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The Piccadilly Puzzle

Fergus Hume

Chapter I A Foggy Night

AT two o'clock in the morning, during the month of August, sounds of music could be heard proceeding from a brilliantly lighted house in Park Lane, where a ball was being given by the Countess of Kerstoke. True, the season was long since over, and though the greater part of London society had migrated, swallow-like, to the south of Europe in search of warm weather, still there were enough people in town to justify the ball being given, and a number of celebrities were present.

Outside it was dull and chill, with a thick yellow fog pervading the atmosphere, but within the great ball-room it was like fairyland with the brilliant light of the lamps, the profusion of bright flowers, and the gay dresses worn by the ladies. The orchestra, hidden behind a gorgeous screen of tropical plants, was playing the latest waltz, "A Friend of Mine," and the sigh and sob of the melody as it stole softly through the room seemed to inspire the dancers with a voluptuous languor as they glided over the polished floor. The soft frou-frou of women's dresses mingled with the light laughter of young-girls and the whispered confidences of their partners, while over all dominated the haunting melody with its weird modulations and suggestions of sensuous passion.

Near the door of the ball-room a young man of about thirty years of age was leaning against the wall in a lazy attitude, idly watching the dancers swinging past him; but judging from the preoccupied expression of his face his thoughts were evidently far away. He was tall, dark-haired, with a short-cut well-trimmed beard, piercing dark eyes, a firmly compressed mouth, and judging from his swarthy complexion, together with a certain crisp curl in his hair, he evidently had some negro blood in his veins. Suddenly he was roused from his meditations by a touch on his shoulder, and on glancing up saw before him a stout elderly gentleman with white hair, a ruddy face, and rather a Silenus cast of countenance.

The one was Spencer Ellersby, only son of a wealthy West Indian planter, and the other Horace Marton, a well-known society man generally called The Town-crier, from the fact that he knew all the current scandals and retailed them with elaborate embellishments to his numerous circle of friends.

"Hey! Ellersby, my boy," said The Town-crier, on the alert to acquire fresh information, "have you come back once more to England, home and beauty, hey?—been all over the world I suppose, hey?—going to publish a book of travels—hey?"

"Not I," replied Ellersby in the slow, languid manner habitual to him, "every one who goes half a dozen miles nowadays publishes a book of travels under some fantastic title. I prefer to be renowned for not having done so."

“Broke no new ground—hey?”

“No,” indifferently. “I haven’t the instincts of Columbus, so the old ground was good enough for me. I’ve done Africa in a superficial manner, called on our American cousins, passed the same compliment to our Australian ditto, in fact, done the usual thing with the usual result.”

“Hey! what’s that?”

“A sense of being bored—I agree with Voltaire to a certain extent, ‘this is the best of all possible worlds,’ but one does get a little tired of it—however, I have satisfied your curiosity, now return the compliment. I’ve been away from England for two years so know nothing of life in town. Come, unfold—tell me all—scandals, deaths, marriages, divorces, in fact all the gossip of the hour.”

This was an occupation after The Town-crier’s own heart, so he launched out into a long description of folly and fashion varied by sermons and scandal, which being spiced with a little maliciousness, proved quite an amusing discourse. Ellersby listened in silence with a quiet smile on his lips, every now and then giving vent to an ejaculation as he heard some special morsel of news.

“You ought to write your memoirs, Marton,” he said, dryly, “they would be as gossiping as Pepys’, as scandalous as De Grammont’s, and as amusing as either, but go on— anything more? Who are the new beauties?”

“Hey!—oh! one was here to-night, Lady Balscombe.”

“What! old Balscombe married,” said Ellersby, in a surprised tone. “I thought he loved no one but himself—so! and who is my lady?”

“That’s what every one wants to know,” replied Marton, eagerly; “he picked her up down in the country somewhere, but she’s got no pedigree—no money, no talents— nothing but personal beauty.”

“Which is worth all the rest put together, to a woman,” interrupted Ellersby, cynically. “What is she like?”

The Town-crier reeled off an auctioneer-like description at once.

“Tall, fair, blue eyes, beautiful complexion, magnificent figure, and the devil’s own temper.”

“Nice set of qualifications, especially the latter,” murmured Ellersby. “Balscombe fond of her?”

“Hey!—oh, yes—madly! won’t let her out of his sight, but he had to to-night as he’s off down to his place in Berkshire on business, tried to make her ladyship come too, but she wouldn’t because of this dance. Good Lord, fancy a dance at this time of the year! but Kerstoke’s wife was always slightly cracked.”

“Does Lady Balscombe reciprocate her husband’s adoration?”

Marton raised his eyebrows, rubbed his hands, and leered significantly.

“Not exactly—hey!” he replied, chuckling. “Calliston is first favorite there.”

“Eh! the deuce—I thought he was in love with old Balscombe’s ward, Miss Penfold.”

“So he is; but he makes love to the wife just to keep his hand in. I wouldn’t be surprised if it ended in the Divorce Court.”

“Well, you are generally right in your surmises,” retorted Ellersby; “but what would Miss Penfold say to that?”

“Hey!—oh, she’d be glad,” replied Marton; “bless you, she cares more for Myles Desmond’s little finger than she does for the whole body of Calliston.”

“Oh, I know Myles,” said Ellersby, promptly, “a rattling good fellow, was with him at Cambridge, but we somehow never hit it off—trying to make a fortune by his pen, I hear.”

“Yes! and hasn’t made a penny yet, so he acts as secretary to his cousin, Lord Calliston—he’s next heir to the title, you know—hey!”

“Much chance he’ll have of it,” replied Ellersby, contemptuously. “Calliston’s sure to marry and have heirs, unless he kills himself in the meantime with drink; but, to revert to our former conversation—the Balscombe menage seems slightly mixed.”

“Hey!—rather. It stands this way,” explained Marton, eagerly: “Balscombe’s jealous of his wife on account of Calliston—Lady B—— is jealous of Calliston on account of Miss Penfold, and that young lady does not care two straws for the whole lot of them in comparison to Myles Desmond.”

“Sounds like the second act of a French play,” murmured Ellersby, yawning. “Well, when I see Lady Balscombe, I’ll give you my opinion of her looks; meantime, you must be dry after all that talking, so come and have a drink.”

“Where are you stopping?” asked Marton, as they went to the supper-room.

“Guelph Hotel, Jermyn Street,” said Ellersby, “only for a few days till I get my rooms fixed up; I’ve brought such a lot of things home that my chambers look like an old curiosity shop. What are you having?”

“Champagne,” replied Marton. “Oh, I say, dear boy,” seeing his companion, with a small glass full of brandy, “that looks bad at this hour! Hey—you haven’t—”

“No, I haven’t,” interrupted Ellersby, impatiently, “I’m only taking this to-night because I don’t feel up to the mark.”

Marton said no more, but after parting with his companion went back to the ball-room, and meeting a friend, confided to him that poor Ellersby was going to the dogs through drink.

“Brandy neat, dear boy—hey!” said the old reprobate. “Bad habits these young fellows pick up abroad—hey! Look used up, by Jove! Gal in it, dear boy—hey! Oh, shocking!”

So The Town-crier evidently did not intend to give the returned wanderer a good character.

Ellersby was now tired of the ball, so bade good-night to his hostess, who was a queer, thin, little woman, wearing a wig, a low-cut dress, and many jewels, giving one the general impression that she was mostly bones and diamonds.

After taking leave of this bizarre figure Ellersby put on his coat and went outside into the street, where he stood for a few moments, undecided whether to take a cab to his hotel or to walk. The fog was very thick, and the gas lamps shone through it like dull yellow stars, while the chill breezes of the night seemed to penetrate the body of the young man, accustomed as he had been of late to tropical climates.

In spite of the apparent discomforts offered by a walk at such a time, Ellersby determined to risk it, thinking it would give him a certain amount of amusement, akin somewhat to the unraveling of a puzzle, to find his way through the fog to Jermyn Street. Smiling at the oddity of the idea of finding pleasure in a cold walk on a foggy night, he lighted a cigar and, buttoning up his coat, took his way down Park Lane toward Piccadilly.

There is a strange feeling in the complete isolation one experiences in fog-land—the thick yellow mist hiding everything under its jealous veil until the pedestrian finds himself adrift as it were on a lonely sea, and though on every side he is environed by millions of human beings, yet the fog creates for the moment a solitude as in those enchanted cities of the “Arabian Nights.”

Ellersby managed to find his way to Piccadilly, and was soon swinging along the pavement at a good round pace. Every now and then ragged figures with sinister faces would loom suddenly out of the fog on the watch for unwary wanderers, but the nomadic life of Ellersby having wonderfully sharpened his faculties, he was always on his guard against the evil advances of these night-birds. Occasionally he could hear a cab drive slowly past, the driver cautiously steering his horse down the familiar street, which as if by magic had suddenly assumed an unreal appearance, transforming Piccadilly into a vague immensity resembling the steppes of Russia.

With his ears alert for every sound, and his eyes peering anxiously into the veil of gray mist, Ellersby hurried along, managed to cross the street, and, by some miracle of dexterity which he placed at once to the credit of instinct, turned down St. James’s Street, and it was here his first mishap occurred, for just as he rounded the corner he came against a young man hastening in the opposite direction at a rapid pace.

“I beg your pardon,” said the stranger, quickly, “but the fog is so dense I could not see—excuse me.”

And he was about to hurry away, when Ellersby, recognizing the voice, stopped him.

“Wait a moment, Desmond,” he said, gayly, “and give an old friend a word.”

Desmond seemed annoyed at being recognized, and looking sharply at the face of the other, gave vent to an ejaculation of surprise, which however had not a very delighted ring in it.

“Ellersby, by Jove!” he said, in a hesitating manner. “I thought you were in Persia or in Patagonia. Who the deuce would have expected to see you in Piccadilly on such a devil of a night?”

“I’ve been to a ball,” explained Ellersby, “and thought I’d walk back to my hotel just to renew my acquaintance with London fogs. It was a mad freak, but amusing. Come to my hotel and have a night-cap.”

“Thanks, awfully,” said Desmond, hurriedly, “but I can’t. I’m—I’m in a hurry. Where are you staying?”

“Guelph Hotel, Jermyn Street.”

“Eh!” said Desmond, with a start. “Jermyn Street—all right, look you up to-morrow.”

“Wait a moment,” observed Ellersby, detaining him. “Tell me where is Calliston? I want to see him.”

“Not much chance,” replied Desmond, shaking his head; “he’s gone off to-night down to Shoreham—yachting, you know. Wants to go to the Azores; well, see you to-morrow; good-night—I’m in a deuce of a hurry.”

He spoke rapidly, with nervous agitation quite at variance with his usual demeanor, as Ellersby knew, and as he went off quickly and was swallowed up by the fog, the latter resumed his walk with a quiet laugh.

“A woman, I bet,” he said to himself, as he made his way cautiously along. “Fancy Venus on such a discouraging night as this—the rosy mists enveloping the goddess are charming, but a London fog—ah, bah!”

He stood on the pavement, wondering how he could strike Jermyn Street, and was about to attempt to cross on the chance of his luck guiding him, when suddenly the tall form of a policeman loomed out of the fog and flashed the bright light of a lantern on him.

“Ah, just in time, policeman,” said Ellersby, in a relieved tone. “I’ve got slightly astray in this fog, so you must guide me to the Guelph Hotel.”

“Just across the street, sir,” replied the policeman, touching his helmet, and he stepped off the pavement, followed by Ellersby.

They soon got into Jermyn Street, and went along the left-hand side toward the hotel. Though the fog was still thick, Ellersby in the vanity of his heart thought he could now find the way for himself. He gave the policeman half a crown, and going along a few yards, went up what he supposed were the steps of the hotel. The policeman stood in the same place, ready to render his services as a guide should he be required, when suddenly he was startled by a cry from Ellersby.

The young man had gone up the wrong steps, and was standing on the top when the policeman hurried up, while at his feet was a bundle of what looked like, clothes.

“I say, policeman,” said Ellersby, in an agitated tone, “here is a woman—I believe she’s dead.”

“Dead drunk, more like, sir,” replied the policeman, skeptically, ascending the steps.

“No,” said Ellersby, “I have shaken her and she will not waken. Her face is quite cold—just look!”

The policeman, somewhat startled out of his professional phlegm, turned the light down on the figure of the woman which was lying in the door-way. It was that of a female with a fair face and golden hair, dressed in a long sealskin jacket, and a silk dress, with a fashionably shaped hat on her head. Her well-gloved hands were tightly clinched, and her eyes, wide open, were staring straight up at the horrified discoverers. There did not seem to be any wound or blood about, but her face was swollen, and appeared to be of a dark purple color, with the tongue slightly protruding between the teeth. It was not by any means a pleasant sight, and both men felt a sensation of horror

“She’s dead, sure enough, sir,” said the policeman at length, and blew a whistle. To this call there was an answer, and soon another policeman made his appearance.

“She looks as if she had been strangled,” said Ellersby, who was much upset by the discovery, “her face is so purple and her tongue protruding.”

The first policeman bent down and looked at the neck of the corpse, but could see no marks of violence, so he shook his head.

“Don’t know, sir,” he answered. “It looks a queer sort of case. We’ll take the body to the hospital, and see what the doctors say.”

In the meantime the other policeman had gone for aid, and in a few minutes two more made their appearance with a stretcher, upon which the body was placed and taken to the nearest hospital.

In accordance with a request made by the policeman, Ellersby gave his card, so that he could be called on to appear at the inquest, and then went to the Guelph Hotel, which was only a short distance up the street.

When he arrived he had a glass of brandy neat, for he felt quite sick with the horrible sight he had witnessed, and all through the night his sleep was broken by visions of the beautiful face distorted with agony.

In truth, it was a tragical termination to a night’s pleasure.

Chapter II

The News Of The Day

“HASH” was a weekly paper, owned by one American, edited by another, and conducted on strictly American principles. It mostly consisted of sharp, incisive paragraphs, strongly epigrammatic in their phraseology, and attention was drawn to these by startling sensational headings. The staff of this journal composed two men besides the editor, and there was a good deal of paste and scissors work in connection with the production of a number. As to the name, “Hash,” it requires some explanation.

The word “hash” is used in America to designate a certain dish much in favor with lodging-house keepers in the land of the free, wherein all the unconsidered trifles left over from the six dinners of the week are made into a savory stew to serve for the seventh, and, being highly spiced and deftly concocted, is apt to deceive an inexperienced novice in lodging-house cookery, inasmuch as he deems it a dish formed of new ingredients, a mistaken view, as can be seen from the foregoing explanation.

The proprietor of “Hash,” therefore, did, in a literary sense, that which is often done in a culinary one, for, by stealing items of news from other sources and making them into spicy little paragraphs, he succeeded in producing a very readable paper, much in favor with Londoners.

If there was any new scandal or shocking occurrence, “Hash” was sure to have a bright and witty description of it, and consequently sold capitally. It was in this paper that the following items of interest were told to the public a week after the discovery of the body in Jermyn Street:

“HIGH JINKS IN HIGH LIFE”

“They’re at it again. When will the British aristocracy learn that they must not covet their neighbor’s wife? Another elopement has taken place, which will doubtless end as usual in the Divorce Court. Same old game.

“Last Monday Lady B—left her home and went off with Lord C—, an intimate friend of the lady’s husband. It generally is the intimate friend who is on the racket.

“The guilty couple have sailed in a yacht for foreign climes, and the indignant husband, Sir K—B—is inquiring for their whereabouts. If he calls at our office, we will lend him articles of warfare, and do our best to put him on the track. There is nothing new or original about this comedy—they all do it. It’s

getting a trifle monotonous, and we should suggest something new in the elopement line—a mother-in-law, for instance. Good old mother-in-law!

“When the pursuing husband comes up with the flying lovers, we will give a report of the inquest.”

In the same number of “Hash” a longer article appeared, headed:

Cain was an amateur in the art of murder, but then he had no one to copy from, so his clumsiness must be excused. The crime of Jermyn Street, however, is an admirable example how civilization can improve the difficult art of taking life in a skillful manner. The whole affair is quite dramatic, so we will divide this tragedy into acts, and place it before our readers.

Act I.—Scene, Jermyn Street; foggy morning; half past two.

Enter Spencer Ellersby on his way to hotel from ball. In dense fog he mistakes his hotel—goes up wrong steps; there finds body of dead woman. Utters a cry of horror—cue for policeman, who enters; views body by lantern light—sealskin jacket, silk dress, fair hair, beautiful face—sounds whistle; enter other policemen, who exeunt with body in one direction, while Spencer Ellersby goes off in the other.

Act II.— Scene, hospital. Present, inspector, policeman, and doctor.

Doctor examines body—finds no evidence of violence, except slight discolored mark on one side of neck—opinion of inspector that something, chain probably, has been wrenched off by assassin—is also of opinion that death could not have been thus caused. Doctor says death is caused by blood-poisoning—evidence being, swollen condition of body, protruding tongue, discoloration of skin—thinks it must be poison—makes minute examination—finds on neck slight scratch just on jugular vein, greatly inflamed—is of opinion that assassin has wounded victim in neck with poisoned dagger or knife. Inspector takes description of body for purpose of having hand-bills printed to distribute about city—*exeunt omnes* with body to Morgue.

Act III. is so long that we will drop the dramatic style and tell it in our own fashion. Our special reporter was at the inquest, and the following are the results of his inquiries:

The body of the deceased was examined by the jury, and the following articles of clothing were put in evidence:

- I. Sealskin jacket.
2. Silk dress. Gloves.
3. Under linen (not marked).
4. Hat (brown and blue velvet intertwined, clasped with silver crescent).

Evidence of Spencer Ellersby:

Independent gentleman. Been traveling for some years, and only returned to England a month ago. Was at Countess of Kerstoke’s ball on Monday last—left at a few minutes past two o’clock—walked along Picadilly; met a friend in St. James’s Street—spoke to him for a few moments. When he left him, met policeman, who guided him through fog to Jermyn Street—left policeman and went up steps, thinking it was Guelph Hotel—found there body of deceased—called policeman, and body was taken to hospital. Does not know deceased in any way.

Evidence of Constable Batter:

Corroboration of evidence of former witness.

Evidence of Dr. Fanton:

Examined body of deceased—well nourished. Deceased had evidently been in good health. Should say she had been dead at time of examination about three hours. Death appeared to have been caused by paralysis. The blood was disorganized, therefore he judged deceased had been poisoned, and disorganization was caused by action of virus. The veins were congested—lungs full of blood, congealed, and of a dark color. The face was swollen, and of a dark purple appearance—tongue also protruded. Small wound on neck over jugular vein, in itself not sufficient to cause death. Thought from all appearances that the assassin had inflicted wound with poisoned dagger or knife, hence appearance of body. If a powerful poison, it would act in a very short time, as the blood in jugular vein went straight to the heart. Poison would act in about ten minutes—if deceased had been excited, in even a shorter time.

This closed the evidence.

Inspector said all inquiries had been made to find name of deceased, but no clew had as yet been obtained. The case had been placed in the hands of Detective Dowker, who was present.

Coroner summed up.

Woman had been found dead—proved by evidence of Policeman Batter and Mr. Ellersby.

Poison administered through wound in neck by means of dagger, knife, or lancet. No evidence to show who had inflicted wound.

Jury would please return verdict in accordance with evidence.

The jury consulted for a few minutes and returned verdict. That deceased had come to her death by violence by the hand of some person or persons unknown.

This is the whole statement of the case which we have entitled The Piccadilly Puzzle, and we will now make our own comments thereon.

In the first place, from all appearances, the deceased was evidently a lady and not a street walker. We know that many street walkers are ladies who have fallen into that state of degradation, but this unknown woman was not one of them in our opinion, for as far as we can learn she bore no marks of dissipation which such a life would inevitably cause. Again, if she had been an *habitué* of the streets she would have been known to the police, but none of them were able to identify her. True, her face had been swollen and disfigured by the action of the poison, so that in any case it would have been difficult to recognize the features, still her dress and figure might lead to identification, but no result had been arrived at. The deceased, therefore, to all appearances, was a lady. Jermyn Street is not a particularly busy thoroughfare at any time, and after eleven o'clock it is comparatively deserted, therefore the assassin must have decoyed his victim there to accomplish his crime in safety. He might have had an appointment to meet her, and while talking to her in the door-way, had he embraced her, might doubtless have wounded her with the poisonous weapon. She would only feel a pin-prick, and then he could watch the poison do its work. She would become confused and then giddy, entertaining no idea that she carried death in her veins. Then passing into a comatose state she would sink to the ground in a dying condition. Her companion had then probably left her, satisfied that she could not call out. There seems to have been a great deal of devilish ingenuity about the committal of the crime, and this brings us to the consideration as to the position in life held by the assassin.

We hold that he is a gentleman, or at least an educated man, possibly a medical man, a medical student, or a *dilettante* in toxicology. A common assassin would have decoyed his victim into a house and murdered her in a more brutal manner, by cutting her throat or battering her head with a poker, but this strange assassin, secure in the possession of a weapon more deadly, engages his unhappy victim in confidential talk, and whilst embracing her causes her death in a sure manner. It is a Judas-like crime, the kiss of friendship and the heart of treachery, therefore we say the criminal who possesses these refined and fiendish instincts must be an educated man, and also one who must have no little knowledge of poisons to employ the subtle drug he did. The nature of the poison can not be discovered, as the simple scratch corrupted the blood and there are no local signs to tell what kind was employed. As to the motive of the crime, it may have been love, it may have been jealousy, perhaps robbery, as no money or jewelry were found on the body, and there was a mark on the neck as though a chain had been roughly wrenched off. What we have set forth is mere conjecture, for the assassin may be a woman, but we think this improbable. No woman would have the nerve to commit such a crime in the open street—true, the assassin was favored by the fog, which hid his or her crime behind an impenetrable veil, but still the risk was enormous.

But be the assassin man or woman, there is no doubt we have in our midst a human fiend who, possessed of a deadly weapon, namely, a poisoned dagger, can commit crimes with impunity? A slight scratch given in a certain portion of the body and the victim is doomed. Who is to point out the assassin, unless he or she is actually seen committing the crime. We have not yet heard the end of the Piccadilly Puzzle, but it will take all the acumen and ingenuity of the London detective to trace this secret assassin, and our only dread is lest some other victim may fall before his or her terrible weapon.

But though the assassin of this unknown woman may escape the consequences of this crime, sooner or later he will thirst again for blood, and the second time he may not be so fortunate. Let him remember

“Tho’ the mills of God grind slowly,
They grind exceeding small.”

Chapter III

Dowker—Detective

Mr. DOWKER was a long lean man of a drab color. His hair was thin, of a neutral tint, his eyes a watery blue, and his somewhat large mouth, drawn down at the corners, betokened a lachrymose nature. He wore grayish clothes always a little threadbare, and large thick-soled boots, chosen rather for utility than beauty. His head-gear consisted of a sad-colored soft hat pulled well over his eyes, from under which his scanty hair hung in a depressing manner. In fact, he had a somewhat sketchy appearance, as if he had been outlined and waited to be filled up with color, but this stage of development, which would have turned him into a thing of beauty, was never arrived at, and his general appearance was dismal in the extreme. He wore a beard, that is, several tufts of straggly hair were planted in patches over his face, but did not seem to flourish. He never smiled, and frequently sighed, so that his manners as well as his appearance were not calculated to inculcate cheerful thoughts.

But notwithstanding this unprepossessing exterior, there was no cleverer man in London, and the most dexterous criminal would rather have had any other detective after him than this apparently unpromising thief-catcher. The outward resemblance of a man is not invariably the index of his mind, and the Puritan physiognomy of Mr. Dowker was a very serviceable mask to the acuteness and brilliancy of his intellect. Consequently, when the Piccadilly Puzzle case promised to be such a difficult one to unravel, it was placed in the hands of Mr. Dowker and the whole affair left entirely to him. Dowker was pleased at this tribute to his cleverness, and sighed in an approving manner as he rapidly reviewed all the evidence which had come under the eyes of the police.

In the first place it would be necessary to discover the name of the deceased, and then by finding out the manner of her life, the motive of the crime might be discovered, pointing to the criminal. The clothing was not marked in any way, but on examining the hat, Dowker found from a ticket on the inside that it had been purchased at the shop of Mme. Rene in Regent Street; so, wrapping up the hat in paper, he betook himself to the establishment of that lady, as the first step in the chain of evidence which he hoped to complete by the discovery of the assassin.

Mme. Rene's establishment was one of the smartest in London, and was well known to the feminine world, who were accustomed to pay the exorbitant sums demanded there for goods which could have been bought much cheaper elsewhere, but then they would not have been stamped with Mme. Rene's approval, and that omission was to declare that the article was unfashionable. Mme. Rene's trade mark being thus indispensable, ladies never ventured to go anywhere else if they could possibly manage it, and Mme. Rene flourished greatly.

Dowker entered the shop and asked to see Mme. Rene, to whose presence he was conducted at once, for the detective was well-known there, having been frequently employed by madame in missions of a delicate nature, principally concerning ladies of high rank and diamonds.

Madame herself was short and stout, with a thoroughly English face, and indeed she had been born within the sound of Bow Bells, but took her French name for trade purposes. Her voice was sharp and shrill, and her black eyes bold and piercing—a thorough woman of business, who knew the value of money and time, so wasted neither.

"Well, Mr. Dowker," said madame, when the detective had taken his seat in her private office and closed the door, "what is the matter now? I was just going to send for you."

"What about?" asked Dowker, with a sigh. "More trouble?"

"Yes—Lady Balscombe's run away with Lord Calliston, and she owes me a lot of money, so I want to know the chances of getting paid."

"Any security?" inquired the detective.

"Oh, yes—I'm not such a fool as to lend ladies money without security," said madame, with a shrill laugh. "I've got a diamond necklace, but I think it belongs to Sir Rupert Balscombe—part of the family jewels—I suppose I'd better go and see him."

"I think that would be the wisest plan."

"Humph!" sniffed the lady, frowning, "I don't know. On the one hand he may pay me my money and redeem the necklace, on the other he may kick up a row, and I don't want my dealings in this way made public. I'd have a whole army of husbands down on me—just like men—they go to the Jews themselves to get ready money, and when their wives do a bit of borrowing with their milliners, they make a fuss."

"Why not sell the necklace?"

"That's what I'm going to do as soon as I hear from Lady Balscombe. I suppose she'll be divorced, and marry Calliston—more fool she, for he's a scamp—then she'll want to redeem the necklace quietly; but I don't know where to write to her. Where have they gone to?"

"I hear in a yacht to the Azores," said Dowker, who knew everything; "they'll turn up again, I've no doubt—then you can see her."

“What an idiot she was to give up such a fair position!” said madame, who looked at the whole affair from a purely worldly point of view. “She was nobody when Sir Rupert picked her up, and he gave her everything—she made ducks and drakes of his money—they fought, and the result is she’s gone off with Calliston—a man who is the biggest scamp in town.”

“Yes, I know, got a little crib in St. John’s Wood,” said Dowker, who had no hesitation in talking plainly to this woman, who knew as much about fast life as he did.

“So I hear—never saw his mistress, but hear she’s a beautiful woman—there will be a row when she hears his latest escapade; but he’ll get tired of Lady Balscombe and go back to the St. John’s Wood establishment—they always do.”

“Well, the whole affair will end as usual,” said the detective with a sigh, “in a public scandal and divorce; but I want to see you about this,” and taking the hat out of the parcel, he laid it before madame. It was rather striking-looking—black straw, with brown and blue velvets twisted together and caught on one side with a slender silver crescent.

“Yes, that’s mine,” said madame, glancing at it. “Rather good style, I think. What do you want to know?”

“The name of the person you sold it to.”

“Humph!—rather a difficult question to answer—some one might have bought it and taken it away with them, but if they left an address I’ll soon find out.”

She touched a bell, and a girl appeared.

“Send Miss Brail to me—she’s invaluable,” explained madame to Dowker, when the girl had vanished. “Such a wonderful memory, forgets nothing. I find her useful in my deals with ladies—a milliner’s business is not all bonnets and hats, as we know.”

“It’s more than the world does,” responded Dowker, with as near an approach to a smile as he allowed himself.

Miss Brail made her appearance, and decided the question at once.

“It was sold to a lady about two months ago—somewhere in St John’s Wood,”

“Was she a real lady?” asked Dowker.

“Well, she was more like a servant,” responded Miss Brail, doubtfully; “I should say a lady’s-maid,”

“Was it sent?” asked madame, impatiently.

“Yes—the address is in the book,” answered Miss Brail, and went out to get the book. In a few moments she returned, and announced:

“Lydia Fenny, Cleopatra Villa, St. John’s Wood.”

In spite of his habitual phlegm, Dowker started, on perceiving which, madame dismissed Miss Brail at once.

“Why do you start?” she asked, curiously, when the door had closed.

Dowker sighed in his usual manner, and taking out his handkerchief, twisted it up into a hard ball, a sure sign that he was impressed in some way.

“Cleopatra Villa is Lord Calliston’s place.”

“Oh!” said madame, in rather an amazed tone, “what a curious thing we should have been speaking about him! I suppose this Lydia Fenny is the lady’s-maid there.”

“Was the lady’s-maid,” corrected Dowker.

“What do you mean?”

“If this hat,” touching it, “was sold by you to Lydia Fenny—she is dead.”

“Dead!”

“Yes; the victim of the Jermyn Street murder.”

“What?” Mme. Rene sprung to her feet, greatly agitated.

“I wanted to find out the name of the dead woman in order to get a clew to the perpetrator of the crime,” explained Dowker, rapidly. “This hat was on the head when the body was discovered. It had a mark inside showing it was bought here, so I came here to find out to whom it was sold. You tell me Lydia Fenny, so the logical conclusion is that Lydia Fenny is the victim.”

“It’s all very strange,” said madame, rapidly looking at him with keen eyes, “but it may not be Lydia Fenny at all. Other hats might have been made similar to this one, or Lydia Fenny might have lent or given the hat to another person.”

“There is only one way of finding that out,” said Dowker, wrapping up the hat and rising to his feet.

“And that is?”

“To make inquiries at Cleopatra Villa. Good-day,” and the detective went out, leaving madame transfixed with astonishment.

“Humph,” she said at length. “I wonder if Lord Calliston’s got anything to do with this murder?”

Chapter IV

The St. John’s Wood Establishment

CLEOPATRA VILLA was a pleasant house and a very expensive one, as Lord Calliston found to his cost. But then the presiding deity, by name Lena Sarschine, was very beautiful, and insisted upon having her dwelling fitted up in a corresponding manner, so Calliston gave way, and spent a small fortune on this bijou residence.

Dowker knew a good many of these little paradises with their worldly wise Eves, the existence of whom was not supposed to be known to the polite world, so he felt quite at ease when upon ringing the bell he

was admitted to the garden by a solemn-looking man-servant. He was well acquainted with Calliston's life both public and private—neither side being very reputable—but then, with such advantages of wrongdoing as the world now offers, 'tis hard to be virtuous.

Calliston had come into the title while in his childhood, and, the estate having been well looked after during his minority, he found plenty of money to spend when he came of age, and he certainly did spend it. Horse-racing and yachting were his two principal pleasures, but curiously enough his name was never mixed up with any well-known woman, and few of his friends knew except by hearsay of the divinity who dwelt in Cleopatra Villa. Calliston had fallen in love with her down in the country some years before, and bringing her up to town installed her in the bijou residence, which she rarely left. Occasionally she went to the theater, and sometimes drove in the park, but at such rare intervals that few people knew who she was. Calliston was very jealous of her, and seldom asked his friends to supper; but she was reported by the few who had been thus honored to be a very beautiful woman with charming manners. The general opinion was that he would end up by marrying her, when his entanglement with Lady Balscombe became known, and henceforward he was seen more by that lady's side than in the neighborhood of St. John's Wood.

Dowker, from some mysterious source only known to himself, was cognizant of all this, and had now come down to discover what connection the establishment of St. John's Wood had with the murder in Jermyn Street.

He knew that Calliston had gone off with Lady Balscombe, so said he had a message from him and would like to see Miss Sarschine. The servant showed him into a magnificently furnished drawing-room, where he awaited the appearance of the lady, intending when she entered to ask her all particulars about her maid Lydia Fenny, with a view to discovering the perpetrator of the crime. Being of an inquiring turn of mind, Dowker arose from his seat when the door was closed, and folding his hands behind his back strolled about the room, his lank, gray-clad figure seeming sadly out of place.

It was not a very large apartment, but luxuriously furnished, the walls being hung with pale-green silk draped in graceful folds and caught up here and there with thick silver cords. The carpet, also of a pale-green, was embroidered with bunches of white flowers, and the window-curtains were of soft white Liberty silk. There were two windows on one side in deep recesses filled with brilliantly tinted flowers, white blossoms predominating, and at the end of the room were folding-doors opening into a conservatory filled with ferns, in the middle of which a small fountain splashed musically into a wide marble basin. There were low velvet-covered lounging-chairs all about, tables covered with bric-a-brac and photographs in oxidized silver frames, while here and there on the carpet were skins of bears and tigers. Contrary to the usual custom in drawing-rooms, there was only one mirror, a small oval glass over the mantel-piece framed in pale-green plush. In the corners were high palms and other tropical vegetation, with white marble statues peering from out of their green leaves, and in one corner a handsome grand piano, on the top of which lay a lot of sheet music. The room was illuminated by two or three tall brass lamps with bright green shades smothered in creamy lace, and just over the piano were a number of quaint-looking weapons arranged in a fantastic fashion. Highland broadswords, Indian daggers, and Malay creeses were all grouped round a small silver shield handsomely embossed, and though at first they seemed somewhat out of place against the rich silk hangings, yet when the eyes became accustomed to them the effect was not unpleasant.

Dowker took a leisurely survey of the apartment and then returned to his seat to await the appearance of Miss Sarschine and to think over the curious aspect the Piccadilly case now presented.

His cogitations ran somewhat after this fashion.

The time of the discovery of the body by Mr. Ellersby was about half past two—the medical evidence at the inquest was to the effect that the deceased had been dead about two hours, so allowing a margin for

possible inaccuracies, the crime must have been committed about midnight, at which time there would be a certain amount of traffic through Jermyn Street. But then the spectacle of a man talking to a woman in a door-way of a house would hardly attract much attention, and if the murderer had accomplished his purpose by means of poison there was no doubt the fanciful description given by “Hash” would be tolerably correct. Supposing the assassin to have wounded his victim by means of a poisoned weapon, she would have become confused and giddy, finally passing into a comatose state, in which she would quietly expire. Therefore, there would be no screaming to attract the attention of passers-by, and albeit in any case lying down would have aroused curiosity, yet the fog was so thick on that night that no one would see the position of the criminal and his victim.

Now, the next question was why did Miss Sarschine not make inquiries after her maid—a week had elapsed since the murder, and the girl’s absence for that time would certainly seem unaccountable. On her non-appearance her mistress would watch the papers to see if anything had happened to her. She would then notice the Jermyn Street murder, and from the description given would have no difficulty in recognizing her servant. Since, though she had without doubt become cognizant of the fact that Lydia Fenny was dead, she had not come forward to identify the body, Dowker pondered over the reason she had for this reticence.

“She can’t have committed the crime herself,” said Dowker, in a puzzled tone, “as she would hardly do so in such a public place. But why has she been so quiet? Again, she couldn’t know anything about poisoned weapons. No, she must have some other reason for holding her tongue.”

At this moment his attention was caught by the display of weapons on the wall, and with a short exclamation he walked across the room and looked sharply at them. They were arranged in a fantastic pattern, each side being the same, but here Dowker noticed with much curiosity that one side was incomplete, a Malay creese having been removed. He looked at the other side and there were certainly two arranged crossways, but on the other there was only one. Dowker was startled by this discovery, as it seemed to point to the fact that the crime had been committed by the missing creese. He knew the Malays were a savage nation, and without doubt poisoned their daggers, so the absence of one of these would argue that this had been the weapon used. He gingerly touched the point of a creese with the tip of his finger, and then drew it hastily away.

“It might be poisoned,” he muttered, looking at his finger to assure himself he had not broken the skin. “I wonder if it is—I’d like to find out.”

Glancing hastily round the room to make sure he was alone, he took a creese from the wall on the other side, so that the pattern was now equalized, and trusted to this fact to hide his abstraction of the weapon. Then he took some old letters out of his pocket, and tearing them up into strips carefully swathed the blade of the creese to prevent possible accidents, and slipped the parcel into his breast-pocket.

“I’ll go and see a doctor,” he muttered to himself as he buttoned his coat, “and try the effect of this on a dog; if the symptoms of death are the same, that will be proof conclusive that the missing dagger was used to commit the crime. Once I establish that, I’ll soon find out the guilty party, as it must have been some one in this house, especially as Lydia Penny was a servant here.”

He walked back again to his chair and had just sat down when the door opened and a woman entered. Not at all pretty, medium height, dark hair and eyes, and a sharps active-looking face, which, however, was disfigured by marks of the small-pox. She was dressed in a well-made dark costume and wore a knot of crimson ribbon round her throat. Dowker surveyed this lady carefully, and instantly came to the conclusion that this was a fellow-servant of Lydia Fenny—certainly not Miss Sarschine.

“Hang it,” muttered Dowker, “he wouldn’t make love to that!”

The new-comer advanced as Dowker arose to his feet.

“You want to see Miss Sarschine?” she asked, looking at the detective.

“Yes; have I the pleasure—”

“No; I am not Miss Sarschine, but I can let her have any message you wish delivered.”

“Can not I see the lady herself?”

“You can not; she is out of town.”

“Oh!” Dowker looked rather blank. This then was the reason Miss Sarschine did not come forward to identify the body.

“From whom is your message?” asked the woman.

“From—from—Lord Calliston,” said Dowker, in a hesitating manner.

“That’s impossible,” replied the woman, curtly.

“Why?”

“Because Lord Calliston is away yachting, and Miss Sarschine is with him.”

“Oh, indeed!”

Dowker was beginning to feel rather nonplused, as he was now at a loss for an excuse for his presence, so he tried another plan.

“Do you read the papers?” he asked, sharply.

“Sometimes; not often,” said the woman, somewhat taken aback. “Why do you ask?”

“I have particular reasons for the question.”

“I am not bound to answer your question. May I ask your name?”

“Dowker—detective.”

The woman started at this and looked a little curiously at him.

“What do you want to know?”

“Are any of the servants of this house missing?”

“No.”

“Dear me! Have any been lately dismissed?”

“No; do you allude to any particular servant?”

“Yes; Lydia Fenny.”

The woman started again.

“What about her?”

“She is dead. If you had read the papers you would have noticed the Jermyn Street tragedy. She is the victim.”

“There is some mistake,” said the woman, quietly.

“I don’t think so,” replied Dowker, coolly taking out the hat from the newspaper. “Do you know this?”

At the sight of the hat the woman became violently agitated.

“Yes; where did you get this?”

“It was on the head of the woman who was murdered.” The other gave a cry and staggered back.

“Oh, my God!” she said, under her breath, “what does it all mean?”

“Mean? It means that Lydia Fenny is dead.”

“No!” she cried, vehemently, “not dead.”

“How do you know?”

“Because I am Lydia Fenny.”

Dowker stared at her aghast.

“Yes,” she went on, rapidly, “the hat is mine. How did you find out I was the owner?”

“I went to Madame Rene and she told me you bought it from her. But who was the dead woman?”

Lydia Fenny gave a cry.

“I’m afraid to say—I’m afraid to say. How was she dressed?”

“In a sealskin jacket, a silk dress, and that hat.”

Lydia wrung her hands in despair.

“It must be true,” she moaned; “it is the dress she wore.”

“Who wore?” asked Dowker, in an excited tone.

“My mistress—Miss Sarschine.”

The case seemed to be more mysterious than ever; instead of the maid it was the mistress. Dowker took a photograph of the deceased and gave it to Lydia.

“Who is that?” he asked, eagerly.

“Miss Sarschine,” she replied, quickly. “But what is the matter with her face?”

“Swollen by poison.”

“Poison?”

“Yes. On Monday last she was found lying dead in Jermyn Street, killed by a poisoned dagger.”

“Last Monday night!” said Lydia, with a gasp, “that was the last time I saw her.”

“Look here,” said Dowker, quietly, “you’d better tell me all about it. I am employed in the case, and I want to discover who murdered your mistress; so tell me all you know.”

Lydia Fenny, who seemed to possess strong nerves, sat down and began to speak deliberately.

“I will tell you everything, and help you to bring the murderer of my poor mistress to justice; but I don’t know any one who would have killed her. She lived a very quiet life and had few friends. Lord Calliston came here very frequently, and she was very much in love with him.

Where she came from I don’t know, as I have only been with her about a year, but he often told her he would make her his wife, and she was always imploring him to do so. About three months ago he met some great lady—”

“Lady Balscombe?”

“Yes, that was the name—and fell in love with her. He neglected Miss Sarschine, and she reproached him. There was a lot of trouble and quarreling between them, and Lord Calliston stayed away a good bit. Three weeks ago I went away for a holiday, and when I came back I found my mistress in a terrible state. She had discovered in some way that Lord Calliston had determined to elope with Lady Balscombe and go off to the Azores in his yacht. Miss Sarschine was mad with rage; she said she would kill them both; and then thought she’d play a trick upon Lord Calliston and go off with him instead. This was on Monday last.”

“The time of the murder,” murmured Dowker.

“She went to Lord Calliston’s rooms in Piccadilly and found out from his valet that he intended to leave town that evening for Shoreham, where his yacht was lying, and that Lady Balscombe was to follow him early next morning. So she came back here and, waiting till the evening, dressed herself and put on my hat as less conspicuous than her own. She intended to catch the ten minutes past nine train from London Bridge Station and, go right on board Lord Calliston’s yacht, and insist upon his sailing and leaving Lady Balscombe in the lurch. She went out about seven with that intention, and since then I have heard nothing of her. I thought she had carried out her scheme and gone off with Lord Calliston to the Azores.”

“Did you not hear of the Jermyn Street murder?”

“Yes, casually, but I never thought of connecting it with my mistress, and all the servants here live very quietly, so they would never think Miss Sarschine was the victim.”

“What was she doing in Jermyn Street?”

"I can't tell you. Lord Calliston has rooms in Piccadilly, so perhaps she went there first, and then through Jermyn Street on her way to the station."

"You do not know any one who had a grudge against her?"

"No—no one."

Dowker arose to his feet.

"I will call and see you again," he said; "but meanwhile give me Lord Calliston's address in Piccadilly, and I will find out if Miss Sarschine was at his rooms on that night."

Lydia Fenny, who was now crying, gave the necessary address and followed him to the door.

"One moment," said Dowker, stopping. "Where is the dagger that used to be on the wall?"

Lydia looked round for the weapons and gave a cry of astonishment.

"Two are gone."

"I have the one; but the other—where is it?"

"Miss Sarschine took it down on Monday, and said if Calliston did not take her with him she'd kill him."

"Kill him—not herself?"

"No; she had no idea of committing suicide. What are you going to do with the other?"

"Try it on a dog, and find out if the symptoms of death are the same, then I will know the companion dagger to this was the cause of your mistress's death."

"But who would take it from her and use it?"

"That's what I've got to find out. She must have met some one in Jermyn Street who killed her with it."

"It can't be suicide?"

"Hardly. The wound is in the jugular vein in the neck, so it could hardly have been self-inflicted. Besides, she would not choose a public street to die in."

"When shall I see you again?"

"After I have found out what took place in the Piccadilly chambers on Monday last."

And Dowker departed, very well satisfied with the result of his inquiries.

Chapter V

The Piccadilly Rooms

CALLISTON occupied a suite of rooms in a side street leading off Piccadilly; and very comfortable apartments they were, being luxuriously furnished in the prevailing fashion of the day. His sitting-room was hung with dark-red curtains and carpet to match, and the furniture being of a kind designed to promote ease and comfort, it looked very snug, particularly at night. There was a desk in one corner of the room piled, up with a disorderly heap of papers. Over this were fencing-foils and boxing-gloves, arranged against the wall, and the pictures mostly consisted of photographs of pretty women and paintings of celebrated horses. There was a small table near the fire-place on which lay pipes, cigar-boxes and tobacco-jars, and on the sideboard a spirit stand, which was much in favor with Calliston's friends. A small book-case contained an assortment of French novels, principally of the Zola and Mendes school, and, judging from the shabby appearance of the books, must have been pretty well read. The whole apartment had a dissipated air, and the atmosphere was still impregnated with a faint odor of stale tobacco smoke. Opening off this apartment were a dressing-room and bedroom, and though the whole *ménage* was somewhat limited, yet it made up in quality what it lacked in quantity.

When Calliston was away, his Lares and Penates were looked after by a worthy lady, who rejoiced in the name of Mrs. Povy, an appellation which has in its sound a certain aroma of Pepys' Diary, but Lord Calliston and his friends not being acquainted with the ingenuous pages of the quaint Samuel, were unaware of this, so Mrs. Povy was generally known by the name of Totty. She was elderly, very stout, with a round red face, the tint of which was due to health and not drink, as she seldom imbibed anything stronger than tea. Totty was addicted to a kind of regulation uniform, consisting of a black dress, a huge white apron, and a muslin cap, set coquettishly on the side of her elderly head. She was one of those quaint old motherly creatures who never offend, no matter what they say, and she frequently lectured Calliston on the irregularity of his life, which that noble lord accepted with an amused laugh.

The late Mr. Povy had long since departed this life, and having been what is vulgarly known as a warm man, had left Totty comfortably off, so that lady occupied her present position more from choice than necessity. She had a gruff voice, and her casual remarks had the sound of positive commands, which she found of great use with refractory servants.

Totty learned from the papers that Lord Calliston had gone off to the Azores with Lady Balscombe, and expressed her disapproval of his action in the most emphatic manner to Mrs. Swizzle (a friend of her youth) as they sat over their four-o'clock tea.

"Ah," said Totty, fixing her eyes pensively on the little black tea-pot, "it ain't no good being a reformatory. The way I've talked to him about his goings-on and now look at his goings-off."

"Perhaps he couldn't help himself," said Mrs. Swizzle, who was tall and thin, and spoke in a kind of subdued whistle.

"He never tried to, I'll be bound," retorted Mrs. Povy, wrathfully. "Not as he's always bin after married pussons, for I know there is a gal as he pays for her board and lodging."

"Lor'," whistled Mrs. Swizzle, curiously. "Where?"

"Never you mind," returned Totty, screwing up her mouth. "She's a gal as no decent woman 'ud speak to her—silks and satings and wasting of money—oh, I've no patience with 'em! Kettles is snow in whiteness with gals' morals now."

At this moment there came a ring at the door, and Totty hurrying away to attend to it, Mrs. Swizzle made the best use of her time by eating up the buttered toast as rapidly as she could.

When Mrs. Povy opened the door she was confronted by a lank figure in gray, which was none other than Dowker, come to prosecute his inquiries concerning Miss Sarschine.

“Well?” inquired Totty, gruffly, annoyed at being disturbed, “and what do you want?”

Dowker gazed on the substantial figure before him and sighed.

“A few words with you about Lord Calliston,” he said, softly.

Mrs. Povy shook with wrath.

“I ain’t no spy or gossip,” she said. “And if that is what you want to find out, this ain’t the shop—so walk, out,” and she prepared to shut the door. But Dowker was too sharp for her, and placed his foot inside.

“Wait a moment, my good lady,” he said, quietly. “I don’t mean any harm to Lord Calliston, and what I want to speak to you about is important.”

Curiosity got the better of Totty’s wrath, so after a time she consented to speak to Dowker privately, and to this end led him upstairs to Calliston’s rooms.

“We’re quiet here,” she said, closing the door. “I can’t ask you into my own room, as a perticler friend of mine is drinking tea with me.”

“This will do capitally,” replied Dowker, glancing round the room. “And now, as my curiosity may appear rude and you may refuse to answer some of my questions, I may as well tell you who I am.”

“And who are you?” asked Mrs. Povy, uneasily; “a noospaper or a politics?”

“Dowker—detective.”

Mrs. Povy’s naturally red face became white.

“What’s up?” she gasped. “Has Lord Calliston bin doing anything wrong?”

“No, no,” replied Dowker, soothingly. “I only want to obtain some information about Miss Sarschine.”

“I don’t know that kind of pusson,” said Totty, angrily.

“Never mind if you know her or not,” retorted Dowker, sternly, “but answer my questions.”

Mrs. Povy sniffed and would have refused, but there was something in the detective’s eye which quelled her, so she yielded an ungracious assent.

“When did Lord Calliston leave town for his yacht?”

“About a week ago—on Monday last.”

“Where was his yacht lying?”

“At Shoreham. He went to London Bridge Station to catch the ten minutes past nine train. His yotsh was to leave next morning.”

“Did he go alone?”

“As far as I know,” retorted Totty. “If Lady Balscome went with him you can see it in the papers. I know no more than that.”

“How often did Miss Sarschine call on Monday,?”

“Once, in the afternoon, to see Lord Calliston.”

“Did she see him?”

“No, he was out; so she said she’d call again in the evening.”

“And did she?”

“Yes; but Lord Calliston had gone about eight o’clock to catch his train. I suppose she thought he wouldn’t go till next morning.”

“Did she know he was going to elope with Lady Balscombe?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Did she see any one when she came the second time?”

“Yes, Mr. Desmond, my lord’s cousin.”

“What time was that?”

“About twelve, between eleven and twelve.”

Dowker pondered a little. So she called here to see Calliston just before she was murdered, and saw Desmond. Now the question was, what had Desmond to do with the affair?

“Was Mr. Desmond here on that evening by accident?”

“No. He told me he had come to give Miss Sarschine a message from Lord Calliston.”

“You did not overhear their conversation?”

“Me,” growled Totty, indignantly. “I never listen; but when she was leaving they were having a row.”

“About what time?”

“I think at ten minutes after twelve.”

“Did she go out alone?”

“Yes. Mr. Desmond followed shortly afterward.

“Did he say anything?”

“No, not a word.”

“Dowker felt puzzled. It was evident Desmond had given her a message from Calliston that made her angry, and she left the house in a rage, but then this did not connect any one with a design to murder her. Suddenly he remembered that Ellersby had mentioned that he had met Desmond coming up St. James’s Street a short time before the body was found. Was it possible that he had killed Miss Sarschine and was then coming away from the scene of his crime? Impossible, because the doctor said the woman must have been dead some hours. And yet he might have killed her and gone down St. James’s Street to avert suspicion, and then come up again when he thought the coast would be clear. Unfortunately, he had met Ellersby and then—well, Dowker made up his mind he would go and see Ellersby, find out what he could about the meeting, and afterward call on Myles Desmond. He, perhaps, might give some satisfactory explanation of his interview with Miss Sarschine, and account for his presence after the interview. If he did not, well, it would appear suspicious.

While these thoughts were rapidly passing through his mind, Totty had her eyes fastened eagerly on him.

“Well, now I’ve answered all your questions,” she said, “perhaps you’ll tell me what it all means.”

“Murder!”

Mrs. Povy became quite excited, for she had a keen relish for horrors.

“Lor’! Who’s dead—not Lord Calliston?”

“No. Miss Sarschine.”

“Miss Sarschine!”

“Yes. She was murdered shortly after she left these rooms and after her interview with Mr. Desmond.”

“Oh, he is innocent, I’m sure,” said Mrs. Povy, eagerly. “What on earth should he want to kill her for? Besides, he’s in love with Miss Penfold.”

“Oh, and she, I understand, was going to marry Lord Calliston.”

“I don’t believe she’d ever have married him,” said Totty, disbelievingly; “she’s that fond of Mr. Desmond as never was. Where are you going?”

“To attend to business,” replied Dowker; “and by the way, where does Mr. Desmond live?”

“You ain’t going to arrest him for this murder?” shrieked Totty.

“No — no — there’s no evidence,” retorted Dowker, lightly. “Where does he live?”

“Primrose Crescent, in Bloomsbury,” replied Mrs. Povy.

The detective took the address and went down-stairs, followed by Mrs. Povy.

“You don’t think Mr. Desmond did it, sir?” began Totty, “for a more—”

“I don’t think anything,” said Dowker, putting on his hat. “You’ll hear soon enough what is done.”

As he hurried away Mrs. Povy shut the door and returned to her room, where she implored Mrs. Swizzle to mix her a glass of brandy.

“I’ve ‘ad such a turn,” she wailed, “as never was. Oh, it’s a blessing Povy died afore he saw his wife mixed up with them nasty police.”

Chapter VI

A Successful Experiment

DOWKER walked along Piccadilly, thinking deeply about the curious aspect the case was now assuming. As far as he could make out, Myles Desmond was the last person who saw Miss Sarschine alive, and he having gone out a few minutes after the interview, it seemed as though he had followed her. The only thing to be done was to see Ellersby, and as he was stopping at the Guelph Hotel Dowker went along in that direction. He followed the same path as he surmised the dead woman must have taken, but what puzzled him was the reason she had for going into Jermyn Street.

“After she found out Calliston had gone off with Lady Balscombe,” he muttered, “the most obvious course would be for her to go home, but she evidently did not intend to do so. I wonder if she walked or took a cab? Walked, I suppose. Let me see, it was a foggy night and she got lost, that is the explanation,. But then this man or woman she met; it must have been a friend, as she would hardly have stopped talking to a stranger, unless indeed she asked the way. Lord,” ejaculated Mr. Dowker, suddenly stopping short, “fancy if this murder turns out to be the work of some tramp; but no, that’s bosh; tramps wouldn’t use a poisoned dagger—unless they took the one she carried. Hang it! it’s the most perplexing case I was ever in.”

He had by this time arrived at the Guelph Hotel and sent up his card to Mr. Ellersby. The waiter soon returned with the information that Mr. Ellersby was in and would see him, so he went upstairs and was shown into a sitting-room. At one end near the window sat Spencer Ellersby in a comfortable arm-chair smoking a pipe and reading a French novel. A remarkably unpromising-looking bulldog lay at his feet and arose with an ominous growl as Dowker entered the room.

“Lie down, Pickles,” said Ellersby to this amiable animal, who obeyed the command in a sulky manner. “Well, Mr. Dowker, what do you want to see me about?”

“That case, sir,” said Dowker, taking a seat.

“Oh, of course,” replied Ellersby, shrugging his shoulders, “I guessed as much. I thought I’d be done with the whole affair at the inquest.”

“As far as it then went, sir,” said the detective, quickly; “but I’ve found out a lot since that time.”

“Ah, indeed! The name of the assassin?”

“Not yet, sir—I’ll do that later on—but the name of the victim.”

“Yes? and it is—”

“Lena Sarschine.”

“Never heard of her. Who is she, what is she, and where does she live?”

“She was Lord Calliston’s mistress,” replied Dowker. “I think that answers all the other questions.”

“Hum! A cottage in St. John’s Wood—gilded vice, and all the rest of it. And what was she doing in Jermyn Street that night?”

“I don’t know, sir. That’s one of the things I’ve got to discover.”

“Well, what else have you found out, and how did you manage to acquire your information?”

“That was easy enough,” said Dowker, confidentially. “I’ll just tell you all, sir, for I want you to give me some information.”

“Delighted—if I can.”

“As to the finding out, sir. The hat worn by the dead ‘un had a ticket inside, showing it was made by Madame Rene, of Regent Street. I went there, and found out it had been sold to a woman called Lydia Fenny, of Cleopatra Villa, St. John’s Wood. I, thinking Lydia Fenny was the victim, went there and found that she was alive, and had lent the hat to her mistress last Monday night.”

“Curious thing for a maid to lend her mistress clothes,” said Ellersby, smiling. “It’s generally the reverse.”

“I think she did it for a disguise, sir,” explained Dowker, “because Miss Sarschine went to Lord Calliston’s chambers in Piccadilly.”

“What for?”

“To get information concerning his elopement with Lady Balscombe.”

“The deuce!” said Ellersby, in astonishment. “This is becoming interesting.”

“It will be still more so before it’s done. I found out from Lydia Fenny that Miss Sarschine discovered her lover was about to elope with Lady Balscombe, so went to his chambers to prevent it. She arrived too late, as Lord Calliston had gone down to Shoreham by the ten minutes past nine train from London Bridge Station. Instead of Lord Calliston she found Mr. Desmond, his cousin, and I suppose he told her she was too late, for there was a row royal, and she left the chambers at twelve o’clock or thereabouts. Desmond followed shortly afterward, and that was the last seen of her alive, as far as I know.”

“Why? Didn’t Miss Sarschine return home when she discovered Calliston had gone off with Lady Balscombe?”

“I can’t tell you, sir; nor what took her to Jermyn Street, unless she got lost in the fog, or there was another man in the case.”

“Eh? Nonsense! what other man could there have been?”

“Well,” said Dowker, slowly, “there was Mr. Desmond.”

“Pshaw!” said Ellersby, springing to his feet. “What rubbish! I’ve known Myles Desmond all my life, and he’s not the fellow to commit such a crime!”

“Yet I understand before you found the body you met Mr. Desmond coming up St. James’s Street?”

Spencer Ellersby swung round in a rage.

“Confound you!” he said, in an angry tone, “do you want me to give evidence implicating my friend?”

Dowker did not lose his temper.

“No; but I want to know what took place between you on that night.”

“Simply nothing. He was in a hurry, and seemed annoyed at my stopping him, but that was only natural on such a beastly night. I asked him to call on me here, and also asked where Calliston was; he told me yachting, and then he went off. Nothing more took place.”

“Humph!” said Dowker, thoughtfully. “It was curious he should have been there at the time.”

“I don’t see it at all. If you ask him, I’ve no doubt he’ll give you a good account of himself. Besides, he had no motive in murdering Miss Sarschine; he is in love with Miss Penfold.”

“I don’t say he deliberately murdered her,” said Dowker, quietly, “but there might have been an accident. You see this?” taking the Malay creese out of his pocket and unwrapping the papers.

“Yes, a dagger. Is that the—” said Ellersby, recoiling.

“No; but I shrewdly suspect it’s the neighbor to it. Down at Cleopatra Villa there were a lot of these sort of things hanging against the wall, arranged in a kind of pattern. One side of the pattern was incomplete, and I found out from Miss Fenny that Miss Sarschine had taken one of the daggers with a view to trying it on Calliston if he did not give up his design of eloping. She was mad with rage or she would never have thought of such an idea. Well— can not you guess what follows? she has the dagger with her—doubtless shows it to Myles Desmond during her stormy interview with him, and leaves the house in a rage. He follows her to try and take such a dangerous weapon from her—meets her in Jermyn Street—struggles to get it, and in the scuffle wounds herself; consequently she dies, and Myles Desmond keeps quiet lest he should be accused of murder.”

“Seems possible enough,” said Ellersby, resuming his seat, “but I doubt its truth. However, the only thing to be done is to see Desmond, and find out what took place at Calliston’s rooms. But tell me, what are you going to do with that other dagger?”

“I want to find out if it’s poisoned,” said Dowker, handling it gingerly. “If it is, it will show that the other weapon was the one with which the crime was committed.”

“Will you allow me to look at it?” said Ellersby, stretching out his hand.

“Certainly,” replied the detective, and rising to his feet, he walked across to Ellersby to give him the dagger. Unluckily, however, just as he was handing it to him he stepped on Pickles, who with a growl of rage made a bite at his leg. In the sudden start Dowker let go the dagger, which fell upon Pickles’ back, inflicting a slight wound.

The detective gave a yell as the bulldog gripped him, but Ellersby pulled Pickles off, and Dowker, hobbling to a chair, sat down to nurse his wounded leg. It was not much hurt, however, as Pickles had got a mouthful of trousers instead of flesh.

Alarmed as Dowker had been by the accident, he was not more alarmed than Ellersby, who sprung to his feet with an oath and rang the bell sharply.

“Damn it!” he said, furiously, “if that dagger is poisoned the dog will die! How could you be such a fool?”

“You’d be the same, sir, if a devil of a dog bit you,” said Dowker, sulkily, not at all displeased at having the question of the dagger tested at once. “I’m very sorry.”

“Sorry be hanged!” said Ellersby, savagely. “I wouldn’t lose that dog for a hundred pounds. “Here,” to the waiter that entered, “send for a doctor at once— don’t lose time, confound you!” at which the astonished waiter vanished promptly.

Meanwhile all this time Pickles was lying down trying to lick his wound, and evidently wondering what all the fuss was about. Dowker watched him intently, and in a short time saw the dog was becoming drowsy. Ellersby picked up the dagger and was about to hurl it furiously back to Dowker, when the detective jumped up in alarm.

“For God’s sake, don’t!” he cried; “I believe it is poisoned—look!”

Ellersby looked, and saw Pickles trying to rise to his feet. He evidently knew something was wrong with him, for he commenced to whine, and a glaze came over his eyes. His master knelt down beside him and dried the blood off the wound with his handkerchief, but it was too late. The dog opened his jaws once or twice, tried to rise to his feet, staggered, and fell over on his side, to all appearances dead. On seeing this, Ellersby jumped to his feet and began to rage.

“The devil take you and your case!” he said, furiously; “you’ve killed my dog.”

“I’m very sorry, sir,” said Dowker, crossing and picking up the dagger; “it was an accident.”

“An expensive accident for me,” said Ellersby, bitterly; “at all events it proves the dagger was poisoned.”

“Yes,” said Dowker, in a delighted tone, “so the crime must have been committed with the other weapon, for if one was poisoned, it’s only common sense to assume the other was.”

He had apparently quite forgotten the loss sustained by Ellersby, for there was no doubt the bulldog was quite dead.

That gentleman looked at him in disgust.

“Oh, go to the devil,” he said, irritably, “and thank your stars I don’t make you pay for this.”

Dowker murmured something about an accident, then, slipping the fatal dagger, once more covered in paper, into his pocket, he took his departure. On his way down he met the doctor coming up, and once outside, he was beside himself with joy at having proved the creese to be poisonous.

“And now,” he said, “I’ll call and see Mr. Desmond.”

Chapter VII

A Literary Aspirant

PRIMROSE CRESCENT lies just off Tottenham Court Road, and though a short distance away the great thoroughfare is full of noise and bustle, everything is comparatively silent in this crescent. Milk-carts are the most frequent vehicles, and occasionally a rakish-looking hansom makes its appearance, while ragged mendicants sometimes pay the neighborhood a visit, and troll out lively ditties in gin-cracked voices. The

organ-grinder is not an unknown personage either, and his infernal machine may frequently be heard playing the latest music-hall melodies as he glances round in search of the humble brown.

The houses are somewhat dismal; tall—very tall, built of dull-hued red brick, with staring windows and little iron balconies, meant for show, not use. No Bloomsbury Juliet can lean over the ornamental iron-work and whisper sweet nothings to Romeo; if she did, Juliet would forthwith be precipitated into the basement, where dwells the servant of the house in company with the domestic cat, and the love-scene would end within the prosaic walls of a hospital

There are a good many boarding-houses to be found in Primrose Crescent, where city clerks, literary aspirants, and coming actors are to be found. A touch of bohemianism pervades the whole street, and perhaps in the future, neat tablets let into the walls of the houses will inform posterity that Horatio Muggins, the celebrated poet, and Simon Memphison, the famous actor, resided there. But fame is as yet far from the quiet street, and the dwellers therein are still struggling upward or downward as their inclinations may lead them.

Mrs. Mulgy was the landlady of one of these boardinghouses, and by dint of hard work and incessant watchfulness managed to keep the wolf from the door; but, alas! the wolf was never far off, and it took all Mrs. Mulgy's time to keep him at his distance. The basement of her mansion was devoted to the kitchen, the presiding deity of which was a pale, thin-looking servant, with a hungry eye and a deprecating manner, who answered to the name of Rondalina, which sounded well and cost nothing. She used to ascend from the kitchen like a ghost from the tomb, wander about the house to minister to the wants of the boarders, and then return to the grave, or rather the kitchen, once more. A rising musician occupied the ground-floor, who went to bed very early in the morning, and got up very late in the afternoon. He was writing an opera which was to make his name, but meantime devoted his spare moments to instructing small children in the art of music, which tried his temper greatly, and rendered him morose. On the first-floor dwelt Mr. Myles Desmond, whose occupation was that of a journalist, and, being good-looking, smartly dressed, and well connected, was Mrs. Mulgy's trump-card in the way of lodgers. Above was the habitation of a maiden lady, by name Miss Jostler, who called herself an artist, and painted fire-screens, Christmas cards and such like things with conventional landscapes and flowers. In the attics lived several young men who, having no money and plenty of spirits, formed quite a little colony of bohemians, being principally concerned with theatrical and literary life.

It was a queer place altogether, and the individuals were a kind of happy family, except that they did not mix much with one another, but they all paid their bills comparatively regular, and so Mrs. Mulgy was content.

It was to this place that Mr. Dowker took his way the day after his interview with Ellersby. As he had seen Mme. Rene, Lydia Fenny, Mrs. Povy, and Mr. Ellersby all in one day, and obtained valuable information from each, he thought he would defer his call on Mr. Desmond, and spent the night in arranging all the evidence he had acquired during the day. The result was very satisfactory to himself, and he wended his steps toward Mr. Desmond's abode in a very happy frame of mind.

It was about eleven o'clock, and Myles Desmond sat in his sitting-room scribbling an article for a society journal, called "Asmodeus," published for the express purpose of unroofing people's houses, and exposing to the world their private life. Not that Desmond did such a thing, he would have scorned to violate the sanctity of private life, but he wrote for all kinds of magazines and papers, and as "Asmodeus" paid well, he now and then wrote them a smart essay on existing evils, or a cynical social story.

He was a tall young man, with reddish hair and mustache, a clever, intellectual face, perhaps not actually good-looking, but a face that attracted attention, and when he chose to exert himself, he could talk excellently on the current topics of the day. His breakfast lay on the table, untouched, he having only

swallowed a cup of coffee, and then pushed the table-cloth aside to make room for his papers. Dressed in an old smoking suit, he leaned one elbow on the table occasionally, ran his fingers through his hair and wrote rapidly, only stopping every now and then to relight his pipe. He was engaged in writing an essay on “Cakes and Ale,” and satirizing the vices of a new school of novelists, who, in their desire to become pure and wholesome, had gone to the other extreme and taken all the masculine vigor out of their productions.

Myles looked worn and haggard, as if he had been up all night, and every now and then his swift pen would stop as he pondered over some thought. There was a ring at the bell below, but he took no notice. This was followed shortly afterward by a knock at the door, and Rondalina glided in, saying a gentleman wished to see him.

“Show him in,” said Myles, not looking up. “Wonder who it can be,” he muttered, as Rondalina went out. “Hang those fellows, they won’t even let me have the morning to myself.”

When the door opened he glanced up and saw that the new-comer was not a friend, but a tall, gray man whom he did not know. Myles paused with his pen in his hand, and waited for his visitor to speak, looking at him interrogatively meanwhile.

Mr. Dowker—for of course it was he—closed the door carefully, and advancing to the table, introduced himself in two words:

“Dowker—detective!”

If Myles looked haggard before, he looked still more so now. His face grew pale, and he shot an inquiring glance at his visitor, who stood looking, mournfully at him.

Then, throwing down his pen in an irritable manner, he arose to his feet.

“Well, Mr. Dowker?” he said, a little nervously. “You want to see me?”

“I do—very particularly,” replied Dowker, coolly taking a seat, “and believe you can guess what it’s about.”

Myles drew his brows together and shook his head.

“No. I’m afraid I can’t,” he said, coldly.

“The Jermyn Street murder.”

Myles gave a kind of gasp, and turned away toward the mantel-piece, ostensibly to fill his pipe, but in reality to conceal his agitation.

“Well,” he said, in an unsteady voice, and what have I to do with it?”

“That’s what I want to know,” said Dowker, imperturbably.

Myles Desmond glanced keenly at him, lighted his pipe, resumed his seat at the table, and leaning his elbows thereon, stared coolly at the detective.

“You speak in riddles,” he said, quietly.

“Humph!” answered Dowker, meaningly, “perhaps you can guess them.”

“Not till you explain them more fully,” retorted Desmond.

It was evidently a duel between the two men, and they both felt it to be so. Dowker wanted to find out something which Desmond knew, and Desmond on his side was equally determined to hold his tongue. The cleverest man would win in the end, so Dowker began the battle at once.

“The woman who was murdered was your cousin’s mistress, Lena Sarschine.”

“Indeed!” said Desmond, with a start of surprise. “May I ask how you know?”

“That is not the point,” retorted Dowker, quickly. “I have satisfied myself as to the identity of the murdered woman—you were the last person who saw her alive.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes, at Lord Calliston’s chambers, between eleven and twelve o’clock on Monday night.”

“Who says I saw her?”

“Mrs. Povy.”

Myles Desmond’s lip curled.

“You seem to have obtained all your information beforehand,” he said, with a sneer; “perhaps you’ll tell me what you want to know from me?”

“First—did you see Miss Sarschine on Monday?”

“Yes! I did, but in the afternoon, not at night.”

“But Mrs. Povy said she called on you there, on Monday night.”

“Mrs. Povy is mistaken; I did not see her.”

“Did you see any one at that time?”

“That’s my business.”

“Pardon me,” said Dowker, ironically, “but it’s mine also. You had better answer my questions or you may find yourself in an uncommonly awkward fix.”

“Oh! so you mean to accuse me of Lena Sarschine’s murder.”

“That depends,” replied Dowker, ambiguously. “Tell me what you did on Monday night.”

Myles thought a moment, and seeing his perilous position resolved to answer.

“I went to the Frivolity Theater, then to the office of the newspaper, ‘Hash,’ and afterward—”

“Well?”

“I went along to Lord Calliston’s rooms, about half past ten.”

“I thought so. And why did you go there?”

“Not to commit a crime,” retorted Desmond, coolly, “but only to arrange some papers for my cousin—he had gone down to Shoreham by the ten minutes past nine train.”

“Did you see him off?”

“No.”

“Then how did you know he went?”

“Because he said he was going.”

“With Lady Balscombe?”

“I know nothing about that,” said Desmond, coldly, “he went—as far as I know—by himself. I was at his chambers to arrange his papers, and after I had done so I left.”

“Did no one call while you were there?”

“Yes,” reluctantly.

“A lady?”

“Well, a woman,” evasively.

“Miss Sarschine?”

“No, it was not Miss Sarschine, that I can swear to.”

“Then who was it?”

“No one having anything to do with this case—a friend of my own.”

“I must know the name.”

“I refuse to tell you.”

Both men looked steadily at one another, and then Dowker changed the subject.

“Why did you quarrel with your friend?”

“That is my business.”

“Oh! and what time did your friend leave?”

“Shortly after twelve.”

“And you?”

“Went a few minutes afterward.”

“You came home?”

“After a time—yes.”

“Where did you go in the meantime?”

“I refuse to answer.”

“Then I can tell you—down St. James’s Street.”

Myles Desmond uttered an oath, and asked sharply:

“Who told you that?”

“No one; but Mr. Ellersby met you coming up shortly after two o’clock.”

“Yes, I did meet him there.”

“Why did you not go straight home?”

Desmond seemed to be trying to think of something—at last with an effort he said:

“I was afraid my friend might get lost in the fog, and followed her down St. James’s Street, then I lost sight of her, and after a time came up St. James’s Street, where I met Ellersby. I did not see my friend again, so I came home.”

“You did not see your friend after she left Lord Calliston’s chambers?”

“No, I did not!” said Desmond, with a sudden flush.

“That’s a lie,” thought Dowker, eying him sharply, then he said out aloud:

“You have answered all my questions except the most important ones.”

“I have answered all I intend to answer.”

“Then you refuse to give me the name of the woman whom you saw on Monday night?”

“Yes!”

“Mrs. Povy is certain it was Miss Sarschine.”

“As I said before, Mrs. Povy is mistaken.”

“Do you know I can arrest you on suspicion?”

“You have no grounds to go upon.”

“You were the person who last saw the deceased alive.”

“Pardon me. I deny that I saw the deceased at all on that night.”

“Mrs. Povy can prove it.”

“Then let Mrs. Povy do so.”

Dowker grew angry—the self-possession and coolness of this young man annoyed him—so he resolved for the present to temporize.

“Well, well, Mr. Desmond, I suppose you can give a good account of yourself on that night?”

“Certainly, to the proper authorities.”

“Good-morning,” said Dowker, and walked out of the room. When he got into the street he strolled along a little way, thinking deeply.

“Confound him! He knows something,” he said to himself, “and refuses to tell. I won’t lose sight of him, so I must get that little devil, Flip, to look after him. I’ll look him up now, and start him at once.”

Just as he was about to put this resolve into execution he saw the door of the house he had just left open, and the servant came out with a piece of paper in her hand, which the keen-eyed detective saw was a telegraph form.

“Halloo!” said Dowker, to himself. “I wonder if Desmond’s sending that. I’ll just find out.”

Rondalina went along to the little post-office at the end of the street, and turned in. Shortly afterward, Dowker followed, and, going to the counter, took a telegraph form as if to send a telegram. The girl was attending to some one else, and Rondalina, with the telegram opened out before her, was waiting her turn. Dowker dexterously leaned across her to get a pen, and glanced rapidly at the telegram, which he read in a moment:

“PENFOLD,
“% Balscombe, Park Lane,
“Meet me Marble Arch three o’clock,
“MYLES.”

Dowker sent a fictitious telegram, and then strolled leisurely out.

“Hum!” he said, thoughtfully. “That’s the girl he wants to marry. I wonder what are his reasons for seeing her to-day. I’d like to overhear their conversation. Can’t go myself, as he knows me, so Flip will be the very person.”

And Dowker departed to find Flip.

Chapter VIII

A Juvenile Detective

FLIP was a small dried-up-looking boy, born and brought up in a London slum. He had no parents—at least, none that he could remember, and had he been asked how he came into existence, he would

probably have answered Topsy-like that he “growed.” His mother and father had both deserted him at an early age, giving him nothing to remember them by, not even a name, so he was thrown on the world a squalling brat. Nevertheless, he managed to get along somehow to the age of fifteen, at which period of his life Dowker chanced on him, and his prospects began to improve.

Dowker, underneath his drab exterior, concealed a kind heart, and, having met Flip one night in the rain, had taken compassion on the miserable morsel of humanity, and given him a cup of coffee to warm him and a roll of bread to satisfy his hunger. Flip was so touched at this disinterested kindness that he attached himself with doglike fidelity to the detective, and tried to serve him to the best of his small ability.

Having had to fight his way in the world, Flip had developed a wonderful sharpness of intellect at a very early age, and Dowker turned this hunger-educated instinct to good account, for he often set the little urchin to follow cabs, run messages, and do other small matters which he required. Flip performed all these duties so well and promptly that Dowker began to take an interest in him, and set to work to cultivate this stunted flower which had sprung up amid the evil weeds of the slums. He had a meeting place appointed with Flip in Drury Lane, and, whenever he wanted him, went there to seek him out. Flip listened to his patron’s instructions carefully, and, having a wonderfully tenacious memory of an uncivilized kind, he never forgot what he was told. In return for services rendered, Dowker gave him a shilling a week, and on this small sum Flip managed to exist, with occasional help from casual passers-by.

Dowker did not give him an education or dress him in decent clothes, as he thought this would spoil his instinct and appearance, both of which were essentially useful in their own particular way, so Flip remained ragged and ignorant; but it was his patron’s intention to give him a chance of rising in the world when he grew older.

He had no name except Flip, and the origin of that was a mystery—no clothes except a pair of baggy trousers and a tattered shirt—and his home was a noisome den in the purlieu of Drury Lane. His language was bad, so was his conduct; yet this small scrap of neglected humanity had in him the makings of a useful member of society. There are many such in London, but the Christians of England prefer to help the savages who don’t want them to the savages who do. The Chickaboo Indians have existed for centuries without morals, religion, or clothes, and can very well exist for a longer period while the ragged denizens of the most civilized city in the world are being relieved.

Every one in London knows Drury Lane, that quaint, dirty narrow street leading to the Strand. The very name conjures up the shades of Siddons and Garrick, and the neighborhood is sacred to the Dramatic Muse. Who has not seen that weather-stained picturesque house from the window of which gossipy old Pepys saw Mistress Nell Gwynne leaning out and watching the milkmaids go down to the Strand Maypole for the pleasant old English dance. But, alas! Nell and the milkmaids with their quaint chronicler have long since passed into the outer darkness— even the Maypole has become but a memory, yet the grim tumble-down house still remains in the dirty lane.

‘Tis a far cry from Charles to Victoria, and the merry milkmaids with their clinking pails have given place to frowsy old women, battered-looking young ones, and a ragged mixture of men and boys. Not an unpicturesque scene, this dilapidated-looking crowd, slouching over the rugged stones, and an artist would have stopped and admired them, but Dowker was not an artist, so looked not for scenic effect, but for Flip.

Flip was sitting considering at the edge of the pavement with his feet, for the sake of coolness, in the gutter, and his eyes fixed on three dirty pennies lying in his own dirty brown palm.

“ ‘Am,” said Flip, deliberating over the expenditure of his fortune. “ ‘Am an’ bread, an’ a swig o’ beer—my h’eye, wot a tuck h’out I’ll ‘ave. ‘Ere,” suddenly, as Dowker touched him with his foot, “what the blazes are you kicking? Why I’m blest if ‘taint the guv’nor.”

He jumped to his feet, and slipped the pennies into the waistband of his trousers, which did duty with him for a pocket.

“Wot’s h’up, guv’nor?” he asked with a leer. Flip’s leer was not pleasant—it had such an unholy appearance, “more larks—my h’eye, I thort I’d never twig you agin. ‘Ave you bin h’over the gardin-wall arter a prig?”

“Hold your tongue,” said Dowker, sharply. “I want you to do something for me—are you hungry?”

“Not much,” said Flip, coolly, “but I don’t mind a ‘am san’wich.”

Dowker cast a sharp glance at the ragged little figure walking beside him.

“Where have you been getting money?” he asked

“My h’eye, it’s a rigler game,” said Flip, rubbing his grimy hands together, as they turned into a ham and beef shop, “I’ll tell yer all—”am I’ll ‘ave, an’ bread.”

Being supplied with these luxuries at the expense of Dowker, Flip stuffed his mouth with a liberal portion and then began to talk.

“Larst Monday,” he began.

“Ha,” said Dowker, suddenly recollecting the date of the murder, “yesterday?”

“No, the Monday afore,” said Flip, “it were at nite, h’awful foggy, my h’eye, a rigler corker it were. I was as ‘ungry as a bloomin’ tyke an’ couldn’t find you nohow, so h’up I goes to Soho to see h’old Jem Mux, you know’s ‘im, guv’nor, the cove as keeps the Pink ‘Un.”

“Same game,” said Flip, “e gives me sumat to eat when I arks it, so I goes h’up to cadge some wictuals; I gits cold meat, my h’eye, prime, an’ bread an’ beer, so when I ‘ad copped the grub, I was a-gitten’ away h’out of the bar when a swell cove comes in—lor’ what a swell—fur coat an’ a shiny ‘at. Ses ‘e to the gal, ses ‘e, ‘Is that ‘ere sparrin’ comin’ orf this evenin’?’ ‘Yes,’ says she, ‘in the drorin’-room.’ ‘Right you h’are,’ ses ‘e, ‘I want to see it afore I leave Hengland. I was a-goin’ down to my yotsh,’ ses ‘e, ‘but I’ll put it orf till to-morrow as I wants to see this set-to,’ then ‘e twigs me an’ ses ‘e, ‘Are you cold?’ ‘Yes,’ ses I.’ ‘Ungry?’ ‘Not much,’ ses I. ‘ ‘Ere’s some tin for you, you pore little devil,’ an’ I’m blessed if ‘e didn’t tip me a sov, so I’ve bin livin’ like a dook on it since I sawr you—nice game, ain’t it, guv’nor?”

During this recital Dowker had not paid much attention till Flip spoke of the yacht, then he suddenly pricked up his ears, for it dawned on him that this unknown benefactor of Flip’s might possibly be Lord Calliston.

“Monday night he was going out of town,” murmured Dowker, “but he was always a sporting blade, so perhaps he stopped for this fight and then went down next morning. I wonder where he met Lady Balscombe. Ah, well, it’s nothing to do with the murder at all events; but I’d like to know if he really did leave town on the night.”

Then he turned to Flip.

“Did the swell see Jem Mux?” he asked, sharply.

“Rather,” said Flip; “an’ Jem ‘e called ‘im my lord, so ‘e must ‘ave been a blooming blinding toff.”

“My lord,” repeated Dowker, thoughtfully. “Oh! no doubt it was Lord Calliston. I wonder if he’s had anything to do with the death of his mistress; it’s curious if he stopped in town all night that he didn’t go back to his chambers. About what time was this?” he asked, aloud.

“About nine,” said Flip, promptly, “or harf parst.”

“Nine,” echoed Dowker; “then in that case he must have stayed in town all night, as the last train to Shoreham is about half past. I’ll look into this business, but meantime I want to find out Desmond’s little game.”

Flip had now finished his meal and was waiting impatiently for instructions from his chief.

“Wot’s h’up, guv’nor?” he asked, his black beady eyes fixed on the detective.

Dowker glanced at his watch.

“It’s about two,” he said, replacing it, “and I want you to meet me at the Marble Arch about a quarter to three.”

“Wot for?”

“To follow a lady and gentleman and overhear what they say,” said Dowker. “I’ll show you whom I mean. Don’t lose a word of their conversation, and then repeat it all to me.”

“I’m fly,” said Flip, with a wink, and then this curiously assorted pair departed, Dowker to his office for a few minutes, and Flip to wend his way to the rendezvous at the Marble Arch.

Chapter IX

The Language Of Love

MAY PENFOLD was a very pretty girl, tall and fairhaired, with a pair of merry blue eyes, and a charming complexion. Her parents died when she was young and left her to the guardianship of Sir Rupert Balscombe, who certainly fulfilled his trust admirably. He had her well educated both intellectually and physically, so when she made her *début* in London society she was much admired. An accomplished musician and linguist, a daring horsewoman and a kindly disposition, it was no wonder that she was much sought after; but when, added to these gifts, it was also discovered that she possessed twenty thousand a year in her own right, she became the catch of the season, and many were the attempts made by hard-up scions of noble houses to secure her hand in marriage.

But alas, for the contrary disposition of womankind, she would have none of the gilded youth but fixed her affections on Myles Desmond, a poor Irish gentleman, with nothing to recommend him but a handsome face, a clever brain, and a witty tongue. In vain Lord Calliston asked her to be his wife; she coolly refused him, telling the astonished nobleman that neither his morals nor his manners were to her liking, and informed Sir Rupert that she intended to marry Myles Desmond.

The baronet was furious at this declaration, and as May was under age and could not marry without her guardian’s consent, he forbade Myles the house, and ordered his ward not to speak to him. But see how the duplicity of love can circumvent the watchfulness of guardians. May and Myles met secretly in the park, at garden-parties, and at balls, whenever they chose, and so cleverly did they manage their meetings that Sir Rupert never for a moment suspected the truth. He wanted his ward to marry Calliston, but when that fickle young man ran off with Lady Balscombe he changed his tone altogether, and had May been

clever enough to have taken advantage of his dismay, he would doubtless have consented to her union with Myles despite the disadvantages of the match. Sir Rupert was paralyzed at the scandal caused by his wife's elopement.

He was deeply in love with her, and having known Calliston from his boyhood, it had never entered his head that such a thing could happen. He was a very proud man, and when he discovered the elopement he shut himself up in his library, refusing to see any one. The guilty pair had gone to the Azores, and knowing that sooner or later they would return to England, he awaited their coming with the intention of divorcing his treacherous wife and punishing her seducer.

Sir Rupert having taken up this position, May was left a good deal to herself, and as the whole affair caused such a scandal she, as a ward of Balscombe, refused to go out into society until some definite settlement of the matter had been arrived at. She had written several times to Myles asking him to see her, but on some plea or another he had always refused to come, much to her bewilderment. When she received his telegram asking her to meet him at the Marble Arch, she was delighted; and slipping out of the house in Park Lane, went to keep her appointment.

At this time of the year there were comparatively few people in town who knew her; nevertheless, for the sake of safety, she dressed herself plainly in a dark dress and wore a thick veil which concealed her face. Thus disguised she had no fear of being recognized, and arrived at the rendezvous about five minutes past three o'clock. There she found Myles waiting for her, and they walked together into the park, feeling perfectly secure from interruption or detection. But they did not know that they were being shadowed by a small ragged boy who was apparently playing idly about them.

Dowker recognizing Myles pointed him out to Flip and departed at once, lest he should be seen by Desmond; so when Flip saw May join the young Irishman he knew it was the couple whose conversation he was there to overhear, and followed them promptly.

Myles and Miss Penfold walked a short distance into the park and then seated themselves for awhile—two ordinary-looking figures not calculated to attract much notice, for, the day being cold, Myles was muffled up in a large ulster, and May's dress, as previously noticed, was not conspicuous.

Flip sat down on the grass at the back of them, apparently engaged in spelling out a dirty bit of newspaper, but in reality drinking in every word the lovers uttered.

They were continuing a conversation begun when they first met.

"Does this man suspect you?" said May, evidently referring to Dowker.

"I'm afraid so," he replied, gloomily, "and I can not open my mouth to defend myself."

"Because my only defense would be an explanation of the events of that night, and I can not explain."

He remained silent, at which the girl turned pale.

"Is there any reason—strong reason?"

"Yes"

"Is that reason—a woman?"

Myles bowed his head.

Miss Penfold grew a shade paler and laughed bitterly.

“A pleasant reason to give me,” she said, with a sneer. “I have given up all else for your sake, because I thought you loved me, and you—you—talk of another woman to me.”

“This is nonsense,” he answered, impatiently. “There is no love in the case; it simply involves the breaking of a promise given to a woman, and you would be the last to ask me to do that. Can you not believe in my honor?”

“Can I believe in any man’s honor?” she replied, sadly.

“That depends who the man is,” answered Myles, quietly. “It is simply a case of Lovelace over again:

“ ‘I would not love thee dear so much,
Loved I not honor more.’

It is absurd—quixotic—ridiculous—to talk about honor in these days, I grant you, but unfortunately I inherit loyal blood, and—well, I must ask you to trust me till I can speak.”

“And you will speak?”

“Yes; if it comes to the worst,” he replied, with a slight shiver.

The girl gave him her hand, which he took and pressed slightly. So thus, mutely, they made up their quarrel.

All the foregoing conversation about honor was Greek to Flip, who, after some cogitation, came to the conclusion it was a scene out of a play. But now they began to talk on a subject more suited to his comprehension.

“May,” said Myles, “I want you to tell me all that Lady Balscombe did on—on that night.”

“The night when she eloped?”

“Yes.”

“Let me see,” said May, knitting her pretty brows, “we went to a ball—to Lady Kerstoke’s.”

“At what time?”

“Between nine and ten.”

“And what time did you leave?”

“Very early—about half past ten; in fact, we were there only a few minutes. Lady Balscombe said she had a headache and went home. You know our house is only a few doors away. I expect she only went there to avert suspicion as to her elopement.”

“What happened when she came home?”

“There was a woman waiting to see her in her boudoir.”

“A woman?” repeated Desmond; “who was she?”

“I don’t know; I didn’t even see her. She saw Lady Balscombe and then left the house, between eleven and twelve.”

“How do you know?”

“My maid told me,”

“And what time did Lady Balscombe leave?”

“I don’t know. I did not see her again that night. She went to bed because of her headache, and, I suppose, departed early in the morning to catch the train to Shoreham.”

“Where was Sir Rupert all this time?”

“He had been down in Berkshire, but arrived some time before twelve—he and Lady Balscombe had quarreled lately and occupied different rooms. Besides, he went off to his club on arriving in town, so he would not know of her flight till the morning.”

“Did she leave a letter for him?”

“I suppose so; but why do you ask all these questions?”

“Because I want to save my neck, if possible. The woman who was murdered is said to be Lena Sarschine, whom I saw during the day. I saw a woman in Calliston’s rooms on the same night, whom the detective thinks was the same person. Now, between the time I left the chambers and the time I met Spencer Ellersby, I was wandering about the streets, and, as I spoke to no one, I can not prove an *alibi*. Ellersby met me coming up St. James’s Street, and the scene of the crime was not far off, so, if I am arrested, circumstances will tell very hard against me. Nobody will believe my assertion that I did not see the dead woman that night, and I can not prove it without breaking my promise.”

“I see what you mean; but what has Lady Balscombe to do with it?”

“Simply this: I am anxious to find out if Calliston really left town on that night, because I want to know if he had anything to do with the death of his mistress. He left his chambers to catch the ten minutes past nine train from London Bridge; but did he catch it? I think not, because he would not have left town without Lady Balscombe, and from your own showing, she did not leave her house till early on Tuesday morning. So I think Calliston must have remained in town at some hotel, where she joined him, and they went down to Shoreham by the first train in the morning.”

“But you don’t think Calliston killed this woman?”

“No, I don’t think so,” he answered, thoughtfully. “I really don’t think so, but I would like to have all his movements on that night accounted for. As for myself, I am in a very awkward position, for, if arrested, I can not extricate myself from it till Calliston returns.”

“Why?”

“Because till his yacht comes back I can not prove my innocence.”

“But you are innocent?”

“Yes; can you doubt me?”

“I was certain of it.”

“I hope the jury of twelve good and lawful men will be as certain,” he replied, grimly, as they walked away.

Flip followed them at a distance, but only caught scraps of conversation which seemed to him to be about trivial matters. So, with all the conversation he had heard in the park indelibly inscribed on his brain, Flip darted away, to give his patron an accurate report and thus add another link to the chain which was gradually encircling the murderer of Lena Sarschine.

Chapter X

The Missing Link

FLIP, having a wonderfully tenacious memory, did not forget the conversation he had overheard between Myles and Miss Penfold; so going to his patron's office, he repeated it in due course to Dowker. The result was that the detective became much exercised in his mind over the whole affair. He could not understand Desmond's refusal to tell the name of the woman he saw on the night of the murder. True, Desmond denied it was Lena Sarschine, but then his denial went for nothing, as he would do so to save himself from suspicion. Mrs. Povy said Lena Sarschine had been there between eleven and twelve, and it was unlikely she would be wrong, seeing how well acquainted she was with the appearance of the dead woman. But then, judging from the drift of Desmond's remarks, his refusal to speak was dictated by a desire to screen the honor of a woman. If so, it could not have been Lena Sarschine, for she had no honor to lose, and his refusal to speak would be a piece of quixotism, which he, as a man of the world, would be one of the first to recognize. At this moment, a sudden thought flashed across Dowker's mind—could it have been Lady Balscombe herself who had the interview with Desmond? Here, indeed, would be a strong motive for Desmond to keep silence, as the visit of a lady to a bachelor's rooms at night would endanger her reputation. Lady Balscombe had, it is true, flung reputation to the winds, but on Monday night it would not have been too late to save her, so if she had seen Desmond, he might have tried to persuade her to give up the elopement, and failed.

“I think I see it all,” said Dowker, musingly. “She was to have met Lord Calliston on that night to go down by the nine train, but went to the ball first to avoid suspicion. He got tired of waiting for her, and went off to The Pink ‘Un. She would have let him know her plans by telegram, and called at his rooms after the ball to explain. He was away and did not get the telegram, so when she arrived at the rooms she found Desmond. He tried to persuade her to go back; she refuses, and after some angry words goes out in a rage, stays all night somewhere, and goes down to Shoreham in the morning, but all this does not explain Lena Sarschine's death. It can't be possible that Lady Balscombe killed her—no, it can't be that—there is no connection between the two,”

He ran over in his mind the principal items of the conversation as reported by Flip, and his thoughts took a new turn.

“Lady Balscombe did not leave her house in Park Lane till after midnight, so that would not have given her time to be at Lord Calliston's chambers and have an interview with Desmond, therefore it can not have been her. I wish I could find out the name of the woman who saw Desmond, and I'd also like to know the name of the woman who saw Lady Balscombe on that night, and discover what was the exact time Lady Balscombe left the house—let me see.”

He took out his note-book, and wrote the following memoranda:

1. To find out name of woman who called at Calliston's chambers on Monday (night of murder) between eleven and twelve.

This could only be proved by Myles Desmond himself, as Mrs. Povy asserted it was Lena Sarschine, and Desmond denied it; therefore there was a deadlock—affirmation and denial.

Memo.—To see Desmond and find out name of visitor.

2. To ascertain appearance, and, if possible, name of woman who visited Lady Balscombe on night of murder, as it might possibly have some bearing on case.

A servant in Lady Balscombe's house could probably furnish this information.

Memo.—To try and find out said servant.

3. To discover exact time Lady Balscombe left her house on Tuesday morning, also ascertain subsequent movements. This would also have to be discovered through a servant—as to finding out subsequent movements, discover, if possible, train she left London by, and what she did between time of leaving her house and leaving by train.

Memo.—These discoveries must be left to future developments of case.

4. To find out what has become of missing dagger.

Possibly this might be discovered in Desmond's possession.

Memo.—Search his room—secretly—employ agent—say Flip.

5. To search out early life of Lena Sarschine!

Might be discovered in a small measure from Lydia Fenny, who, being confidential maid, might possibly have gathered information from casual remarks.

Memo.—To see Lydia Fenny.

Having thus arranged his plan of action satisfactorily, Dowker turned his attention to Number Four of his memoranda, and proceeded to tell Flip what he wanted him to do.

"You see this?" asked Dowker, showing Flip the dagger he had abstracted from Cleopatra Villa.

Flip intimated by a vigorous nod of his head that he did.

"I've got an idea," explained Dowker, smoothly, "that a dagger very similar to this is to be found in the possession of Mr. Myles Desmond, the gentleman you saw today, so I want you by some means to get into his rooms and find out if it's there."

Flip screwed his face into a look of profound thought, and then smiled in a satisfied manner.

"I'll do it, guv'nor," he said, sagaciously.

"How?" asked Dowker, curious to learn how this juvenile detective proposed to deal with the problem.

“I’ll doss on his doorstep to-night,” said Flip, “and when he comes ‘ome do a ‘perish’—you knows”—in an explanatory tone—“say I’m dyin’ for victuals—’e’ll take me inside, and when I gits there you leave me alone, guv’nor, I’m fly!”

“Well, you can manage it as you please,” said Dowker. “But don’t you prick yourself with it, as it’s poisoned; and, Flip, if you bring me this dagger without him knowing about it, I’ll give you half a sov.”

“Done, guv’nor!” said Flip, joyfully, and bidding adieu to his patron, went off to get something to eat and prepare his plan of action.

It was now about six o’clock and very dark, the sky being overcast with clouds. Soon it began to rain steadily, and the streets became sloppy and dismal. Flip drew his rags round him, shivered a little in a professional manner, and then, going off to a cook-shop he patronized in Drury Lane, had a hunch of bread and a steaming cup of coffee for a small sum.

Being thus prepared for his work, Flip wiped his mouth, and, sallying forth into the dirty lane, took his way up to Bloomsbury, combining business with pleasure by begging on the road.

Turning into Primrose Crescent, he soon found the house he wanted, and curling himself up on the doorstep, waited patiently for chance to deliver Myles into his designing hands.

The rain continued to pour down steadily, and as it was now dark, Flip could see the windows all along the street being lighted up. The gas-lamps also shone brightly through the rain, and were reflected in dull, blurred splashes on the pavements. Occasionally a gentleman would hurry past with his umbrella up, and a ragged tramp would slouch along singing a dismal ditty. It was dreary waiting, but Flip was used to such times, and sat quite contented, thinking how he could lay out his promised half sovereign to the best advantage, till his quick ear caught the sound of footsteps inside.

This was his cue, so he immediately lay down on the wet stones and commenced to moan dismally. Myles opened the door, and would have stumbled over him, for he was right in front of the entrance after the fashion of the clown in the pantomime, only he caught sight of him in time.

“Halloo,” said Myles, crossly, “what the deuce is the matter?”

Flip made no reply to this, but groaned with renewed vigor, upon which Desmond, who was a kind-hearted man, bent down and touched the ragged little figure.

“Are you ill?” he asked, gently.

“Oh, Lor’—awful—my insides,” groaned Flip, pressing his dirty hands on his stomach. “Ain’t ‘ad a bit for days.”

Myles was doubtful as to the genuineness of this case as he knew how deceptive tramps are, but as the poor lad did seem in pain, and it was raining heavily, he determined to give him the benefit of the doubt.

“Can you rise?” he asked, sharply; “if so get up and come inside. I’ll give you something to do you good.”

With many groans and asseverations of extreme pain Flip struggled to his feet, and aided by Myles went inside, up the stairs, and was at last safely deposited on the hearth-rug in front of the fire, where he lay and groaned with great dramatic effect.

“I’ll give you some hot port wine,” said Myles, going to the sideboard and taking out a glass and a bottle, “so I’ll have to go down-stairs and get some hot water—you wait here.”

Flip groaned again and gyrated on the floor like a young eel; but when the door had closed behind his benefactor, he sprung to his feet and took a survey of the room.

It was a large and lofty apartment, with a pair of folding-doors on one side, which, being half open, showed Flip that the other room was a bedroom.

There was a sideboard in the sitting-room and near this a writing-table, toward which Flip darted and commenced to turn over the papers rapidly with the idea of finding the dagger hidden underneath.

Nothing however rewarded his efforts, and though he looked into the sideboard, examined the book-case and lifted up the covers of the chairs, he found no sign of the weapon.

“Must be in the bedroom,” thought Flip, scratching his head in perplexity, and wondering how he could get in, when suddenly it occurred to him that he had not examined the mantel-piece.

There was not a moment to be lost, as Myles might return at any moment, so in a second Flip scrambled up on a chair, and was eagerly looking among the ornaments on the mantel-piece.

There was a mirror framed in tarnished gold, and in front of this a tawdry French clock under a glass shade, two Dresden china figures simpering at one another, and two tall green vases at each end. Flip saw nothing of what he wanted till he peered into one of these vases, when he saw something looking like steel, and drew forth a slender shining blade with no handle.

Wonder if this is what the guv’nor wants,” he said to him, turning it over gingerly, “t ‘ain’t got no ‘andle.”

He thought for a moment, and then, as he had been so lucky with one vase looked into the other, and found a cross handle—he joined the two and they fitted perfectly. Being certain this was what Dowker wanted, he was thinking how he could take it, when he heard Myles ascending the stairs. Jumping down he hid the broken blade and the handle securely among his rags, being very careful not to prick himself as he remembered Dowker’s warning about the poison, then he lay down on the hearth-rug again, and was groaning loudly when Myles entered with the hot water.

“Feeling bad?” asked Myles, sympathetically, pouring out some port wine.

“Awful,” groaned Flip, feeling not a bit of compunction at the treacherous part he was playing. “It’s cold I think—cold and ‘unger.”

“Here, drink this,” said Desmond, kneeling down beside him, and giving him the steaming tumbler. “It will do you good.”

“Thanks, guv’nor,” said Flip, gratefully, feeling if the broken blade was all safe, “it ‘ull warm me up.”

Desmond lighted his pipe and sat watching the ragged little Arab drinking the hot wine, never thinking for a moment that he was nourishing a viper—a viper that would turn and sting him. Honest himself, he never suspected wrong-doing in others, and while succouring this outcast he did not know he was doing an evil thing for himself.

After Flip had finished the wine he declared he felt better, and with many asseverations of gratitude took leave of his benefactor.

“Poor little devil!” said Desmond as he closed the door and saw the ragged little urchin scudding away into the darkness, “he seemed very bad—well I’ve done one good action, so perhaps it will bring me a reward.”

It did, and the reward was that next morning Myles Desmond, of Bloomsbury, journalist, was arrested for the murder of Lena Sarschine.

Chapter XI

Another Complication

THOUGH he had arrested Myles Desmond, Dowker was by no means certain that he had got hold of the right man. Judging from the conversation reported by Flip, Desmond himself appeared to have strong suspicions about Calliston, and Dowker in his own mind became convinced that there was some connection between the elopement of Lady Balscombe and the murder of Lena Sarschine.

He wanted to find out the name of the woman who visited Lady Balscombe on the night of the murder, for a sudden thought had presented itself that this unknown visitor might have been Lena Sarschine. But the idea seemed absurd, for a woman of such a character as Lord Calliston’s mistress could hardly have the audacity to visit Lady Balscombe.

“And yet,” pondered Dowker, “I don’t know—these two women both loved the same man, and a free-lance like Lena Sarschine would not hesitate for a moment in slanging any woman who took her man away—but why did not Lady Balscombe kick up a row and order her to leave the house?—I’m hanged if I can get to the bottom of this!”

At length Dowker decided that the best thing to be done would be to find out from some servant of the Balscombe household all that took place subsequent to Lady Balscombe’s departure. First, however, he decided on seeing Lydia Fenny and finding out if Lena Sarschine had let fall any hint of calling on her rival.

Lydia Fenny received the detective eagerly, as she evidently loved her mistress and wanted to do all in her power to further the ends of justice. As there was no time to be lost, Dowker plunged at once into the subject matter of his visit.

“Did Miss Sarschine state on the night of her murder where she was going?” he asked.

“Yes,” replied Lydia, “as I told you before she said she was going to Lord Calliston’s rooms.”

“Nowhere else?”

“Not to my knowledge.”

“Humph! she did not make any remark that would lead you to believe she was going to Lady Balscombe’s?”

“Lady Balscombe’s!” echoed Lydia, in astonishment, “why what would she want to do there?”

“I don’t know, but I think she was there on that night,” and Dowker detailed to Lydia the conversation overheard by Flip, at the conclusion of which she said:

“I suppose you want to find out from the servants if Miss Sarschine was there?”

“Yes; do you know any of the servants?”

“One—Lady Balscombe’s maid—Anne Lifford.”

“Oh!” said Dowker; in a satisfied tone. “Can you ask her to come along here and see you? I can find out all I want to know from her.”

“I dare say I can get her to come here to-day, as her mistress being away she can not be busy.”

“Good!” replied the detective, “send for her at once. I will wait here.”

“Very well,” said Lydia, and was leaving the room when Dowker called her back.

“Could you let me see your mistress’s private desk?” he asked.

“What for?” demanded Lydia, rather taken aback.

“Because I want to look over her papers; from them I can gather her past life, and find out if any one had a motive in killing her.”

“Oh!” said Lydia, after a pause, “you don’t think then that Mr. Desmond is guilty?”

Dowker shrugged his shoulders.

“How can I tell?” he replied; “as far as I can see he had no motive, and one does not commit murder for sport—but come, show me her desk.”

Lydia looked at him doubtfully.

“I don’t know if I ought to let you see her private papers.”

Dowker laughed in a subdued manner.

“Why not?” he said, lightly, “she is dead, and we want to find out who killed her—looking at her papers can not do any harm and may save the life of an innocent man.”

Lydia Fenny hesitated no longer, but leading the detective to the end of the drawing-room showed him a recess wherein was placed a very handsome desk of the ordinary office character. Dowker tried some of the drawers.

“Locked,” he said, quietly. “Have you the keys?”

“No, she had them with her.”

Dowker made up his mind to commit a burglary.

“Bring me a-chisel.”

“At once,” replied Lydia Fenny, going, “and I’ll also send for Anne Lifford.”

She left the room, and Dowker sitting down in front of the desk examined it carefully. It was one of those table desks with a knee-hole in the center and a row of drawers on each side. At the back were a number of pigeon holes containing papers, and these Dowker examined, but found nothing more than bills and blank sheets of paper.

“Whatever private papers she’s had,” said Dowker, on discovering this, “are in these drawers.”

Lydia Fenny arrived with the chisel and a small hammer, both of which she handed to Dowker, telling him at the same time she had sent for Anne Lifford. Dowker nodded carelessly and began to force open the drawers.

After half an hour’s hard work this was the result of his labors:

First, a bundle of old letters addressed to “Miss Helena Dicksfall, Post Office, Folkestone,” signed F. Carrill.

Second, a photograph of a handsome white-haired old man, on the back of which photograph was written, “Your loving father, Michael Dicksfall.”

Third, a photograph of Lena Sarschine, taken in a white dress with a tennis racket in her hand.

Dowker examined the photographs carefully, and then coolly read all the letters, of which there were about ten. After doing this, he turned to Lydia Fenny who had been watching him all the time, and said:

“I can read a whole story in this: the name of your mistress was not Lena Sarschine, but Helena Dicksfall—she lived at Folkestone with her father, Captain Michael Dicksfall, and a lady she calls Amelia, whom I take to be her sister. Lord Galliston went down to Folkestone, saw her and fell in love—all these letters show how he conducted his intrigue, which he did under the name of Frank Carrill. He loved Miss Dicksfall but did not wish to marry her; at last he persuaded her to run away with him, and at last she did so. Ashamed of her position, she changed her name to Lena Sarschine so as to conceal her identity. The portrait of the old gentleman is that of her father, Captain Michael Dicksfall, and this one is herself.” Lydia Fenny listened in silent amazement to the way in which he had pieced the story together, and then taking the portraits in her hand she looked at them long and earnestly.

“Yes,” she said, at length, laying down the photographs with a sigh. “It is Miss Sarschine, but it must have been taken some time ago, for I never saw her in that dress, and I have been with her for about a year.”

Dowker was about to make a reply when the door opened and a woman entered. Tall, thin, with a pale face, dark hair, and an aggressive manner, dressed in a green dress, and bonnet to match.

“Oh!” observed Lydia, on seeing her, “is this you, Anne?”

Dowker looked sharply at the new comer, whom he now knew to be Lady Balscombe’s maid, and she returned his gaze with a look of suspicion.

“Well, sir,” she said, at length, in a rather harsh voice, “I hope you’ll know me again.”

Dowker laughed, and Lydia hastened to introduce him to Miss Lifford, who, being an extremely self-possessed young person, took the introduction very calmly, though she manifested some surprise when she heard Mr. Dowker’s calling.

“This gentleman,” said Lydia, when they were all seated, “wants to ask you a few questions.”

“And for what?” asked Miss Lifford, indignantly, “my character I hope being above policemen’s prying.”

“I’m not a policeman,” explained Dowker, smoothly, “but a detective, and I want to know all that took place on the night your mistress eloped.”

“Are, your employed by Sir Rupert?” asked Anne, grandly, “because though I knows they fought bitter, yet wild bulls won’t drag anything out of me against my mistress, she being a good one to me.”

“I don’t want you to say anything against your mistress,” replied Dowker, mildly, “but I am investigating this case of murder.”

“Murder!” echoed Miss Lifford, in a scared tone, “who is murdered—not Lady Balscombe?”

“No,” said Lydia, bursting into tears, “but my poor mistress, Miss Sarschine.”

“A person of no repute,” sniffed Anne, coldly.

“Leave her alone,” said Lydia, passionately. “She’s dead, poor soul, and even if she was not married, she was better than Lady Balscombe, carrying on with Lord Calliston.”

“Oh, indeed, miss,” said Anne, rising indignantly. “This is a plot, is it, to mix up Lady Balscombe with your mistress? I won’t have anything to do with it.”

Dowker caught her wrist as she arose, and forced her back into her chair.

“You’ll answer what I want to know,” he said, sternly, “or it will be the worse for yourself.”

Upon this Miss Lifford began to weep; and demanded if she was a slave or a British female, to be thus badgered and assaulted by a policeman. At last, after some difficulty, Dowker succeeded in making her understand that what he wanted to know was not detrimental to her mistress, upon which she said she would tell him what he required. So Dowker produced his note-book and prepared to take down Miss Lifford’s evidence.

“First,” asked Dowker, “do you remember the night when Lady Balscombe eloped?”

“Not being a born fool, I do,” retorted Miss Lifford, sharply. “Such goings-on I never saw.”

“Can you tell me all that took place on that night?”

Miss Lifford sniffed thoughtfully.

“There was a ball they was going to.”

“Who were going to?”

“Lady Balscombe and Miss Penfold. They did go, and left shortly before ten, but before I had time to turn round, they were back again, as Lady Balscombe said she had a headache.”

“Oh, so I suppose she went to bed?”

“Then you suppose wrong,” retorted Anne, triumphantly, “for there was a pusson waiting to see her.”

“A lady?” asked Dowker, eagerly.

“I don’t know,” retorted Miss Lifford, sharply. “She had a veil on.”

“Can you describe her dress?”

Miss Lifford thought a moment, while Lydia bent forward anxiously to hear her answer.

“A hat trimmed with blue and brown velvet, and a sealskin jacket.”

Lydia Fenny sunk back in her seat with a groan.

“Oh, my poor mistress!”

“Your mistress!” echoed Miss Lifford, turning sharply. “It could not have been Miss Sarschine who called on that night.”

“But I’m certain it was,” said Dowker.

“What impertinence!” muttered the virtuous Anne.

“Never mind,” said Dowker, sharply, “go on with your story.”

Miss Lifford sniffed indignantly and resumed:

“Lady Balscombe returned at half past ten and went up to her dressing-room, where this—this lady was waiting for her. Miss Penfold went to bed. I don’t know how long the lady was with my mistress, as I was told that my mistress would not require me again that night; but I waited about in case I should be wanted, and saw the lady leave the house shortly after eleven.”

“Miss Sarschine?”

“Yes—at least, the lady in the sealskin jacket, and you say it was Miss Sarschine, so I suppose it was. I then went to Lady Balscombe’s room, but found the door locked, so as I thought she had gone to bed I went downstairs to get my supper. When I came upstairs again about twelve, the door was still locked, so I went to bed.”

“Lady Balscombe could not have gone out in the meantime?”

“No, because I asked the footman if any one had gone out or come in, and he said no one.”

“She could not have gone out without attracting the notice of the servants, I suppose?”

“No, they would have recognized her at once. I think she waited till every one was in bed and then went off to meet Lord Calliston.”

“But you are sure she did not leave till after twelve?”

“I’d swear it anywhere,” returned Miss Lifford impatiently.

"In that case," muttered Dowker, "it could not have been Lady Balscombe who saw Mr. Desmond at Lord Calliston's chambers, so it must have been Lena Sarschine."

"Do you want to know anything more?" asked Miss Lifford, icily.

"Yes. Tell me, what was Lady Balscombe like?"

Miss Lifford laughed contemptuously.

"Why, don't you know?" she replied. "You ought to, as she was one of the beauties of the season. Her portrait was all over the place. Why," catching sight of the photograph on the study-table, "you have one."

Dowker handed her the photograph.

"Do you say that is Lady Balscombe?"

"Yes, certainly."

"What nonsense!" said Lydia, "why, that is Miss Sarschine."

"I never saw Miss Sarschine," retorted Miss Lifford, "but I know that's Lady Balscombe."

"I never saw Lady Balscombe," replied Lydia, angrily, "but I know that's Miss Sarschine."

Dowker looked from one to the other, and then slipped the photograph into his pocket along with the letters and the other photograph.

"There's only one way of settling this," he said, quietly, "I'll call on the photographer and ask him who it is."

He gave Anne Lifford some money, and then left the house wrapped in thought.

"This is a new complication," he said to himself, "this resemblance—they must be very like one another if their maids mix them up like this—and then Lena Sarschine calling on Lady Balscombe, I wonder if there can be any relationship between them—not likely—a lady of title, and a woman of light character—well," finished up Dowker, philosophically, "I think the best thing for me to do is to discover as much about Lena Sarschine's previous life as possible, and to do this, I'll run down to Folkestone, and look up Captain Michael Dicksfall."

Chapter XII

Family History

MR. DOWKER was not a man to let grass grow under his feet, so he went straight to the photographer whose name was on the back of the portrait found in Lena Sarschine's possession, and ascertained without much difficulty that it was that of Lady Balscombe.

"Now, what the deuce was that portrait doing in her desk?" he muttered, as he left the gallery, "and why should Lydia Fenny mistake it for her mistress? I wish I could get a picture of Miss Sarschine."

But he could not manage this, for, according to Lydia Fenny, Miss Sarschine would never consent to have her portrait taken, so that he had no means of learning if there was such a wonderful resemblance between the two women, except by personal description, which was not by any means satisfactory.

Under these circumstances there was only one thing to be done—see Captain Dicksfall, the father of Lena—so putting a few things together Dowker caught the afternoon train to Folkestone from Charing Cross.

Dowker duly arrived at Folkestone and took up his abode in an hotel in the Sandigate Road, where he ordered himself a pleasant little dinner and made the acquaintance of a fatherly old waiter who knew every one and everything.

Barbers have the credit of being most notorious gossips, videlicet Figaro, and the barber in “The Arabian Nights,” but, as a matter of fact, they are not worse than waiters, who generally hear everything that’s going on in their locality, and, being of a garrulous nature, do not keep their knowledge to themselves.

This waiter at the Prince’s Hotel rejoiced in the name of Martin, and, hovering about Dowker, armed with a napkin and a pint bottle of Heidsieck, managed to satisfy that gentleman’s curiosity concerning the existence of Captain Michael Dicksfall.

“Yes, sir—know him well, sir—by sight, sir,” he said, brimming the empty glass with champagne. “H’old gentleman, sir—bin in the army—’ad two daughters.”

“Two daughters?” repeated Dowker, eagerly.

“Yes, sir—Miss Amelia and Miss Helena, sir—twins—as fine-looking gals as you ever saw, sir—tall, ‘andsome, and golden ‘air.”

“Oh, indeed!” replied Dowker, indifferently. “And are they living with Captain Dicksfall?”

“No, sir,” said Martin, gravely. “You see, sir, Miss Helena fell in love with a gent who was stopping at the Pavilion, sir, and went off with him.”

“What was his name?”

“Don’t know, sir. He called himself Carrill, but they do say it was not his right name.”

“Humph!”

Dowker pondered a little over this. It was as he had thought after reading the letters. Lord Calliston had masqueraded at Folkestone under the name of Carrill, and had inveigled Helena Dicksfall away from home, and kept her in St John’s Wood as “Lena Sarschine.”

“And the other young lady,” he asked, “Miss Amelia?”

“Oh, she made a good match, sir,” replied Martin. “Married Sir Rupert Balscombe, sir, about a year ago. But I did ‘ear, sir, as ‘ow she ‘ad bolted last week, sir, with Lord Calliston—same blood, sir; it will come out,” and Martin departed to attend upon an important customer.

“Same blood,” repeated Dowker, musingly. “I wonder if he knows it’s the same man? Calliston evidently had a *penchant* for the family, for there seems to be no doubt that Miss Sarschine and Lady Balscombe

were sisters. So he kept one and made love to the other! Queer—deuced queer! Well, I think I had better look up Captain Dicksfall.”

He finished his wine, and putting on his hat, went out into the cool evening and strolled leisurely along the Leas, first having taken the precaution of putting Dicksfall’s address in his pocket.

There were a great number of people on the Leas, and that pleasant promenade was crowded with youth, beauty, and fashion. Charming girls in charming dresses, well-dressed men, happy-looking boys, and here and there a shaky-looking invalid, formed the greater part of the assembly, so that Dowker found a good deal of amusement in watching the passers-by. The lift was hard at work lowering people to the beach below or taking them up to the higher level, and the pier was full of gayly dressed idlers, who looked like pygmies from the heights above. Very pleasant and amusing to an unoccupied man, but Dowker being down on business, and not pleasure, turned away from the pleasant scene and went up past Harvey’s statue toward the heart of the new town.

He had no difficulty in finding Captain Dicksfall’s cottage, which was a comfortable-looking place with a small garden in front. A neat maid-servant admitted him into a dusky passage, and from thence showed him into a small drawing-room, at the end of which, near the window, Captain Dicksfall lay on a sofa, looking out on to the quiet street. A haggard, pale face, worn by suffering, but which had once been handsome. He lay supinely on the sofa in an attitude of utter lassitude, covered by a heavy rug, and his slender white hands were toying with a book which was lying on his lap.

He turned fretfully when Dowker entered, and spoke in the querulous voice of an invalid.

“What is it, my good man?” he said, peevishly. “Why do you come and disturb me at this hour? My doctor has ordered complete rest, and how can I get it if you trouble me?”

“Selfish old chap,” thought Dowker, but without saying a word he took his seat near the invalid and commenced to talk.

“I am sorry to trouble you, sir,” he said, respectfully, “but I wanted to see you about your daughters.”

“My daughters!” echoed Captain Dicksfall, angrily. “You are making a mistake, I have only one—Lady Balscombe!”

Dowker felt disappointed. Only one daughter! If so, Lena Sarschine could be no relation of Lady Balscombe, and his theory about the possible motive for the committal of the Piccadilly crime would fall to the ground. But then the name, Helena Dicksfall—the portrait of the old gentleman before him. It must be true.

“I understood you had two daughters, sir, Lady Balscombe and Miss Helena Dicksfall?”

“Who the devil are you to intrude yourself into my private affairs?”

Dowker came at once promptly to the point.

“My name is Dowker. I am a detective.”

Captain Dicksfall struck his hand angrily down on the pillow.

“Sent by Sir Rupert, I presume?” he said, with a sneer. “He wants to get a divorce, and you have come to me for evidence. I know nothing—my daughter was always a good daughter to me, and if Sir Rupert had

treated her well, this elopement with Lord Calliston would never have taken place. He is to blame—not she.”

“I do not come from Sir Rupert,” said Dowker, coldly, “but from Scotland Yard.”

“About what?”

“The death of your other daughter.”

Captain Dicksfall started up with a groan, and stared wildly at Dowker.

“Good God! Is Helena dead?”

“Who is Helena?” asked Dowker, stolidly.

“My daughter—my daughter.”

“I thought you said you’d only one, sir.”

The sick man turned away his face.

“I had two,” he said, in a low tone, “but one, the eldest, ran away with some scamp called Carrill. Since then I have heard nothing of her, so I always say I have only one.

Dowker thought for a few moments. It was a very delicate position to occupy, and, feeling it to be so, for a moment he was doubtful as to how to proceed.

“Captain Dicksfall,” he said, at length, “I know I am only a common man and you are a gentleman; it is not for such as me to speak to you about your private affairs, but this is a matter of life or death to a human being, and, if you hear my story, I am sure you will not refuse to help me by telling me what I want to know.”

Dicksfall was looking at the detective with a somber fire burning in his unusually bright eyes, then with a sigh he lay down and prepared to listen.

“Tell me what you wish,” he said, languidly, “and, if possible, I will do what you require.”

Whereupon, Dowker told him the story of the Jermyn Street murder, the elopement of Lady Balscombe, and the reasons he had for believing that the two incidents were connected in some mysterious way. He also informed him of the arrest of Myles Desmond, and of the doubts he entertained concerning his criminality.

At the conclusion, Dicksfall was silent for a minute, then turned toward the detective, and clasped his thin fingers nervously together.

“I am a proud man,” he said, with a touch of pathos, “and do not care about telling the world, my private affairs; but in a case like this I think it is only right I should put myself aside for the sake of clearing the character of an innocent man. What do you wish to know?”

“Was Lena Sarschine your daughter?”

For answer Dicksfall pointed to a small table near at hand, upon which was a morocco frame containing two portraits. Dowker took them to the window and looked at them.

“Both of the same lady?” he asked.

Dicksfall smiled faintly.

“You are not the first who has been deceived,” he said, with a sigh. “No! One is my daughter Helena, who, from your story, I believe to be Lena Sarschine, and the other is Amelia, Lady Balscombe—twins.”

Dowker examined the photographs closely, and was astonished at the likeness, which was further aided by both of them being dressed exactly alike.

“It is wonderful,” he said, and no longer marveled at the way in which Lydia Fenny and Anne Lifford had confused the identity of the portrait found in Lena Sarschine’s desk.

“I have been living here for many years,” said Dicksfall, in a low voice, “and my two daughters lived with me. Their mother has been dead a long time. About three years ago, a young man, who called himself Carrill, came here and stopped at the Pavilion Hotel. He obtained an introduction to me by some means, and appeared to be struck with the beauty of Helena. I thought he was going to marry her, when I heard rumors as to the fastness of his life, and also that he was not what he represented himself to be. I taxed him with it, but he denied the accusation, yet so transparent was his denial that I forbade him the house. The result was that Helena ran away with him, and, until the time you spoke to me of her and told me his real name, I did not know it, and never entertained any suspicion as to his real rank in life. I was so angry that I forbade Helena’s name to be mentioned in my hearing, and always said, as I did to-night, that I had only one daughter—my daughter Amelia, married to Sir Rupert Balscombe last year, and I thought that she would, at least, not follow the example of her sister. Now, however, I know all, but to tell you the truth, I blame Sir Rupert; for her elopement, as I know she was a kind daughter, and I am sure she’d have made a good wife. He was very jealous of her, and had a fearful temper, so I dare say he drove her to it. From what you say, I suppose my poor Helena, went to see her sister on the night of the elopement to dissuade her from going with Lord Calliston, and surely she had the best right to speak of one who had ruined her own life, but evidently her arguments were of no avail, and she called at Calliston’s chambers to remonstrate with him. He was not there, and she went out to her death, and then Amelia eloped with him, as you have told me. I was a fast man in my youth, and the sins of the father are being visited on the children.”

“But this does not clear up the mystery of Lena Sarschine’s death.”

“Don’t call her by that name,” said Dicksfall, angrily. “It is the name that shames her. No; you are right, it does not explain her death, but I do not know, from what you say, what motive Myles Desmond could have had in murdering her.”

“I don’t believe he did,” said Dowker, bluntly, “but I want to find out your daughter’s past life. Had she any lovers?”

Dicksfall flushed a deep red.

“She was always a good daughter to me,” he said, quietly, “but I believe she was very much admired.”

“Do you know the name of any one who admired her?”

“No.”

“Not one?”

“Not one.”

There was clearly nothing more to be gained from Dicksfall, so Dowker respectfully said good-bye and took his leave.

“At all events,” he said to himself, as he wended his way back to his hotel, “I’ve found out one thing—Lena Sarschine and Lady Balscombe were sisters, and both loved the same man. What I’d like to know is, whether Lady Balscombe killed her sister out of jealousy. D—n it, I’m getting more perplexed than ever. This visit, instead of clearing up the mystery, deepens it. I think I’ll see Sir Rupert Balscombe and ask him about things; as his wife is mixed up in it, I’ve a right, and I’d give anything to save that young fellow’s life, because I’m sure he’s innocent,”

Chapter XIII

Myles Desmond Finds Friends

MYLES DESMOND was not a particularly good young man, but good enough as young men of the present generation go. He was a healthy, cheery, enough-for-the-day-is-the-evil-thereof sort of fellow, and considered himself decidedly hardly treated at being arrested on such a serious charge as that of the murder of Lena Sarschine.

According to the cynical creed prevailing nowadays all his friends should have turned their backs on him now he was in trouble, but there is a wonderful lot of undiscovered good even in friends, and none of them did. Instead of calling him names and laughing at his misfortune, Desmond’s friends took up his cause warmly, and both in clubs and drawing-rooms he was heartily commiserated. Many people, both in his own set and in the literary circle of which he had become a member, had taken a liking to the bright, kindly young man, and emphatically declared that the whole thing was a terrible mistake.

“Myles Desmond a murderer!” they said, “why as soon say the Archbishop of Canterbury is an atheist.” So as certain grasses only give out perfume when crushed, Myles’s misfortune brought all his friends around to help him if need be.

And he sadly needed help, poor fellow, for his position was a very critical one, the evidence against him being as follows:

1. He had last seen Lena Sarschine alive on the night of the murder.
2. He had been met in St. James’s Street by Ellersby not far from the scene of the crime.
3. He had in his possession the dagger with which the crime was, to all appearances, committed.

Myles answered these accusations as follows:

1. He had not seen Lena Sarschine on that night, but another lady whose name he refused to divulge.
2. His presence in St. James’s Street on the night in question was purely accidental.
3. And the dagger found in the vase was one he had taken from Lena Sarschine on the afternoon of the day she had called to see Calliston about the elopement.

“I’ll tell you all about that dagger,” explained Myles to Norwood, his solicitor. “I was at Calliston’s rooms on the Monday afternoon, looking over his papers, when Lena Sarschine came in like a mad woman to see Calliston. I tried to quiet her, but she refused to be pacified, and pulling out the dagger, said she would kill Calliston first and Lady Balscombe afterward. I tried to take it from her, and she flung it away—neither of us knew it was poisoned, or I don’t think we would have been so reckless over it. In falling, the dagger rested slantwise from the floor to the fender, and in springing to get it I put my foot on it and broke the handle off. In case she should get it again, I put the pieces in my pocket and took them home—I left them on a side-table, so if they were found in the ornaments some one must have placed them there—and Lena Sarschine went away on that day, and since then I have seen nothing of her.”

“Then who was the lady you saw on that night?” asked his solicitor.

“I can not tell you,” replied the young man, doggedly. “I gave my word to the lady I would not say she had been there till I had her permission, and till I get it I can not.”

“When will you get it?”

“When Calliston returns in his yacht.”

“Why, in that case,” said Norwood, “you must mean Lady Balscombe?”

“I have not said so.”

“No,” replied Norwood, quickly, “but you say your permission to speak must come from a lady, and the only lady on board the yacht is Lady Balscombe, as she ran away with Lord Calliston. Come, tell me, was it Lady Balscombe you saw on that night?”

“I won’t answer you.”

All that Norwood could do could not get any other answer from the obstinate young man, so in despair the lawyer left him.

“It’s impossible to perform miracles,” he muttered to himself, as he went back to his office, “and if this young fool won’t tell me the whole truth, I can not see what I can do.”

On arriving at his office he found a lady waiting to see him, and on glancing carelessly at the card handed to him by his clerk, started violently.

“Miss Penfold,” he said, “by Jove! she was engaged to Lord Calliston. Now I wonder what she wants?”

The young lady made her appearance, and the door being closed, soon enlightened him on that point.

“You are Mr. Desmond’s lawyer?” she asked.

“Yes, I have that honor,” replied Norwood, rather puzzled to know what she had come about.

“I—I take a great interest in Mr. Desmond,” said the girl, hesitating, “in fact, I’m engaged to him.”

“But I thought Lord Calliston—”

“Lord Calliston is nothing to me,” she broke in, impatiently. “I never did like him, though my guardian wished me to marry him, and I love Myles Desmond, if I did not I would not be here.”

“Well, of course I feel sure he is innocent.”

“Innocent! I never had any doubt on the subject, but I want to know what chances there are of proving his innocence.”

“It will be a difficult matter,” said Norwood, thoughtfully, “as I can get him to tell me nothing.”

“What is it he refuses to tell you?” asked Miss Penfold,

“The name of the lady whom he saw at Lord Calliston’s chambers on the night of the murder. I believe myself it was Lady Balscombe.”

“Lady Balscombe!” echoed May, in astonishment, “why, what would take her there?”

“Perhaps she went to meet Lord Calliston. The reason why I think it’s she is that Mr. Desmond says he promised the lady he saw that he would not speak without her permission, and then he tells me he can not speak till Lord Calliston’s yacht comes back; and as Lady Balscombe is the only lady on board, it must be her.”

“But why should he refuse to tell you it was her?”

Norwood shrugged his shoulders.

“Well, it’s hardly the thing for a lady to visit a chambers at that hour of the night—her reputation—”

“Her reputation!” repeated May Penfold, contemptuously, “he need not try to save it now, and considering she’s thrown it away by eloping with Lord Calliston; but what else is there in his favor?”

“The principal thing is the dagger,” said Norwood; “he told me he took it from Lena Sarschine and brought it home—so if his landlady or any one else put it away, they must have seen it—and so it will show the truth of his story.”

“Then in order to find out it will be best to see his landlady.”

“Certainly—but I don’t know where he lives.”

“I do—Primrose Crescent, Bloomsbury. You go there and find out what you can.”

“I may as well try,” said Norwood, thoughtfully, “but I’m afraid it’s a forlorn hope.”

“Forlorn hopes generally succeed,” replied May, with a confident smile. “So you go to his lodgings, and then let me know the result of your inquiries.”

Norwood agreed to this, and after Miss Penfold had departed called a cab and drove to the address of Myles Desmond. Rondalina, more wan and ghost-like than ever, opened the door and informed the lawyer that Mrs. Mulgy had gone out.

“That’s a pity,” said Norwood, in a disappointed tone. “Are you the servant?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Rondalina, dropping a courtesy.

“And you attend to all the lodgers?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Oh! then perhaps you can tell me what I want to know,” said Norwood, cheerfully. “Take me up to Mr. Desmond’s room.”

Rondalina, being a London girl, was very sharp, and looked keenly at Mr. Norwood to see if he had any design of burglary. The scrutiny proving satisfactory, she led him upstairs, and showed him Desmond’s sitting-room.

“Now, then,” said Norwood, taking a seat, “I want you to answer me a few questions.”

Rondalina looked frightened, and said, “Yes, sir,” in a mechanical manner.

“First,” asked Norwood, “do you dust this room and put things straight?”

“I do, sir.”

“Do you remember seeing a broken dagger about the place—a blade and a handle?”

Rondalina twisted her apron up into a knot and thought hard, then intimated she had seen it.

“Oh!—and when did you see it?”

“About a week or so ago, sir,” replied Rondalina. “Mr. Desmond, sir, he comes in at five o’clock when I was a-layin’ of the cloth for dinner, and ses he ‘I ain’t a-goin’ to stay in for dinner, ‘cause I’m a-goin’ h’out,’ then he takes the knife from his pocket, being broken in two, and throws the bits on the table, and goes out to put his clothes on. I takes the dinner things down-stairs, and when I comes up he was gone, so I sets to work an’ tidies up the room.”

“Was the dagger still on the table?”

“The knife, sir,” corrected Rondalina; “yes, sir, it were, and I puts the bits in the h’ornaments so as to keep ‘em out of the way of the children, an’ I ‘ope it weren’t wrong, sir.”

“No, not at all,” replied Norwood, “but tell me, did Mr. Desmond come back on that night?”

“Yes, sir—but not till late, sir—three o’clock in the morning. He ‘adn’t his latch-key, so I ‘ad to git h’up and let him in.”

“Was he sober?”

“Quite, sir, only he seemed upset like, and goes up to his room without saying a word.”

This was all the information obtainable from Rondalina, so Norwood departed from the house very much satisfied with what he had discovered. He drove straight to Park Lane and told May Penfold all Rondalina had said.

“You see,” he said, in conclusion, “this evidence will prove one thing—that Desmond could not have committed the crime with that dagger.”

“Then I suppose they’ll say he did it with another,” said May, bitterly.

“If they do so they will damage their own case,” replied Norwood, coolly, “for Dowker swears the crime was committed by this special dagger, and if Desmond did not use it—as can be proved by the evidence of the servant—no one else could have done so; by the way, you say Sir Rupert was down at Berkshire on that night?”

“He was,” replied May, “but he came up by a late train, and then went to his club shortly before twelve.”

“Is he in?” asked the lawyer.

“No, but you will be able to see him about five o’ clock,” said Miss Penfold, “he has been shut up in his library since the elopement of his wife, but had to go out to-day on business.”

“I’ll call then.”

“What do you want to see him about?”

“I am anxious to ascertain if he knew his wife’s movements on that night, and whether she left the house.”

“I don’t think he can tell you that, as his wife and he were on bad terms and occupied different rooms; besides, even if you find out that Lady Balscombe visited Lord Calliston’s chambers on that night, it won’t save Myles.”

“I don’t know so much about that,” replied Norwood, cheerfully, “it will help to unravel this mystery, and when everything is made plain I’m certain Myles Desmond won’t be the man to suffer for this crime.”

Chapter XIV

My Lady’s Husband

IN the brilliant comedies of Wycherley, Moliere, Goldoni, and Lope de Vega the betrayed husband is always made the scapegoat for the sins of the lovers, and all the sympathies of the dramatists are with the pretty wife and the gay deceiver. This was the case with poor Sir Rupert, for though his friends pitied him heartily for the manner in which his wife had behaved, yet they also laughed at him for the way in which he had allowed Calliston to carry on the intrigue under his very nose. Sir Rupert thought Calliston’s visits were to his ward, but in reality she was merely used as a stalking-horse to conceal the designs of the young man on Lady Balscombe. When the blow came and the lady eloped, no one was surprised except the unsuspecting husband, who, having raised his wife from an obscure position to a brilliant one, and given her all she could wish for, never dreamed for a moment she would reward him in so base a manner.

Sir Rupert, however, had no idea of playing the complacent husband in this case, and at once proceeded to take steps for a divorce. The difficulty was to serve the guilty pair with citations, for as the yacht had gone to the Azores there was no chance of doing so until she returned to England, or until she touched at some civilized port easy to be reached by the long arm of the law.

The baronet sat in his library reading a letter from his lawyers, who informed him that Calliston’s yacht, the “Seamew,” had put into a French port for repairs as she had been disabled in a storm, and that they had sent over a clerk to serve the citations at once. The intelligence seemed to afford Sir Rupert the greatest

pleasure, and he threw down the paper with a grim smile. He was a tall, fine-looking man of forty-nine, with a soldierly carriage and iron-gray hair.

“She won’t find life with Calliston so happy as she did with me,” he muttered, walking up and down the room. “He’ll not marry her after she is free, and then she’ll go from bad to worse. I was a fool to make her my wife; with the instincts she’s got she would have been just as satisfied with being my mistress—come in,” he said aloud, as a knock came to the door.

It opened and Miss Penfold entered, followed by Norwood, at the sight of whom Sir Rupert seemed surprised, but said nothing.

“This gentleman wishes to speak with you, Sir Rupert,” said May, advancing toward the baronet. “He is—”

“A lawyer, I know,” replied Sir Rupert, coldly pushing a chair toward his ward, “I’ve seen him in court—and what is the object of your visit, sir?” he said, turning to Norwood.

“I’ve called to see you about this arrest of Myles Desmond for the murder of Lena Sarschine,” says Norwood, placing his hat on the table.

“I know nothing about him,” replied the baronet, looking angrily at May. “Why do you come to me for information?”

“Because we want to save Mr. Desmond’s life,” said May, boldly.

“His life—a murderer?”

“He is no murderer,” said the young girl, quickly. “Appearances are against him, but he is innocent.”

“I believe you love the fellow still,” said Balscombe, contemptuously.

“So much that I’m going to marry him,” she replied.

“You may do so, if he escapes the gallows—which I doubt,” retorted the baronet.

“I do not doubt,” interposed Norwood, quietly; “I am certain Mr. Desmond is innocent and could clear himself but for some absurd idea of honor.”

“And what’s all this got to do with me?” asked Balscombe, haughtily.

“Simply this: that I have reason to believe Lady Balscombe had something to do with the case.”

“Lady Balscombe!” echoed Sir Rupert, turning pale with fury. “Take care, sir, take care. My affairs have nothing to do with you, and Lady Balscombe’s folly is quite apart from this—this murder.”

“I think not,” answered Norwood, quietly, “for in my opinion Lady Balscombe left this house and went to Lord Calliston’s chambers on the night of the murder and saw Mr. Desmond.”

“Did Mr. Desmond tell you this?” said Balscombe, in a nervous voice.

“No, Mr. Desmond refuses to tell anything,” rejoined Norwood; “but I am certain it was Lady Balscombe, and as you came up from Berkshire on that night I thought you might tell me at what hour Lady Balscombe went out?”

“I am no spy on my wife’s movements,” retorted the baronet, haughtily. “I came up from Berkshire, it is true, and understood from my servants that my wife was in her room. As we were not on good terms I did not see her, but went straight to my club. From there I did not return till about three in the morning. I then went to bed and did not know of Lady Balscombe’s flight till next morning when it was too late to stop her. So, you see, I can tell you nothing.”

Norwood was about to reply when a knock came to the door and the servant, entering, gave a card to Sir Rupert, which he glanced at and then handed to Norwood.

“Here is the detective who has the case in hand,” he said, quietly. “Perhaps, if you question him you may find out what you want to know. Show the gentleman in.”

“Dowker’s a clever man,” said Norwood, when the servant had retired; “he arrested Desmond, so I presume he has come here to get evidence against him. Now, Miss Penfold, we must put our wits against his.”

“Yes, and between the two stools poor Desmond will fall to the ground,” replied the baronet, with a cold smile. “Here is your detective.”

Mr. Dowker, being announced by the servant, entered the room quietly, and bowed first to Miss Penfold and then to Sir Rupert.

“How do you do Mr. Norwood?” he said, calmly. “I did not think to meet you here, but I suppose we’re on the same errand.”

“Not quite,” replied Norwood. “You want to destroy Myles Desmond. I wish to save him.”

“There you are wrong,” said Dowker, placing his hat beside a chair and taking his seat. “I want to save him also.”

“Save him?” cried May, starting up.

“Yes; because I believe him to be innocent.”

“Then why arrest him?” asked Norwood.

Dowker shrugged his shoulders.

“The evidence against him was too strong to permit him being at large, but from what I have learned lately I have reason to believe he is not the guilty man.”

This remark, coming from such a source, produced the profoundest impression on the mind of May Penfold, and Norwood himself seemed relieved, while the baronet stood on the hearth-rug and looked stolidly on.

“Then we can work together?” said the lawyer.

“Yes; to prove the innocence of Mr. Desmond,” replied Dowker. “And in doing so we will discover the real criminal.”

“And now,” observed Balscombe, in a cold voice, “having settled this little matter about helping Mr. Desmond, whom I sincerely trust will be proved innocent of this charge, perhaps, Mr. Dowker, you will inform me the reason of your visit?”

“Certainly, sir,” replied Dowker, deliberately. “I want to ask you some questions about Lady Balscombe.”

Two of his listeners looked at him in surprise, struck by the singularity of the coincidence that he should have called on exactly the same errand as they did.

“I wish to know,” said Dowker, “if you are aware that your wife called at Lord Calliston’s chambers on the night of the murder?”

“Who says so?” asked Balscombe, harshly.

“No one,” replied the detective; “but did she?”

“I can not tell you,” said Sir Rupert; and he gave the same account of his movements on the night in question as he had done to Norwood.

“Oh,” said Dowker, stroking his chin; “so you were in town after all on that night?”

Sir Rupert looked uncomfortable under the steady gaze of the detective, and blurted out, somewhat confusedly, that he was.

“And you,” questioned Dowker, turning to Norwood, “think it was Lady Balscombe that Desmond saw?”

“Yes; because he said he could not get permission to speak except from the lady on board the ‘Seamew’ and the lady we know is Sir Rupert’s wife.”

“But Lady Balscombe did not leave this house till after twelve o’clock, and as the woman saw Mr. Desmond before that time it could not have possibly been Lady Balscombe.”

“How do you know my wife did not leave till after twelve?” demanded Balscombe.

“From the evidence of her maid, Anne Lifford.”

“Yes, she told me the same thing,” interposed May; “and if that is so, well—” she looked at the other three in helpless confusion.

“As Mr. Desmond refuses to give us any information,” said Dowker, “the only thing to be done is to wait and find out the truth from Lady Balscombe herself.”

“What could she know about this woman’s death?” asked Sir Rupert.

“She might not know much,” replied Dowker, significantly, “but enough to show in what way her sister met her death.”

“Her sister!” echoed the others in surprise.

“Yes, I have ascertained Lena Sarschine to have been the sister of Lady Balscombe.”

“Are you mad?” said the baronet, angrily. “Do you know who my wife was?”

“I do. The daughter of Captain Michael Dicksfall of Folkestone. He had two daughters—twins—one, Miss Helena Dicksfall, ran away with Lord Calliston three years ago and became his mistress under the name of Lena Sarschine; the other, Miss Amelia Dicksfall, married Sir Rupert Balscombe.”

The baronet sunk into his seat, looking pale and haggard.

“My God!” he muttered, “this is worse and worse. I knew Amelia had a twin sister, but understood she was dead.”

“Dead as Helena Dicksfall, not as Lena Sarschine.”

“Could Lady Balscombe have had any interest in her sister’s death?” asked Norwood, in a puzzled tone.

“For Heaven’s sake don’t make her out to be a murderess!” said Sir Rupert, vehemently. “She’s bad enough as it is, but surely she would not go so far—as—murder.”

“I don’t know,” said Dowker, brutally; “they both loved the same man; and when women are jealous, well—there’s the devil to pay.”

At this moment a servant entered with a telegram which he handed to Sir Rupert. Tearing it open the baronet glanced hastily over it and then sprung to his feet.

“Now we will know the truth,” he said, triumphantly.

“What do you mean?” asked May, trembling in every limb.

“Simply this,” said her guardian, crushing up the telegram in his hand, “the ‘Seamew’ is on her way to England.”

Chapter XV

A Startling Discovery

PERHAPS among all his friends Myles had no warmer supporter than Spencer Ellersby. The young man appeared to be genuinely sorry that his evidence about meeting Desmond in St. James’s Street should be used against him.

“Hang it!” he said to Marton, as they were seated at their club, “if I had only known how it would have been twisted, I’d not have said a word, but that detective fellow got it out of me somehow—brute of a fellow—killed my dog, you know, Pickles.”

“Well, I hear they’ll not be able to prove the dagger in Desmond’s possession was the one used,” said Marton. “Good for poor old Myles—hey!”

“I think it’s d—d rubbish, the whole thing,” retorted Ellersby, hotly. “What the deuce should Myles kill this woman for? she was nothing to him; more likely Calliston knows about it.”

“Well, he’ll soon be asked, at all events,” said Marton, with a chuckle. “The ‘Seamew’s’ back at Brighton.”

“What!” cried Ellersby, astonished. “And Lady Balscombe?”

“Oh, she’s on board also,” said Marton. “Sir Rupert has gone down, I hear, to see his wife. What a deuce of a row there’ll be, hey!” and the old reprobate rubbed his hands.

“Well, there is one thing to be said,” observed Ellersby ringing for a brandy and soda: “Calliston can’t marry Miss Penfold now.”

“All the better for Desmond, dear boy, hey?”

“I don’t see that,” retorted Ellersby, coolly; “even if Desmond’s acquitted, he’ll have a stain on his name. She won’t marry him.”

“Hey!” said The Town-crier, all on the alert for news. “What do you mean?”

“Simply this: that I’m going to have a look in at the heiress myself.”

“Bosh!”

“Fact; the matrimonial stakes are open to any one, and I don’t see why Miss Penfold shouldn’t marry me.”

“She might if Desmond was out of the way; but as it is —pish!”

“Well, we’ll see,” retorted Ellersby, lighting a cigarette. “I’ve fallen in love with her, and I’m going to ask her to be my wife.”

“Bet you a hundred to one she don’t have you,” said Marton, producing his pocket-book.

“Done!” and the bet was booked immediately.

“Why hang it,” said Marton, when this little transaction was concluded, “you’re not fit to marry—Drink, dear boy—bad thing, hey?”

“Oh, I’ll give all that sort of thing up when I’m married,” replied Ellersby, carelessly.

“You’ll have to give up half your life then,” retorted his friend, rudely, “for you always seem to be at the brandy bottle.”

Ellersby laughed, in nowise offended.

“If you had had as many agues and fevers as I have, you’d be at it too; but you needn’t be afraid; when I become benedict I’ll take the pledge. By the way, come and see my new rooms; I’ve got ‘em all done up.”

“Right, dear boy, right!” said Marton, and the two gentlemen left the club chatting about the Piccadilly murder and the possible result thereof.

While this interesting conversation was going on, Sir Rupert, Dowker, and Norwood were all in a first-class carriage on their way to Brighton. As Marton had informed Ellersby, the “Seamew” had returned to

England the previous day, and now the trio were going down to see if Lady Balscombe could give them any information likely to solve the mystery of the murder of Lena Sarschine. Of course Sir Rupert fully recognized the truth of the proverb “Every man for himself,” but now the guilty passion of his wife appeared a secondary consideration to the desire of saving an innocent man from a shameful death.

On the way down, Norwood told Dowker the discovery he had made about the dagger, at which the detective was much astonished.

“If, as you say,” he remarked, “the lodging-house servant can prove the broken dagger was in the house all the time, it certainly can not have been the weapon used, and yet it corresponds in every particular with the other weapon I took from Cleopatra Villa. I can quite understand Miss Sarschine taking it and the manner in which it came into Desmond’s possession, but if this was not the weapon used, where is the weapon that was?”

“There are plenty of these daggers,” suggested Norwood.

“Certainly—but the coincidence in this case is that the dagger found in Mr. Desmond’s rooms, which came from the house of the murdered woman, was poisoned, and Lena Sarschine was killed by a poisoned instrument.”

“There were no other daggers taken from the house I suppose?” asked Norwood.

“Not that I know of,” replied the detective; “but I am convinced that the whole secret of this crime lies in the conversation between Mr. Desmond and Lady Balscombe.”

“You do not say my wife is guilty of this murder?” said Sir Rupert, angrily.

“I say nothing,” replied Dowker, evasively, “till I see Lady Balscombe.”

When the trio arrived at Brighton it was growing late, so they went to the Ship Hotel and had something to eat. Finding out from the waiter that the “Seamew” was lying a short distance from the pier they went down, and hiring a boat rowed to the yacht. When they climbed up on the deck they were accosted by one of the officers, who wanted to know their business.

“We want to see Lord Calliston,” said Balscombe, quietly.

“I’m afraid that’s impossible,” replied the officer, “as he went up to town to-day on business.”

“Is there not a lady on board?” asked Norwood.

“Yes—you mean—”

“Never mind telling us her name,” said Balscombe, shortly, feeling a horror at hearing his wife’s name mentioned. “Can we see her?”

“I will ask,” answered the officer, and he went downstairs to the cabin, from which he soon reascended with the news that they could go down.

Dowker went first, followed by Norwood and Sir Rupert, all feeling in a strange state of excitement at the prospect of the coming interview.

The cabin was small, but luxuriously fitted up in pale-blue silk, and the walls paneled in oak, with small medallions of seascapes around. A lamp hanging from the ceiling shed a soft mellow light over all, and on the table below was a work-basket and some embroidery.

“She has been working, I see,” whispered Balscombe with a sneer as they entered into the cabin. No one was present, but suddenly they heard the rustle of a dress, and a curtain at the end of the cabin parted, admitting a woman—a tall, fair-faced woman, with shining golden hair.

At this sight Norwood and Dowker turned to look on Sir Rupert, to watch the effect of the sight of his wife on him, when they saw he was pale as death and had made a step forward.

“You wish to see me?” asked the lady, advancing toward the group.

“You—you—” cried Sir Rupert, in a choked voice. “You are not Lady Balscombe,”

“I!” in surprise. “No!—I am not Lady Balscombe.”

Dowker and Norwood turned suddenly.

“Who are you?”

“Lena Sarschine!”

Chapter XVI

More Revelations

IF there ever were three men taken aback, those three were certainly in the cabin of the “Seamew.” As for Miss Sarschine, she stood looking calmly at them with an expression of surprise.

“Will you kindly tell me what you want?” she asked, quietly. “Is it to see Lord Calliston?”

“No,” replied Dowker, who had somewhat recovered himself, “we wanted to see you.”

“To see me?” she said, with surprise,

“Or at least, Lady Balscombe.”

Miss Sarschine smiled contemptuously.

“I understand what you mean,” she said, coolly. “You thought that Lord Calliston had eloped with Lady Balscombe—so he intended to have done, but I changed his plans and eloped instead.”

“And where did you leave Lady Balscombe on the night you visited her?” asked Norwood.

“I do not answer that question till I know who you are,” she said, boldly, frowning at him.

“I will tell you,” said Sir Rupert, who had hitherto kept silent. “This gentlemen is Mr. Norwood, a solicitor—this Mr. Dowker, of Scotland Yard—and I am Sir Rupert Balscombe.”

“You—you Sir Rupert Balscombe?” she said, quickly.

“Your sister’s husband.”

“How do you know Lady Balscombe was my sister?”

“I found it out,” interposed Dowker, “from your father, Captain Dicksfall.”

“My father,” she murmured, turning pale, “you have seen him?”

“Yes.”

“Well,” she said, coldly, “now you have found out my relationship with Lady Balscombe, what do you want to see me about?”

“Her murder,” said Dowker, in a deep voice.

She sprung forward with a sudden cry.

“Her murder—her—what do you mean?”

“I mean that the victim of the Jermyn Street murder, whom we thought to be you, turns out to be Lady Balscombe.”

“My wife!” said Sir Rupert, with a groan, burying his face in his hands.

“God!—it’s too horrible,” cried Lena, and sunk down into a chair. “Amelia dead—murdered—by whom?”

“That’s what we want to find out,” said Norwood, coldly.

“What enemies had she?” muttered Miss Sarschine, half to herself—“none that would desire her death—I can not understand. I can not”—then suddenly struck by a thought, she asked, “Why did you think the dead woman was I?”

“Because she was dressed in your clothes.”

“Yes! yes!” she said, feverishly. “I can understand now—I can understand.”

“Where did you see her last?” asked Norwood.

“At her own house in Park Lane.”

“Did you leave her there?”

“No! she left me.”

“Oh!” cried Dowker, a light breaking in on him. “Now I understand—you changed clothes there, and she left the house first.”

“She did—to go to Calliston’s rooms.”

“I thought so!” said Norwood, with a cry of triumph. “It was Lady Balscombe Desmond saw.”

“Desmond! Desmond!” she echoed. “What has he to do with this?”

“Simply this—he is now in prison on a charge of murdering Lena Sarschine.”

“I see—you mistook my sister for me— But murder—I can’t understand—I can’t understand,” and she pressed her hand across her forehead.

Sir Rupert looked up.

“Listen to me,” he said, sternly; “a man’s life hangs on your evidence, so tell us all that happened between you and my wife on that night.”

There was a carafe of water on the table, and filling a glass from it Lena drank it up quickly, and then turned with ashen face to the three men, who sat cold and silent before her.

“I will tell you all,” she said, in a shaky voice, “and you can form your own conclusions.”

The three settled themselves to listen, and she began to speak, in a trembling voice, which gradually became steadier, the following story:

“I need not tell you my early history, as you already know it. When I left Folkestone I went abroad with Lord Calliston, and when we returned he took the house for me in St. John’s Wood. I stayed with him, because I loved him, and he promised to marry me—a promise he has since fulfilled. When my sister became known in London as Lady Balscombe, I soon found it out from Calliston, and then implored him to make me his wife. He laughed, and said he would. Then my sister fell in love with him—not he with her, I swear, for he loves no one but me, and in the end she persuaded him to elope with her. I discovered the fact from my maid, who learned it from Lady Balscombe’s maid, Anne Lifford, and in despair I went to see Calliston, and implore him to give up the mad idea. Blinded with rage and despair, I took a dagger from the wall of my drawing-room, intending to kill Calliston if he did not agree to give up my sister—sounds melodramatic, I know, but look what I had at stake! Calliston was not in, and I only saw Mr. Desmond, who tried to persuade me to go home again. He tried to get the dagger from me, and I flung it across the room. By accident he put his foot on it, and broke it. So seeing it was useless, I made no further attempt to get it, and he put the pieces in his pocket. Then I went home in despair, but could not rest. I went out with the intention of catching an early train to Shoreham, concealing myself on board the yacht, and then confront my sister when she arrived.

“Then I thought I would call and implore her to give up my lover. She had gone to a ball, but I waited for her, and when she came into the room revealed myself. We had a stormy scene—she refused to give Calliston up, and, at length, the only thing I could obtain from her was this—that she would go to Calliston’s chambers, ask him if his love was for her or me, and when she got his answer return to me at Park Lane. I agreed to this, but proposed, as she would compromise herself in going to a bachelors rooms at that hour of the night, that she should put on my clothes, and, as we were very like one another, she could pass herself off for me in the event of discovery. We changed clothes, and she went away while I remained and locked myself in her room. I waited nearly all night for her return, but as she did not come I left the house about four o’clock in the morning and went to London Bridge Station, where I caught the five-forty-five train to Shoreham. I was dressed in Lady Balscombe’s clothes, and went straight on board the yacht without awaking suspicion, as they were expecting my sister. I went into my cabin, and fell asleep, worn out with the events of the night. When I woke, about ten o’clock, I found we were on our way, and that Lord Calliston was on board. Being told that Lady Balscombe was on board asleep, he did not trouble himself to see me, or else he would have discovered the truth, but said I was not to be disturbed, and gave orders for the yacht to start. When he did see me I need hardly tell you his surprise. I told him all, and we had a terrible battle over things. He wanted to go back to England, but I swore I’d

throw myself overboard if he did, so he yielded, and in the end we made it up. We started for the Azores, but the yacht became disabled in a storm, and put in to a French port, where we were married by the English consul. Then we started back for England and arrived yesterday. Lord Calliston went up to town on business, and I remained here—so that is all I know of the affair.”

“Then you are now Lady Calliston?” said Sir Rupert.

“Yes, he has done me that justice at last.”

“Then I hope you’ll have a happier life and end than your sister,” said the baronet, bitterly. “But even what you have told us does not solve the mystery of her death.”

“It solves a good many things, however,” said Dowker, cheerfully; “it proves the truth of Mr. Desmond’s statement about the dagger, and shows us how it was Lady Balscombe went to Lord Calliston’s chambers instead of Miss Sarschine—I beg pardon, Lady Calliston— But tell me, madame, did your husband know of the murder before he left England?”

“No; how could he?” she said, in surprise. “He came down to Shoreham by an early train and the yacht left at once.”

“But he would be sure to see about it in the morning papers?” suggested Norwood.

“He would only see the announcement, but no details,” said Dowker, “and thinking Lady Balscombe was on board the yacht and Miss Sarschine at home, he would never think either of them was the victim.”

“Well, gentlemen,” said Sir Rupert, turning his haggard face toward them, “now we have discovered the dead woman to have been my wife, what is the next thing to be done?”

“See Lord Calliston,” answered Dowker, promptly. “I want to know all his movements on that night.”

“You don’t suspect him,” said Lena, turning on him like a tigress.

“I never said I did,” he replied, quietly. “I merely want to find out his movements, and I dare say he’ll have no hesitation in giving an account of them.”

“Of course he won’t,” she, replied, wearily, “and now, as I’ve told you all, you’ll permit me to retire. I’m quite worn out.”

She bowed to the three men, then left the cabin slowly. When she disappeared, Dowker shook himself briskly.

“Well, gentlemen, we must go back to town at once and see Lord Calliston. I want an account of all his movements on that night, and I already know where he was at nine o’clock.”

“Where?” asked Norwood, curiously.

“At the Pink ‘Un, Soho, to see a boxing-match—afterward I don’t know where he went, but I must have a satisfactory explanation.”

“But you don’t think he murdered Lady Balscombe?” said the baronet.

Dowker looked wise.

“No,” he replied, significantly, “I don’t think he murdered Lady Balscombe, but he might have murdered Lena Sarschine.”

“You mean he might have mistook my wife for his mistress?”

“Exactly!”

Chapter XVII

The Prodigal’s Return

MRS. POVY was delighted to see Calliston back again, but she was not going to betray any exultation, as she did not think him worthy of it, so received him with great dignity and formality. Lord Calliston, a tall, slender, dissipated young man, noticed the restraint of her manners and commented thereon at once.

“What’s the matter with you, Totty,” he asked, jocularly. “You are as cross as two sticks—any one been proposing to you?”

“I wouldn’t have them if they had,” snapped Totty. “No, my lord, there ain’t nothing the matter with me as far as I’m aware.”

“Now, Mrs. Povy, that’s nonsense,” returned Calliston, disbelievingly. “You’re cross about something.”

“Which ain’t to be wondered at,” burst out Totty, wrathfully. “Not ‘avin’ bin brought up to being badgered and worried by policemen.”

Calliston turned round in his chair, and looked at her keenly.

“What do you mean?” he asked, sharply.

“What I say, my lord,” replied Totty. “After you ‘ad gone some policeman, called Dowker, or Bowker, came here and wanted to know all about you.”

“Oh, Dowker!” said Calliston, thoughtfully, “that’s the detective that arrested poor old Myles.”

“You know all about it then, my lord?” said Totty, quickly.

“I couldn’t be in London twenty-four hours without knowing something of the Jermyn Street affair,” replied Calliston, coolly. “I know that a woman was found dead, and they arrested my cousin as the murderer, thinking the woman was Lena Sarschine.”

“And ain’t she?” gasped Mrs. Povy.

“No, it was Lady Balscombe that was murdered.”

“But I thought she went off with you?”

“Well, she didn’t—shows I’m not as black as I’m painted,” replied the young man, “but the worst of it is they seem to think I’m mixed up in the affair, and the detective was down at Brighton yesterday to see me. I quite expect a call from him this morning to find out what I know about the row.”

“You don’t think Mr. Desmond guilty, do you, my lord?” asked Mrs. Povy, anxiously.

“Pish! what a question to ask,” said Calliston, contemptuously; “you’ve been with our family for a long time, Mrs. Povy, and you ought to know our character by this time. Halloo!” as a knock came to the door, “who’s that?”

The door opened and his valet entered, soft-footed and deferential.

“A gentleman to see you, my lord,” he said, handing Calliston a card.

“Humph! I thought so,” said Calliston, glancing at the card; “show Mr. Dowker up, Locker.”

Locker retired, and Mrs. Povy was about to follow his example when Calliston stopped her.

“Don’t go, Mrs. Povy,” he said, authoritatively, “you saw this man before, so you can hear our interview—I may have to ask you something.”

Totty acquiesced obediently, and went over to the window while Locker, showing Mr. Dowker into the room, retired, closing the door after him. Calliston opened the conversation at once:

“Your name is Dowker—you are a detective—you want to see me about the Jermyn Street murder?”

“Quite correct, my lord,” replied Dowker, quietly, though rather astonished at the business-like tone assumed by Calliston. “I want to ask your lordship a few questions.”

“Indeed!” said Calliston, abruptly. “Oh, so you didn’t find out everything from the lady you saw on board the yacht?”

“How do you know I was down at Brighton?” asked Dowker.

“Simply enough,” answered Calliston. “I received a telegram from my sailing-master informing me of your visit. You saw Miss—Miss—” here he glanced at Totty as if doubtful to announce his marriage, “Miss Sarschine?”

“Yes, I saw Miss Sarschine,” replied Dowker, with an emphasis on the last word.

“And she doubtless told you of her visit to Lady Balscombe’s house?”

“She did.”

“And of Lady Balscombe’s visit to these rooms?”

“Correct.”

“Then what do you want to know from me?” demanded Calliston.

Mr. Dowker ran his hand round the brim of his hat.

“I want an account of your lordship’s movements on that night,” he said, smoothly.

Lord Calliston sprung to his feet with a burst of laughter.

“Good heavens!” he cried. “Surely you don’t think I killed Lady Balscombe?”

Dowker said nothing, but looked discreetly on the ground, upon which Calliston frowned.

“Don’t carry the joke too far,” he said, harshly. “I am a very good-natured man, but there are limits to one’s good temper. In some cases I would decline to answer your very impertinent questions, but as I want to save my cousin’s life, if possible, I will tell you what I know. Be seated.”

The detective bowed and took a seat, while Calliston turned to Mrs. Povy.

“You can go now,” he said, quietly, “and don’t let me be disturbed until I ring the bell.”

“Wait a minute,” observed Dowker, as Mrs. Povy passed him. “You told me it was Miss Sarschine visited Mr. Desmond on that night?”

“And so it was,” retorted Totty, defiantly, pausing at the door. “If I was massacred this minute I’d swear it.”

“How are you so certain?”

“Because I saw her face—as if I didn’t know it! and another thing, she wore the same dress and jacket as she did when she were here in the afternoon—get along with you,” said Totty, viciously, “telling me I’m telling lies, an’ am old enough to be your mother, only my sons ‘ud be men and not skeletons,” and with this sarcastic allusion to Dowker’s leanness, the indignant Mrs. Povy departed.

“Ah!” said Dowker, thoughtfully, not paying any attention to her last remark, “it was the resemblance and the change of clothes made her make the mistake— humph—”

“Now, then, Mr. Dowker,” said Calliston, tapping the table, impatiently, “where do you want me to begin from?”

“From the time your lordship arrived at The Pink ‘Un.”

Calliston stared at him in astonishment.

“How the deuce did you know I was there?” he asked.

“Easily enough,” replied the detective, coolly; “the little urchin you gave money to told me.”

“The devil!” said Calliston, in a vexed tone. “One seems to be surrounded with spies. Perhaps you can tell me how I spent the rest of the night?”

“No; I leave that to your lordship.”

“Then it’s easily done,” retorted the young lord, coolly. “I left these rooms intending to go to Shoreham by the ten minutes past nine train from London Bridge”

“Was Lady Balscombe to meet you there?”

“No—she intended to go first to the Countess of Kerstoke’s ball in order to avert suspicion, and then was to come down to Shoreham by the first train in the morning —about five-forty-five. At all events, I left here about eight o’clock in order to go down, when I looked in at my club for a few minutes, and heard of a sparring match coming off at The Pink ‘Un, and was induced by some friends to go. I thought I’d not bother about going down by the nine-ten train, as I could catch the early train in the morning, and go down with Lady Balscombe, so I went to The Pink ‘Un, and saw the match — then I thought I’d go home to my rooms. Just as I got to them a woman came out of the door-way, and rushed away like a mad thing. If you remember, it was a foggy night, but I was close enough to recognize the dress, and thought it was Lena Sarschine. Just as I was puzzling over her sudden appearance a man passed me quickly, and went after the woman—they both disappeared in the fog, and I thought I’d better follow and find out what was up. I lost myself in the fog, and after wandering about for a couple of hours I managed to get a cab and go to my club; there I met some fellows, and as I had to catch an early train, did not think it worth while to go to bed. I fell asleep, however, on the sofa, and the end of it was I went down to Shoreham by a late train, and came on board the yacht. They told me Lady Balscombe was on board, so I ordered the yacht to start at once, and it was only when we were right out that I found out my mistake—until I came back to England, I had no more idea than you that Lady Balscombe had been murdered.”

Dowker listened to all this with the deepest interest, and then asked Lord Calliston a question.

“Who was the man who passed you in pursuit of the woman?”

“How should I know?” replied Calliston, fidgeting in his seat.

“You did not know him?”

“How could I recognize any one on such a foggy night?”

“Had you any idea who it was?” persisted Dowker.

“Well, I had,” said Calliston, reluctantly. “It is only fancy, mind, because I did not see the man’s face, but I thought his figure and bearing resembled some one I know.”

“And the name of that some one?”

“Sir Rupert Balscombe.”

Dowker uttered an ejaculation of astonishment and summed up the whole thing in his own mind.

“Cock-and-bull story,” he muttered to himself. “He has learned since it was Lady Balscombe whom he saw and wants to put the blame on to the husband—pish!”

“Well,” said Calliston, anxiously.

“It’s a grave accusation to make,” said Dowker.

“I’m not making any accusation,” retorted Calliston, violently. “I only think it was Sir Rupert. I’m not accusing him of anything. Is that all you want to know? If so, you’ll oblige me by leaving my rooms.”

Both men arose to their feet and looked at one another, and so absorbed were they that they did not hear the door softly open behind them.

“Not yet, Lord Calliston,” said Dowker, calmly. “I want to know what you did those two hours you were in the fog.”

“Do! nothing, except walk about looking for the woman I thought Lena Sarschine.”

“And you found her?”

“No.”

“Bah! what jury would believe that?”

“Do you mean to accuse me of this murder?” asked Calliston, furiously, clenching his fists.

“I accuse you of nothing,” retorted Dowker, coolly. “I merely put a case to you—here is a man, yourself, going to run off with another woman, when his mistress, as he thinks, comes to stop him—he sees her leave his chambers in a furious rage, follows her—what is more natural than that he should meet her, and she heap reproaches on him—”

“Wait a minute,” interrupted Calliston, with a sneer; “your picture is very tragic but quite wrong. Suppose I did meet the woman who left my chambers, I would find not Lena Sarschine but Lady Balscombe, the very woman I wanted to meet.”

Dowker rubbed his head, being for once in his life nonplused by a man as clever as himself.

“It does sound wrong I confess,” he said ruefully, “still you are in an awkward situation. If you did not kill Lady Balscombe, what is the name of the person who did?”

“Lena Sarschine!”

It was a third voice that uttered the name, and both men turned round to see Lena Sarschine looking at them with blazing eyes.

“Yes!” she said, advancing toward Dowker, “I knew you suspected Calliston when you came to the yacht yesterday, and I came up to prevent him meeting you. I am too late for that, but not too late to prevent you arresting an innocent man. You want to know who murdered my sister—I did—I was mad with rage, and jealousy, I followed her from her own house and saw her leave these rooms, we met and she told me she was going down to Shoreham and defied me, so I killed her with this dagger,” and throwing a small silver-mounted stiletto at the detective’s feet, her unnatural strength gave way and she sunk on the floor in a dead faint, while the two men stood looking blankly at one another.

“My God!” said Calliston. “this is terrible!”

“Yes,” replied Dowker, “if it is true.”

“Don’t you believe it?”

“Not one word!”

Chapter XVIII

What Myles Desmond Thought

IMPRISONMENT is not calculated to raise a man's spirits, consequently poor Myles, having now been shut up for some weeks, was in rather a dismal frame of mind. Norwood informed him from time to time of the discoveries that were being made, so, in spite of his quixotic ideas concerning the promise he had made to Lady Balscombe, there seemed every chance that he would soon be released from his perilous position.

After the discovery that Lady Balscombe was dead and not Lena Sarschine, Norwood, accompanied by May Penfold, went to tell Myles about it in the hope that this being the case he would now tell all about his interview with the deceased, and thus possibly throw some light on the mystery. Myles was delighted to see May and clasped her fondly to his breast, while Norwood, finding the meeting of two lovers somewhat trying, busied himself with his notes at the other end of the cell.

"I knew you would not forsake me, May," said Myles, tenderly, "you at least do not believe me guilty."

"Of course not," replied May, "nor does any one else—Mr. Dowker, my guardian, and Mr. Ellersby all swear you are innocent."

"Ellersby!" said Myles, in surprise, "I thought after meeting me on that night he would think I had committed the crime."

"Well, he does not!"

"I did not think Ellersby would prove such a friend," said Desmond, heartily.

"I don't know if you'll consider him so much of a friend when I tell you he wants to marry me."

"What! marry you!"

"Yes! he came yesterday morning to see me and asked me if I would marry him."

"And you—what did you answer?"

"Can you ask?" she said, looking at him reproachfully. "I told him I was engaged to you—he said he had heard so but was not certain if it was true, and then—"

"Go on," said Myles, seeing she hesitated.

"Then he said you were in a dangerous position, but that if I promised to marry him he would do his best to prove your innocence."

"How can he do that?" asked Myles, quietly.

"I don't know," answered May; "that is what he said; then I refused him again and said your innocence would be proved without any assistance from him. After that I left the library, and shortly afterward he went away. Since then I have not seen him and I don't want to."

"It's very kind of Ellersby wanting to help me," said Myles, kissing May, "but I don't think it was honorable of him to make your hand the price of his help, knowing you were engaged to me."

"He was not certain of that. You know every one thought Lord Calliston was my future husband."

"They can hardly think so now," said Myles, in a rather husky voice, kissing her on the cheek.

"As soon as you are ready to attend to business, Mr. Desmond," said Norwood, coming forward, "I have some serious things to say."

"Go on!" replied Desmond, listlessly.

"You said that on the return of Calliston's yacht you would be released from the promise you made to the lady whom you saw on that night."

"Yes," answered Myles, uneasily, "I did, but I don't think the yacht will return for a long time."

"You are wrong—the 'Seamew' is at Brighton now."

"And Calliston?" gasped Desmond, a grayish pallor overspreading his face.

"Calliston is in London—and Lena Sarschine."

"Lena Sarschine?" mutters Myles, with a quick indrawn breath.

"Yes. We know now that Lady Balscombe was the woman who left the rooms in anger, and was murdered in Jermyn Street."

"True! True!" murmured Desmond, "It's quite true!"

"You knew Lady Balscombe was murdered, and not Lena Sarschine?" asked May, with a cry.

He bowed his head.

"Yes. I saw Lady Balscombe on that night. She was dressed in Lena Sarschine's clothes, and came to see Calliston. He was not there—I was. She told me of the visit of her sister to her house, and how she had come to learn the truth from Calliston's own lips. I told her it was true that Lena Sarschine—or rather, Helena Dicksfall—was Calliston's mistress. She was mad with anger, and wanted to go straight back to her sister. Knowing if she did the two women would have a row, and things might become serious, I tried to quiet her, but was unsuccessful. In spite of all I could do, she rushed away outside, and though I followed her in a few minutes, I was unable to find her, as she had disappeared in the thick fog. I went along Piccadilly as quickly as I could, thinking she had gone home, but after getting to Park Lane and not finding her, I thought I had lost her on the way, as she could not have walked as quickly as I did. I did not ask for her at Park Lane, as that would have let the servants know she was out, and I wanted to save her good name. I went back again along Piccadilly, down St. James's Street, in a vain hope of finding her. I was unsuccessful, as you may guess, so was coming up St. James's Street on my way back to Park Lane, when I met Ellersby, as you know. After that I gave up the chase in despair and went home. Next morning I heard of the murder in Jermyn Street, and saw by the description of the dress it was Lady Balscombe, but as the idea got about it was Lena Sarschine, I did not seek to contradict it."

"Why?" asked Norwood.

"For very strong reasons," replied Desmond, coldly.

"Were your very strong reasons connected with the murder?"

"They were."

“Can not you tell them to me now?”

“If you give me a few minutes to think I will let you know.”

“Very good,” said Norwood, cheerfully.

“Why did you not tell us all this before?” asked May.

“Because Lady Balscombe made me promise I would not tell of her visit,” said Myles. “When she found out Calliston had been playing her false she left in a rage, saying she would go back to her house, and not jeopardize her position in society for his sake. If I had told you of her visit I would have had to tell you all the rest.”

“Why place your neck in a noose for the sake of any woman?” said Norwood.

“I would not have done so,” replied Myles. “If it came to the worst I would have told all, but I wanted to remain true to my promise as long as I could.”

“Whom did you think Calliston had gone off with?”

“At first I thought no one,” replied Myles, slowly, “but when you came and questioned me about Lena Sarschine, I remembered the change of clothes, and, of course, knowing they were twins—for Lady Balscombe told me all on that night—I guessed that Lena Sarschine had taken her sister’s place.”

“So far so good,” said Norwood. “But now for your strong reasons not to tell the real name of the dead woman?”

Myles grew pale again, and bit his nether lip fiercely. Then he turned toward May and took both her hands.

“Can you bear a shock?” he asked, looking searchingly at her.

“Yes,” she replied, faintly.

“Good heavens!” thought Norwood. “Surely he isn’t going to confess he murdered the woman himself?”

Myles paused a moment, and was then about to speak, when the door of the cell was opened and Dowker entered in a state of suppressed excitement.

“Good-morning, Miss Penfold and gentlemen,” he said, rapidly. “I have some news—good news—for you!”

“About what?” asked Norwood, curiously.

“This Jermyn Street case,” replied Dowker. “I have been to see Lord Calliston, and found out his movements on that night.”

“Do they incriminate him?” asked Norwood.

“If they did it would not much matter,” replied the detective, “for I have discovered the real criminal.”

“What?” cried Norwood and Miss Penfold, while Myles said nothing, but fixed his eyes eagerly on Dowker’s face.

“Yes—she has confessed.”

“She!” cried May. “Is it a woman?”

“It is—Lena Sarschine!”

“Lena Sarschine!” echoed the three in astonishment.

“The same. She has confessed that she followed her sister on that night and killed her through jealousy.”

“What weapon did she use?” asked Desmond, disbelievingly.

“This,” replied Dowker, and produced the dagger Lena had thrown at his feet.

“Do you believe this story?” asked Desmond.

“At first I did not believe one word,” answered the detective slowly, “but I am now doubtful, as I don’t see what she would gain by confessing herself guilty of a crime she had not committed.”

“I can tell you what she would gain,” said Desmond, vehemently. “Yes—she loves Calliston devotedly, and thought you were trying to bring home the crime to him. Did she overhear your conversation?”

“Some of it,” admitted Dowker, reluctantly.

“Then that explains all,” said Myles, triumphantly. “She thought Calliston was in danger of being arrested for the murder, and swore she did it in order to save him. Remember, she has an excitable nature, and her nerves are overstrung with the horror of her sister’s death. Ten to one she did not know what she was saying.”

“But this dagger?” began Norwood.

“Pish!” retorted Myles. “I don’t believe that toy had anything to do with it. Find out if it’s poisoned, for I’ll stake my existence it is not. No; Lena Sarschine did not commit the crime!”

“You seem to be, very certain,” said Dowker. “Perhaps you can tell me who did?”

“I can’t tell you for certain,” retorted Desmond, “but I have my suspicions. You wanted to know my reasons for not divulging the identity of the deceased,” he went on, turning to Norwood, “I can now give them, as this self-accusation of Lena Sarschine’s is too absurd to be allowed to stand. I told you I did not see Lady Balscombe again on that night. I told a lie—I did. When I left the house to follow her and see that she got home safely, I went along Piccadilly, as I told you. Under a gas-lamp I saw Lady Balscombe standing talking to a man. They were quarreling, and the man’s voice was raised in anger. Suddenly I saw the man put his hand to her throat and wrench something away. Lady Balscombe gave a cry and fled across the street in the direction of St. James’s Street, followed by the man. They were swallowed up in the fog, and I saw no more of them. It was the direction they took that led me into St. James’s Street on that night. If you remember, there was a mark on Lady Balscombe’s neck, as if something had been wrenched off, so you can now understand the reason. I believe the man inflicted the fatal wound at the same time. She fled from him, went blindly down St. James’s Street, into Jermyn Street, and sunk in a dying condition on the steps where she was found.”

“Did you recognize the man?” asked Dowker, who had been listening intently to this story.

“I did.”

“And who was it?” cried the trio.

“Sir Rupert Balscombe,” said Myles.

May fell into Norwood’s arms with a stifled cry, but Dowker began to speak rapidly:

“Why, Lord Calliston also said he saw him going after Lady Balscombe. By Jove! so he is the criminal after all. What a fool I’ve been—I’m off!”

“Where to?” asked Norwood.

“I want to find out where the locket and chain is that Sir Rupert wrenched off his wife’s neck.”

Chapter XIX

What Dowker Discovered

AFTER hearing the revelations made by Lord Calliston and Myles Desmond, concerning the movements of Sir Rupert Balscombe on the night of the murder, Dowker had no doubt in his own mind that the baronet was guilty of the crime. Rumor, speaking truly for once, said they lived unhappily together owing to Lady Balscombe’s numerous infidelities, and it was only the honor of his name that prevented Sir Rupert applying for a divorce. Now, however, he had done so, as his wife’s apparent flight with Lord Calliston was of too glaring a character to be overlooked even by the most complacent husband.

Dowker, however, did not believe in the genuineness of the application, merely looking upon it as a clever piece of acting on the part of a wily scoundrel to cloak his crime. In the detective’s opinion, Sir Rupert had simulated rage on hearing of his wife’s apparent iniquity, had applied for a divorce, knowing she was dead, and had gone down to the yacht with a full knowledge that he would not see Lady Balscombe. In fact, all through he had acted a very clever part, in order to ward off suspicion that he was guilty of the crime of murder.

What Dowker now wanted to find was the locket which Sir Rupert had wrenched off his wife’s neck, and also the weapon used in the committal of the crime. It had been clearly shown that the Malay creese taken from Cleopatra Villa could not have been used by any one, so the baronet must have had some dagger of his own, which was now doubtless in his possession. If these two things could be found, their discovery, coupled with the evidence of Calliston and Desmond, would be quite sufficient to prove Sir Rupert guilty, unless, indeed, he could prove himself innocent, of which there did not seem to be much chance.

Dowker did not go at once to Park Lane as he was anxious to know how Lena Sarschine, or rather Lady Calliston, was after her hysterical confession of guilt, so he drove down to Cleopatra Villa, and on being shown into the drawing-room was confronted by Lord Calliston. That young nobleman looked haggard and worn out, so that in spite of his conduct, which had led to the murder of one woman and the self-accusation of another, the detective felt sorry for him.

“What do you want now?” he asked, irritably. “Have you come to arrest my wife?”

“Your wife,” said Dowker, pretending to have heard this for the first time.

“Yes,” replied Calliston, boldly; “we were married in France and she is now my wife. I don’t believe her guilty of this crime—do you?”

“I told you this morning I did not,” said the detective, quietly. “It was only a statement made by her to save you, because she thought you were guilty.”

“What do you say?” asked Calliston, abruptly.

“If you had asked me this morning, I should have said the circumstances were suspicious,” said Dowker, smoothly, “but now I can say heartily that you are innocent.”

“How do you know I am?” demanded Calliston, ironically.

“Because I have found out the real criminal, at least, one I believe to be the real criminal.”

“Sir Rupert Balscombe?”

“Yes, Sir Rupert Balscombe.”

“I thought so,” said Calliston, bitterly. “I know he hated his wife.”

“And had he not reason?” asked Dowker, significantly.

Calliston flushed and turned his face away.

“I am not a saint,” he said, in a low voice, “and though my conduct may appear to you to have been wrong I could hardly help myself; it would have taken a stronger man than myself to withstand the temptation.”

“And now?”

“Now,” replied Calliston, turning toward the detective, “I have married the only woman I ever really cared about, and we are going a tour round the world as soon as she is well—that is—if she ever does get well.”

“Is she then so ill?”

“Brain fever,” replied Calliston, curtly.

“I’m very sorry to hear it,” said Dowker, quietly, “for she is a noble woman.”

Calliston made no reply, but flung himself down on a couch and buried his face in his hands; so, without saying another word, Dowker left the room and made his final exit from Cleopatra Villa.

It was now about four o’clock in the afternoon, so Dowker drove to the Park Lane mansion and asked for Sir Rupert Balscombe. The footman told him the baronet was out, but added, on hearing his name, that Miss Penfold had given orders if he called that he was to be shown into the library, as she wished to see him. Dowker was pleased at this as he wanted to ask May some questions, and followed the servant in a very pleased frame of mind.

May Penfold was seated by a small table talking eagerly to Mr. Norwood, who sat near her with a pocket-book open on his knee. When Dowker entered May arose and went forward in a curiously eager manner. Her face was very pale, and there were dark circles under her eyes, but her features wore a very hopeful

expression, for she was now certain of saving her lover, though on the other hand she might lose her guardian.

“I’m so glad you’ve come, Mr. Dowker,” she said, quickly. “Mr. Norwood and myself have been talking over the position of the case and we want your assistance.”

“I will be delighted to give it,” answered Dowker, gravely, taking a seat. “I am anxious to make Mr. Desmond all the reparation in my power, as I was the unconscious cause of all his trouble.”

“You only acted according to your duty,” said Norwood, in a business-like tone; “the evidence against my client was very strong, but the evidence against Sir Rupert—”

“Is stronger still,” finished the detective. “Exactly; but we have to find out that evidence. Lord Calliston and Mr. Desmond can swear they saw him in Piccadilly following his wife, and the latter saw him wrench the locket off his wife’s neck; now I want to find that locket, and also— if possible—the dagger with which the crime was committed.”

Norwood shrugged his shoulders.

“You may be certain he would not keep dangerous evidence like that about.”

“Pardon me; I think he would, because, taking the case as a whole, it would have been impossible to bring his guilt home to him but for the circumstance of his being recognized by Lord Calliston and Mr. Desmond; even if he did not keep the dagger he would certainly retain the locket.”

“Why?” asked May.

“Because he would never dream that there would be any question of the locket being brought in evidence—had it not been for the mark on the neck of the wrenching off, no one would have ever known that Lady Balscombe wore a locket.”

“Oh! but I knew,” said May, eagerly; “she had a large gold locket with a thin gold chain—she always wore it.”

“Why did she attach such value to it?” asked Norwood.

“I don’t know; but she wore it morn, noon, and night.”

“Can you describe it?” demanded Dowker, knitting his brows.

May Penfold thought a moment.

“It was an old-fashioned piece of jewelry,” she said at length; “I never saw it very closely, as Lady Balscombe kept it to herself, but it had two curls of hair—light and dark—twined together on one side, and on the other I think there was a portrait.”

“Of whom?”

“I don’t think Sir Rupert and Lady Balscombe were so fondly attached as all that—it’s more probable it was Lord Calliston.”

“Have you any idea where Sir Rupert could have put it?” asked Dowker, glancing round the room.

“Not the least in the world,” replied May. “He might have it in his bed room or dressing-room—or it might be here.”

“Here!” echoed both the men, rising.

“Well, Sir Rupert was always in this room,” said May. “He mostly sat at this desk, so perhaps he placed it in one of the drawers thinking no one would ransack his private papers.”

The desk she alluded to was a massive piece of furniture, beautifully carved. There were innumerable drawers down each side—a morocco covered writing-board, and at the back of this, more drawers—while the center was a fantastic piece of carving, representing the head of Shakespeare with characters from his dramas all round him. Owing to the elaborate carving the wood was wonderfully massive and thick, so that the whole desk looked a remarkably handsome piece of furniture.

“It belonged to Lady Balscombe’s father, Captain Dicksfall,” said May, as they looked at it, “and he gave it to Sir Rupert as a wedding present.”

Dowker bent down and pulled at the drawers, but they were all locked, whereupon he straightened himself and looked somewhat disconsolate.

“Not much chance of getting in there,” he said, in an annoyed tone, “and we can not break open the drawers as we have no authority to do so.”

May Penfold laughed a little maliciously.

“In spite of your being a detective,” she said, lightly, “I am able to help you—the mouse will gnaw the net and release the lion. If Sir Rupert has hidden the locket anywhere, it will be in the secret hiding-place of this desk.”

“Is there one?” asked Norwood, looking at it.

“Yes! I was examining the desk one day, and Lady Balscombe told me there was a secret drawer which nobody knew but herself—not even Sir Rupert, as her father had not told him about it on presenting the desk. I asked her where it was, but she refused to tell me, and said I could find out.”

“Did you try?” asked Dowker.

“Of course I did—I am a woman, and therefore curious,” replied May, with a smile, “I discovered it one day by accident, so I will now show it to you.”

“Wait a moment,” said Norwood. “If Sir Rupert did not know of the existence of this secret place he can hardly have hidden anything in it.”

May Penfold’s face fell.

“No—that’s true,” she replied, dismally, “however, I will show it to you, and then we will find some means to open these other drawers.”

“The end of this will be a search-warrant,” said Dowker, decisively.

May did not reply; but leaning on the desk, pressed her fingers on the ears of the Shakespeare head—a sharp click was heard—and she lifted out the whole face of the carving, disclosing a wide place, but with no depth, so that any articles placed therein would have to stand on end. As she removed the carving Dowker gave an exclamation and bent forward, for there before them was an old-fashioned locket, a slender gold chain, and an arrow-head. The three looked at one another in silence, which was broken by Dowker.

“This,” he said, taking up the locket, “is without doubt what you allude to, Miss Penfold—see, there is a fair curl and a dark curl of hair on this side, and on the other the face of a man—or rather a boy.”

And indeed the face looked like that of a boy—smooth face—black hair—clearly cut features and dark eyes.

“Who can it be?” said May, gazing at it. “I’ve seen that face before.”

“So have I,” answered Dowker, with decision; “there is something in it familiar; but is this the locket you have seen Lady Balscombe wear?”

“Yes—and this is the chain.”

“So far so good,” said Norwood, taking up the arrowhead: “but what is this?”

Dowker looked at it for a moment, and then smiled.

“I would advise you to take care of that,” he said, quietly, “it’s poisoned.”

“Poisoned!” echoed Norwood, and quickly replaced it in the drawer, “how do you know?”

“Because I am certain that it is the weapon with which the crime was committed—we were misled by the Malay creese, but this is a certainty.”

“Then you think Sir Rupert guilty?” asked May, in dismay.

“Sir Rupert is jealous of his wife—he follows her on that night, knowing she is going to elope—meets her in Piccadilly, and is seen following her by one witness—is overheard having angry words with her by a second, who also sees him wrench a locket off her neck—his wife is found dead—and in a secret drawer, known only to Sir Rupert, yourself, and the dead woman, is found the locket and the weapon with which the crime was committed. I think the case is clear enough.”

“What will you do now?” asked Norwood.

“Put them back for the present,” said Dowker, replacing the locket and chain, “and wait here for Sir Rupert. I will question him. He will deny it. Then I will confound him by showing him the evidence of his guilt. Will you kindly replace the carving, Miss Penfold.”

May did as she was told in silence, for though this discovery would save her lover, yet she was deeply grieved at the thought of what it meant to her guardian.

“If his wife had been a good woman this would not have happened,” she said, bitterly.

“Were all people good I’d have no occupation,” said Dowker, dryly.

At this moment they heard footsteps outside and a man talking, whose voice May immediately recognized.

“It’s Mr. Ellersby,” she said, quickly. “He has come to see Sir Rupert about my marriage. I can not meet him.”

“Neither can I,” said Dowker, “as I want to see Sir Rupert alone. Is there no place where we can wait?”

“Yes, here,” said May, and walked to the end of the room, where there was a door leading to a smaller apartment, before which hung a curtain. “Let us all go in here till he is gone.”

Dowker and Norwood took up their hats and went after her into the room, leaving the library quiet and deserted.

Chapter XX

The End Of It All

SPENCER ELLERSBY, well dressed, nonchalant, and languid, entered the room with a smile on his face, which faded quickly when he found there was no one present to receive him.

“I thought you said Miss Penfold was here,” he observed, sharply, turning to the footman who was showing him in.

“So she was, sir,” stammered the servant, in some confusion, “and two gentlemen.”

“Gentlemen!” muttered Ellersby to himself, taking a chair, “some of those empty-headed men about town, I suppose.”

“I think Miss Penfold must have gone up to the drawing-room, sir,” said the servant, turning toward the door. “Will I take your name up, sir?”

“No,” replied Ellersby, with a yawn. “I want to see Sir Rupert just now, so I’ll wait here till he comes in, and go upstairs afterward.”

“Very good, sir,” said the footman, and was just retiring when Sir Rupert, looking jaded and worried, entered the room, upon which Ellersby rose to his feet, and the footman going out, closed the door behind him.

“Ah, Sir Rupert,” he said, carelessly, “I am so glad to see you, as I thought I’d have to wait for some time. I must apologize for coming into this room, but your servant said Miss Penfold was here.”

“Have you seen her?” said Sir Rupert, moodily, taking his seat in front of the desk and swinging round the seat so as to face his visitor.

“No, he made a mistake. She is up in the drawing-room, so I am going to see her later on.”

“Meanwhile?” demanded the baronet.

“I am going to see you,” finished Ellersby, smoothly, resuming his seat.

Balscombe raised his eyebrows.

“What about?”

“A very important subject—marriage.”

“Whose marriage?”

“My own.”

“What have I to do with your marriage?”

“A great deal,” replied Ellersby, calmly, “because I want to marry Miss Penfold.”

“Impossible,” said Balscombe, pointedly, “quite impossible.”

“How so?” asked the other, coolly. “I have a good position, plenty of money, and my character is good.”

“Your moral character?” sneering.

“Oh, that,” with a laugh, “is no better nor worse than other young men, so I would like your answer. Will you favor my suit?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because, in the first place, my ward is going to marry Myles Desmond.”

“Marry Myles Desmond!” replied Ellersby, with a sneer. “A man lying in prison under a charge of murder!”

“He will be proved innocent of that charge.”

“By whom?”

“That’s my business,” retorted Balscombe, with a scowl.

Ellersby laughed in a most irritating manner.

“So that is your first objection,” he said, lightly. “Pray what is your second?”

For answer Balscombe turned to his desk, and unlocking a drawer, took therefrom a bundle of old letters tied with a blue ribbon.

“This is my second objection,” he said, holding them up. “Perhaps you recognize these letters?”

Spencer Ellersby turned pale and half rose from his seat. “Where did you find them?”

"In the secret drawer of this desk," replied the baronet. "My wife, thinking I did not know the hiding-place, put them there for safety; but her father told me about the secret drawer when he gave me the desk, and one day I opened it idly, not expecting to find anything, when I found these."

Ellersby laughed discordantly.

"And what are those wonderful letters?"

"You need not pretend ignorance," said the baronet, coldly. "These are letters written by you to my wife at Folkestone, under her maiden name of Amelia Dicksfall, and which prove that you were her lover long before she met me."

"I acknowledge it," said Ellersby, insolently. "And what have you to say about it?"

"Simply this," replied Balscombe, rising, "that you may thank God that I do not kill you where you sit. But my wife proved to be such a worthless woman, she is not fit to be defended, and knowing this, you have the daring to ask me for my ward's hand. Do you think I would give her to you, a scoundrel, a profligate? Never!"

"I think you will," said Ellersby, coldly, "for the very good and sufficient reason that I can force you to."

"How so?"

"You know well enough," sneered the other. "If the police ask me who committed the Jermyn Street murder, I can tell them who did it—Rupert Balscombe."

"You scoundrel—do you mean to say I killed my wife?"

"I can swear it—and I will, too, if you don't give me your ward!"

"It's a cursed lie!" cried the baronet, white with fury; "where are your proofs?"

"Open that hiding-place, and you'll find them."

Sir Rupert gave a stifled cry, and staggered back against the desk, while Ellersby looked at him with a smile of triumph. The three listeners in the other room were standing close to the door, with greedy ears drinking in every word of this strange conversation.

The baronet with an effort recovered himself, and, turning to the desk, touched the secret spring and took down the carving. There lay the locket, the chain, and the fatal arrow.

"There is the locket you wrenched off your wife's neck on that night," said Ellersby, pitilessly, "and there is the poisoned arrow-head with which you committed the crime!"

Balscombe took out the objects and looked at them vacantly.

"What devilry is this?" he said, fiercely. "This is the locket, I know—the locket that contains your hair and your picture, curse you! But the arrow-head—I know nothing of that."

"Bah! who would believe you?" replied the other, mockingly; "it is in your secret drawer."

“How did you know this hiding-place?” demanded Balscombe.

“I never said I knew it.”

“No, but you said your evidence was in there, so you must have seen these things before. I believe you put the arrow-head there yourself.”

“Did I, indeed?” said Ellersby, with a sneer. “Where would I get the arrow-head? don’t blame me for a crime you committed yourself.”

“I did not commit it!” shouted Balscombe, in a frenzy. “I acknowledge I knew of my wife’s intended elopement, and came up from Berkshire to prevent it. I was too late, and went to Calliston’s rooms to see him. I missed the door in the fog, and when I found it, the first thing I saw was my guilty wife leaving the house. I followed her and caught up to her—she shrieked, and I gave way to my just anger. I knew she had this locket, and thought it contained Calliston’s portrait, not yours, so wrenched it off her neck to make sure. She ran away across the street and I lost her in the fog. I swear I saw no more of her on that night till I read of her death.”

“You knew it was your wife that was dead?”

“I was not certain. I heard the ‘Seamew’ had sailed with Lady Balscombe on board, and thought that the dead woman was some wretched street-walker with whom my wife had changed clothes; but I was not certain she was dead till I saw Lena Sarschine on board the ‘Seamew’—then I knew my wife was the victim of the Jermyn Street tragedy, but I swear I did not kill her.”

Ellersby laughed scoffingly.

“Of course it is to your interest to say that—but who will believe you with such strong evidence against you?”

“Then I suppose you mean to denounce me?” said the baronet, coldly.

“Not if you agree to give me the hand of May Penfold.”

“I can not force her inclinations.”

“No, but you are her guardian and can influence her.”

“If I refuse?”

“You do so at your own risk.”

“And that risk?”

“Means hanging to you!” said Ellersby, brutally.

The two men stood looking fixedly at one another, and for a few moments there was a dead silence, while the three listeners waited with beating hearts for the end of the conversation which seemed to promise the solution of this extraordinary mystery.

Balscombe remained for a time in deep thought, and then looked up with a look of determination in his eyes.

“I decline to accede to your demand,” he said, firmly.

“Then you must take the consequence.”

“I am prepared to do so.”

Ellersby paused for a minute.

“Will you tell me the reason for your decision?”

“First, because I am innocent of the crime you accuse me of, and second, I believe you placed this poisoned arrow-head here in order to implicate me in the murder.”

“I can speak openly to you,” said Ellersby, coolly, “because you are in my power. I did place the poisoned arrow-head there, in order to secure evidence against you!”

“Then it was you killed my wife!” cried Balscombe, stepping toward him with the arrow-head in his hand.

“I never said I did!” retorted Ellersby, audaciously; “but I can tell you this—I met your wife on that night after you left her, and I asked her for those letters, as they compromised both her and myself. She told me where they were and described the hiding-place to me. Last time I was here I searched and discovered the secret, but the letters were not there.”

“No. They were removed by me.”

“So I see; but if I did not find the letters, I found something better—the locket with my portrait which you took from your wife’s neck on that night; so, as I wanted to marry Miss Penfold and wanted you to help me, I placed there the arrow-head so as to force you for your own safety to help me. I have succeeded, and you must do what I order, or swing for it.”

“You devil!” cried Balscombe, madly. “It was you who murdered my unhappy wife—do not deny it! I can see it in your cowardly face; I will accuse you before the world, and hang you for your crime!”

“Bah! who will believe your word against mine? There is no evidence against me!”

“Your own confession!”

“Does not include a confession of murder; what I have said to you in private I will deny in public—you have no witnesses.”

“You lie! here are three!”

The two men turned round with a cry, and there, on the threshold of the room stood May Penfold, with a look of triumph in her eyes; and behind, Dowker and Norwood. Ellersby saw he was lost, and with a harsh shriek made a bound for the door of the library; but before he could reach it Balscombe threw himself on him and bore him to the ground. The two men rolled on the floor fighting desperately, and then Dowker joined in to assist in securing Ellersby, when suddenly his struggles ceased and he became quite passive.

"It's all over," he said, quietly, with a livid face, as Balscombe arose to his feet. "I will escape you yet."

"You will not escape the gallows!" cried Balscombe, panting.

"Yes, I will," sneered Ellersby, with a ghastly smile; "and by your own act. You forgot you had the poisoned arrow-head in your hand, and you have wounded me— see!"

He held up his right hand, and there they saw a long red, ragged wound where the weapon had torn him.

"In ten minutes I will be a dead man," he said, quietly. "Not all the science in the world can save me now."

"Curse it!" cried Dowker, in a rage, while the other three remained silent with horror.

"Ah! you are angry at my escaping from you," said Ellersby, with his usual cynicism. "Console yourself, my astute thief-catcher, my capture would not have redounded to your credit, as you were quite on the wrong scent. You suspected Desmond, Calliston, Lena Sarschine, and Balscombe; every one but the right one. I have fooled you to the end, and, now I am caught, will yet escape your clutches."

May Penfold stepped; toward him.

"As you have sinned so deeply," she said, in a low tone, "you had better make reparation while you may and confess all, so as to release Myles from prison. Meanwhile, I will go for a doctor."

He signed her feebly to remain.

"No doctor can do me any good," he said, faintly, "but I will tell all. Mr. Dowker will, perhaps, write it down, and if I'm not too far gone, I'll—I'll sign it."

"I will write your confession," said Norwood, and, sitting down at the desk, he took up a pen and waited.

It was a strange scene. Ellersby lying on the floor with his eyes half closed, Balscombe leaning, against the desk, with his clothes all torn and a white, haggard face, and May Penfold standing beside Dowker, looking with pitying eyes on the dying man at her feet.

As he knew he had not long to live, Ellersby commenced at once:

"I am, as you know, the son of a West Indian, and came to England to be educated. I was brought up, in early childhood, by a negro nurse, and before I left Barbadoes she gave me an arrow-head, which, she told me, was steeped in deadly poison, and that one scratch would kill. Something to do with their Obi business, I suppose. She told me to use it on my enemies, but I was not so savage as she was, though I have got negro blood in my veins, and I did not bother much about it. I finished my education and went into society. One time, while down at Folkestone, I met Amelia Dicksfall, and loved her—you do not know how I loved her—with all the mad passion of a creole. She led me on till I was her slave and then refused to marry me, for at least two years—for what reason I was then ignorant, but now I know it was because she wanted to marry a title, and kept me in hand so as to become my wife if she failed to realize her ambition. I went abroad and when I returned a short time ago, I found she had married Balscombe. I saw her and reproached her with her treachery, but she only laughed at me. Then I heard how she carried on with Calliston and swore I would kill her if she preferred him to me. She denied that she cared for him, and then I heard about her projected elopement and determined to make one more appeal to her. If that failed I took an oath I would kill her with the poisoned arrow-head. I thought I would see her on that night, so, dressing myself in evening dress, I put the arrow-head in my pocket and went along to Park

Lane. I was told she had gone to the Countess of Kerstoke's ball and, thinking this was a mere subterfuge on her part, I thought I would go to Calliston's chambers and see him. I went along to his rooms in Piccadilly, but as I did not know where they were it was some time before I found them. I was going in when I saw Balscombe waiting about, and wondered what he was doing there. While thus waiting a woman came out, and I recognized Lady Balscombe at once. I saw Sir Rupert go after her and witnessed their dispute under the lamp. I saw him wrench off the locket, and then Lady Balscombe fled. I followed, and found her wandering vaguely about in the fog. She recognized me, and we had a stormy interview. I insisted on her coming to my hotel and going away with me in the morning, pointing out that now her husband had seen her coming out of Calliston's chambers he would apply for a divorce. I then asked her about the letters and she told me where they were. I said I would get them, and then Sir Rupert, would never know with whom she had gone away. She agreed to go with me, and went as far as Jermyn Street; then she refused to go further, saying she loved Calliston and hated me. She insisted on going down to Shoreham in the morning, and taunted me so that I got mad with anger and determined to kill her. So I apparently agreed to what she said and asked her to kiss me for the last time. She did so, and when I was embracing her I wounded her in the neck with the poisoned arrow-head. She thought it was only a pin pricking her, but when she was dying I told her what I had done and said, that now she could never be any other man's mistress or wife. She died shortly afterward, and then I thought about saving myself, so went along to the Countess of Kerstoke's ball, in order to prove an *alibi* should it be necessary. In coming back I went up the steps where I had left her to see if she was still there, thinking the body might have been discovered. It was still lying there, however, so I called the policeman. The rest you know. As to the arrow-head, I placed it in there in looking for the letters, in order to throw the blame on Balscombe, because I knew all his movements on that night were in favor of the presumption of his having committed the crime."

He paused at this point, for his eyes were becoming glazed and his voice was faint and weak. Norwood had written out the words that had fallen from his lips, and now brought the paper and pen, in order for him to sign it. The dying man raised himself on his elbow with an effort and signed his name with difficulty in the place indicated by the lawyer. When this was done, Balscombe and Norwood affixed their signatures as witnesses; then the latter placed the confession in an envelope.

The action of the poison being very rapid, Ellersby was now in a half-comatose condition, his eyes being closed and his breathing stertorous. He began to speak again in a drowsy voice, which sounded as if he was far away:

"It's the irony of Fate . . . brought me here . . . to my death. I came to conquer and remain to die. . . . The old Greeks were right. . . . Man ... sport of Fate . . . Nemesis . . . wins hands down ... if there is . . . world . . . beyond . . . I . . . I . . . find . . ."

His slow, monotonous voice stopped here, and his head fell back; to all appearances he was asleep, but the onlookers knew it was his last earthly sleep, and when he awoke it would be in another world.

The calm, placid light of the evening stole softly through the windows and shone on the still face of the dead man, and on the awe-struck spectators.

Epilogue

THE Piccadilly puzzle being now solved, nothing remained but to settle all matters in connection therewith, which was speedily done. The publication of the whole story caused a great deal of excitement, and of course all the newspapers quoted the well-known proverb that "Truth is stranger than fiction."

Myles Desmond was released from prison, and became a kind of hero, owing to the fortitude with which he had sustained his unpleasant position. Sir Rupert gave his consent to May Penfold's marriage with him, and it took place at St. George's, Hanover Square, with great splendor, and the happy pair departed to the Continent for their honey-moon. On their return Myles published a novel he had written, which was a great success, and being in an independent position, owing to his wife's fortune, he had the peculiar satisfaction of writing to please himself, and not the public.

Lord Calliston did not remain in London long, as the part he had played in the terrible drama was not by any means an enviable one; so as soon as Lena Sarschine, now Lady Calliston, recovered from her illness, they went away to the South Seas in the "Seamew," where among the gorgeous scenery of the islands, they soon forgot the one tragic episode of their lives.

Sir Rupert did not marry again, but left London for his place in the country, where he shut himself up like a hermit, and steadily refused to see any one. His faith in womankind was gone, and not having any heirs, a distant cousin is now eagerly waiting for his demise, as he is anxious to enjoy the Balscombe estates and the large income appertaining thereto.

Flip was taken off the streets by Dowker, and put to school, where his natural sharpness was wonderfully developed, and he is now looking forward to the time when Dowker intends to instruct him in the mysteries of the detective craft and make him his successor.

As to Dowker, he was a good deal disappointed at the unlooked-for termination to the case, for had it not been for the accident of overhearing the conversation in the library, he would most certainly have done his best to hang Sir Rupert Balscombe. As it turned out that the baronet was innocent, he felt only too glad that he had been saved from the committal of such a terrible crime as condemning a guiltless man to an ignominious death, but to this day, he always refers to the Piccadilly Puzzle as the most extraordinary case that ever came under his experience.

THE END

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