The Murder of the Glen Ross

BY A NEW CONTRIBUTOR
[Rebecca Harding Davis]

CHAPTER I.

THE tragedy I am about to relate occurred many years ago when I practiced law in Virginia, before removing to Philadelphia, where I have lived since I retired from the bar. All the facts, therefore, came within my own personal knowledge.

There is one case recorded on the criminal docket for C—— County, which, although it has stood there for thirty years as one of the most important ever brought before that court, has sunk into a mysterious oblivion. No lawyer cites it as precedent, though there were intricate points of law involved in it. The judge before whom it came, the advocates who plead in it—old, gray-headed men now—if, by chance, it is named in their after-dinner gossipings, become suddenly gloomily silent. Even the old plantation slaves, grown gray with their masters, hint this forgotten story darkly to each other round the cabin fires at night, so that the curious young "picaninnies" shall not understand.

I am going to tell this story. Not its mere legal course, as it stands on the docket, but the soul of the matter; give you a hint of the shame, and love, and hate underneath; bare it all. I have a reason for this. It has been smothered down too long. It is time we should know how much shame and guilt there was: the innocent should no longer be condemned through ignorance.

I was senior counsel for the defendant in this case. For other reasons, which will appear hereafter, I am better qualified to explain whatever is untold in the technical record, than any of the other agents who bore part in its dark catastrophe. I alter the names, necessarily—except my own.

One still, sultry afternoon, late in August 1830, I sat alone in my office, writing. I remember I had been with the auditor all day, settling some puzzling accounts, which I was copying now, and was tired and thoroughly run down, ready for my cigar and whist at the club.

Lawyers, in those times, were not men of the stamp current nowadays—keen, alert, solid in business habit. Cases lagged drowsily through the courts. Great action for great emergencies was the motto of the craft; meantime slipshod walking and easy chairs. The warm August civil courts were no spurs to such sauntering ambition.

I was tired, as I said. When, therefore, just as I was closing, I heard the customary signal of the office boy to announce a client, I stopped, impatiently glancing at my watch.

"Past business hours, Pine," I said to the black face at the door.

"Yes, marster, tell 'um."

But hardly had he disappeared, when one of the students from the anteroom entered.

“If you could, Mr. Page; it’s a lady.”

“Who, Flint?”

“A stranger, sir. From the West, I suppose; for she wears a flounced dress in a carriage.”

Some confused idea of Flint’s taste in flounces serving him but slightly in the legal profession crossed my mind as I rose to receive the lady, whom he ushered in with a profound bow.

She seated herself at the other side of the table, and, with only the preface of a quiet glance at my face, and the spectacles I held in my hand (as if, somehow, she had expected a younger man), went straight to her business.

“Mr. Page, I believe?”

I assented.

She unfolded a paper which she held, and handed it to me.

“Would such a certificate as that,” she said, “if filled with the proper name, be a legal document? Would it be worth anything in a court of justice?”

I looked at it. It was a copy of a marriage certificate, in a delicate hand, informally drawn up, and dated, some fifteen years back, in a village in Georgia. The names of the parties were omitted.

“The paper is not couched in the usual form, madam,” I replied. “However, with the proper names and signatures it would be all that is requisite. Perfectly valid.”

She received the paper which I handed her, and tendered me the fee, which, of course, I declined.

“You will take it, Mr. Page, and oblige me,” she said, gravely. “I have a favor to ask of you. I shall not have the courage to do so unless we close our business in the usual form.”

I bowed, and expressed my readiness to serve her in the set terms.

“In October you attend the district court in C—— County?”

“In November—yes.”

“It is the same. I have understood that you usually are a guest of Dr. Berkley, while there; a friend of his?”

“A relative, madam.”

She glanced at me keenly, and hesitated.

“A relative? It does not matter. Dr. Berkley’s daughter is to be married while you are there.”

I assented again. I did not like cross-examinations, especially when I did not know the object. Perhaps she saw this; for, throwing off her formal manner, she said, in a frank, careless way,

“You think me inquisitive? *Mon Dieu!* I have reasons.” The accent suddenly became brusque, French.

I looked at her attentively now, for the first time I had leisure; for she was busied in opening a small package she held. She was a middle-aged woman, with traces of great beauty not well preserved, evidently wasted—how, I could not decide. A lady? I hesitated. No. Yet the pale, worn-out face, the rich dress, the slow, monotonous movements were stamped with an excessive quiet, even gravity. But the gravity seemed rather an iron mask than a natural effect of inward life. The woman repelled me instinctively, as something coarse, as a treacherous sham. Why, I could not tell. The ill-timed flounces hurt Flint’s sense of the eternal proprieties. It may be some such trifle touched me unpleasantly in this sad, delicate woman. The hard bass voice, perhaps, unnaturally softened; or the stealthy, light eyes that did not meet mine.

She found some difficulty in opening the package.

“Yes, I have a reason to ask,” she continued, in a disconnected way, dropping, now and then, into a French idiom—purposely, I thought. The intonation of her voice—that infallible test—was purely American. However, many of the inhabitants of Louisiana parishes had just such an accent. “I will ask a favor of you,” she said, pulling open the strings with her ungloved hand. The fingers were white, loaded with glittering rings—but skinny, wrinkled, as if the pure, rich blood had been, as I said, wasted. “Miss Berkely marries—whom?”

“A Mr. Hope, Rector of C—— parish.”

“Ah! surely. I forgot. *Bien, la voici enfin*.” She drew out a small morocco box, papered and sealed, and laid it on the table; then, turning to me, with the same grave, monotonous manner, curiously at variance with her abrupt sentences, continued, “I am a friend—do you understand?—of Dr. Berkley, or—*sa fille*. An old friend, ah! for many years. When she marries, all who love her send tokens—*vous comprenez?* It is the custom in Virginia; with us also. I, too, would be remembered—would offer my tribute to the bride. My little keepsake—you call it? *Mon cadeau, oui?* Will you present it for me? It is here.”

I took the box. “With pleasure, madam. But if you are a friend of the lady’s, would not your gift be doubly welcome if offered by yourself? Why not be present at the wedding? Dr. Berkley—”

There was a curious change on her face.

"*Mais non*," in the same slow, hard way, affecting a Parisian shrug. "I have been there, in that country. My health is not strong; the hills do not like me; *l'air me tue, a vous parler ingenument*. When the wedding is, I shall be——"

She stopped suddenly and rose, gathering her mantle around her, a complacent smile at some unspoken thought on her face.

I rose also, glad she was going. Doubtless she spoke truth; but the suddenly affected foreign expression puzzled me. She was *not* French.

"Certainly, I will offer your gift, madam," I said.

"You are kind. Let it be a surprise, I beg. It may be that I shall be there; otherwise I shall be remembered, *grace a vos soins*." She bowed, and was turning away with the same cunning smile.

"Pardon me; but you send no message—no name?"

She stopped. ["]Oh! *c'est egal*. The box will tell all. Let it be a surprise. If I were to tell it you, *il vous s'echapperait sans doute. Qu'on doit peu compter sur les hommes!*" There was an undeniable sneer on the thin, red lips as she said this, raising her light, confusing eyes boldly to my face.

I was silent: startled at the words, the tone that gave them sting, and the change which the eyes made in the woman's face. With all its pale, hackneyed beauty, it might have been that of a thief or a Messalina.

It was but an instant's flash, however. The lids fell sorrowfully again, and the face hardened into the cold gravity.

"*Adieu, monsieur. La porte? De grace*——"

I opened it, ushered her out into the anteroom, where Flint and Pine escorted her to her carriage, and, coming back, examined the box with a little curiosity. There was, however, no address on the paper in which it was wrapped; so, locking it up, I dismissed the matter from my mind, wondering where "Tom" (for Dr. Berkley, with all his white hair, was only Tom for me) had formed the friendship of this woman, with a slight shiver at the thought of such friendship.

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CHAPTER II.

LATE in October, I left for C—— County. Court, I knew, would sit but for three days: then I was free. November was my open month in the fall, my vacation, into which I crowded all the reward for the hot work of the summer terms. This fall I had arranged to spend it all at Berkley Place on account of Sarah's wedding. And she, good little soul! had deferred her wedding, I found out afterward, until November, that I might be present. God bless her! It was not the first unselfish

kindness the child had showed to her gray-headed old cousin. When I arrived at Berkley Village (the plantation was distant some twelve miles), I sent out my baggage, with a message that I would prefer to remain at the inn until court had adjourned; would go out on Saturday morning.

Friday evening court did adjourn. It was a gray, gusty day; the village lay on a bleak hilltop: heavy snow clouds were swooping low in the valley round it. A most cold, uncomfortable day. As I gathered up my papers to leave the courtroom, and glanced out at the dull, inhospitable streets, I wished I had not postponed my departure until morning. I knew no one in the village, and few of the planters had attended court: the evening was long and dismal to look forward to. Pine, who had lounged all day through the dirty little tavern, the grocery, the blacksmith's shop, shared in my forebodings, it appeared; coming up with a most woebegone aspect for my satchel, he said, "Court done gone, Mars' John? When we gwan out a' dis town? Tink it muss be de lass place in Virginny. Nuffin heah but pore white folks."

Sending Pine grumbling before me, I made my way through the crowded courtroom out into the street. The boy had shrewdly hit the truth. The people of the village were of the lowest class, low in thought, habit, culture: a whisky drinking, cockfighting crew, living for the most part on the charity of the landholders of the neighborhood. Pine went through them into the low door of the inn, with the supercilious contempt which the pampered house servants never fail to feel for the poorer whites.

I followed him into the passageway. It may have been the contrast with the bloated, dirty faces around me, that caused me to be struck with the peculiar air of a man standing in the back part of the barroom, drawn back as if to avoid notice. A tall, dark man, past the prime of life. In any situation, the face and commanding figure would have demanded a second look; here they stood boldly out from the swarming crowd of half-drunken loafers, so curiously solitary, that I involuntarily hesitated as I passed. The face was strongly marked, sallow, the features cut clear and fine; according to a young lady's standard a picturesque, poetic face: the face from which a child or a dog would shrink away with loathing. I, with my lawyer's eye, thought I never had seen one stamped with deeper latent power of evil. The whole air of the man showed him to be a stranger: he had none of the careless ease of gesture of the Virginia "colonels" and "generals"; the heavy folds even of the black cloak, richly trimmed with sable, were totally different from the slouching Boston wrappers then in vogue among the planters.

When I came in, the man was looking intently at a C—— County guide, turning over the leaves hastily, his whip in his hand and spurs on, as if eager to be off. Dick Poole, one of the small farmers of the neighborhood, stood near, waiting, cracking his boot with his cane impatiently. In a moment the stranger handed the book back to the landlord, and the two men left the room, and, mounting their horses, set off.

The men idling in the barroom lounged out to see them start. "De Lohd be good!" ejaculated Pine. "See dat fur, Mars' John? Touch abuv Berkley Village, dat!" And he too went out for another look. Little thinking what terrible import even Pine's curiosity would hold hereafter, I turned to the fire.

"A curious head that, eh, Mr. Page?" said the landlord, coming up confidentially.

“Yes. Who is it?”

“Not in court? No? Thought certain ’twas a ’torney from up the country. Can’t say then. Man came hyur toh me this mornin’, said he wanted toh board in the country a spell. Dick Poole was hyur an’ offered toh take him. So they’re gone. Thought he shunned notice, like. However, allers a drunken set in this room disagreeable to a gentleman. Wun’t *yuh* hev a drink o’ suthin warm, now, Mr. Page?”

How far mine host’s entreaties would have prevailed this deponent cannot affirm, for Pine suddenly broke up the colloquy, by coming in with a gray-headed coachman, and bursting out triumphantly, “Yur’s Uncle Jo, Mars’ John, an’ the kerridge, an’ Mist’ Sarah, and Marst’ Harry an’ all, for me an’ you!”

“Uncle Jo,” Dr. Berkley’s coachman, who twenty years before was a boy fishing with Tom and me, came up with outstretched hand. “Mist’ Sarah’s kum for you, Mars’ John;” and when I reached the door, half a dozen little Berkleys were swarming out of the great old-fashioned family coach, and tumbling over the pavement to see Cousin John, while a rosy, brown-eyed little face, in a cherry-colored hood, was put eagerly out of the door. “There he is. Oh! come on, Cousin John!”

You may be sure cousin John went on. Of all the little girls in Virginia, Sarah Berkley was the honestest, and prettiest, and best. A chubby, bright-eyed, crimson-lipped little thing, with a heart just as full of warm, earnest love as it could be. Not a fool either. A pure-minded, honorable girl, with a chivalric scorn for everything mean or make-believe. (Women are your true chevaliers after all). With a quick temper (she got that from her father), you could see that in the sudden tear in the eye, now and then, and a quick, tender care for the feelings of others. Sarah was the eldest of a host of children: their mother died years before. Well, she took care of them, of everybody; house, servants, dogs—took care of all in the gentlest, tenderest way. People coming into the house put themselves into the care of this rosy, singing little girl “with a will,” and felt themselves cosy and cheerful immediately. As for Dr. Berkley, one of the stiffest, hottest-headed men in the valley of the Blue Ridge, she wound him round her finger like a thread—so the people said, laughing as they said it.

It is no wonder that I left the dismal, dirty tavern and hurried to the carriage, leaving Pine to follow with my hat and papers.

“I’m glad you’ve come. Jump right in, Cousin John. Papa was determined you should come out tonight and so was I. Oh! Charley, dear, come sit on my lap. Four is a little too many for Cousin John. Look, Harry, there’s Pine! I was afraid your master would bring someone else, Pine.”

“Couldn’t do it, Mist’ Sarah. Couldn’t take care o’ *his*self nohow, nor no other pusson.” With which doubtful sentence, Pine shut the carriage door with a lofty bow, and, mounting the box, proceeded to display the latest Richmond graces to Uncle Jo; while the fat, old grays drew the unwieldy coach out of the village to the open country beyond. Such a noisy carriage load! There was so much to tell: how papa had the gout, or would have been in just at once; how Ned was

coming next week from Charlottesville; how there was nobody come yet, but week after next the house would be full, and so would aunt Nelly's, and a dozen aunts beside, "Because you *know*, Cousin John——" whispered Charley, with a significant glance at his blushing sister. How the four children and Sarah all laughed and talked at once, and then declared Cousin John made the most noise of any! Which might have been a fact.

Berkley Place (we did not reach it until long after dark) would have cheered the heart of the crustiest hermit, much less that of an old lawyer let loose for his yearly vacation. As we lumbered through the autumn stained forest, the blinding snow drifting through the darkening twilight, we caught glimpses now and then of the long rows of red windows, miles away, for the house lay in the midst of the plantation. No doubt Berkley Place would have wrung the heart of a landscape gardener, for there were neither ravishing views, nor "picturesque possibilities"; the trees grew, the creeks ran as nature pleased. But the forests were centuries old; the creeks were dimpled with the rarest of trout, where all the world, black or white, was free to come and go, hunt or fish as it pleased. I suppose a canny New England farmer, fresh from his r[i]ch-ploughed farm of ten acres, would have shuddered to look at the great fallow fields, the broken fences, the dilapidated barns, the wild profusion, the riot, waste, thriftlessness. He would have reason. Over this plantation, almost equal in extent to a German principality, prodigality, careless idleness, unbounded hospitality, reigned as in an old Irish kingdom. The house, wide, rambling, stood in the center as warm and full of genial comfort as the heart of its owner. As we passed near the negro quarters that lined the road like straggling villages, I caught glimpses of hundreds of dark faces turning to answer the cheery smile that shone on them from out of the carriage window. She was nothing but a child to most of them this little "Mist' Sarah"; her father was still only "young Marster Tom" despite his gray hairs. Not a few of the patriarchs on the place would still take him to task for his hasty ways, reminding him of "what his father was afore him." Had not they as good a right to the place as he? Their grandfathers had served his grandfather, and so they thought it must go on *ad infinitum*. For the Berkleys had pride in saying that no servant had ever been sold from their plantations.

The great hall at Berkley Place glowed with red warmth, as we drove up to the door. The very grays broke into a trot to express the general satisfaction. There were a dozen of black hands ready to open the carriage door, a dozen picaninnies instantly under the wheels, the horses' feet. The house steps were crowded with aunts and cousins, notwithstanding Sarah's assertion that there was "nobody come." In the midst of the light and confusion was old Tom Berkley himself, who had been wheeled into the hall in his easy chair to give me welcome. And beyond all, and by no means to be despised after the cold, long ride, came a savory whiff of hot coffee, and turkey, and oysters, with the crowning rich steam of golden "Johnnycake," perfection of edibles in this mortal life.

So I was installed chief guest for the present at Berkley Place.

I wish I could stop here, and plunge into the warm, spicy memory of the life there, in that most heartsome of all country homesteads. But I must be brief with my story.

Dinner was over. Dr. Berkley had been wheeled back into the drawing room, where a great fire threw a ruddy light over the beaming faces gathered round it. "Push me into the library," he said

to the footman. “Come on, John, where we can have some peace and talk things over.” I knew what *that* meant, Sarah’s wedding. I had noticed how his voice softened as he spoke to her in all the laughing, and how wistfully she looked at him when he did not see.

“I tell you, old boy,” he broke out, when we were alone, “it’s not an easy thing to give up my little girl. The boys are well enough in their way. But there’s nobody like Sally.” He stopped, looking in the fire, and I said nothing. “To be sure,” he resumed, after awhile, “Geoffrey Hope is just the man I would have chosen, to make the child happy, if I had hunted the world over. Besides that, it seems natural somehow. There is nobody the Berkleys *could* marry with hardly, in the valley, but the Hopes.” He spoke in all earnestness.

I did not smile. “There is Geoffrey now,” I said, as a firm step struck the hall without.

“Never mind. Don’t go out. You’ll see him after awhile. He has been as impatient as we were for you to come. How long is it since you saw him?”

“Ten years. Before he left home: he was nothing but a boy then.”

“He is altered now. Look.”

I looked through the open doors, into the drawing room, at the newcomer, who was bending, for the instant, over the back of Sarah’s chair, with some laughing words that sent the pink blood tingling to her cheeks. There was a great disparity in their ages. Mr. Hope was a grave, stately man of middle age, whose hair was already touched with gray. I spoke of this.

“Yes, I know,” said her father, quickly. “There is a difference. I am glad of it. John, I think the child needs Geoffrey Hope. Something strong, and quiet, and noble to lean on. Somebody she can look up to. I’m hot and quick, you know, and we live in such a helter-skelter way, as the boys call it. It may be that he’ll make Sally a happier woman than her old father could ever have done.” His rough voice shook a little.

“Mr. Hope has charge of this parish?” I said, after a pause.

“Yes. Do you know, John,” with sudden animation, “that I think our Sarah has made him a better preacher?”

“I don’t doubt it,” I laughed.

“You know what the Hopes are? Fierce, passionate, terribly strong for good or evil. Geoffrey is not this. Since he came home—I don’t know what he was when a boy—but since he came back, after his ten years’ absence, he has been a grave, sad man, tenderhearted as a woman. Quiet, gloomy. Look at him now. See the difference, how proud and light his step is! It does one’s heart good to hear a laugh like that.”

“And you think Sarah has done it all!”

“Yes. A man may be too earnest, too grave in his good work. He needed fresh life to bring back his youth.”

One after another sauntered into the library. Dr. Berkley began his nightly game of chess, and I had leisure to look at the inmates of the drawing room. Mr. Hope was near Sarah, with the ubiquitous Harry and Charley on his knee, deep in a fairy story if I could guess from their wonder-stricken faces. There was nothing in his face to call for the words *grave* or *gloomy*. It was frank, manly, kind; with an honest smile ready trembling on the mouth. Sunburned and wrinkled, but that was owing to his years of travel and exposure. How fast he had grown old! I remembered him well, an impetuous, high-tempered boy, when he was left an orphan, master of himself and his estate, and had started out, like the prince in the fairy tale he was telling, to seek his fortune. If he had returned a sad, earnest man, as Dr. Berkley said, there was no trace of it on his face now. A strong, kindly face, as I said before. Tenderhearted? I was sure of it. Just such a face as a beggar or a child would choose to turn to in a thousand.

“Why, Cousin John!” He saw me suddenly, and sprang up with a hearty grasp of the hand. “Sarah told me some good news would turn up, this evening, but I never thought she meant you! What have your keen eyes been studying in there?”

“Only a face.”

“I know!” laughed Sarah. “Geoffrey’s own. What do you find in it?”

I smoothed her hair. “A good husband, Sallie dear.”

Mr. Hope did not join in our laugh. A doubtful pain shot over his face, but was gone in an instant.

“You do not know,” he said, quietly. “I will try.” His voice sobered us. He was in deadly earnest now.

“Come back and finish,” demanded the boys, pulling at his coat sleeves. He went back, and Sarah and I sat down to listen. Very soon the old smile began to flash over his face, as he embellished his story for his new auditors, but not much to the satisfaction of the old ones.

“Why, Mr. Hope!” broke out Harry, “*all* your princesses have brown eyes and rosy cheeks just like other women!”

“And wear nothing but pink dresses like sister Sarah,” grumbled Charley.

“Oh, Charley, Charley! come to bed.” And the princess, with rosier cheeks than ever, carried them off captive.

That night, as Pine was distributing the contents of my trunks in wardrobe and bureau, the morocco box, with which I had been entrusted, fell on the floor. I had forgotten to mention my disagreeable visitor to Dr. Berkley, but picking up the box now determined to present the gift

with the first of the bridal tokens. I wanted to know what appropriate offering this woman, who was so oddly repulsive to me, would send. Yellow, mocking topaz. I did not doubt if there were truth in emblems.

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CHAPTER III.

WE were alone for the next week. I never had known Berkley Place so quiet. The reason was apparent. Virginia weddings are solemn epochs to housekeepers. The festivities last for weeks; the bridal party visiting in turn every uncle or cousin who can present a claim, gathering as they go, until whole counties, if the clan be large, are in one ruddy glow of genial hospitality and jollity. Etiquette demands a certain quiet before the turmoil begins. So it happened, that, although mighty preparations were convulsing the lower regions, where Uncle Jo's wife held undisputed sway, the family routine was singularly undisturbed and tranquil.

Mr. Hope rode over in the mornings, and usually was surprised there by the night.

As time wore on, I noticed the changing smile disappear from Sarah's face and give place to a thoughtful gravity. The tears lay near the surface, those days, very ready to start out, at a word; she lost her free, light step, grew shy and timid. As for Mr. Hope it was far different. "Look at Geoffrey Hope," said Dr. Berkley to me. "Upon my soul, he grows stronger, and brighter, and fresher every day. Hear him with those boys. He is actually lighter-hearted than they. His very laugh, somehow, says, 'Thank God.'"

One Saturday evening, Mr. Hope asked me to ride with him. "I want you," he said, as we reached the park, "to come over to the parsonage, and judge of my talent for architecture and house furnishing."

"You have rebuilt the house then?"

"No," his eye saddened, "I could not. It was Will's house, you know: my brother. He died there. I could not take down one of the old stones. Sarah did not wish it; she understood." He was silent for a moment. "But I have built an addition, I think it is the very picture of a home."

I laughed. "Men who live single lives long, appreciate the ideal of such a blessing at least. I speak from experience. So can you."

His voice was almost bitter as he replied, slowly stroking his horse's mane, "I need a home. Yes. I have had none for many years, have suffered more chance and change than falls to the lot of many men. I can hardly realize now that my security is real."

"You have found work, comfort in your charge?" I said. "You had a home in the affections of your people."

“I do not know,” he said, doubtfully. “The ministers of Christ need a mortal physician themselves, before they can cure others. They ought to go out among the people from a healthy, cheerful atmosphere of true love, not from the morbid remorse and doubts of their own hearts.”

We were trenching on some deep and cankered feeling I saw by his face. I turned from it with a shallow jest. “I, at least, have not found that to be alone in life was to be miserable.”

“Nor I,” he said, almost fiercely. “God sends worse curses sometimes than solitude.” I looked at him questioningly; but, as if startled at his own words, he struck spurs in his horse and we rode on in silence.

It was a cool day in early November. The snow lay light and rose-tinted on the brown mould, or clinging in flakes to the dropping leaves. An hour’s brisk riding brought us to the borders of the Hope plantation. The cloud was gone from my companion’s face; he had banished whatever transient thought had caused it, and was genial and careless again. I was touched to notice the greetings of the people on the road to their pastor as we met them, how bright and cordial they were on his side and theirs. We turned at last from the main road and struck into a bypath leading directly to the parsonage. It ran along the base of a rocky hill for about a mile, and then divided, one part branching off into the valley of the Hope plantations, the narrower track winding through a ravine of the mountains. Ross Glen they called the ravine, a wild, solitary haunt of a few half-savage free negroes.

Just at the opening of the Glen, where the paths divided, one of the villagers was waiting our approach, a bloated, half-clad wretch known as Jim Blake, generally an inmate of the county jail. He touched his cap respectfully enough as we came up.

“Mr. Hope,” he said, “you are wanted tonight at Lucky Jenkyll’s, down the Glen.”

“Is Lucky ill again, Blake?”

“No. You are wanted, I was bid toh say, at ten o’clock, by a woman in need of help. In sore need.” He recited it like a half-learned lesson.

“I will go. Some of the negroes, doubtless. Were you ever in Ross Glen?” he asked, stopping abruptly.

“No? Come down then a step or two. You can have an idea of what it is deeper in.”

We turned our horses into the steep, slimy path and advanced a few yards. The Glen was a deep, winding chasm between two of the highest peaks of the Blue Ridge, dark at midday, overgrown to the very steepest summit with gloomy pines and gray spectral mosses. The Ross, a mountain stream, that gave the Glen its name, crept through it for miles sluggish and black, through tangled weeds and lichens grown in the dampness and darkness into monstrous forms. The slimy leaves of the trees brushed in our faces as we rode along; the air was filled with the poisonous effluvia of nightshade and purple fungi.

“There is something horrible in this place,” said my companion, under his breath, “it oppresses me like a nightmare. Look. Here, you could fancy dead men’s faces peering out from under this pool.” He struck the deep stream with his riding whip. The black curdling water shuddered and lay still again. Our horses trod heavily through the thick underwood as we turned to come out into the free air again.

“It grows deeper, darker, more ghastly farther in,” he said. “I have a strange horror of the place. Unaccountable, but I cannot shake it off.”

“Who lives there?”

“Only a harmless old negro, Lucky Jenkyll, about a mile down, and such free negroes as she may shelter, or runaways.”

We rode out. Poor Geoffrey! No wonder that the damp, unnatural Glen warned him back as with a leprous cry of unclean! Unclean! the shadow of the valley of death was on him.

The evening air blew freshly in our faces as, emerging from the ravine, we galloped into the broad bridle path. Turning a sudden bend in the road, the parsonage lay before us, in the midst of its vineyards, and flower gardens, and thick forests. I drew my bridle, while my companion looked down on the little landscape with a beaming eye. Every house and its surroundings express some distinct thought; the idea, the soul of this was easily read. Here was the dream of this man’s life made real: the pure, strong love in his soul had worked itself into visible shape. God had given him, late in life, a great gift; here was the temple he had built to keep it in. Late in life, after he had borne heavy burdens, grown old with pain. He was grateful. There was not a trifling mark of his joyous toil that did not show it. The pure, fairly fashioned dwelling; the sunny sweeps of meadow; the very fountain springing out of the heart of the green hill, said, “God has been good to me, and I thank Him.” An assured quiet sense of coming happiness seemed to breathe in the very air of the place, as in the face of its master.

We dismounted, and spent an hour going over the house, the gardens, and orchards. Sarah’s name was never mentioned. Yet I saw how every minutest arrangement was ordered with reference to her pleasure or comfort.

When the evening was closing in, we went out to order our horses. The sun was setting, and the red glow fell cheerily over Mr. Hope’s face, as he stood with a heart-warm smile in his eyes, glancing now and then back at the home “made ready for the bride.” I stooped involuntarily from my horse and grasped his hand. His face flashed with a quick, childlike pleasure, but he did not speak: his look showed that he understood all that I would say. We rode on briskly, for the night was coming on, and we had a long stretch of road before us; too briskly to admit of conversation. Mr. Hope, knowing the way better, took the advance, I followed slowly; my horse stumbled over the stony path. There was a little incident occurred during the ride which I scarcely noticed at the time, but which afterward, when the terrible drama of the night was unfolded, assumed a momentous significance. Mr. Hope, as I said, had ridden on before some two hundred yards; in the gathering twilight I could scarcely distinguish the figure of his horse. We were passing a close thicket of trees, which stood near the entrance of Glen Ross, or, to be exact, I was passing

it, for Geoffrey was out of hearing. There was an old cabin just in the interior of the thicket by the side of the road; as I came up I heard voices in it, speaking in a smothered, passionate tone. One rose above the other, hard, monotonous, in abrupt French sentences. I drew my bridle unconsciously, startled. Where had I heard this voice before? The woman? Dr. Berkley's mysterious friend? Impossible. I touched my horse with the spur, ashamed of my absurd suspicion. As I passed the cabin, the voice rose. "Too late! You cannot hinder me," the tone was sharp with passion. "I will see him. I have not come so far to be balked here. By you, Gustav." The woman—if it were a woman—spoke in broken French. That of the man was pure, the voice quiet and low. "As you will, Gertrude. You know the end, I will not fail to do what I have said. It may be better after all. You tire me." Something in the low voice unspeakably cold, cruel, struck me. I did not wonder to hear it followed by a helpless, wailing cry, "I tire you! Gustav! Gustav!" I rode on. Some Frenchman quarreling with his wife doubtless, I thought. And yet the voice was strangely familiar. Hurrying on, I joined Mr. Hope.

"You have French settlers among the villagers?"

"No; one or two Alsatians. Among the roughest of the people."

I said no more, but was hardly satisfied. The voices I heard did not speak the guttural Alsatian patois: the cabin too was vacant; the speakers had met in it by chance it appeared. Then the voice so curiously recalled the woman who had visited my office. But with an impatient pish at my own idle conjectures, I dismissed the matter from my mind.

It was late when we reached Berkley Place. A cold, starlit night: the snow, as I said, lying light on the ground. Dr. Berkley had retired to his chamber and his gout, we knew by the lights in his window.

"Supper's waitin'," said Pine, as he helped me alight. "Mist' Sarah has it kep' for you and Mars' Geoffrey in the library."

Accordingly we found the little girl with an impromptu supper set out on one of the library tables. She sent out the housekeeper and insisted on pouring out our coffee herself, on making the tea, on conducting herself in such an earnest, anxious way to play waiter, that, hungry as we were, Geoffrey and I almost forgot to eat in our amusement. Do you think me prosy and maudlin, because I want to stop and linger a moment, talking of that last evening, and this child-woman with her winning, womanly ways?

My story, as you may see, is but an outline; brief to brusqueness; scarcely more than you could gather from the record of the criminal docket. Underneath the hints I give you lay whole volumes of unwritten tragedy, which I have no skill to unfold. My lawyer's pen, trained to the formal routine of briefs and deeds, has no delicate touch, no colors to paint love, or jealousy, or fierce, gnawing pain. Yet even I hesitate at this point of my story. This girl, with her fresh smile, her innocent love shining in every word or look, haunts the dry details of my memory with strange persistency, like the breath of a quiet song. I like to think of that evening. Sitting alone, sometimes, I find myself, like a doting old man, going back to the little cosy table in the library, and the faces that surrounded it then for the last time. I remember my own desperate attempts at

wit, and Geoffrey's genial bursts of laughter; how Sarah sang "Auld Robin Gray" and "Roy's Wife" for my especial pleasure, and we—Mr. Hope and I—tried to join in with tenor and bass, and miserably broke down.

There is not a word which is not fresh in my memory, now, of the careless, joyous idleness; it may be because of the dark hour that followed so soon after, to blot out all future laughter and joy.

Just at the end of one of our discordant choruses, the pendule on the mantelshelf struck eight. Mr. Hope started up.

"I shall be late," he said, hastily. "I had forgotten my summons to Lucky Jenkyll's tonight."

"You have yet two hours. Ten was the time appointed," I remarked.

"I must return to my rooms in the village first. Not a word, Sarah!" he laughed. "I am too ready to be tempted, and I ought to go."

In spite of this vehement protestation of duty, he lingered for half an hour; by the fire, in the hall; at last on his horse, in the drifting snow, tossing back laugh, and jest, and good nights to us, standing in the red light of the door. At last he was gone; we caught the last notes of "Roy's Wife," as he rode whistling down the avenue, and we turned shivering from the door.

"Oh! Cousin John, I must show you!" broke out my impetuous little hostess, running into the drawing room, and, returning with a morocco case, "Look! Geoffrey's present!" She opened the case and placed a small picture before me.

"A strange gift for a bride," was my involuntary thought, the first moment; the next, struck with admiration, and touched by the hidden delicacy of the meaning, I bent eagerly forward. It was an exquisite picture in cameo, by Giottura. The subject: *Von der Wart's wife*, in that terrible night, when, through the storm and darkness, she watched by him on the rack. Only the figure of the woman was seen, sharply relieved by the dusky night: her hands raised as if to wipe the death drops from his forehead, the face calm in its perfect trust, save for a slight quiver of agony upon the lip.

I looked at it in silence; glancing up, I saw Sarah's eyes were full of tears.

"Can a wife's love reach so far as that?" I said, to try her.

Her eyes flashed an indignant answer. "It was a little thing to do," she said. "How could she do otherwise than stay by his side? She could not help it—she could not have lived elsewhere."

I smiled. "Yet the world thought him guilty?"

"She did not," she answered, impatiently. "She believed in him—loved him."

“Suppose,” I persisted, “she had not believed in him? If she had known him guilty? What then? Would she have left him then?”

The girl’s face colored. She said, in a low tone, “It would be the same. She would have loved him still. Why,” she added, looking up quickly, “why do you ask such questions? Geoffrey did the same. Am I then so fickle, so variable, that you all must needs test my faith? Am I?”

“No,” I said, seriously. “You would cling to Geoffrey—innocent or guilty—I do believe, until the death-end.”

She blushed suddenly, and stooped over the picture with a shudder at my words. “Until the death-end!” I heard her whisper, under her breath, as she folded up the cameo, and, with a light, loving touch, as if it had been a part of someone she dearly loved, put it away. Not because it was the work of Giottura—a prize for ducal cabinets—but because it was Geoffrey’s present; that was all.

The little girl was nervous, excited. I blamed myself, and tried to turn back into the light, jesting badinage of an hour ago. It was easily done. The bridal gifts offered themselves as a happy expedient, and (why had I forgotten it so long?) the mysterious box which I was charged to deliver. She was amused, curious. I called on my imagination, dull as it was, to picture the oddly repulsive woman who sent it, with her vulgar beauty, her treacherous, dramatic manner.

“But, Cousin John,” she said, earnestly, “she is an imposter, surely. Papa knows no such woman; nor I. Perhaps, however, your old bachelor prejudices blinded you? You did not like to be assaulted in your solitary den, and so have converted some *dame gracieuse* into this dreadful smirking woman. Who knows?”

I laughed with her. “No. Tomorrow you will know. I will give you the box, and we will get down to the bottom of the mystery.”

“Oh! if tomorrow were but come!” she sang, ringing the bell for her night lamp. “I will sleep as fast as possible to pass away the time.”

She stood by the fire for a few moments, her lamp in her hand, her brown hair pushed back from her forehead, curiously guessing like an impatient child. At last she turned to go.

“Sally,” I said, “I will send the box to your room, if you choose. You must show its contents to me in the morning, however.” She assented eagerly, bade me good night, and ran up the stairs.

If I had waited! Only waited until morning, the terrible tragedy of the night might have had another ending. But I did not know. I do not think I was to blame.

Winny, her maid, came down to carry the box to her. I found it in my trunk, and, giving it to the mulatto, returned to the library for an hour’s quiet study. The fire was burning low; I threw on another log, and, drawing the lamp nearer, plunged into the midst of Dupont’s Criminal Practice in the Netherlands.

I had read but a few moments, when a cold hand touched my arm. I started up.

“Sarah! Are you ill?”

She did not speak for a moment, though her lips moved, but stood there, rubbing her hand across her clammy forehead in a wild, uncertain way.

“Sarah?”

“It is nothing—I know,” trying to laugh. Her white, ghastly face terrified me. She held a yellow paper covered with faded writing out to me. “Cousin John, what is this? what is this?” Her voice went down into a hoarse whisper. She cleared her throat, smoothed her hair with her shaking hands, with the same unnatural effort to laugh.

I tried to take the paper; but she held it fast.

“Nothing! Nothing, I know. Only a jest. I do not believe it, you know. Did they think I would believe it? But it was a foolish jest! Oh! foolish! It hurt me so!” She put her hand to her side, with a sharp sob torn out of her lips by force.

“What has hurt you, Sarah? I will not believe it—do not be afraid—I will not! Give me the paper.”

I took it out of her reluctant hands, seating her on a chair near me. She did not heed nor hear me; her eyes followed the paper with the same bewildered stare.

“Was it in the box?” I was afraid to open it. She nodded.

“Do not let Geoffrey know. It is such an idle joke; but it would vex him.”

I opened the paper. It was the original of the copied marriage certificate which the woman had shown me; dated in Georgia, fifteen years back; with the names of clergyman and witnesses—valid enough—the same as that I had seen; only here the names of the parties were given. *They were those of Gerturde Parny and Geoffrey Hope*.

It may seem strange, but it is true: I never for a moment doubted the validity of this paper. Not only because it bore within itself the inherent proof of authenticity to a lawyer’s eye, but by some unaccountable instinct I knew it was no forgery. In the brief moment in which I held it in my hand, the tragedy, past and to come, opened itself before me with the vividness of reality. Geoffrey Hope had been married, was married now: the woman, his wife, who had visited my office, was here in the village. I remembered the voices in the house by the wayside, as Mr. Hope and I rode past: the French accent, the man’s cry to “Gertrude.” And “Gertrude” here. It was Geoffrey Hope whom she had come to see. Then the appointment at Lucky Jenkyll’s flashed into my memory. And Sarah! In an instant I saw it all. Whether my face told my conviction to the girl, or whether her strength had been too heavily taxed, I know not; but when I turned slowly to

her, it was only to catch her head as it sank forward on the table with a smothered cry. I was glad she had fainted. Ringing the bell, I put her in the charge of her maid and the old black nurse. No kinder hearts could be found to care for the poor, motherless girl.

As for me, I had no time to spare. Charging the servants not to alarm Dr. Berkley, I summoned Pine to bring my horse, and, in a few moments, was galloping down the village road to find Geoffrey Hope.

(To be concluded.)

CONCLUDED FROM PAGE 355.

CHAPTER IV.

THE thought of the girl I had left behind and her bitter wrong made even my quiet blood heat angrily as I rode down the village street. The snow lay light on the house roofs and bridle paths and still was falling softly. The church clock struck eleven as I reached the door of the cottage where Mr. Hope had his rooms. There was no light in his windows. I was then too late. Dismounting and knocking impatiently, I brought at last a sleepy negro to the door.

Mr. Hope was gone—had been gone an hour. To Glen Ross. I hesitated. It was impossible for me to follow him, ignorant as I was of the localities. Yet Sarah must see him. In spite of the heavy suspicion, I knew that he could clear himself. Erring he might have been—mistaken in concealing some dark passage of his life from her; but guilty—never! never! The frank, kindly face rose up before me to give the lie to any surmise of dishonor. And yet the proof was damning. I paused, my foot in the stirrup. I could not return to keep the child in suspense until morning.

“Mars’ Geoffrey will soon be hyur,” said the servant, opening the door. “Good plan t’wait, sah.”

My resolution was taken instantly. I handed him the bridle of the horse. “Do you know Ross Glen? No? Can you send a messenger there then?”

“In ’minute, marster.” He led the horse to the stable; then darted over to the door of the little tavern, in the barroom of which still burned a furtive light.

When he came back he was accompanied by a lounging, half-asleep loafer, Joe Flynn by name, hitching up his trousers and pulling at his hat with an attempt at a bow.

“Hyur’s de man dat knows dat place frum Lucky’s to the ford. He’ll do yer business, mars’er, in a jiffey. Hyur’s the man.”

“Can you find Lucky Jenkyll’s?” I asked, writing a line to Mr. Hope on a bit of torn paper.

“I know Lucky’s, yes.”

“Take this to Mr. Hope then, and come back for your money. Take my horse. I will wait for you here.”

“The parson; ye know, Joe?” said the negro.

“I know.”

Joe was at home on horseback. He went down the street at a gallop. I followed the negro into the house and sat down in the little parlor to wait. He piled some wood on the fire and left me. A few books—the Virginia history, Hyatt on dogs, a map, and an old copy or two of the Richmond Inquirer—lay on the table. I was in no mood for reading. Pacing the floor slowly, I waited more than an hour. Less than that time I knew would not suffice for my messenger to reach the Glen. Another hour must pass before Mr. Hope could return. I tried to be patient.

The curtain was drawn from before the little window. It still snowed heavily enough to dull the sound of approaching steps. I sat down, trying to beguile the time with an old Congressional debate.

The village clock struck one. What could the delay mean? While my eyes had been passing over the columns, my brain had been busy with this strange revelation of the night. I could make nothing of it.

I went back to my first knowledge of Geoffrey Hope. A proud, impetuous boy he had appeared to me, though his temper and spirit were younger than his years. In a fit of moody gloom, after his father’s death (the Hopes had strong, deep feelings), he had left home, and was absent many years. This certificate bore date in one of those years. I knew that during this time no trace of him was held by his friends: that, whereas he left home an eager, impulsive boy, with brain and heart on fire, he returned grave to sadness—his every thought and word devoted to the earnest service of God and his fellow men. Impossible! It was against nature to believe this man capable of a crime so black as that of which he stood accused. The next hour crept slowly on. When the bell was on the last stroke of two, I went to the window. Down in the lower part of the village I heard a slight, confused noise; saw lights glancing in one or two houses. There was a quick trampling of horses in the dulled snow, then sudden angry cries, oaths. Some drunken brawl, doubtless. But one figure on horseback rapidly approached, coming up the hilly street uttering a hoarse cry which I could not understand. I ran to the door. It was my drunken messenger.

“What do you mean?” I broke out, angrily, seizing the horse’s bridle and pulling him from the saddle. “Have I waited here all night for you to go on a carouse? Come off. Where is Mr. Hope?”

The light from the window fell on his face. It was white with terror. “What do I mean?” he gasped out when he caught breath; “I mean murder! Murder!”

The frantic cry sounded through the streets. The village was wakened—the cry was repeated by a hundred frightened sleepers. The man yet had some reason left. "In the Glen Ross," he said. "Take your horse and go."

I waited to hear no more. She had killed him then, this woman. My horse was blown with the mad haste of Flynn's riding. As I went down the street he stumbled, but I struck the spurs in deep, and gave him his head. There was a crowd before me whom Flynn had roused first—two or three men on horses and others on foot; with torches, guns, pitchforks, whatever weapon they could first grasp, shouting, cursing, in an extremity of drunken fright and rage. The mounted men were the police. They at least were sober. They outstripped me soon, for my exhausted horse, in spite of the spurring, fell into a lame trot. I have no recollection of those four miles. I remember but the end.

At the entrance of Glen Ross I found myself alone; the men who had passed me some half-hour before were returning. I saw their lights slowly approaching in the hollow—and waited. Before them came two men carrying a board, on which lay a body, one arm dangling to the ground. They stopped as they came near me that I might see. There was a sweeping mass of light hair trailing on one side, bloody; a rich gaudily colored silk dress, with the skirt turned up over the face. One of the men pushed it down.

"Through the heart the shot went, sir," he said, pointing to the hole.

I stooped. It was a woman. Merciful God! Geoffrey Hope's wife! The skinny, treacherous, smirking face! I drew back in horror. The men went on, and I rode to meet the party that came behind. They were gloomily silent. I knew them—the coroner of Pike, some constables, little Davis, and in the midst, alive and well, thank God, Geoffrey himself. I spurred forward to meet him.

"Back, if you please, Mr. Page," said one of the men. "Mr. Hope is a prisoner. He did it."

The man's voice died out in a whisper. He was one of Hope's parishioners.

Geoffrey did not look up. His face was vacant, idiotic. I called to him, but he did not seem to hear, but sat twisting the mane of his horse in the bridle as he rode along. Davis took me aside, glad of a listener to the horrible story.

That night I was too bewildered to comprehend; afterward I found the plain statement, divested of exaggeration, to be simply this: Flynn had gone to Lucky Jenkyll's, but was told that Mr. Hope, on reaching there, had been sent to a house half a mile farther down the stream, belonging to a white man named Stone, to see a lady who lodged there. On coming to Stone's, Flynn had found the house apparently deserted, but discovering a light in one window, had forced his way in, where he saw the woman lying on a bench, insensible or dead, and Mr. Hope pacing the floor with the same vacant stare on his face that had remained ever since. He had returned, as I already knew. The police, on descending the Glen, had met Stone coming on foot to the village, who accused Mr. Hope of the murder; said that the woman who had lodged with him some days had sent for the minister, had received him when he came in a large outlying apartment called the

keeping room; that he (Stone), listening, had heard terrible words pass between them, then a shot, and, breaking in, had found the woman dying, and Hope leaning over her. Such was the outline. Horror-struck as the people were, no one at first seemed to doubt Geoffrey's guilt. Yet he had been an earnest, faithful minister, was beloved by them; but the old tradition of his fiery temper clung to them. "It's the Hope blood!" they said, gloomily shaking their heads. "Nothing will wash it out."

I find myself involuntarily hurrying over this part of my story. I cannot stop to paint the shame and misery that so suddenly fell among us, and seemed to spread and blacken in every fireside. In a month Geoffrey Hope was brought to trial. Let us pass over that month in silence.

There was a man, old before his time, sitting dumb and tearless in a cell in the county jail, whose hair grew whiter, whose limbs more bony every day: there was a girl hardly past childhood, lying sick unto death, and an old brokenhearted man watching over her day and night. Make a pitiful story of this if you can. I have not the heart.

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CHAPTER V.

I WAS senior counsel for Geoffrey Hope. Two weeks before the trial, he gave me a letter for Dr. Berkley. To write it was the only effort made by the wretched man during his imprisonment. I give it without alteration.

"I have done you a deadly wrong," it ran. "No other man, living or dead, can accuse me of this. Yet you will be just to me. I dare ask it from you. I believe that you will take what I say for truth. I have no plea to make, no apology for the crime of which I am guilty. Only to tell the truth as God sees it. Then deal with me as you will. You know what I was when I left home fifteen years ago. A passionate, willful boy, ignorant of life as it was; morbid, solitary, with no guide, no helper. I went to New Orleans. With unlimited money at command, I plunged into every folly and vice. I drank, gambled, was noted as the most rash of the reckless men who haunted the hells. Through it all, my heart was sick to loathing of it all. I was intolerably alone, without a friend, I thought, on earth or in heaven. I was ill that summer with yellow fever. One of my companions, Parny, took me to his own hotel, and nursed me. It was kind in him; his sister was more than kind. She was a beautiful woman, Gertrude Parny, then; beautiful, at least, in a weak boy's eyes, fair, winning, treacherous, skilled to beguile men's hearts by a long course of subtle scheming. I was rich, young, it was worth her while to marry me. She was noted as one of the most brilliant women on the Gulf coast. I was flattered, grateful for the love I thought she gave me. I did not know that at the very time she was betrothed to a Creole officer, Gustav Aix; I believe she loved this man with all the strength her treacherous nature possessed. In the fall we made a tour in the lower states. I married her in Georgia. I have no hope to palliate my guilt to you; therefore I shall not linger on what that marriage was to me. I suffered indescribably for two years. The woman was coarse, greedy, passionate. God knows I tried to do my duty to her. I was patient in my very desperation. Her indifference to me grew into contempt, hate. Even now I dare not trust myself to speak of what this woman became. There was no degradation so groveling, no treachery so public, that she would not wallow in it. We went to France. I could not

breathe the air my mother had breathed while bound to so vile a wretch. In Bordeaux she met her old lover, Aix, secretly, and a month after eloped with him during my temporary absence in Lyons. When I returned, I found they had sailed in a sloop for America. The vessel (l'Orient) was wrecked off the Brittany coast; few of the passengers were saved. I received a letter from the captain of the sloop stating that Aix and my wife were lost, and with the letter came whatever papers had been recovered from the wreck. I send you this letter. It will prove much that I assert. Before God I swear that until a fortnight ago I never suspected it of being a forgery. Freed thus, as I thought, from my burden, I came home, a poor man, but honest in my hopes, gloomy as they were. I hoped to do some little good, to gain a little late kindly regard from the people who knew me when a boy. You know what followed. You do not know what she, whom I have wronged so fatally, was to me. You thought me idly foolish in my love for Sarah, laughed at my care of her. I was an old man, Dr. Berkley, in feeling, if not in years. She was the first woman I had really loved. All that I knew of good, of rest, of whatever was fair or kindly in life, lay in her. Let me be silent here. It is all over now. I did not tell you of my history. There was my guilt. Only there! Except in that one fatal concealment, I have been innocent. I shrank from the vile story with too sharp a pain to willingly recall it. As time passed and it was yet untold, I weakly resolved never to reveal it. My happiness was too nearly within my clutch for me to risk it. I was wrong. Gertrude I thought lay in the bottom of the sea, would not return to tell of what had been; if my silence was a crime, my punishment has been sufficient. God, the all-knowing, all-pitiful, will forgive me, but—will you? Will she?

"Of the crime for which I am to stand my trial, I do not fear that you will hold me guilty for a moment. Yet I have no proof to bring of innocence. I went to the Glen, expecting to find a sick woman in need of aid. I found—my wife. I have no words to describe that meeting.

"I could not rid myself of the belief that it was some mocking, taunting fiend risen to drive me mad. God knows what malicious whim drove her here. My disgust and horror crazed her, I think. She came near me, caught my hand, and held it with jeering vows of wifely devotion. I thrust her from me, and, as I did it, a shot was fired and she staggered and fell. For a moment I thought she herself had discharged the weapon, but her hands were empty. She lived but a moment, cried wildly for Gustav—for help—pushed me from her with her last breath. I remember nothing more of that night.

"I will say no more. If I am condemned, you at least will not believe me guilty. One other. I dare not speak of her. God's will be done."

No trial in the valley of the Blue Ridge ever excited more gloomy consternation. No family whose plantation lay in the boundaries of the four counties whose blood was not mixed with the Hopes or the Berkleys. It was a season of mourning. I was touched to find how deeply Geoffrey had endeared himself to these people. Irresistible as the circumstantial evidence was against him, palliative as was the plea of fiery anger, uncontrollable passion, the mass of the people persisted in believing in his entire innocence. So strong had this feeling grown, and so intense was the excitement in his favor, that Hall, the prosecuting attorney, moved for a change of venue. It was granted, and the case was removed to the court of the neighboring district.

I shall never forget the day it came on. A gray, brooding day of early winter. The snow lay deep, the icicles hung heavy from the eaves. The little town of —— was crowded from early morning, yet it was strangely silent. Men talked in whispers at the corners in eager groups. The feeling of excitement ran deep and still. One feature of the trial was peculiar. The gallery of the little courtroom was filled with ladies, a thing unheard of in Virginia. No more real or delicate proof of sympathy could have been offered by the planters.

I had but one colleague, Hoyt of Marion. He came down the day before. I was worn-out. I had never worked harder on a case, or, let me confess it, with more hopeless effort. What will my readers think if I acknowledge that, before Hoyt's arrival, I had laid the bare facts of the case before another and very different counsellor? Pine. Never in white or black have I ever found a more subtle, acute genius for discovery, combination. Do you laugh? Then you do not know the instinct of the negro. It had often happened that some curious hint, some lucky hit, had gained me a victory, which was due to the intuitive knack of Pine for odd bits of knowledge. How or in what way he obtained his acquaintance of the leading points of civil cases was a perpetual mystery; in such trials as this, where the facts were patent, where every minutia of evidence told, I did not scruple to avail myself of his ubiquitous ear and lynx-eye. But Pine heard or saw nothing that would avail.

When the bell was ringing for court to open, I went to the jail to accompany my client to the courtroom. He was calm, pale. A higher trust than even faith in his own innocence supported him. I had planned words of encouragement out of my own desponding fancy; I uttered none of them; he had another aid that I, alas! knew not. The constables led him down the narrow passage leading to the prisoner's box. I followed closely. In the jail yard, on the wall, were gaping crowds of men and boys, black and white; he did not seem to see them, passed on with a slow, firm step, and quiet face. The courtroom was one mass of heads, of watchful eyes turned to the solitary man who came in with bent head, and took the place of shame. Used as I was to the scene, it took this day for me a new significance. I looked at it with Geoffrey's eyes, felt it with Geoffrey's nerves.

Court was opened. The jury empaneled. The prisoner challenged no one, but sat with his head bent on his hands, seemingly unconscious of all that was passing. While the jury was being sworn there was a slight pause. I saw a motion at one door, the crowd respectfully making way. A bluff, stalwart figure, halting slightly, came quietly in, leading a lady deeply veiled. Old Tom Berkely! With his face paler, sterner than usual. He made their way to the bench outside of the prisoner's box, and leaning over touched the bent shoulder. "Why, Geoffrey boy!" The prisoner started up. Sarah had seated herself by his side, quietly; it was her right. Her father crowded close on the other hand. One look into her face, and that was all; then Geoffrey's head sunk suddenly, lower than before. In what praise and thanksgiving to God, only He knows! It may be the brave, tender heart, beating beside him, could guess. The brave, tender girl! In all that crowded courtroom there was not a heart which did not bless her then and there!

When the prisoner raised his head again, there was a change in his face. Before, his trust had been in the Unseen; now, this little touch of true, warm human love had fired his heart like new wine. The usual slow routine of the opening of the trial occupied an hour or two of the forenoon. I have no intention of dwelling on the technicalities of the case—it would but weary my readers;

only the few salient points divested of legal verbiage. I left the earlier conduct of the case in Hoyt's hands, and studied closely the faces of the jurors. This is no subordinate part of a criminal pleader's duty, especially in a cause like this, where success depended on oratory rather than facts. But now my heart sank. The men were plain, commonsense farmers, or shrewd mechanics, upon whom no power of pathos would outweigh a grain of evidence; men who would show their sturdy pride in the stern justice of their condemnation of one who belonged to the patrician class. (I may say here, by the way, that, despite the popular outcry against the influence of caste, I have found, in my practice, it was harder, for that very caste reason, to obtain clear justice for the rich than for the poor.) While Hoyt was opening, with Hall, my attention was suddenly attracted by the face of a man leaning over the gallery railing, whose desperate, eager watchfulness marked him even in that intent mass of listeners. I recognized him instantly: the stranger I had seen at the village inn with Dick Poole. It is strange how floating trifles will impress the mind even in the most solemn moments. While my brain was busy with Geoffrey's imminent peril, I wondered who this man with the picturesque, sharply cut olive face was, where he had been staying, what was his interest in this trial! Presently I missed him; he had left the courtroom.

Hall rose after the indictment was read. He traced back Geoffrey Hope's life from the period when he first left Virginia; his mad career of folly in New Orleans; the kindness of the Parnys, brother and sister; his marriage in Georgia (producing an affidavit from the minister still living); the elopement of his wife, and his return to his native place. Hall was one of the acutest lawyers in the state. From papers left by the dead woman they had gained a knowledge of Hope's relation to her. Without bringing a charge against the prisoner of willful intention to commit bigamy, without calling a blush to the cheek of the girl beside him, he threw, in a delicate, covert way, a doubt of infamy over his whole life; upon his silence with regard to his first marriage; his sincerity as an humble, penitent Christian minister; his ignorance that the woman Gertrude still lived. Such doubts can be thrown, such deep, intangible charges can be brought as skillfully in an advocate's speech as in an after-tea gossip. He then proceeded to draw, as he said, this woeful, lifelong tragedy to its dark culmination, and summoned his witnesses.

Jim Blake testified to the carrying of the message to Mr. Hope on the evening of our visit to the Parsonage. "Had received the message from Lucky Jenkyll. Had not seen the woman who sent it. Thought it was some friend of Lucky's, or other poor white trash. Got a dram of brandy for bringing it."

Lucky Jenkyll, a slave was not admitted as evidence.

Peter Stone, sworn, testified: "Am a bricklayer by trade. Live in the hollow called Glen Ross. Two weeks ago deceased came to my house; said she had been told I had rooms to let. Told her they were not fit for such as she, being a lady and uppish-like. Said she did not care; wanted out of the town; would pay well. My wife was took with her odd French ways; so we took her in. She was very quiet; stayed mostly in her room; did pay well. Once or twice I undertook to pump some news out of her as to her business, but could get no satisfaction. She only left the house twice while she was there. Went out one morning early, and was gone all day. About noon I was coming past the Berkley plantations, and see her a-walking quick through the trees, hiding as it might be. I stopped to look, being curious. Saw Mr. Hope on horseback, coming down the road, by Dr. Berkley's carriage. Was talking to the young lady inside. After they were out of sight, the

French woman came out, laughing to herself. Told my wife about it when I went home; said I didn't like her ways. She said 'long as she paid well to let her alone. The day of the murder my wife went over to her mother's on Sandy Creek, meaning to come back that night; but she did not get back until the next day. The deceased went out toward the village in the afternoon. Before dark I was sitting on the bench at the door, when I heard a noise in the apple orchard like voices quarreling in a whisper. Think it was voices I heard, but won't swear; it might have been something else; sounded like voices though. At last I heard a sharp sort of cry, and a name; foreign name it was; disremember it; and the French woman came hurrying up the yard. She was holding her hands as if she had been frightened, and had been crying; for the red paint on her cheeks was washed into streaks and looked bad enough. She was all of a tremble. I spoke to her; but she went past me in the house. Came down in an hour, dressed and painted again. Said that she wished I would stay around the yard, and, if anyone came wanting her, not to let them in. She thought some of those negroes would be bothering her; for they came begging every day. I thought that was a lie, if she was a lady; but said nothing. Then she said the preacher was coming to see her, and she wanted the use of the keeping room, as they had some business; to let him come there when he came. Thought it was very good in Mr. Hope to take some account of the foreign body; for I didn't think she was worth it. Waited round until nine o'clock; then went to bed. About ten I heard a horse come to the front door; went down and found Mr. Hope. He asked how the sick woman was. Said she wasn't sick, but had business I believed. Took him in the keeping room, and went out as the French woman came in the other door. Heard a curious noise like a moan; so stopped and listened. The woman was talking jeering-like, laughing now and then. Only heard Mr. Hope's voice once or twice; it sounded unnatural, smothered as if something hurt him terribly. Was just going to open the door, when I heard her walk over the floor. He said something loud as if he cursed her, and then I heard a shot. I was scared, stunned; did not go in for a minute or two. When I did, she was lying on a bench dead and Mr. Hope walking the floor. I only stayed a minute; asked him who did it. He said he didn't know; looked as if he had not his senses; was white, the big drops of sweat on his face. I started off to the town. I was afraid I would be took up for the murder myself. Met the officers an hour afterward in the Glen."

Such was his testimony. His cross-examination was as follows: "Where were you during that hour?" "Hiding in the thicket. I got scared, thought nobody would believe the preacher did it, and I would be suspected." "What kind of voice did you hear in the apple orchard?" "Will not swear that they were voices, thought they were, as much from the looks of the woman as from hearing; thought there must be someone there or she would not have cried out the name." "What name?" "One I never heard before." A sudden thought struck me. I leaned over the desk, and, in a voice inaudible to the audience, said, "Was it Gustav?" The face of the witness brightened. "Yes! that is it. I had disremembered it."

Flynn was then sworn. He testified to being sent by me after Mr. Hope, to arriving at Lucky Jenkyll's and learning there that the prisoner had gone on to Stone's. He described his entrance into the keeping room—the position of the body, and the crazed appearance of Hope, as I have before stated. The evidence of Davis, the constables, and that of the coroner, Pike, followed; but they elicited nothing new to the reader. Albert Ward and John Hoge, physicians, severally testified as to the state of the body when examined by them. The shot, a pistol bullet, had taken effect almost instantly, lodging in the inner cavity of the heart. The bullet, when found, had been

driven against the ribs with such force as to carry a bit of paper (part of the wadding) uninjured with it. They had found no other marks of violence.

With supplementary, unimportant evidence, the counsel for the prosecution closed. I never have known a stronger case of circumstantial evidence. Our rebutting testimony was meagre in fact, however strong we held it to be in inference. Hoyt summoned first a few witnesses to testify to the moral position of the prisoner. He had chosen them well. Their evidence was short, forcible, weighty. Geoffrey Hope, as he was, stood before the people, a lofty, high-souled Christian gentleman, bearing the weight of a great sorrow. The story of his first marriage was brought forward in its true light, by means of letters which he had fortunately preserved. The forged letter, proving his ignorance of the existence of this woman, told upon the jury. But alas! the stronger we made our point of his past misery with the dead woman, and his entire conviction of her death, the more probable appeared the fact that in a madness of desperation he had rid himself of the curse.

The former witnesses were recalled to prove that no weapon was found on the prisoner when discovered, nor in the room; but that we knew availed little, the pistol might easily have been flung from the window into the swampy ground.

It is easy for an experienced lawyer to tell the tone and temper of a jury. My heart grew more leaden every moment. Hoyt, summoning the witnesses, could hardly conceal his hopeless chagrin. Even if the evidence was not held strong enough to convict him, the verdict would be actually what it would nominally be rendered in Scotland, not "Acquitted," but "Not Proven." The man would go forth, if not to the gallows, to a worse fate—with blasted fame and fortune, the mark of Cain upon his brow.

The case was closed. The speeches of the junior counsel lasted late into the night, yet the audience rested in intent, unabated excitement. No finer forensic display has ever been made in a criminal trial in Virginia. The advocates who spoke that night were men who had earned an enduring fame, and the terrible emergency of the present cause called out every latent power. I saw the prisoner shudder as Hall sat down, and the judge rose to adjourn court. He was a doomed man. The ringing words, that had just died away, were like a peal of vengeance, inflexible, immutable. The court was cleared in deathly silence. Once or two women in the galleries were carried out insensible—sisters, friends of the man who tomorrow was to be condemned to death, or worse than death. The group around the bar of advocates, judges, broke up gloomily and passed out. The prisoner was detained until the room was emptied. He turned then and lifted the bent face beside him to his own. The face of the picture! White as death, radiant with perfect trust, the lips quivering slightly with agony. Watching, believing, until the death-end! Only one look, and then he turned away, and was led back to his cell.

CHAPTER VI.

I SLEPT but little that night. At noon the next day I was to close the plea for the prisoner. Wild as I knew the hope to be, I was aware that his friends did rest their hope on me. It was the straw of the drowning man. Yet I prayed for help as earnestly as if I had possessed the faith that my

prayer could be granted. I never felt the weakness of my own powers so deeply as when conscious that so awful a confidence was placed on them.

The bell rang for court. From my inn window I watched the crowds pouring through the narrow streets, until the building was filled to suffocation. It was a day of clear, bewildering sunlight; how mocking it seemed!

I took my way slowly to court. Hoyt was speaking as I entered. Stamworth, on the opposite side, was to follow. I glanced at Geoffrey. Over his face there was a sickly pallor; his eyes were closed; he had bidden good-by to the fears and hopes of the world. Listening dully to my colleague's desperate effort to gild over the fatal facts, I leaned against the plastered wall.

A sudden wrench at my arm made me turn. It was Pine, his black face ashy with excitement. "Fur de lub o' God, Mars' John! cum heah." I went hastily out of the crowd. He thrust into my hand a scrap of something black. "He's de murderer! Gor a Mighty be praised, he did it!"

"What do you mean? Are you crazy, boy?"

"He—de man at Dick Poole's. Look at dat stuff, marster—dat black fur, 'ud know dat fur in Ejup."

"Where did you find it?"

"Fund it dis mornin, me um Jim Blake, hangin to um bush outside dem window, where de woman was shot, marster."

A wild thought struck me—I had been dumb not to think of it before—I made my way hastily, though silently, to the witness-box. There was a small table below it. I looked upon it, under it. The room had been swept that morning; what I sought was gone. No! There it was on the floor—the crumpled, bloody piece of paper wadding found in the body. I caught it, my old hand shaking with excitement.

What was gained I knew not—but everything was to be risked on the possibility of that gain. I scrawled on a slate, and handed it up to Hoyt: "Speak all day, if you can, and if I have not returned, sue for an adjournment on the plea of new and vital testimony."

Hoyt changed color, but neither by word nor look betrayed surprise. I hurried out.

It was growing dusk when I returned, and, pausing a moment in the jury room, quietly entered court. It was even more densely crowded than in the morning. Hoyt was still up. I saw through his labored sentences an incessant, watchful glance to the door. He observed me; a significant motion was enough for him. A vague notion had spread through the people that Hoyt was speaking against time; that my absence had some important bearing on the case. The prisoner and his friends had caught the wild hope. Geoffrey, no longer self-possessed, sat nervously wiping his clammy face from time to time, his muscles rigid with a tense suspense. He was only a man; life was worth much—and honor!

Hoyt drew his argument to a sudden close, and, prompted by a look from me, quietly prayed the court for "suspension of rules and the admission of important and unforeseen evidence." It was granted. There was an eager breath of excitement over the room; then silence.

A few whispered words to Hoyt gave him his cue. Referring to the papers left by the deceased, he proved her connection with Gustav Aix as his nominal wife to have existed as lately as the second August just past.

I was then summoned as witness and sworn, waiving my position as counsel for the accused. I testified to the conversation overheard by me in the cabin by the roadside on the afternoon of the murder. This was proof that this man had followed her to the neighborhood.

Richard Poole was then summoned and sworn. Poole was one of the small farmers of C—— County, the owner of one or two negroes, hardly a step above them in refinement, ignorant, cowardly, but honest enough. He trembled excessively on mounting to the stand, and for some moments was so bewildered by terror that his evidence was unintelligible. Patience, however, calmed him at last, and the assurance that his testimony should not be used against him. He then testified as follows: "Am a planter in a small way. Badly off. Like to make a little money honestly if I can. Was down in the Berkley Town tavern last day of court in last month. Landlord Simms said to me there was a man there wanted to board in the country 'count of fishing and gunning. I offered to take him. Thought I could make a raise, maybe. Man came out with me, tall, dark man he was; handsome. Been boarding at my house ever since. I saw little of him, being out on the farm most of the time. He hardly ever stayed indoors; used to go out in the morning and not come home till night. Never brought any game though, which I thought queer. Day of the murder he came home early in the evening, looked flushed and angry. Went upstairs to his room. I said to my wife, 'There's something wrong with Mr. Thorne,' (for that was the name we called him by.) I went upstairs and looked in his room, out of curiosity-like, as I passed the door. He was standing with his back to me, but was loading a pistol. Tore a bit of paper for wadding out of a letter and threw it on the floor. When I came down I said, 'He's after no good.' Directly he came down and went out of the door. I don't know what made me follow him, but I did. Told my wife I was going out to see the stock foddered; but instead took after him a good piece behind. He kept on at a fast pace. He had on a black cloak, trimmed with fur. Went down the fields outside the village, through Starr's Thicket, then down through Glen Ross. It was getting dark, but I was curious to see the matter out; for now and then he would take out the pistol and cock it, as if he expected to shoot right away. It was somewhat late: it might be nine or ten o'clock when we got to Peter Stone's. He climbed over the yard fence and crept round the bushes. I got behind a linden tree and watched through a crack. There was a light in one window. He got up to it on the outside, hanging onto the beams. It is a wood house, badly weatherboarded. I saw him sticking there for a minute or two, clutching the chunks to keep himself from falling. Then he raised the pistol to a broken pane of the window and fired. I did not hear any cry inside.

"I made off as fast as I could over the hills, by a short cut I knew, and got home about three o'clock. I told my wife. We were afraid to tell. Thorne came home late the next morning. We were indoors pretty constant since then. Only heard of Mr. Hope's trial last week. I felt awful,

not knowing what to do, but thought as I had kept quiet so long I would be tried for accessory after the fact, if I said anything. Heard of such things in law. Besides, was mortal afraid of my life with Thorne. I am a poor man, have a family. Couldn't run the risk of bein' hung for Mr. Hope, though I like him. Thorne hung round the house until yesterday, then was gone for an hour or two in the morning; came here, I think, to the trial. Came home about noon, went upstairs and got some money out of his trunk and papers, borrowed my horse, Morgan, to go back to the village, he said. Has never been back. This morning the horse came back, blown and sweating awful: must have been ridden almost to death. The constables came out an hour or two after, and brought me and my wife here. I have told the whole truth, so help me God." Poole here began to blubber for mercy, and his testimony being complete, was removed and his wife placed on the stand. Her evidence corroborated his in every particular.

During the time these witnesses occupied the stand, a silence, terrible in its intentness, reigned over the house. Men scarcely grasped the full force of what they heard. Hoyt availed himself of the dead stillness to produce his last conclusive fact. A cloak, trimmed with sable, was shown, and sworn to by Poole as that worn by his lodger on the night of the murder. A piece of cloth and fur attached, which exactly fitted into a rent in it, were found, as Jim Blake testified by him, clinging to one of the thorn bushes under the window. No papers or letters had been left by the fugitive which could give a clue to his identity save one; the paper from which he had torn the wadding of the pistol, and which the Pooles had secreted. It was a bill from a wine dealer in Mobile, Alabama, to Gustav Aix, receipted. The bloody fragment found in the heart of the deceased was produced, and made the torn paper complete. Hoyt closed the case with only these words, "Justice, gentlemen of the jury!"

I will not repeat the judge's charge. The old man, who had known Geoffrey Hope from boyhood, delivered it with a voice which he could not steady, so full was it of eager thankfulness.

The jury did not leave their box. "Not guilty" sounded through the courtroom in a clear, firm voice, that was lost in one wild whirlwind of uproar. The tempest of enthusiasm, that had been restrained for two hours, broke out at last and swept all order, dignity, rule away. The sheriff vainly called for silence, scarcely able himself to keep from joining in the tremendous cheer ringing from courtroom and streets, where eager crowds were waiting.

In the midst of it all the freed man stood silent, unconscious of anything but the pale, worn-out girl, who, with a shivering sigh, had sunk down, like one dead, at his feet; while old Tom Berkley, sobbing like a boy, sat beside him.

The ensuing spring, I returned to Berkley Place from Richmond. The welcome I met was less joyous than the last, but more deep and feeling. There was a wedding in the old homestead in a few days. A quiet wedding, though the clans of Hope and Berkley were met together. But the shadow of the great danger, that had passed by so lately, rested over the house, over the faces and hearts of bride and bridegroom.

A grave, solemn wedding. In the darkness of that peril, man and woman had looked deep into the future that lay before them, and hand in hand dared it with slow, firm steps, trusting in the love within, the love above. The trust has never failed.

All that I have told in my story passed years ago. Whenever I can, I go to Berkley Place, where old Tom, genial and warm as ever, still holds open court. Pine accompanies me, a middle-aged "uncle" now, with gray hair and sometimes troublesome rheumatism; but after the first day, he hands me over to the care of someone else and is missing. When I go over to make my visit to the parsonage I find him there, established as majordomo of kitchen, buttery, and house, generally escorted by a troop of youthful Toms, and Geoffreys, and Johns. "Let Uncle Pine stay with us, Cousin John," coaxed one of these nuisances (my namesake by the way), the last time I was there. "Yes," plead Sarah, "leave Pine with us, I think he will be happy here. And we owe him happiness such as we never can return." "What do you owe him?" persisted the curly-headed catechist. "Only a life, my boy," said his father, stroking the little hand with an unsteady touch. Pine's black face worked nervously, then he broke into a laugh, the negro's only concealment for excitement. "Guess Mars' John owes me two or three times dat. Got no more gumpshion dan dis chile 'bout keepin' hisself alive. No, no, Mist. Sarah, muss stay with ole Mars' while um lives. Only he's got to cum down heah once a year, anyhow."

Some four or five years after the trial, in a Lynn paper, I read of the sudden illness of a man under trial for forgery, whose real name it was averred was Gustav Aix.

I started instantly for Massachusetts, and with some difficulty obtained from the dying man a full confession of the murder of the woman Gertrude. It was made public in those counties where the trial was held. I took the paper myself to Geoffrey Hope and placed it in his hands. He read it in silence, pressed my hand and said nothing.

But going into his study that evening, I found his book open at the words, "In the day of trouble I called unto Thee: and Thou hast answered."

Peterson's Magazine, November and December 1861