A lie! a fraud!” cried the French woman. “A lie of lies! a fraud of frauds!”

The Justice made a sign to two of the constables present, as she burst out with those exclamations, and the men removed her to an adjoining room.

The second servant from the Hall was then put in the box, and was followed by one of the tenants. After what they had heard and seen, neither of these men had any hesitation in swearing positively to their master’s identity.

“It is quite unnecessary,” said the Justice, as soon as the box was empty again, “to examine anymore witnesses as to the question of identity. All the legal formalities are accomplished, and the charge against the prisoners falls to the ground. I have great pleasure in ordering the immediate discharge of both the accused persons, and in declaring from this place that they leave the court without the slightest stain on their characters.” He bowed low to my mistress as he said that, paused a moment, and then looked inquiringly at Mr. James Smith. “I have hitherto abstained from making any remark unconnected with the immediate matter in hand,” he went on. “But now that my duty is done, I cannot leave this chair without expressing my strong sense of disapprobation of the conduct of Mr. James Smith—conduct which, whatever may be the motives that occasioned it, has given a false color of probability to a most horrible charge against a lady of unspotted reputation, and against a person in a lower rank in life whose good character ought not to have been imperiled, even for a moment. Mr. Smith may, or may not, choose to explain his mysterious disappearance from Darrock Hall, and the equally unaccountable change which he has chosen to make in his personal appearance. There is no legal charge against him; but, speaking morally, I should be unworthy of the place I hold, if I hesitated to declare my present conviction that his conduct has been deceitful, inconsiderate, and unfeeling in the highest degree.”

To this sharp reprimand, Mr. James Smith (evidently tutored beforehand as to what he was to say) replied that, in attending before the Justice, he wished to perform a plain duty, and to keep himself strictly within the letter of the law. He apprehended that the only legal obligation laid on him was to attend in that court to declare himself and to enable competent witnesses to prove his identity. This duty accomplished, he had only to add that he preferred submitting to a reprimand from the Bench to entering into explanations which would involve the disclosure of domestic circumstances of a very unhappy nature. After that brief reply he had nothing to add, but that he would respectfully request the Justice’s permission to withdraw.

The permission was accorded. As he crossed the room he stopped near his wife, and said confusedly, in a very low tone, "I have done you many injuries, but I never intended this. I am sorry for it. Have you anything to say to me before I go?" My mistress shuddered and hid her face. He waited a moment, and, finding that she did not answer him, bowed his head politely, and went out. I did not know it then, but I had seen him for the last time.

After he had gone, the lawyer, addressing Mr. Robert Nicholson, said that he had an application to make, in reference to the woman Josephine Durand.

At the mention of that name my mistress hurriedly whispered a few words into her relation's ear. He looked toward Mr. Philip Nicholson, who immediately advanced, offered his arm to my mistress, and led her out. I was about to follow, when Mr. Dark stopped me, and begged that I would wait a few minutes longer, in order to give myself the pleasure of seeing "the end of the case."

In the meantime the Justice had pronounced the necessary order to have the French woman brought back. She came in, as bold and confident as ever. Mr. Robert Nicholson looked away from her in disgust, and said to the lawyer:

"Your application is to have her committed for perjury, of course?"

"For perjury?" said Josephine, with her wicked smile. "Ah, well! well! I shall explain some little things then that I have not explained before. You think I am quite at your mercy now? Bah! I shall make myself a thorn in your sides, yet."

"She has got scent of the second marriage," whispered Mr. Dark to me.

There could be no doubt of it. She had evidently been listening at the door, on the night when my master came back, longer than I had supposed. She must have heard those words about "the new wife"—she might even have seen the effect of them on Mr. James Smith.

"We do not, at present, propose to charge Josephine Durand with perjury," said the lawyer, "but with another offense, for which it is important to try her immediately, in order to effect the restoration of property that has been stolen. I charge her with stealing from her mistress, while in service at Darrock Hall, a pair of bracelets, three rings, and a dozen and a half of lace pocket handkerchiefs. The articles in question were taken this morning from between the mattresses of her bed; and a letter was found in the same place which clearly proves that she had represented the property as belonging to herself and that she had tried to dispose of it to a purchaser in London." While he was speaking Mr. Dark produced the jewelry, the handkerchiefs, and the letter, and laid them before the Justice.

Even the French woman's extraordinary powers of self-control now gave way at last. At the first words of the unexpected charge against her she struck her hands together violently, gnashed her sharp white teeth, and burst out with a torrent of fierce-sounding words in her own language, the meaning of which I did not understand then, and cannot explain now.

“I think that’s checkmate for Marmzelle,” whispered Mr. Dark, with his invariable wink. “Suppose you go back to the Hall, now, William, and draw a jug of that heavenly old ale of yours? I’ll be after you in five minutes, as soon as the charge is made out.”

I could hardly realize it, when I found myself walking back to Darrock a free man again. In a quarter of an hour’s time Mr. Dark joined me, and drank to my health, happiness, and prosperity, in three separate tumblers. After performing this ceremony, he wagged his head and chuckled with an appearance of such excessive enjoyment that I could not avoid remarking on his high spirits.

“It’s the Case, William; it’s the beautiful neatness of the Case that quite upsets me. Oh, Lord, what a privilege it is to be concerned in such a job as this!” cries Mr. Dark, slapping his stumpy hands on his fat knees in a sort of ecstasy.

I had a very different opinion of the case, for my own part, but I did not venture on expressing it. I was too anxious to know how Mr. James Smith had been discovered and produced at the examination, to enter into any arguments. Mr. Dark guessed what was passing in my mind, and telling me to sit down and make myself comfortable, volunteered, of his own accord, to inform me of all that I wanted to know.

“When I got my instructions and my statement of particulars,” he began, “I was not at all surprised to hear that Mr. James Smith had come back. (I prophesied that, if you remember, William, the last time we met?) But I was a good deal astonished, nevertheless, at the turn things had taken; and I can’t say I felt very hopeful about finding our man. However, I followed my master’s directions, and put the advertisement in the papers. It addressed Mr. James Smith, by name; but it was very carefully worded as to what was wanted of him. Two days after it appeared, a letter came to our office in a woman’s handwriting. It was my business to open the letters, and I opened that. The writer was short and mysterious; she requested that somebody would call from our office, at a certain address, between the hours of two and four that afternoon, in reference to the advertisement which we had inserted in the newspapers. Of course, I was the somebody who went. I kept myself from building up hopes by the way, knowing what a lot of Mrs. James Smiths there were in London. On getting to the house, I was shown into the drawing room; and there, dressed in a wrapper and lying on a sofa, was an uncommonly pretty woman, who looked as if she was just recovering from an illness. She had a newspaper by her side, and came to the point at once: ‘My husband’s name is James Smith,’ she says, ‘and I have my reasons for wanting to know if he is the person you are in search of.’ I described our man as Mr. James Smith of Darrock Hall, Cumberland. ‘I know no such person,’ says she—”

“What! was it not the second wife, after all?” I broke out.

“Wait a bit,” says Mr. Dark. “I mentioned the name of the yacht next, and she started up on the sofa as if she had been shot. ‘I think you were married in Scotland, ma’am?’ says I. She turns as pale as ashes, and drops back on the sofa, and says, faintly, ‘It *is* my husband. Oh, Sir, what has happened? What do you want with him? Is he in debt?’ I take a minute to think, and then make up my mind to tell her everything—feeling that she would keep her husband (as she called him)

out of the way, if I frightened, her by making any mysteries. A nice job I had, William, as you may suppose, when she knew about the bigamy business. What with screaming, fainting, crying, and blowing me up (as if I was to blame!), she kept me by that sofa of hers the best part of an hour—kept me there, in short, till Mr. James Smith himself came back. I leave you to judge if that mended matters! He found me mopping the poor woman's temples with scent and water; and he would have pitched me out of the window, as sure as I sit here, if I had not met him and staggered him at once with the charge of murder against his wife. That stopped him, when he was in full cry, I can promise you. 'Go and wait in the next room,' says he, 'and I'll come in and speak to you directly.' I knew he couldn't get out by the drawing room windows, and I knew I could watch the door; so away I went, leaving him alone with the lady, who didn't spare him by any manner of means, as I could hear easily enough in the next room. However, all rows in this world come to an end sooner or later; and a man with any brains in his head may do what he pleases with a woman who is fond of him. Before long I heard her crying and kissing him. 'I can't go home,' she says, 'after this. You have behaved like a villain and a monster to me—but oh, Jemmy, I can't give you up to anybody! Don't go back to your wife! oh don't, don't go back to your wife!' 'No fear of that,' says he. 'My wife wouldn't have me if I did go back to her.' After that, I heard the door open, and went out to meet him on the landing. He began swearing the moment he saw me, as if that was any good! 'Business first, if you please, Sir,' says I, 'and any pleasure you like, in the way of swearing, afterward.' With that beginning, I mentioned our terms to him, and asked the pleasure of his company to Cumberland in return. He was uncommonly suspicious at first, but I promised to draw out a legal document (mere waste paper, of no earthly use except to pacify him), engaging to hold him harmless throughout the proceedings; and what with that, and telling him of the frightful danger his wife was in, I managed, at last, to carry my point.

"But did the second wife make no objection to his going away with you?" I inquired.

"Not she," said Mr. Dark. "I stated the case to her, just as it stood; and soon satisfied her that there was no danger of Mr. James Smith's first wife laying any claim to him. After hearing that, she joined me in persuading him to do his duty, and said she pitied your mistress from the bottom of her heart. With her to back me, I had no great fear of our man changing his mind. I had the door watched that night, however, so as to make quite sure of him. The next morning he was ready to time when I called; and a quarter of an hour after that, we were off together for the north road. We made the journey with post-horses, being afraid of chance passengers, you know, in public conveyances. On the way down Mr. James Smith and I got on as comfortably together as if we had been a pair of old friends. I told the story of our tracing him to the north of Scotland; and he gave me the particulars, in return, of his bolting from Darrock Hall. They are rather amusing, William—would you like to hear them?"

I told Mr. Dark that he had anticipated the very question I was about to ask him.

"Well," he said, "this is how it was: To begin at the beginning, our man really took Number Two to the Mediterranean as we heard. He sailed up the Spanish coast, and, after short trips ashore, stopped at a seaside place in France called Cannes. There he saw a house and grounds to be sold, which took his fancy as a nice retired place to keep Number Two in. Nothing particular was wanted but the money to buy it; and, not having the little amount in his own possession, Mr.

James Smith makes a virtue of necessity, and goes back overland to his wife with private designs on her purse strings. Number Two, who objects to be left behind, goes with him as far as London. There he trumps up the first story that comes into his head, about rents in the country, and a house in Lincolnshire that is too damp for her to trust herself in; and so, leaving her for a few days in London, starts boldly for Darrock Hall. His notion was to wheedle your mistress out of the money by good behavior; but it seems he started badly by quarreling with her about a fiddle- playing parson who—”

“Yes, yes, I know all about that part of the story,” I broke in, seeing by Mr. Dark’s manner that he was likely to speak both ignorantly and impertinently of my mistress’ unlucky friendship for Mr. Meeke. “Go on to the time when I left my master alone in the Red Room, and tell me what he did between midnight and nine the next morning.”

“Did?” said Mr. Dark. “Why he went to bed with the unpleasant conviction on his mind that your mistress had found him out, and with no comfort to speak of, except what he could get out of the brandy bottle. He couldn’t sleep; and the more he tossed and tumbled the more certain he felt that his wife intended to have him tried for bigamy. At last, toward the gray of the morning, he could stand it no longer, and he made up his mind to give the law the slip while he had the chance. As soon as he was dressed it struck him that there might be a reward offered for catching him, and he determined to make that slight change in his personal appearance which puzzled the witnesses so much before the magistrate today. So he opens his dressing case and crops his hair in no time, and takes off his whiskers next. The fire was out, and he had to shave in cold water. What with that, and what with the flurry of his mind, naturally enough he cut himself—”

“And dried the blood with his nightgown!” said I.

“With his nightgown,” repeated Mr. Dark. “It was the first thing that lay handy, and he snatched it up. Wait a bit, though, the cream of the thing is to come. When he had done being his own barber, he couldn’t for the life of him hit on a way of getting rid of the loose hair. The fire was out, and he had no matches, so he couldn’t burn it. As for throwing it away, he didn’t dare do that in the house, or about the house, for fear of its being found, and betraying what he had done. So he wraps it all up in paper, crams it into his pocket to be disposed of when he is at a safe distance from the Hall, takes his bag, gets out at the window, shuts it softly after him, and makes for the road as fast as his long legs will carry him. There he walks on till a coach overtakes him; and so travels back to London to find himself in a fresh scrape as soon as he gets there. An interesting situation, William, and hard traveling from one end of France to the other had not agreed together in the case of Number Two. Mr. James Smith found her in bed, with doctor’s orders that she was not to be moved. There was nothing for it after that but to lie by in London till the lady got better. Luckily for us she didn’t hurry herself; so that, after all, William, your mistress has to thank the very woman who supplanted her for clearing her character by helping us to find Mr. James Smith!”

“And pray how did you come by that loose hair of his which you showed before the Justice today?” I asked.

“Thank Number Two again,” says Mr. Dark. “I was put up to asking after it by what she told me. While we were talking about the advertisement, I made so bold as to inquire what first set her thinking that her husband and the Mr. James Smith whom we wanted might be one and the same man. ‘Nothing,’ says she, ‘but seeing him come home with his hair cut short and his whiskers shaved off and finding that he could not give me any good reason for disfiguring himself in that way. I had my suspicions that something was wrong, and the sight of your advertisement strengthened them directly.’ The hearing her say that suggested to my mind that there might be a difficulty in identifying him after the change in his looks; and I asked him what he had done with the loose hair before we left London. It was found in the pocket of his traveling coat just as he had huddled it up there on leaving the Hall, worry and fright and vexation having caused him to forget all about it. Of course I took charge of the parcel; and you know what good it did as well as I do. So to speak, William, it just completed this beautifully neat case. Looking at the matter in a professional point of view, I don’t hesitate to say that we have managed our business with Mr. James Smith to perfection. We have produced him at the right time, and we are going to get rid of him at the right time. By tonight he will be on his way to foreign parts with Number Two, and he won’t show his nose in England again if he lives to the age of Methuselah.”

It was a relief to hear that; and it was almost as great a comfort to find, from what Mr. Dark said next, that my mistress need fear nothing that the French woman could do for the future. The threat that had fallen from her on her reappearance before the Justice, he assured me, had not at all surprised him. He had suspected from the first that she must have known of the second marriage, because he believed it to be impossible that she would risk bringing her infamous charge against my mistress and myself without being acquainted with the nature of the circumstance which made it Mr. James Smiths interest to keep out of the way. This information, he said, she might well have gained by listening at the door; but he felt convinced at the same time that it did not include a knowledge of the means by which evidence of the second marriage might be procured. If she had possessed this dangerous information, she would long since have turned it to good account; for the threat of making the evidence public would have given her exactly that hold over her mistress which it was her interest to gain. As matters had turned out, however, there was no reason to fear her, let her know as much as she might. The charge of theft, on which she was about to be tried, did not afford the shadow of an excuse, in law anymore than in logic, for alluding to the crime which her master had committed. If she meant to talk about it she might do so at Botany Bay; but she would not have the slightest chance of being listened to previously in a court of law.”

“In short,” said Mr. Dark, rising to take his leave, “as I have told you already, William, its checkmate for Marmzelle. She didn’t manage the business of the robbery half as sharply as I should have expected. She certainly began well enough by staying modestly at a lodging in the village to give her attendance at the examinations, as it might be required. Nothing could look more innocent and respectable so far. But her hiding the property between the mattresses of her bed—the very first place that any experienced man would think of looking in—was such an amazingly stupid thing to do, that I really cant account for it, unless her mind had more weighing on it than it was able to bear, which, considering the heavy stakes she played for, is likely enough. Anyhow, her hands are tied now, and her tongue too, for the matter of that. Give my respects to your mistress, and tell her that her runaway husband and her lying maid will never either of them harm her again as long as they live. She has nothing to do now but to pluck up her

spirits and live happy. Here's long life to her and to you, William, in the last glass of ale; and here's the same toast to myself in the bottom of the jug." With those words, Mr. Dark pocketed his large snuffbox, gave a last wink with his bright eye, and walked away, whistling, to meet the London coach.

I, who knew my poor mistress far better than he did—I, who had noticed, that very day, that the sad, dull, vacant look in her face never brightened when the Justice spoke the few welcome words which told her that her innocence was made clear, and that she was a free woman again—I, in short, who looked at her and at her future prospects with very different eyes from the eyes of a stranger, felt mournful misgivings at my heart when I thought over Mr. Dark's parting toast after he had left me. Other people—her relation, the lawyer, among them—thought she would get over the shock that had been inflicted on her, with time and care. I alone felt doubts about her recovery from the first. As soon as possible after the occurrence of the events that I have just been relating she was removed to London for change of scene and for the best medical advice. From London she was sent to the seaside; and her next removal was to the country house on the estate in Yorkshire. I attended her wherever she went, and saw but too plainly the utter uselessness of all the efforts that were made to preserve her life. She drooped and faded slowly, without a look of impatience or a word of complaint, considerate, and kind, and thankful for small services to the last. Long years have passed since those melancholy days, but the sorrowful remembrance of them is still so strong in my memory that I cannot be sure of preserving my composure, even now, if I dwell too long on the details of my mistress' last illness. It will be better, on all accounts, to pass over them, and to come quickly to the sad end. In little more than a year from the time of that last examination before the Justice I made one of the mourners who followed her to the grave. The day before she departed I was called to her bedside. All through her illness she had never spoken of the trouble and the terror of the past time. But when she took leave of me forever in this world, she reverted, for a moment, to the old days of sorrow. "We bore the burden of that heavy trial together," she said, "and when I am gone, William, you will find that I have not forgotten you." Those words referred to the legacy which, in her great generosity and gratitude, she left me out of the savings of her income, which were hers to dispose of. It was a large sum—too large a sum for a person like me. I do not underrate the value of that money—I am deeply sensible of the great advantage and security of worldly position, which it has been the means of procuring for me—but I can say, honestly, from the bottom of my heart, that I would have given it all, and more, to have saved my mistress' life, and to have purchased me the privilege of living and dying in her service.

My long story is almost done. A few last words relating to the persons chiefly concerned in the events of this narrative will conclude all that it is now necessary for me to say.

The French woman was found guilty of the robbery, and was transported for seven years. She did not live to serve out her time. After two years' submission to punishment, she and another woman joined some male convicts in an attempt to escape. They succeeded in getting away, but perished fearfully in the interior of the country. The bodies were discovered by the help of the natives; and certain appearances were observed which led to horrible suspicions of cannibalism on the part of the men, who probably survived starvation longest. The circumstances are all

detailed, I believe, in the Parliamentary Blue Books. But it is needless for my purpose to say more about them than I have said already.

Mr. Meeke must not be forgotten, although he has dropped out of the latter part of my story. The truth is that he had nothing to do with the serious events which followed the French woman's perjury. I remember hearing that he came to the Hall, after I had been removed to the Justice's, and asked, helplessly, if he could be of any use. In the confusion and wretchedness of the time he was treated with very little ceremony, and went back to his parsonage in despair. There can be no question, I think, that the poor little man was, in his weak way, warmly attached to my mistress. The news of her death quite broke him down. He said he should never forget, to his dying day, that he had been the innocent first cause of all the trouble at Darrock Hall; and he declared that he would devote the rest of his life to a great and good object, as some atonement for the mischief that he had unconsciously produced. When I next heard of him he had carried out this idea by volunteering to join a missionary expedition to the Cape of Good Hope—an object which he was about as fit to forward as my cat there lying asleep on the rug. However, his strength gave way—fortunately, perhaps, for himself—before responsibilities of any sort were fairly laid on his shoulders. On the voyage out he suffered so severely from seasickness that they were obliged to put him ashore at Madeira. He had broken a blood vessel, and was given over by the ship's surgeon; but he languished, rather than lived, for some time, in the fine climate in which they left him. When the last weak remains of life were exhausted, Death took him very quietly. He departed with my mistress' name on his lips, and he is now laid in the English burial ground at Madeira.

As for Mr. James Smith, he was spared for many years, and lived quietly abroad with his Scotch wife. I hope, for his own sake, that he took advantage of the opportunity for repentance which was mercifully granted to him. It may seem unjust, to our earthly eyes, that he should have offended so grievously, and have escaped suffering for his wickedness in this world; but our punishments, as well as our rewards, wait for us beyond our mortal time. He has gone to answer for his sins before a Judge who can never err. I heard nothing of his last moments; and I can say no more of him, now I have spoken the words that record his death.

Hardly six months have passed since I heard of his widow. She has married again, and is settled in London. She, and I, and Mr. Dark—who is now a feeble old man, the eldest of a brotherhood occupying a charitable asylum—are the only survivors of the troubles at Darrock Hall. I take Mr. Dark a present of snuff once a year. The last time I saw him his faculties were thought to be decaying. He knew who I was, however; for he winked feebly, and muttered and mumbled several words together. I could not make out one half of them; but I heard enough to convince me that he was still given to talking about the Tour in Scotland, and the “beautifully neat case” in which it ended.

I have perhaps wearied you, Sir, by a very long story. But I hope I have not occupied your time without convincing you that I had some little cause for speaking as I did when I said that there was no sight in the country I would not sooner take you to see than the empty house which is known by the name of Darrock Hall.

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