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The Opal Serpent

Fergus Hume

Chapter I

Don Quixote In London

Simon Beecot was a country gentleman with a small income, a small estate and a mind considerably smaller than either. He dwelt at Wargrove in Essex and spent his idle hours—of which he possessed a daily and nightly twenty-four—in snarling at his faded wife and in snapping between whiles at his son. Mrs. Beecot, having been bullied into old age long before her time, accepted sour looks and hard words as necessary to God's providence, but Paul, a fiery youth, resented useless nagging. He owned more brain-power than his progenitor, and to this favoring of Nature paterfamilias naturally objected. Paul also desired fame, which was likewise a crime in the fire-side tyrant's eyes.

As there were no other children Paul was heir to the Beecot acres, therefore their present proprietor suggested that his son should wait with idle hands for the falling in of the heritage. In plain words, Mr. Beecot, coming of a long line of middle-class loafers, wished his son to be a loafer also. Again, when Mrs. Beecot retired to a tearful rest, her bully found Paul a useful person on whom to expend his spleen. Should this whipping-boy leave, Mr. Beecot would have to forego this enjoyment, as servants object to being sworn at without cause. For years Mr. Beecot indulged in bouts of bad temper, till Paul, finding twenty-five too dignified an age to tolerate abuse, announced his intention of storming London as a scribbler.

The parents objected in detail. Mrs. Beecot, after her kind, dissolved in tears, and made reference to young birds leaving the nest, while her husband, puffed out like a frog, and redder than the wattles of a turkey-cock, exhausted himself in well-chosen expressions. Paul increased the use of these by fixing a day for his departure. The female Beecot retired to bed with the assistance of a maid, burnt feathers and sal volatile, and the male, as a last and clinching argument, figuratively buttoned up his pockets.

“Not one shilling will you get from me,” said Beecot senior, with the graceful addition of vigorous adjectives.

“I don’t ask for money,” said Paul, keeping his temper, for after all the turkey-cock was his father. “I have saved fifty pounds. Not out of my pocket-money,” he added hastily, seeing further objections on the way. “I earned it by writing short stories.”

“The confounded mercantile instinct,” snorted paterfamilias, only he used stronger words. “Your mother’s uncle was in trade. Thank Heaven none of my people ever used hands or brains. The Beecots lived like gentlemen.”

“I should say like cabbages from your description, father.”

“No insolence, sir. How dare you disgrace your family? Writing tales indeed! Rubbish I expect” (here several adjectives). “And you took money I’ll be bound, eh! eh!”

“I have just informed you that I took all I could get,” said Beecot junior, quietly. “I’ll live in Town on my savings. When I make a name and a fortune I’ll return.”

“Never! never!” gobbled the turkey-cock. “If you descend to the gutter you can wallow there. I’ll cut you out of my will.”

“Very good, sir, that’s settled. Let us change the subject.”

But the old gentleman was too high-spirited to leave well alone. He demanded to know if Paul knew to whom he was talking, inquired if he had read the Bible touching the duties of children to their parents, instanced the fact that Paul’s dear mother would probably pine away

and die, and ended with a pathetic reference to losing the prop of his old age. Paul listened respectfully and held to his own opinion. In defence of the same he replied in detail,—

“I am aware that I talk to my father, sir,” said he, with spirit; “you never allow me to forget that fact. If another man spoke to me as you do I should probably break his head. I *have* read the Bible, and find therein that parents owe a duty to their children, which certainly does not include being abused like a pick-pocket. My mother will not pine away if you will leave her alone for at least three hours a day. And as to my being the prop of your old age, your vigor of language assures me that you are strong enough to stand alone.”

Paterfamilias, never bearded before, hastily drank a glass of port—the two were enjoying the usual pleasant family meal when the conversation took place—and said—but it is useless to detail his remarks. They were all sound and no sense. In justice to himself, and out of pity for his father, Paul cut short the scene by leaving the room with his determination unchanged. Mr. Beecot thereupon retired to bed, and lectured his wife on the enormity of having brought a parricide into the world. Having been countered for once in his life with common-sense, he felt that he could not put the matter too strongly to a woman, who was too weak to resent his bullying.

Early next day the cause of the commotion, not having swerved a hair's-breadth from the path he had marked out, took leave of his mother, and a formal farewell of the gentleman who described himself as the best of fathers. Beecot senior, turkey-cock and tyrant, was more subdued now that he found bluster would not carry his point. But the wave of common-sense came too late. Paul departed bag and baggage, and his sire swore to the empty air. Even Mrs. Beecot was not available, as she had fainted.

Once Paul was fairly out of the house paterfamilias announced that the glory of Israel had departed, removed his son's photograph from the drawing-room, and considered which of the relatives he had quarrelled with he should adopt. Privately, he thought he had been a trifle hard on the lad, and but for his obstinacy—which he called firmness—he would have recalled the prodigal. But that enterprising adventurer was beyond hearing, and had left no address behind him. Beecot, the bully, was not a

bad old boy if only he had been firmly dealt with, so he acknowledged that Paul had a fine spirit of his own, inherited from himself, and prophesied incorrectly. "He'll come back when the fifty pounds is exhausted," said he in a kind of dejected rage, "and when he does—" A clenched fist shaken at nothing terminated the speech and showed that the leopard could not change his spots.

So Paul Beecot repaired to London, and after the orthodox fashion began to cultivate the Muses on a little oatmeal by renting a Bloomsbury garret. There he wrote reams on all subjects and in all styles, and for six months assiduously haunted publishers' doors with varying fortunes. Sometimes he came away with a cheque, but more often with a bulky manuscript bulging his pocket. When tired of setting down imaginary woes he had time to think of his own; but being a cheerful youth, with an indomitable spirit, he banished trouble by interesting himself in the cheap world. By this is meant the world which costs no money to view—the world of the street. Here he witnessed the drama of humanity from morning till night, and from sunset till dawn, and on the whole witnessed very good acting. The poorer parts in the human comedy were particularly well played, and starving folks were quite dramatic in their demands for food. Note-book in hand, Paul witnessed spectacular shows in the West End, grotesque farces in the Strand, melodrama in Whitechapel and tragedy on Waterloo Bridge at midnight. Indeed, he quite spoiled the effect of a sensation scene by tugging at the skirts of a starving heroine who wished to take a river journey into the next world. But for the most part, he remained a spectator and plagiarised from real life.

Shortly, the great manager of the Universal Theatre enlisted Paul as an actor, and he assumed the double *rôle* of an unappreciated author and a sighing lover. In the first capacity he had in his desk ten short stories, a couple of novels, three dramas and a sheaf of doubtful verses. These failed to appeal to editor, manager or publisher, and their author found himself reduced to his last five-pound note. Then the foolish, ardent lad must needs fall in love. Who his divinity was, what she was, and why she should be divinised, can be gathered from a conversation her worshipper held with an old school-fellow.

It was in Oxford Street at five o'clock on a June afternoon that Paul met Grexon Hay. Turning the corner of the street leading to his Bloomsbury

attic, the author was tapped on the shoulder by a resplendent Bond Street being. That is, the said being wore a perfectly-fitting frock-coat, a silk hat, trousers with the regulation fold back and front, an orchid buttonhole, grey gloves, boots that glittered, and carried a gold-topped cane. The fact that Paul wheeled without wincing showed that he was not yet in debt. Your Grub Street old-time author would have leaped his own length at the touch. But Paul, with a clean conscience, turned slowly, and gazed without recognition into the clean-shaven, calm, cold face that confronted his inquiring eyes.

“Beecot!” said the newcomer, taking rapid stock of Paul’s shabby serge suit and worn looks. “I thought I was right.”

The voice, if not the face, awoke old memories.

“Hay—Grexon Hay!” cried the struggling genius. “Well, I am glad to see you,” and he shook hands with the frank grip of an honest man.

“And I you.” Hay drew his friend up the side street and out of the human tide which deluged the pavement. “But you seem—”

“It’s a long story,” interrupted Paul flushing. “Come to my castle and I’ll tell you all about it, old boy. You’ll stay to supper, won’t you? See here”—Paul displayed a parcel—“a pound of sausages. You loved ‘em at school, and I’m a superfine cook.”

Grexon Hay always used expression and word to hide his feelings. But with Paul—whom he had always considered a generous ass at Torrington school—a trifle of self-betrayal didn’t matter much. Beecot was too dense, and, it may be added, too honest to turn any opportunity to advantage. “It’s a most surprising thing,” said Hay, in his calm way, “really a most surprising thing, that a Torrington public school boy, my friend, and the son of wealthy parents, should be buying sausages.”

“Come now,” said Paul, with great spirit and towing Hay homeward, “I haven’t asked you for money.”

“If you do you shall have it,” said Hay, but the offer was not so generous a one as would appear. That was Hay all over. He always said what he did not mean, and knew well that Beecot’s uneasy pride shied at loans however small.

Paul, the unsophisticated, took the shadow of generosity for its substance, and his dark face lighted up. "You're a brick, Hay," he declared, "but I don't want money. No!"—this in reply to an eloquent glance from the well-to-do—"I have sufficient for my needs, and besides," with a look at the resplendent dress of the fashion-plate dandy, "I don't glitter in the West End."

"Which hints that those who do, are rich," said Grexon, with an arctic smile. "Wrong, Beecot. I'm poor. Only paupers can afford to dress well."

"In that case I must be a millionaire," laughed Beecot, glancing downward at his well-worn garb. "But mount these stairs; we have much to say to one another."

"Much that is pleasant," said the courtly Grexon.

Paul shrugged his square shoulders and stepped heavenward. "On your part, I hope," he sang back; "certainly not on mine. Come to Poverty Castle," and the fashionable visitor found his host lighting the fire in an apartment such as he had read about but had never seen.

It was quite the proper garret for starving genius—small, bleak, bare, but scrupulously clean. The floor was partially covered with scraps of old carpet, faded and worn; the walls were entirely papered with pictures from illustrated journals. One window, revealing endless rows of dingy chimney-pots, was draped with shabby rep curtains of a dull red. In one corner, behind an Indian screen, stood a narrow camp bedstead, covered with a gaudy Eastern shawl, and also a large tin bath, with a can of water beside it. Against the wall leaned a clumsy deal bookcase filled with volumes well-thumbed and in old bindings. On one side of the tiny fireplace was a horse-hair sofa, rendered less slippery by an expensive fur rug thrown over its bareness; on the other was a cupboard, whence Beecot rapidly produced crockery, knives, forks, a cruet, napkins and other table accessories, all of the cheapest description. A deal table in the centre of the room, an antique mahogany desk, heaped high with papers, under the window, completed the furnishing of Poverty Castle. And it was up four flights of stairs like that celebrated attic in Thackeray's poem.

"As near heaven as I am likely to get," rattled on Beecot, deftly frying the sausages, after placing his visitor on the sofa. "The grub will soon be

ready. I'm a first-class cook, bless you, old chap. Housemaid too. Clean, eh?" He waved the fork proudly round the ill-furnished room. "I'd dismiss myself if it wasn't."

"But—but," stammered Hay, much amazed, and surveying things through an eye-glass. "What are you doing here?"

"Trying to get my foot on the first rung of Fame's ladder."

"But I don't quite see—"

"Read Balzac's life and you will. His people gave him an attic and a starvation allowance in the hope of disgusting him. Bar the allowance, my pater has done the same. Here's the attic, and here's my starvation"—Paul gaily popped the frizzling sausages on a chipped hot plate—"and here's your aspiring servant hoping to be novelist, dramatist, and what not—to say nothing of why not? Mustard, there you are. Wait a bit. I'll brew you tea or cocoa."

"I never take those things with meals, Beecot."

"Your kit assures me of that. Champagne's more in your line. I say, Grexon, what are you doing now?"

"What other West-End men do," said Grexon, attacking a sausage.

"That means nothing. Well, you never did work at Torrington, so how can I expect the leopard to change his saucy spots."

Hay laughed, and, during the meal, explained his position. "On leaving school I was adopted by a rich uncle," he said. "When he went the way of all flesh he left me a thousand a year, which is enough to live on with strict economy. I have rooms in Alexander Street, Camden Hill, a circle of friends, and a good appetite, as you will perceive. With these I get through life very comfortably."

"Ha!" said Paul, darting a keen glance at his visitor, "you have the strong digestion necessary to happiness. Have you the hard heart also? If I remember at school—"

“Oh, hang school!” said Grexon, flushing all over his cold face. “I never think of school. I was glad when I got away from it. But we were great friends at school, Paul.”

“Something after the style of Steerforth and David Copperfield,” was Paul’s reply as he pushed back his plate; “you were my hero, and I was your slave. But the other boys—” He looked again.

“They hated me, because they did not understand me, as you did.”

“If that is so, Grexon, why did you let me slip out of your life? It is ten years since we parted. I was fifteen and you twenty.”

“Which now makes us twenty-five and thirty respectively,” said Hay, dryly; “you left school before I did.”

“Yes; I had scarlet fever, and was taken home to be nursed. I never went back, and since then I have never met an old Torrington boy—”

“Have you not?” asked Hay, eagerly.

“No. My parents took me abroad, and I sampled a German university. I returned to idle about my father’s place, till I grew sick of doing nothing, and, having ambitions, I came to try my luck in town.” He looked round and laughed. “You see my luck.”

“Well,” said Hay, lighting a dainty cigarette produced from a gold case, “my uncle, who died, sent me to Oxford and then I travelled. I am now on my own, as I told you, and haven’t a relative in the world.”

“Why don’t you marry?” asked Paul, with a flush.

Hay, wary man-about-town as he was, noted the flush, and guessed its cause. He could put two and two together as well as most people.

“I might ask you the same question,” said he.

The two friends looked at one another, and each thought of the difference in his companion since the old school-days. Hay was clean-shaven, fair-haired, and calm, almost icy, in manner. His eyes were blue and cold. No one could tell what was passing in his mind from the expression of his face. As a matter of fact he usually wore a mask, but at

the present moment, better feelings having the upper hand, the mask had slipped a trifle. But as a rule he kept command of expression, and words, and actions. An admirable example of self-control was Grexon Hay.

On the other hand, Beecot was slight, tall and dark, with an eager manner and a face which revealed his thoughts. His complexion was swart; he had large black eyes, a sensitive mouth, and a small moustache smartly twisted upward. He carried his head well, and looked rather military in appearance, probably because many of his forebears had been Army men. While Hay was smartly dressed in a Bond Street kit, Paul wore a well-cut, shabby blue serge. He looked perfectly well-bred, but his clothes were woefully threadbare.

From these and the garret and the lean meal of sausages Hay drew his conclusions and put them into words.

“Your father has cut you off,” said he, calmly, “and yet you propose to marry.”

“How do you know both things?”

“I keep my eyes open, Paul. I see this attic and your clothes. I saw also the flush on your face when you asked me why I did not marry. You are in love?”

“I am,” said Beecot, becoming scarlet, and throwing back his head. “It is clever of you to guess it. Prophecy more.”

Hay smiled in a cold way. “I prophesy that if you marry on nothing you will be miserable. But of course,” he looked sharply at his open-faced friend, “the lady may be rich.”

“She is the daughter of a second-hand bookseller called Norman, and I believe he combines selling books with pawnbroking.”

“Hum,” said Hay, “he might make money out of the last occupation. Is he a Jew by any chance?”

“No. He is a miserable-looking, one-eyed Christian, with the manner of a frightened rabbit.”

“One-eyed and frightened,” repeated Hay, musingly, but without change of expression; “desirable father-in-law. And the daughter?”

“Sylvia. She is an angel, a white lily, a—”

“Of course,” said Grexon, cutting short these rhapsodies. “And what do you intend to marry on?”

Beecot fished a shabby blue velvet case out of his pocket. “On my last five pounds and this,” he said, opening the case.

Hay looked at the contents of the case, and saw a rather large brooch made in the form of a jewelled serpent. “Opals, diamonds and gold,” he said slowly, then looked up eagerly. “Sell it to me.”

Chapter II

Deborah Junk, Duenna

Number forty-five Gwynne Street was a second-hand bookshop, and much of the stock was almost as old as the building itself. A weather-stained board of faded blue bore in tarnished gold lettering the name of its owner, and under this were two broad windows divided by a squat door, open on week-days from eight in the morning until eight at night. Within the shop was dark and had a musty odor.

On either side of the quaint old house was a butcher's and a baker's, flaunting places of business, raw in their newness. Between the first-named establishment and the bookshop a low, narrow passage led to a small backyard and to a flight of slimy steps, down which clients who did not wish to be seen could arrive at a kind of cellar to transact business with Mr. Norman.

This individual combined two distinct trades. On the ground floor he sold second-hand books; in the cellar he bought jewels and gave money on the same to needy people. In the shop, pale youths, untidy, abstracted old men, spectacled girls, and all varieties of the pundit caste were to be seen poring over ancient volumes or exchanging words with the proprietor. But to the cellar came fast young men, aged spendthrifts, women of no reputation and some who were very respectable indeed. These usually came at night, and in the cellar transactions would take place which involved much money exchanging hands. In the daytime

Mr. Norman was an innocent bookseller, but after seven he retired to the cellar and became as genuine a pawnbroker as could be found in London. Touching books he was easy enough to deal with, but a Shylock as regards jewels and money lent. With his bookish clients he passed for a dull shopkeeper who knew little about literature; but in the underground establishment he was spoken of, by those who came to pawn, as a usurer of the worst. In an underhand way he did a deal of business.

Aaron Norman—such was the name over the shop—looked like a man with a past—a miserable past, for in his one melancholy eye and twitching, nervous mouth could be read sorrow and apprehension. His face was pale, and he had an odd habit of glancing over his left shoulder, as though he expected to be tapped thereon by a police officer. Sixty years had rounded his shoulders and weakened his back, so that his one eye was almost constantly on the ground. Suffering had scored marks on his forehead and weary lines round his thin-lipped mouth. When he spoke he did so in a low, hesitating voice, and when he looked up, which was seldom, his eye revealed a hunted look like that of a wearied beast fearful lest it should be dragged from its lair.

It was this strange-looking man that Paul Beecot encountered in the doorway of the Gwynne Street shop the day after his meeting with Hay. Many a visit had Paul paid to that shop, and not always to buy books. Norman knew him very well, and, recognizing him in a fleeting look as he passed through the doorway, smiled weakly. Behind the counter stood Bart Tawsey, the lean underling, who was much sharper with buyers than was his master, but after a disappointed glance in his direction Paul addressed himself to the bookseller. “I wish to see you particularly,” he said, with his eager air.

“I am going out on important business,” said Norman, “but if you will not be very long—”

“It’s about a brooch I wish to pawn.”

The old man’s mouth became hard and his eyes sharper. “I can’t attend to that now, Mr. Beecot,” he said, and his voice rang out louder than usual. “After seven.”

“It’s only six now,” said Paul, looking over his shoulder at a church clock which could be seen clearly in the pale summer twilight. “I can’t wait.”

“Well, then, as you are an old customer—of books,” said Aaron, with emphasis, “I’ll stretch a point. You can go below at a quarter to seven, and I’ll come round through the outside passage to see you. Meantime, I must go about my business,” and he went away with his head hanging and his solitary eye searching the ground as usual.

Paul, in spite of his supposed hurry, was not ill-pleased that Aaron had gone out and that there was an idle hour before him. He stepped lightly into the shop, and, under the flaring gas—which was lighted, so dark was the interior of the shop in spite of the luminous gloaming—he encountered the smile of Barty. Paul, who was sensitive and proudly reticent, grew red. He knew well enough that his apparent admiration of Sylvia Norman had attracted the notice of Bart and of the red-armed wench, Deborah Junk, who was the factotum of the household. Not that he minded, for both these servants were devoted to Sylvia, and knowing that she returned the feelings of Paul said nothing about the position to Aaron. Beecot could not afford to make enemies of the pair, and had no wish to do so. They were coarse-grained and common, but loyal and kindly of heart.

“Got any new books, Bart?” asked Beecot, coming forward with roving eyes, for he hoped to see Sylvia glide out of the darkness to bless his hungry eyes.

“No, sir. We never get new books,” replied Bart, smartly. “Leastways there’s a batch of second-hand novels published last year. But bless you, Mr. Beecot, there ain’t nothing new about them ‘cept the bindings.”

“You are severe, Bart. I hope to be a novelist myself.”

“We need one, sir. For the most part them as write now ain’t novelists, if that means telling anything as is new. But I must go upstairs, sir. Miss Sylvia said I was to tell her when you came.”

“Oh, yes—er—er—that is—she wants to see a photograph of my old home. I promised to show it to her.” Paul took a parcel out of his pocket. “Can’t I go up?”

“No, sir. ‘Twouldn’t be wise. The old man may come back, and if he knew as you’d been in his house,” Bart jerked his head towards the ceiling, “he’d take a fit.”

“Why? He doesn’t think I’m after the silver?”

“Lor’ bless you no, sir. It ain’t that. What’s valuable—silver and gold and jewels and such like—is down there.” Bart nodded towards the floor. “But Mr. Norman don’t like people coming into his private rooms. He’s never let in anyone for years.”

“Perhaps he fears to lose the fairest jewel he has.”

Bart was what the Scotch call “quick in the uptake.” “He don’t think so much of her as he ought to, sir,” said he, gloomily. “But I know he loves her, and wants to make her a great heiress. When he goes to the worms Miss Sylvia will have a pretty penny. I only hope,” added Bart, looking slyly at Paul, “that he who has her to wife won’t squander what the old man has worked for.”

Beecot colored still more at this direct hint, and would have replied, but at this moment a large, red-faced, ponderous woman dashed into the shop from a side door. “There,” said she, clapping her hands in a childish way, “I know’d his vice, an’ I ses to Miss Sylvia, as is sittin’ doing needlework, which she do do lovely, I ses ‘That’s him,’ and she ses, with a lovely color, ‘Oh, Deborah, jus’ see, fur m’ear’t’s abeating too loud for me t’ear ‘is vice.’ So I ses—”

Here she became breathless and clapped her hands again, so as to prevent interruption. But Paul did interrupt her, knowing from experience that when once set going Deborah would go on until pulled up. “Can’t I go up to Miss Norman?” he asked.

“You may murder me, and slay me, and trample on my corp,” said Deborah, solemnly, “but go up you can’t. Master would send me to walk the streets if I dared to let you, innocent as you are, go up them stairs.”

Paul knew long ago how prejudiced the old man was in this respect. During all the six months he had known Sylvia he had never been permitted to mount the stairs in question. It was strange that Aaron should be so particular on this point, but connecting it with his

downcast eye and frightened air, Paul concluded, though without much reason, that the old man had something to conceal. More, that he was frightened of someone. However, he did not argue the point, but suggested a meeting-place. "Can't I see her in the cellar?" he asked. "Mr. Norman said I could go down to wait for him."

"Sir," said Deborah, plunging forward a step, like a stumbling 'bus horse, "don't tell me as you want to pawn."

"Well, I do," replied Paul, softly, "but you needn't tell everyone."

"It's only Bart," cried Deborah, casting a fierce look in the direction of the slim, sharp-faced young man, "and if he was to talk I'd take his tongue out. That I would. I'm a-training him to be my husband, as I don't hold with the ready-made article, and married he shall be, by parsing and clark if he's a good boy and don't talk of what don't matter to him."

"I ain't goin' to chatter," said Bart, with a wink. "Lor' bless you, sir, I've seen gentlemen as noble as yourself pawning things down there"—he nodded again towards the floor—"ah, and ladies too, but—"

"Hold your tongue," cried Deborah, pitching herself across the floor like a ship in distress. "Your a-talking now of what you ain't a right to be a-talkin' of, drat you. Come this way, Mr. Beecot, to the place where old Nick have his home, for that he is when seven strikes."

"You shouldn't speak of your master in that way," protested Paul.

"Oh, shouldn't I," snorted the maid, with a snort surprisingly loud. "And who have a better right, sir? I've been here twenty year as servant and nuss and friend and 'umble well-wisher to Miss Sylvia, coming a slip of a girl at ten, which makes me thirty, I don't deny; not that it's too old to marry Bart, though he's but twenty, and makes up in wickedness for twice that age. I know master, and when the sun's up there ain't a better man living, but turn on the gas and he's an old Nick. Bart, attend to your business and don't open them long ears of yours too wide. I won't have a listening husband, I can tell you. This way, sir. Mind the steps."

By this time Deborah had convoyed Paul to a dark corner behind the counter and jerked back a trap door. Here he saw a flight of wooden

steps which led downwards into darkness. But Miss Junk snatched up a lantern on the top step, and having lighted it dropped down, holding it above her red and touzelled head. Far below her voice was heard crying to Beecot to “Come on”; therefore he followed as quickly as he could, and soon found himself in the cellar. All around was dark, but Deborah lighted a couple of flaring gas-jets, and then turned, with her arms akimbo, on the visitor.

“Now then, sir, you and me must have a talk, confidential like,” said she in her breathless way. “It’s pawning is it? By which I knows that you ain’t brought that overbearing pa of yours to his knees.”

Paul sat down in a clumsy mahogany chair, which stood near a plain deal table, and stared at the handmaiden. “I never told you about my father,” he said, exhibiting surprise.

“Oh, no, of course not”—Miss Junk tossed her head—“me being a babe an’ a suckling, not fit to be told anything. But you told Miss Sylvia and she told me, as she tells everything to her Debby, God bless her for a pretty flower!” She pointed a coarse, red finger at Paul. “If you were a gay deceiver, Mr. Beecot, I’d trample on your corp this very minute if I was to die at Old Bailey for the doing of it.”

Seeing Deborah was breathless again, Paul seized his chance. “There is no reason you shouldn’t know all about me, and—”

“No, indeed, I should think not, begging your pardon, sir. But when you comes here six months back, I ses to Miss Sylvia, I ses, ‘He’s making eyes at you, my lily,’ and she ses to me, she says, ‘Oh, Debby, I love him, that I do.’ And then I ses, ses I, ‘My pretty, he looks a gent born and bred, but that’s the wust kind, so we’ll find out if he’s a liar before you loses your dear heart to him.’”

“But I’m not a liar—” began Paul, only to be cut short again.

“As well I knows,” burst out Miss Junk, her arms akimbo again. “Do you think, sir, as I’d ha’ let you come loving my pretty one and me not knowing if you was Judas or Jezebel? Not me, if I never drank my nightly drop of beer again. What you told Miss Sylvia of your frantic pa and your loving ma she told me. Pumping *you* may call it,” shouted Deborah, emphasising again with the red finger, “but everything you

told in your lover way she told her old silly Debby. I ses to Bart, if you loves me, Bart, go down to Wargrove, wherever it may be—if in England, which I doubt—and if he—meaning you—don't tell the truth, out he goes if I have the chucking of him myself and a police-court summings over it. So Bart goes to Wargrove, and he find out that you speaks true, which means that you're a gent, sir, if ever there was one, in spite of your frantic pa, so I hopes as you'll marry my flower, and make her happy—bless you,” and Deborah spread a large pair of mottled arms over Paul's head.

“It's all true,” said he, good-naturedly; “my father and I don't get on well together, and I came to make a name in London. But for all you know, Deborah, I may be a scamp.”

“That you are not,” she burst out. “Why, Bart's been follerin' you everywhere, and he and me, which is to be his lawful wife and master, knows all about you and that there place in Bloomsbury, and where you go and where you don't go. And let me tell you, sir,” again she lifted her finger threateningly, “if you wasn't what you oughter be, never would you see my pretty one again. No, not if I had to wash the floor in your blue blood—for blue it is, if what Bart learned was true of them stone figgers in the church,” and she gasped.

Paul was silent for a few minutes, looking at the floor. He wondered that he had not guessed all this. Often it had seemed strange to him that so faithful and devoted a couple of retainers as Bart and Deborah Junk should favor his wooing of Sylvia and keep it from their master, seeing that they knew nothing about him. But from the woman's story—which he saw no reason to disbelieve—the two had not rested until they had been convinced of his respectability and of the truth of his story. Thus they had permitted the wooing to continue, and Paul privately applauded them for their tact in so making sure of him without committing themselves to open speech. “All the same,” he said aloud, and following his own thoughts, “it's strange that you should wish her to marry me.”

Miss Junk made a queer answer. “I'm glad enough to see her marry anyone respectable, let alone a gent, as you truly are, with stone figgers in churches and a handsome face, though rather dark for my liking. Mr. Beecot, twenty year ago, a slip of ten, I come to nuss the baby as was my

loving angel upstairs, and her ma had just passed away to jine them as lives overhead playing harps. All these years I've never heard a young step on them stairs, save Miss Sylvia's and Bart's, him having come five years ago, and a brat he was. And would you believe it, Mr. Beecot, I know no more of the old man than you do. He's queer, and he's wrong altogether, and that frightened of being alone in the dark as you could make him a corp with a turnip lantern."

"What is he afraid of?"

"Ah," said Deborah, significantly, "what indeed? It may be police and it may be ghosts, but, ghosts or police, he never ses what he oughter say if he's a respectable man, which I sadly fear he ain't."

"He may have his reasons to—"

Miss Junk tossed her head and snorted again loudly. "Oh, yes—he has his reasons," she admitted, "and Old Bailey ones they are, I dessay. But there's somethin' 'anging over his head. Don't ask me what it is, fur never shall you know, by reason of my being ignorant. But whatever it is, Mr. Beecot, it's something wicked, and shall I see my own pretty in trouble?"

"How do you know there will be trouble?" interrupted Paul, anxiously.

"I've heard him pray," said Miss Junk, mysteriously—"yes, you may look, for there ain't no prayer in the crafty eye of him—but pray he do, and asks to be kept from danger—"

"Danger?"

"Danger's the word, for I won't deceive you, no, not if you paid me better wages than the old man do give and he's as near as the paring of an inion. So I ses to Bart, if there's danger and trouble and Old Baileys about, the sooner Miss Sylvia have some dear man to give her a decent name and pertect her the more happy old Deborah will be. So I looked and looked for what you might call a fairy prince as I've heard tell of in pantomimes, and when you comes she loses her heart to you. So I ses, find out, Bart, what he is, and—"

“Yes, yes, I see. Well, Deborah, you can depend upon my looking after your pretty mistress. If I were only reconciled with my father I would speak to Mr. Norman.”

“Don’t, sir—don’t!” cried the woman, fiercely, and making a clutch at Paul’s arm; “he’ll turn you out, he will, not being anxious for anyone to have my flower, though love her as he oughter do, he don’t, no,” cried Deborah, “nor her ma before her, who died with a starvin’ ‘eart. But you run away with my sweetest and make her your own, though her pa swears thunderbolts as you may say. Take her from this place of wickedness and police-courts.” And Deborah looked round the cellar with a shudder. Suddenly she started and held up her finger, nodding towards a narrow door at the side of the cellar. “Master’s footstep,” she said in a harsh whisper. “I’d know it in a thousand—just like a thief’s, ain’t it?—stealing as you might say. Don’t tell him you’ve seen me.”

“But Sylvia,” cried Paul, catching her dress as she passed him.

“Her you’ll see, if I die for it,” said Deborah, and whirled up the wooden steps in a silent manner surprising in so noisy a woman. Paul heard the trap-door drop with a stealthy creak.

As a key grated in the lock of the outside door he glanced round the place to which he had penetrated for the first time. It was of the same size as the shop overhead, but the walls were of stone, green with slime and feathery with a kind of ghastly white fungus. Overhead, from the wooden roof, which formed the floor of the shop, hung innumerable spider’s webs thick with dust. The floor was of large flags cracked in many places, and between the chinks in moist corners sprouted sparse, colorless grass. In the centre was a deal table, scored with queer marks and splotched with ink. Over this flared two gas-jets, which whistled shrilly. Against the wall, which was below the street, were three green painted safes fast locked: but the opposite wall had in it the narrow door aforesaid, and a wide grated window, the bars of which were rusty, though strong. The atmosphere of the place was cold and musty and suggestive of a charnel house. Certainly a strange place in which to transact business, but everything about Aaron Norman was strange.

And he looked strange himself as he stepped in at the open door. Beyond, Paul could see the shallow flight of damp steps leading to the

yard and the passage which gave admission from the street. Norman locked the door and came forward. He was as white as a sheet, and his face was thickly beaded with perspiration. His mouth twitched more than usual, and his hands moved nervously. Twice as he advanced towards Paul, who rose to receive him, did he cast the odd look over his shoulder. Beecot fancifully saw in him a man who had committed some crime and was fearful lest it should be discovered, or lest the avenger should suddenly appear. Deborah's confidential talk had not been without its effects on the young man, and Paul beheld in Aaron a being of mystery. How such a man came to have such a daughter as Sylvia, Paul could not guess.

"Here you are, Mr. Beecot," said Aaron, rubbing his hands as though the cold of the cellar struck to his bones. "Well?"

"I want to pawn a brooch," said Beecot, slipping his hand into his breast pocket.

"Wait," said Norman, throwing up his lean hand. "Let me tell you that I have taken a fancy to you, and I have watched you all the many times you have been here. Didn't you guess?"

"No," said Paul, wondering if he was about to speak of Sylvia, and concluding that he guessed what was in the wind.

"Well then, I have," said the pawnbroker, "and I think it's a pity a young man should pawn anything. Have you no money?" he asked.

Paul reddened. "Very little," he said.

"Little as it may be, live on that and don't pawn," said Aaron. "I speak against my own interests, but I like you, and perhaps I can lend you a few shillings."

"I take money from no one, thank you all the same," said Beecot, throwing back his head, "but if you can lend me something on this brooch," and he pulled out the case from his pocket. "A friend of mine would have bought it, but as it belongs to my mother I prefer to pawn it so that I may get it again when I am rich."

“Well, well,” said Aaron, abruptly, and resuming his downcast looks, “I shall do what I can. Let me see it.”

He stretched out his hand and took the case. Slowly opening it under the gas, he inspected its contents. Suddenly he gave a cry of alarm, and the case fell to the floor. “The Opal Serpent!—The Opal Serpent!” he cried, growing purple in the face, “keep off!—keep off!” He beat the air with his lean hands. “Oh—the Opal!” and he fell face downward on the slimy floor in a fit or a faint, but certainly unconscious.

Chapter III Dulcinea Of Gwynne Street

Near the Temple Station of the Metropolitan Railway is a small garden which contains a certain number of fairly-sized trees, a round band-stand, and a few flower-beds intersected by asphalt paths. Here those who are engaged in various offices round about come to enjoy *rus in urbes*, to listen to the gay music, and, in many cases, to eat a scanty mid-day meal. Old women come to sun themselves, loafers sit on the seats to rest, workmen smoke and children play. On a bright day the place is pretty, and those who frequent it feel as though they were enjoying a country holiday though but a stone’s throw from the Thames. And lovers meet here also, so it was quite in keeping that Paul Beecot should wait by the bronze statues of the Herculaneum wrestlers for the coming of Sylvia.

On the previous day he had departed hastily, after committing the old man to Deborah’s care. At first he had lingered to see Aaron revive, but when the unconscious man came to his senses and opened his eyes he fainted again when his gaze fell on Paul. Deborah, therefore, in her rough, practical way, suggested that as Beecot was “upsetting him” he had better go. It was in a state of perplexity that Paul had gone away, but he was cheered on his homeward way by a hasty assurance given by Miss Junk that Sylvia would meet him in the gardens, “near them niggers without clothes,” said Deborah.

It was strange that the sight of the brooch should have produced such an effect on Aaron, and his fainting confirmed Paul’s suspicions that the old man had not a clean conscience. But what the serpent brooch had to do with the matter Beecot could not conjecture. It was certainly an odd

piece of jewellery, and not particularly pretty, but that the merest glimpse of it should make Norman faint was puzzling in the extreme.

“Apparently it is associated with something disagreeable in the man’s mind,” soliloquised Paul, pacing the pavement and keeping a sharp look-out for Sylvia, “perhaps with death, else the effect would scarcely have been so powerful as to produce a fainting fit. Yet Aaron can’t know my mother. Hum! I wonder what it means.”

While he was trying to solve the mystery a light touch on his arm made him wheel round, and he beheld Sylvia smiling at him. While he was looking along the Embankment for her coming she had slipped down Norfolk Street and through the gardens, to where the wrestlers clutched at empty air. In her low voice, which was the sweetest of all sounds to Paul, she explained this, looking into his dark eyes meanwhile. “But I can’t stay long,” finished Sylvia. “My father is still ill, and he wants me to return and nurse him.”

“Has he explained why he fainted?” asked Paul, anxiously.

“No; he refuses to speak on the matter. Why did he faint, Paul?”

The young man looked puzzled. “Upon my word I don’t know,” he said. “Just as I was showing him a brooch I wished to pawn he went off.”

“What kind of a brooch?” asked the girl, also perplexed.

Paul took the case out of his breast pocket, where it had been since the previous day. “My mother sent it to me,” he explained; “you see she guesses that I am hard up, and, thanks to my father, she can’t send me money. This piece of jewellery she has had for many years, but as it is rather old-fashioned she never wears it. So she sent it to me, hoping that I might get ten pounds or so on it. A friend of mine wished to buy it, but I was anxious to get it back again, so that I might return it to my mother. Therefore I thought your father might lend me money on it.”

Sylvia examined the brooch with great attention. It was evidently of Indian workmanship, delicately chased, and thickly set with jewels. The serpent, which was apparently wriggling across the stout gold pin of the brooch, had its broad back studded with opals, large in the centre of the body and small at head and tail. These were set round with tiny

diamonds, and the head was of chased gold with a ruby tongue. Sylvia admired the workmanship and the jewels, and turned the brooch over. On the flat smooth gold underneath she found the initial "R" scratched with a pin. This she showed to Paul. "I expect your mother made this mark to identify the brooch," she said.

"My mother's name is Anne," replied Paul, looking more puzzled than ever, "Anne Beecot. Why should she mark this with an initial which has nothing to do with her name?"

"Perhaps it is a present," suggested Sylvia.

Paul snapped the case to, and replaced it in his pocket. "Perhaps it is," he said. "However, when I next write to my mother I'll ask her where she got the brooch. She has had it for many years," he added musingly, "for I remember playing with it when a small boy."

"Don't tell your mother that my father fainted."

"Why not? Does it matter?"

Sylvia folded her slender hands and looked straight in front of her. For some time they had been seated on a bench in a retired part of the gardens, and the laughter of playing children, the music of the band playing the merriest airs from the last musical comedy, came faintly to their ears. "I think it does matter," said the girl, seriously; "for some reason my father wants to keep himself as quiet as possible. He talks of going away."

"Going away. Oh, Sylvia, and you never told me."

"He only spoke of going away when I came to see how he was this morning," she replied. "I wonder if his fainting has anything to do with this determination. He never talked of going away before."

Paul wondered also. It seemed strange that after so unusual an event the old man should turn restless and wish to leave a place where he had lived for over twenty years. "I'll come and have an explanation," said Paul, after a pause.

“I think that will be best, dear. Father said that he would like to see you again, and told Bart to bring you in if he saw you.”

“I’ll call to-day—this afternoon, and perhaps your father will explain. And now, Sylvia, that is enough about other people and other things. Let us talk of ourselves.”

Sylvia turned her face with a fond smile. She was a delicate and dainty little lady, with large grey eyes and soft brown hair. Her complexion was transparent, and she had little color in her cheeks. With her oval face, her thin nose and charming mouth she looked very pretty and sweet. But it was her expression that Paul loved. That was a trifle sad, but when she smiled her looks changed as an overcast sky changes when the sun bursts through the clouds. Her figure was perfect, her hands and feet showed marks of breeding, and although her grey dress was as demure as any worn by a Quakeress, she looked bright and merry in the sunshine of her lover’s presence. Everything about Sylvia was dainty and neat and exquisitely clean: but she was hopelessly out of the fashion. It was this odd independence in her dress which constituted another charm in Paul’s eyes.

The place was too public to indulge in love-making, and it was very tantalising to sit near this vision of beauty without gaining the delight of a kiss. Paul feasted his eyes, and held Sylvia’s grey-gloved hand under cover of her dress. Further he could not go.

“But if you put up your sunshade,” he suggested artfully.

“Paul!” That was all Sylvia said, but it suggested a whole volume of rebuke. Brought up in seclusion, like the princess in an enchanted castle, the girl was exceedingly shy. Paul’s ardent looks and eager wooing startled her at times, and he thought disconsolately that his chivalrous love-making was coarse and common when he gazed on the delicate, dainty, shrinking maid he adored.

“You should not have stepped out of your missal, Sylvia,” he said sadly.

“Whatever do you mean, dearest?”

“I mean that you are a saint—an angel—a thing to be adored and worshipped. You are exactly like one of those lovely creations one sees in

mass-books of the Middle Ages. I fear, Sylvia,” Paul sighed, “that you are too dainty and holy for this work-a-day world.”

“What nonsense, Paul! I’m a poor girl without position or friends, living in a poor street. You are the first person who ever thought me pretty.”

“You are not pretty,” said the ardent Beecot, “you are divine—you are Beatrice—you are Elizabeth of Thuringia—you are everything that is lovely and adorable.”

“And you are a silly boy,” replied Sylvia, blushing, but loving this poetic talk all the same. “Do you want to put me in a glass case when we marry? If you do, I sha’n’t become Mrs. Beecot. I want to see the world and to enjoy myself.”

“Then other men will admire you and I shall grow jealous.”

“Can you be jealous—Paul?”

“Horribly! You don’t know half my bad qualities. I am poor and needy, and ambitious and jealous, and—”

“There—there. I won’t hear you run yourself down. You are the best boy in the world.”

“Poor world, if I am that,” he laughed, and squeezed the little hand. “Oh, my love, do you really think of me?”

“Always! Always! You know I do. Why, ever since I saw you enter the shop six months ago I have always loved you. I told Debby, and Debby said that I could.”

“Supposing Debby had said that you couldn’t.”

“Oh, she would never have said that. Why, Paul, she saw you.”

The young man laughed and colored. “Do I carry my character in my face?” he asked. “Sylvia, don’t think too well of me.”

“That is impossible,” she declared. “You are my fairy prince.”

“Well, I certainly have found an enchanted princess sleeping in a jealously-guarded castle. What would your father say did he know?”

Sylvia looked startled. “I am afraid of my father,” she replied, indirectly. “Yes—he is so strange. Sometimes he seems to love me, and at other times to hate me. We have nothing in common. I love books and art, and gaiety and dresses. But father only cares for jewels. He has a lot down in the cellar. I have never seen them, you know,” added Sylvia, looking at her lover, “nor have Deborah or Bart. But they are there. Bart and Deborah say so.”

“Has your father ever said so?”

“No. He won’t speak of his business in the cellar. When the shop is closed at seven he sends Bart away home and locks Deborah and I in the house. That is,” she explained anxiously, lest Paul should think her father a tyrant, “he locks the door which leads to the shop. We can walk over all the house. But there we stop till next morning, when father unlocks the door at seven and Bart takes down the shutters. We have lived like that for years. On Sunday evenings, however, father does not go to the cellar, but takes me to church. He has supper with me upstairs, and then locks the door at ten.”

“But he sleeps upstairs?”

“No. He sleeps in the cellar.”

“Impossible. There is no accommodation for sleeping there.”

Sylvia explained. “There is another cellar—a smaller one—off the large place he has the safes in. The door is in a dark corner almost under the street line. This smaller cellar is fitted up as a bedroom, and my father has slept there all his life. I suppose he is afraid of his jewels being stolen. I don’t think it is good for his health,” added the girl, wisely, “for often in the morning he looks ill and his hands shake.”

“Sylvia, does your father drink alcohol?”

“Oh, no, Paul! He is a teetotaler, and is very angry at those who drink to excess. Why, once Bart came to the shop a little drunk, and father would have discharged him but for Deborah.”

Paul said nothing, but thought the more. Often it had struck him that Norman was a drunkard, though his face showed no signs of indulgence, for it always preserved its paleness. But the man's hands shook, and his skin often was drawn and tight, with that shiny look suggestive of indulgence. "He either drinks or smokes opium," thought Paul on hearing Sylvia's denial. But he said nothing to her of this.

"I must go home now," she said, rising.

"Oh, no, not yet," he implored.

"Well, then, I'll stay for a few minutes longer, because I have something to say," she remarked, and sat down again. "Paul, do you think it is quite honorable for you and I to be engaged without the consent of my father?"

"Well," hesitated Beecot, "I don't think it is as it should be. Were I well off I should not fear to tell your father everything; but as I am a pauper he would forbid my seeing you did he learn that I had raised my eyes to you. But if you like I'll speak, though it may mean our parting for ever."

"Paul," she laid a firm, small hand on his arm, "not all the fathers in the world will keep me from you. Often I have intended to tell all, but my father is so strange. Sometimes he goes whole days without speaking to me, and at times he speaks harshly, though I do nothing to deserve rebuke. I am afraid of my father," said the girl, with a shiver. "I said so before, and I say so again. He is a strange man, and I don't understand him at all. I wish I could marry you and go away altogether."

"Well, let us marry if you like, though we will be poor."

"No," said Sylvia, sorrowfully; "after all, strange and harsh though my father is, he is still my father, and at times he is kind. I must stay with him to the end."

"What end?"

Sylvia shook her head still more sorrowfully. "Who knows? Paul, my father is afraid of dying suddenly."

"By violence?" asked Beecot, thinking of Deborah's talk.

“I can’t say. But every day after six he goes to church and prays all alone. Deborah told me, as often she has seen him leave the church. Then he is afraid of every stranger who enters the shop. I don’t understand it,” cried the girl, passionately. “I don’t like it. I wish you would marry me and take me away, Paul; but, oh, how selfish I am!”

“My own, I wish I could. But the money—”

“Oh, never mind the money. I must get away from that house. If it was not for Deborah I would be still more afraid. I often think my father is mad. But there,” Sylvia rose and shook out her skirts, “I have no right to talk so, and only do so to you, that you may know what I feel. I’ll speak to my father myself and say we are engaged. If he forbids our marriage I shall run away with you, Paul,” said poor Sylvia, the tears in her eyes. “I am a bad girl to talk in this way. After all, he is my father.”

Beecot had an ardent desire to take her in his arms and kiss away those tears, but the publicity of the meeting-place denied him the power to console her in that efficacious fashion. All he could do was to assure her of his love, and then they walked out of the gardens towards the Strand. “I’ll speak to your father myself,” said Paul; “we must end this necessary silence. After all, I am a gentleman, and I see no reason why your father should object.”

“I know you are everything that is good and true,” said Sylvia, drying her eyes. “If you were not Debby would not have let me become engaged to you,” she finished childishly.

“Debby made inquiries about me,” said Paul, laughing, to cheer her. “Yes! she sent Bart to Wargrove and found out all about me and my family and my respected father. She wished to be certain that I was a proper lover for her darling.”

“I am your darling now,” whispered Sylvia, squeezing his arm, “and you are the most charming lover in the world.”

Paul was so enchanted with this speech that he would have defied public opinion by embracing her there and then, but Sylvia walked away rapidly down Gwynne Street and shook her head with a pursed-up mouth when Paul took a few steps after her. Recognizing that it would

be wise not to follow her to the shop lest the suspicious old man should be looking out, Beecot went on his homeward way.

When he drew near his Bloomsbury garret he met Grexon Hay, who was sauntering along swinging his cane. "I was just looking for you," he said, greeting Paul in his usual self-contained manner; "it worries me to think you are so hard-up, though I'm not a fellow given to sentiment as a rule. Let me lend you a fiver."

Paul shook his head. "Thank you all the same."

"Well, then, sell me the brooch."

Beecot suddenly looked squarely at Hay, who met his gaze calmly. "Do you know anything of that brooch?" he asked.

"What do you mean? It is a brooch of Indian workmanship. That is all I know. I want to give a lady a present, and if you will sell it to me I'll take it, to help you, thus killing two birds at one shot."

"I don't want to sell it," said Paul, looking round. His eyes fell on a respectable man across the road, who appeared to be a workman, as he had a bag of tools on his shoulder. He was looking into a shop window, but also—as Paul suddenly thought—seemed to be observing him and Hay. However, the incident was not worth noticing, so he continued his speech to Grexon. "I tried to pawn it with Aaron Norman," he said.

"Well, what did you get on it?" asked Hay, with a yawn.

"Nothing. The old man fainted when I showed him the brooch. That is why I asked you if you know anything strange about the article."

Hay shook his head, but looked curiously at Beecot. "Do you know anything yourself?" he asked; "you seem to have something on your mind about that brooch."

"There is something queer about it," said Paul. "Why should Aaron Norman faint when he saw it?"

Hay yawned again. "You had better ask your one-eyed friend—I think you said he was one-eyed."

“He is, and a frightened sort of man. But there’s nothing about that opal serpent to make him faint.”

“Perhaps he did so because it is in the shape of a serpent,” suggested Grexon; “a constitutional failing, perhaps. Some people hate cats and other fluttering birds. Your one-eyed friend may have a loathing of snakes and can’t bear to see the representation of one.”

“It might be that,” said Beecot, after a pause. “Aaron is a strange sort of chap. A man with a past, I should say.”

“You make me curious,” said Grexon, laughing in a bored manner. “I think I’ll go to the shop myself and have a look at him.”

“Come with me when I next go,” said Paul. “I had intended to call this afternoon; but I won’t, until I hear from my mother.”

“What about?”

“I want to learn how she came into possession of the brooch.”

“Pooh, nonsense,” said Hay, contemptuously, “you think too much about the thing. Who cares if a pawnbroker faints? Why I wish to go to the shop, is, because I am anxious to see your lady-love. Well, when you do want me to go, send for me; you have my address. ‘Day, old man,’ and the gorgeous being sauntered away, with apparently not a care in the world to render him anxious.

Paul was anxious, however. The more he thought of the episode of the brooch the stranger it seemed, and Sylvia’s talk of her father’s queer habits did not make Paul wonder the less. However, he resolved to write to his mother, and was just mounting his stairs to do so when he heard a “Beg pardon, sir,” and beheld the working man, bag of tools, pipe and all.

“Beg pardon, sir,” said the man, civilly, “but that gentleman you was a-talking to. Know his name, sir?”

“What the devil’s that to you?” asked Paul, angrily.

“Nothing, sir, only he owes me a little bill.”

“Go and ask him for it then.”

“I don’t know his address, sir.”

“Oh, be hanged!” Paul went on, when the man spoke again.

“He’s what I call a man on the market, sir. Have a care,” and he departed quickly.

Paul stared. What did the working man mean, and was he a working man?

Chapter IV

The Unforeseen

Paul did not go near the Gwynne Street shop for the next few days, much as he wanted to do so. Being deeply in love he could hardly bear to be away from Sylvia even for a few hours: but in spite of this he remained away for two reasons. The first of these was that he awaited a reply to his letter written to Mrs. Beecot, as he wished to be able to tell Aaron Norman where the brooch had been obtained. He thought by doing this to ingratiate himself with the old man, and perhaps, if thus confidential, might learn, for the satisfaction of his curiosity, why the sight of the brooch had produced such an effect on the pawnbroker.

The other reason was that, not having been able to sell the brooch, or rather pawn it since he did not wish to lose it altogether, funds were running low, and now he had but a few shillings left. A call at the office of a penny weekly had resulted in the return of three stories as being too long and not the sort required. But the editor, in a hasty interview, admitted that he liked Paul’s work and would give him three pounds for a tale written on certain lines likely to be popular with the public. Paul did not care to set forth another person’s ideas, especially as these were old and very sensational; but as he required money he set to work and labored to produce what would bring him in the cash. He made several attempts before he reached the editor’s level, which was low rather than high, and succeeded in getting the tale accepted. With three golden pounds in his pocket and exultation in his heart—for every success seemed to bring him nearer to Sylvia—Paul returned to his aerial castle and found waiting for him the expected letter.

It was written in a low-spirited sort of way, characteristic of Mrs. Beecot, but with a true motherly heart. After two pages of lamentation over his absence, and a description of how the head of the household managed to bear up against the affliction of his son's absence, Mrs. Beecot proceeded to explain about the brooch.

“Why do you ask me about the opal brooch, my dear boy?” wrote Mrs. Beecot in her scratchy handwriting. “All I know is that your father bought it out of a pawnbroker's shop in Stowley, which is some town in the Midlands. Your father was travelling there and saw the brooch by chance. As I always thought opals unlucky he was anxious to make me see the folly of such a superstition, so he bought the brooch and took it away with him. Afterwards, I believe, he received a letter from the pawnbroker, saying that his assistant had sold the brooch by mistake, that the time for redeeming it had not run out when your father bought it. The pawnbroker asked that the brooch might be returned, and wanted to pay back the money. But you know what your father is. He refused at once to give back the brooch, and insisted on my wearing it. I had a bad fall while wearing it, and then was thrown out of that high dog-cart your father would insist on driving. I am sure the brooch or the stones is unlucky, and, as after a time your father forgot all about it, I let it lie in my jewel-case. For years I had not worn it, and as I think it is unlucky, and as you need money, my darling boy, I hope you will sell it. There is no need to pawn it as you say. I never want to see the brooch again. But regarding your health, etc., etc.”

So Mrs. Beecot wrote in her verbose style, and with some errors of grammar. Paul saw in her simple tale fresh evidence of his father's tyranny, since he made his wife wear gems she detested and was superstitiously set against possessing them. The dog-cart episode Paul remembered very well. Mr. Beecot, in his amiable way, had no patience with his wife's nerves, and never lost an opportunity of placing her in unpleasant positions, whereby she might be, what he called, hardened. Paul sighed to think of his mother's position as he folded up the letter. She had a bad time with the truculent husband she had married. “And I can't believe she became his wife of her own free will,” thought Paul; “probably the governor bullied her into it in his own sweet way.”

However, there was nothing in the letter to explain Norman's faint. It was certainly strange that the pawnbroker, from whom the brooch had

been originally purchased, should have demanded it back; and the excuse given seems rather a weak one. However, Paul did not waste time in thinking over this, but resolved to tell Aaron what his mother had said.

He had received two letters from Sylvia, mentioning, amongst other things, that her father, now quite well, was asking after Paul, and urging him to come and see him. "My father appears to have a fancy for you," wrote Sylvia, "so if you are very nice—as nice as you can be—perhaps he won't be very angry if you tell him we are engaged." There was much more to the same effect, which Paul thought good advice, and he intended to adopt the same. It was necessary that he should tell Aaron of his love if things were to be conducted in a straightforward and honorable manner. And Paul had no desire to conduct them otherwise.

Having made up his mind to see Aaron again, Paul bethought himself of Grexon Hay. That gentleman had never appeared again at the Bloomsbury garret, and had never even written. But Paul was anxious that Hay—whom he regarded as a clever man-of-the-world—should see the old man, and, as our trans-Atlantic cousins say, "size him up." Norman's manner and queer life puzzled Paul not a little, and not being very worldly himself he was anxious to have the advice of his old school friend, who seemed desirous of doing him a good turn, witness his desire to buy the brooch so that Paul might be supplied with money. So Beecot wrote to Grexon Hay at his Camden Hill chamber and told him he intended to go to Gwynne Street on a certain day at a certain time. To this Grexon responded by saying that he was at Paul's service and would come especially as he wanted to see Dulcinea of Gwynne Street.

Paul laughed at the phrase. "I suppose Grexon thinks I am very Quixotic," he thought, "coming to London to tilt with the windmills of the Press. But Don Quixote was wise in spite of his apparent madness, and Grexon will recognize my wisdom when he sees my Dulcinea, bless her! Humph! I wonder if Hay could pacify my father and make him look more kindly on my ambitions. Grexon is a clever fellow, a thoroughly good chap, so—"

Here Paul paused to think. The incident of the working man and the warning he had given about Hay recurred to his mind. Also the phrase "Man on the Market" stuck in his memory. Why should Grexon Hay be

called so, and what did the phrase mean? Paul had never heard it before. Moreover, from certain indications Beecot did not think that the individual with the bag of tools was a working man. He rather appeared to be a person got up to play the part. The fellow watching them both and accosting Paul alone certainly seemed a doubtful character. Beecot regretted that he had been so short with the man, else he might have learned why he had acted in this way. The story of the little bill was absurd, for if Grexon owed the man money the man himself would certainly have known the name and address of his creditor. Altogether, the incident puzzled Paul almost as much as that of Aaron's fainting, and he resolved to question Grexon. But it never crossed his mind that Hay was anything else but what he appeared to be—a man-about-town with a sufficient income to live upon comfortably. Had Paul doubted he would never have asked Grexon to go with him to Gwynne Street. However, he had done so, and the appointment was made, so there was no more to be said.

The man-about-town duly made his appearance to the very minute. "I always keep appointments," he explained when Paul congratulated him on his punctuality; "there's nothing annoys me so much as to be kept waiting, so I invariably practise what I preach. Well, Paul, and how is Dulcinea of Gwynne Street?"

"She is very well," replied Paul, who was still a young enough lover to blush, "but I have not seen her since we last met. I waited for a letter from my mother about the brooch, so that I might explain to Aaron how she got it. The old man has been asking after me."

"Oh, confound the brooch!" said Grexon in his cool manner. "I don't want to hear about it. Let us talk of Dulcinea."

"Rather let us talk of yourself," said Paul.

"Not an interesting subject," replied Hay, rising as Paul opened his garret door for departure, "you know all about me."

"No! I don't know why you are called a man-on-the-market."

Hay flushed and turned sharply. "What do you mean?" he asked in a particularly quiet tone.

“I don’t know what I *do* mean,” said Paul. “Do you remember that working man with the bag of tools who was across the road when we last conversed?”

“No,” said Hay, staring, “I never notice creatures of that class. Why?”

“Because he asked me who you were and where you lived. It seems you owe him some money.”

“That is very probable,” said Hay, equably. “I owe most people money, and if this man has a debt against me he would certainly know all about me as to address and name.”

“So I thought,” replied Paul, “but the queer thing is that he told me to take care, and called you a man-on-the-market. What does it mean? I never heard the phrase before.”

“I have,” said Hay, proceeding calmly down the somewhat steep stairs; “a man-on-the-market means one who wants to marry and is eligible for any heiress who comes along with a sufficient rent-roll. But why should a fellow like that talk the shibboleth of Society?”

Paul shrugged his shoulders. “I can’t say. Perhaps the man guessed I intended to take you to see Sylvia, and warned me against you, as it seems from his phrase that you wish to marry.”

“Ah! Then your Dulcinea is an heiress?” said Hay, fixing his eye-glass carefully; “if so, you needn’t fear me. I am almost engaged and won’t be on the market any longer. What confounded cheek this fellow addressing you in that way and talking of me as he did. I suppose,” he added with a cold laugh, “it is not necessary for me to defend myself.”

“What rubbish,” replied Beecot, good-naturedly. “All the same, it is strange the man should have spoken to me as he did. I told him to go to the devil.”

“And go to the devil he assuredly will if I meet him,” was the dry reply. “I’ll break his head for not minding his own business. I think I can explain, and will do so as soon as you take that telegram the lad is holding out for you.”

Grexon was quicker-sighted than Paul, for the moment they arrived at the bottom of the stairs and were about to emerge into the street he saw the messenger. "Do you know if any gent of that name lives here, guvnor?" asked the boy, holding out the buff-colored envelope.

Beecot, to his surprise, saw his own name. "Who can be wiring to me?" he said, taking the telegram. "Wait, boy, there may be an answer," and he skimmed through the lines. "Don't sell the brooch, but send it back," read Paul, puzzled, "your father angry.—Mother." He paused, and looked at the boy. "Got a form?" he asked.

The lad produced one and a stumpy pencil. With these materials Beecot wrote a reply saying the brooch would be returned on the morrow. When the boy went away with the answer Paul felt in his breast pocket and took out the old blue case. "I've a good mind to send it now," he said aloud.

"What's that?" asked Hay, who was yawning at the door. "No bad news I hope?"

"It's about that brooch again."

Hay laughed. "Upon my word it seems to you what the Monster was to Frankenstein," said he. "Send it back—to Mrs. Beecot, I presume—and have done with it." He cast a glance at the case. "I see you have it with you," he ended, lightly.

"Yes," said Paul, and replacing the case in his pocket went down the street with his friend. Then he determined to ask his opinion, and related the gist of Mrs. Beecot's letter. "And now the mater wires to have it back," he said. "I expect my father has found out that she has sent it to me, and is furious."

"Well, send it back and have done with it," said Hay, impatiently; "you are in danger of becoming a bore with that brooch, Beecot. I'll lend you money if you like."

"No, thanks, I have three pounds honestly earned. However, we'll speak no more of the brooch. I'll send it back this very day. Tell me," he linked his arm within that of his friend, "tell me of that man."

“That man—of the working creature,” said Hay, absently. “Pooh, the man was no more a working man than I am.”

“Well, I thought myself he was a bit of a fraud.”

“Detectives never do make up well,” said Grexon, calmly.

Paul stopped as they turned into Oxford Street. “What? Was the man a detective?”

“I think so, from your description of his conversation. The fact is I’m in love with a lady who is married. We have behaved quite well, and no one can say a word against us. But her husband is a beast and wants a divorce. I have suspected for some time that he is having me watched. Thanks to you, Paul, I am now sure. So perhaps you will understand why the man warned you against me and talked of my being a man-on-the-market.”

“I see,” said Paul, hesitating; “but don’t get into trouble, Hay.”

“Oh, I’m all right. And I don’t intend to do anything dishonorable, if that is what you mean. It’s the husband’s fault, not mine. By the way, can you describe the fellow?”

“Yes. He had red hair and a red beard—rather a ruddy face, and walked with a limp.”

“All put on,” said Hay, contemptuously; “probably the limp was affected, the beard false, the hair a wig, and the face rouged—very clumsy indeed. I daresay he’ll appear pale and gentlemanly the next time he watches me. I know the tricks of these fellows.”

The two friends talked for some time about this episode, and then branched off into other subjects. Hay described the married lady he adored, and Paul rebuked him for entertaining such a passion. “It’s not right, Hay,” said he, positively; “you can’t respect a woman who runs away from her husband.”

“She hasn’t run away yet, Sir Galahad,” laughed Grexon. “By Jove, you are an innocent!”

“If that means respecting the institution of marriage and adoring women as angels I hope I’ll remain an innocent.”

“Oh, women are angels, of course,” said Hay as they walked down Gwynne Street; “it’s a stock phrase in love-making. But there are angels of two sorts. Dulcinea is—”

“Here we are,” interrupted Paul, quickly. Somehow it irritated him to hear this hardened sinner speak of Sylvia, and he began to think that Grexon Hay had deteriorated. Not that he was considered to be particularly good at Torrington school. In fact, Paul remembered that he had been thoroughly disliked. However, he had no time to go into the matter, for at this moment Aaron appeared at the door of the shop. He stepped out on to the pavement as Paul approached. “Come in,” he said, “I want to see you—privately,” he added, casting a frightened look at Hay.

“In that case I’ll leave you,” said Grexon, disengaging his arm from Paul. “Dulcinea must wait for another occasion. Go in and do your business. I’ll wait without.”

Paul thanked his friend by a look and went into the shop with the old man. “That brooch,” said Aaron, in a timid whisper, “have you got it? Give it to me—quick—quick.”

There was no one in the shop as Bart had apparently gone out on an errand. The door leading to the stairs, down which Sylvia had so often descended, was closed, and no one was about to overhear their conversation. “I have the brooch,” said Paul, “but—”

“Give it to me—give it,” panted Aaron. “I’ll buy it—at a large price. Ask what you want.”

“Why are you so eager to get it?” demanded Beecot, astonished.

“That’s my business,” said Norman, in a suddenly imperious manner. “I want it. The stones take my fancy,” he ended weakly.

“Was that why you fainted?” asked Paul, suspiciously.

“No.” The man grew white and leaned against the counter, breathing heavily. “Where did you get the brooch?” he asked, trying to keep himself calm, but with a visible effort.

“I got it from my mother, and she received it from my father—”

“Beecot—Beecot,” said the old man, fingering his lips, much agitated. “I know no one of that name save yourself, and you are not a spy—a scoundrel—a—a—” He caught the eyes of Paul fixed on him in amazement, and suddenly changed his tone. “Excuse me, but the brooch reminds me of trouble.”

“You have seen it before?”

“Yes—that is no—don’t ask me.” He clutched at his throat as though he felt choked. “I can’t talk of it. I daren’t. How did your father get it?”

More and more astonished, Paul explained. Aaron listened with his one eye very bright, and made uneasy motions with his lean hands as the young man spoke. When Beecot ended he bit his nails. “Yes, yes,” he murmured to himself, “it would be asked for back. But it sha’n’t go back. I want it. Sell it to me, Mr. Beecot.”

“I’m sorry I can’t,” replied Paul, good-naturedly. “But my mother wired that it was to be returned. My father has discovered that she sent it to me and is not pleased.”

“Did you tell your mother you had shown it to me?”

“No. There was no need.”

“God bless you!” breathed the man, pulling out a crimson handkerchief. “Of course there was no need,” he tittered nervously. “It doesn’t do to talk of pawning things—not respectable, eh—eh.” He wiped his face and passed his tongue over his white lips. “Well, you won’t sell it to me?”

“I can’t. But I’ll ask my mother if she will.”

“No, no! Don’t do that—say nothing—say nothing. I don’t want the brooch. I never saw the brooch—what brooch—pooh—pooh, don’t talk to me of the brooch,” and so he babbled on.

“Mr. Norman,” said Beecot, gravely, “what is the story connected with the brooch?”

Aaron flung up his hands and backed towards the counter. “No, no. Don’t ask me. What do you mean? I know no story of a brooch—what brooch—I never saw one—I never—ah”—he broke off in relief as two pale-faced, spectacled girls entered the shop—“customers. What is it, ladies? How can I serve you?” And he bustled away behind the counter, giving all his attention to the customers, yet not without a sidelong look in the direction of the perplexed Paul.

That young gentleman, finding it impossible to get further speech with Aaron, and suspecting from his manner that all was not right, left the shop. He determined to take the brooch to Wargrove himself, and to ask his mother about it. Then he could learn why she wanted it back—if not from her, then from his father. This knowledge might explain the mystery.

“Did you sell the brooch?” asked Grexon as they walked up Gwynne Street.

“No. I have to send it back to my mother, and—”

“Hold on!” cried Hay, stumbling. “Orange-peel—ah—”

His stumble knocked Paul into the middle of the road. A motor car was coming down swiftly. Before Hay could realize what had taken place Paul was under the wheels of the machine.

Chapter V

Trouble

“Oh, Debby,” wept Sylvia, “he will die—he will die.”

“Not he, my precious pet,” said the handmaiden, fondling the girl’s soft hands within her own hard ones. “Them sort of young men have as many lives as tom cats. Bless you, my flower, he’ll be up and ready, waiting at the altar, before the fashions change—and that’s quick enough,” added Deborah, rubbing her snub nose. “For they’re allays an-altering and a-turning and a-changing of ‘em.”

The two were in the sitting-room over the bookshop. It was a low-ceilinged apartment, long and narrow, with windows back and front, as it extended the whole depth of the house. The back windows looked out on the dingy little yard, but these Norman had filled in with stained glass of a dark color, so that no one could see clearly out of them. Why he had done so was a mystery to Sylvia, though Deborah suspected the old man did not want anyone to see the many people who came to the back steps after seven. From the front windows could be seen the street and the opposite houses, and on the sills of the windows Sylvia cultivated a few cheap flowers, which were her delight. The room was furnished with all manner of odds and ends, flotsam and jetsam of innumerable sales attended by Aaron. There were Japanese screens, Empire sofas, mahogany chairs, Persian praying mats, Louis Quatorz tables, Arabic tiles, Worcester china, an antique piano that might have come out of the ark, and many other things of epochs which had passed away. Sylvia herself bloomed like a fair flower amidst this wreckage of former times.

But the flower drooped at this moment and seemed in danger of dying for lack of sunshine. That, indeed, had been taken away by the removal of the young lover. Bart, who had witnessed the accident, returned hastily to tell Sylvia, and so great had the shock of the dreadful news been, that she had fainted, whereupon the foolish shopman had been severely dealt with by Deborah. When Sylvia recovered, however, she insisted upon seeing Bart again, and then learned that Paul had been taken to Charing Cross Hospital.

“They drawed him from under the wheels, miss, as white as a vellum binding as ain’t bin used. That gent as he was a-walking arm-in-arm with, slipped and knocked Mr. Beecot spinning under the steam engine.” So did Bart describe the latest triumph of civilisation. “He was that sorry, in a cold-blooded way, as I never saw. He helped to git Mr. Beecot into a cab and druve off. Then I come to tell you.”

“And a nice way you’ve told it,” grunted Deborah, driving him to the door. “Get back to the shop, you threadpaper of a man. My husband shall never be such a fool. The engagement’s off.”

“Oh, Debby!” whimpered Bart, who, strange to say, was fondly attached to the stout servant. But that may have been habit.

“Get along with you,” she said, and banged the door in his face. “And don’t tell master,” she bawled after him, “else he’ll be fainting again, drat him for a lily-livered duck!”

So Aaron never knew that the man who possessed the brooch had been run over by a motor or was in the hospital. Sylvia and Deborah both tried to look as cheerful as possible, and schemed how to see the lover who had thus been laid low. Deborah boldly announced that she was taking Sylvia to buy her a new dress—that is, to choose it, for the cost was to be paid out of the servant’s wages—and went with her one afternoon to the hospital. They heard that Paul’s arm was broken, and that he had been slightly hurt about the head. But there was no danger of his dying, and although they were not allowed to see him the two women returned greatly cheered. But Sylvia frequently gave way to low spirits, thinking that at any moment the good symptoms might give way to bad ones. Deborah always cheered her, and went daily to get news. Always she returned to say, “He’s a-goin’ on nicely, and has that color as he might be a sunset.” So Sylvia was bright until her next fit of low spirits came.

Meanwhile, their attention was taken up by the odd behavior of Aaron. The old man suddenly announced that he was about to sell the shop and retire, and displayed a feverish haste in getting rid of his stock, even at a low price. Whether he sold the jewels so cheap as the books no one ever knew; but certainly the pundit caste did well out of the sale. Within the week the shop below was denuded, and there were nothing but bare shelves, much to the disgust of Bart, who, like Othello, found his occupation gone. The next day the furniture was to be sold, and when Deborah was comforting Sylvia at the week’s end the fiat had already gone forth. Whither he intended to transfer his household the old man did not say, and this, in particular, was the cause of Sylvia’s grief. She dreaded lest she should see her lover no more. This she said to Deborah.

“See him you shall, and this very day,” cried the maiden, cheerfully. “Why, there’s that dress. I can’t make up my mind whether to have magenter or liliac, both being suited to my complexion. Not that it’s cream of the valley smother in rosebuds as yours is, my angel, but a dress I must have, and your pa can’t deny my taking you to choose.”

“But, Debby, it seems wrong to deceive father in this way.”

“It do,” admitted Debby, “and it is. We’ll speak this very night—you and me in duets, as you might say, my pretty. He sha’n’t say as we’ve gone to hide behind a hedge.”

“But we have, Debby, for six months,” said Sylvia.

“Because I’m a hardened and bold creature,” said Deborah, fiercely, “so don’t say it’s you as held your tongue, for that you didn’t, my honeycomb. Many and many a time have you said to me, ses you, ‘Oh, do tell my par,’ and many a time have I said to you, ses I, ‘No, my precious, not for Joseph,’ whoever he may be, drat him!”

“Now, Debby, you’re taking all the blame on yourself!”

“And who have the broader shoulders, you or me, my flower?” asked Debby, fondly. “I’m as wicked as Bart, and that’s saying much, for the way he bolts his food is dreadful to think of. Never will I have a corkidile for a husband. But here,” cried Deborah, beginning to bustle, “it’s the dress I’m thinking of. Magenter or lilacs in full boom. What do you think, my honey-pot?”

So the end of Deborah’s shameless diplomacy was, that the two went, not to the inferior draper’s where Debby bought her extraordinary garments—though they went there later in a Jesuitical manner—but to the hospital, where to her joy Sylvia was allowed to see Paul. He looked thin and pale, but was quite himself and very cheerful. “My darling,” he said, kissing Sylvia’s hand, while Debby sat bolt upright near the bed, with a large handbag, and played propriety by glaring. “Now I shall get well quickly. The sight of you is better than all medicine.”

“I should think so,” sniffed Debby, graciously. “Where’s your orchards, with sich a color.”

“You mean orchids, Debby,” laughed Sylvia, who blushed a rosy red.

“It’s them things with lady slippers a size too large for your foot I’m a-thinking of, pet, and small it is enough for glarse boots as the fairy story do tell. But I’m a-taking up the precious time of billing and cooing, so I’ll shut my mouth and my ears while you let loose your affections, my sweet ones, if you’ll excuse the liberty, sir, me being as fond of my lovey there as you is your own self.”

“No, I can’t admit that,” said Paul, kissing Sylvia’s hand again and holding it while he talked. “Darling, how good of you to come and see me.”

“It may be for the last time, Paul,” said Sylvia, trying to keep back her tears, “but you’ll give me your address, and I’ll write.”

“Oh, Sylvia, what is it?”

“My father has sold the books and is selling the house. We are going away. Where to I don’t know.”

“Tumbucktook would suit him,” snapped Debby, suddenly; “he’s trying to get into some rabbit-hole. Why, I don’t know.”

“I do,” said Paul, lying back thoughtfully. He guessed that Aaron was moving because of the brooch, though why he should do so was a mystery. “Sylvia,” he asked, “did your father see my accident?”

“No, Paul. He was busy in the shop. Bart saw it, but Debby said he wasn’t to tell father.”

“Because of the fainting,” explained Debby; “the man ain’t strong, though Sampson he may think himself—ah, and Goliath, too, for all I care. But why ask, Mr. Beecot?”

Paul did not reply to her, but asked Sylvia another question. “Do you remember that opal brooch I showed you?”

“The serpent. Yes?”

“Well, it’s lost.”

“Lost, Paul?”

The young man nodded mournfully. “I’m very vexed about it,” he said in a low tone; “my mother wanted it back. I was going to send it that very day, but when I met with the accident it got lost somehow. It wasn’t in my pocket when my clothes were examined, though I asked for it as soon as I became conscious. My friend also couldn’t tell me.”

“Him as caused the smashes,” said Deborah, with several sniffs. “A nice pretty friend, I do say, sir.”

“It wasn’t his fault, Deborah. Mr. Hay stumbled on a piece of orange peel and jostled against me. I was taken by surprise, and fell into the middle of the road just as the motor came along. Mr. Hay was more than sorry and has come to see me every day with books and fruit and all manner of things.”

“The least he could do,” snapped the servant, “knocking folks into orspitals with his fine gent airs. I sawr him out of the winder while you was in the shop, and there he spoke law-de-daw to a brat of a boy as ought to be in gaol, seeing he smoked a cigar stump an’ him but a ten-year-old guttersnipe. Ses I, oh, a painted maypole you is, I ses, with a face as hard as bath bricks. A bad un you are, ses I.”

“No, Deborah, you are wrong. Mr. Hay is my friend.”

“Never shall he be my pretty’s friend,” declared Debby, obstinately, “for if all the wickedness in him ‘ud come out in his face, pimples would be as thick as smuts in a London fog. No, Mr. Beecot, call him not what you do call him, meaning friend, for Judas and Julius Cezar ain’t in it with his Belzebubness.”

Beecot saw it was vain to stop this chatterer, so he turned to talk in whispers to Sylvia, while Debby murmured on like a brook, only she spoke loud enough at times to drown the whispering of the lovers.

“Sylvia,” said Paul, softly, “I want you to send your father to me.”

“Yes, Paul. Why do you wish to see him?”

“Because he must be told of our love. I don’t think he will be so hard as you think, and I am ashamed of not having told him before. I like to act honorably, and I fear, Sylvia darling, we have not been quite fair to your father.”

“I think so, too, Paul, and I intended to speak when we went home. But give me your address, so that if we go away unexpectedly I’ll be able to write to you.”

Beecot gave her his Bloomsbury address, and also that of his old home at Wargrove in Essex. "Write care of my mother," he said, "and then my father won't get the letter."

"Would he be angry if he knew?" asked the girl, timidly.

Paul laughed to himself at the thought of the turkey-cock's rage. "I think he would, dearest," said he, "but that does not matter. Be true to me and I'll be true to you."

Here the nurse came to turn the visitors away on the plea that Paul had talked quite enough. Debby flared up, but became meek when Sylvia lifted a reproving finger. Then Paul asked Debby to seek his Bloomsbury lodgings and bring to him any letters that might be waiting for him. "I expect to hear from my mother, and must write and tell her of my accident," said he. "I don't want to trouble Mr. Hay, but you, Debby—"

"Bless you, Mr. Beecot, it ain't no trouble," said the servant, cheerfully, "and better me nor that 'aughty peacock, as ain't to be trusted, say what you will, seeing criminals is a-looking out of his eyes, hide one though he may with a piece of glarse, and I ses—"

"You must go now, please," interposed the nurse.

"Oh, thank you, ma'am, but my own mistress, as is a lady, do I obey only."

"Debby, Debby," murmured Sylvia, and after kissing Paul, a farewell which Debby strove to hide from the nurse by getting in front of her and blocking the view, the two departed. The nurse laughed as she arranged Paul's pillows.

"What a strange woman, Mr. Beecot."

"Very," assented Paul, "quite a character, and as true as the needle of the compass."

Meanwhile, Debby, ignorant of this flattering description, conducted Sylvia to the draper's shop, and finally fixed on a hideous magenta gown, which she ordered to be made quite plain. "With none of your fal-de-lals," commanded Miss Junk, snorting. "Plain sewing and good stuff is

all I arsk for. And if there's any left over you can send home a 'at of the same, which I can brighten with a cockes feather as my mar wore at her wedding. There, my own," added Debby, as they emerged from the shop and took a 'bus to Gwynne Street, "that's as you'll allways see me dressed—plain and 'omely, with no more trimmings than you'll see on a washing-day jint, as I know to my cost from my mar's ecomicals."

"Economy, Debby."

"It ain't fur me to be using fine words, Miss Sylvia; cockatoos' feathers on a goose they'd be in my mouth. The 'ole dixionary kin do for you my flower, but pothooks and 'angers never was my loves, me having been at the wash-tub when rising eight, and stout at that."

In this way Debby discoursed all the way home. On arriving in the room over the shop they found themselves confronted by Aaron, who looked less timid than usual, and glowered at the pair angrily. "Where have you been, Sylvia?" he asked.

The girl could not tell a direct lie, and looked at Debby. That handmaiden, less scrupulous, was about to blurt forth a garbled account, when Sylvia stopped her with a resolute expression on her pretty face. "No, Debby," she commanded, "let me speak. Father, I have been to see Mr. Beecot at the Charing Cross Hospital."

"And you couldn't have my flower do less as a good Smart 'un," put in Debby, anxiously, so as to avert the storm. "Girls is girls whatever you may think, sir, of them being dolls and dummies and—"

"Hold your tongue, woman," cried Norman, fiercely, "let me talk. Why is Mr. Beecot in the hospital?"

"He was knocked down," said Sylvia, quietly, "and his arm is broken. A motor car ran over him in Gwynne Street. He wants to see you, to tell you that he lost something."

Norman turned even whiter than he was by nature, and the perspiration suddenly beaded his bald forehead. "The opal serpent!" he cried.

"Yes—the brooch he showed me."

“He showed you!” cried Aaron, with a groan. “And what did he tell you about it?—what—what—what—the truth or—” He became passionate.

Debby grasped Aaron’s arm and whirled him into the middle of the room like a feather. Then she planted herself before Sylvia, with her arms akimbo, and glared like a lioness. “You can pinch me, sir, or gives me black eyes and red noses if you like, but no finger on my precious, if I die for it.”

Aaron was staggered by this defiance, and looked fierce for the moment. Then he became timid again and cast the odd, anxious look over his shoulder. “Leave the room, Deborah,” he said in a mild voice.

The faithful maid replied by sitting down and folding her arms. “Get your wild horses, sir,” she said, breathing heavily, “for only by them will I be tugged away.” And she snorted so loudly that the room shook.

“Pshaw,” said Norman, crossly, “Sylvia, don’t be afraid of me.” He wiped his face nervously. “I only want to know of the brooch. I like the opals—I wanted to buy it from Mr. Beecot. He is poor—he wants money. I can give it to him, for—the—the brooch.”

He brought out the last word with a gasp, and again glanced over his shoulder. Sylvia, not at all afraid, approached and took the old man’s hand. The watchful Deborah moved her chair an inch nearer, so as to be ready for any emergency. “Dear father,” said the girl, “Mr. Beecot doesn’t know where the brooch is. It was stolen from him when the accident happened. If you will see him he can tell you—”

“Not where the brooch is,” interrupted Aaron, trying to appear calm. “Well, well, it doesn’t matter.” He glanced anxiously at Sylvia. “You believe me, child, when I say it doesn’t matter.”

A snort from Deborah plainly said that she had her doubts. Sylvia cast a reproving glance in her direction, whereupon she rose and committed perjury. “Of course it don’t matter, sir,” she said in a loud, hearty voice which made Aaron wince. “My precious believes you, though lie it might be. But folk so good as you, sir, who go to church when there ain’t anyone to see, wouldn’t tell lies without them a-choking of them in their blessed throats.”

“How do you know I go to church?” asked Norman, with the snarl of a trapped animal.

“Bless you, sir, I don’t need glares at my age, though not so young as I might be. Church you enjoy, say what you may, you being as regular as the taxes, which is saying much. Lor’ save us all!”

Deborah might well exclaim this. Her master flung himself forward with outstretched hands clawing the air, and with his lips lifted like those of an enraged dog. “You she-cat,” he said in a painfully hissing voice, “you’re a spy, are you? They’ve set you to watch—to drag me to the gallows—” he broke off with a shiver. His rage cooled as suddenly as it had heated, and staggering to the sofa he sat down with his face hidden. “Not that—not that—oh, the years of pain and terror! To come to this—to this—Deborah—don’t sell me. Don’t. I’ll give you money—I am rich. But if the opal serpent—if the opal—” He rose and began to beat the air with his hands.

Sylvia, who had never seen her father like this, shrank back in terror, but Deborah, with all her wits about her, though she was wildly astonished, seized a carafe of water from the table and dashed the contents in his face. The old man gasped, shuddered, and, dripping wet, sank again on the sofa. But the approaching fit was past, and when he looked up after a moment or so, his voice was as calm as his face. “What’s all this?” he asked, feebly.

“Nothing, father,” said Sylvia, kneeling beside him; “you must not doubt Debby, who is as true as steel.”

“Are you, Deborah?” asked Aaron, weakly.

“I should think so,” she declared, putting her arms round Sylvia, “so long, sir, as you don’t hurt my flower.”

“I don’t want to hurt her ...”

“There’s feelings as well as bones,” said Deborah, hugging Sylvia so as to keep her from speaking, “and love you can’t squash, try as you may, though, bless you, I’m not given to keeping company myself.”

“Love,” said Aaron, vacantly. He seemed to think more of his troubles than of Sylvia going to visit a young man.

“Love and Mr. Beecot,” said Deborah. “She wants to marry him.”

“Why, then,” said Aaron, calmly, “she shall marry him.”

Sylvia fell at his feet. “Oh, father—father, and I have kept it from you all these months. Forgive me—forgive me,” and she wept.

“My dear,” he said, gently raising her, “there is nothing to forgive.”

Chapter VI

A Noise In The Night

Both Deborah and Sylvia were astonished that Aaron should be so indifferent about their long concealment. They had expected and dreaded a storm, yet when the secret was told Mr. Norman appeared to take it as calmly as though he had known about the matter from the first. Indeed, he seemed perfectly indifferent, and when he raised Sylvia and made her sit beside him on the sofa he reverted to the brooch.

“I shall certainly see Mr. Beecot,” he said in a dreamy way. “Charing Cross Hospital—of course. I’ll go to-morrow. I had intended to see about selling the furniture then, but I’ll wait till the next day. I want the brooch first—yes—yes,” and he opened and shut his hand in a strangely restless manner.

The girl and the servant looked at one another in a perplexed way, for it was odd Norman should take the secret wooing of his daughter so quietly. He had never evinced much interest in Sylvia, who had been left mainly to the rough attentions of Miss Junk, but sometimes he had mentioned that Sylvia would be an heiress and fit to marry a poor peer. The love of Paul Beecot overthrew this scheme, if the man intended to carry it out, yet he did not seem to mind. Sylvia, thinking entirely of Paul, was glad, and the tense expression of her face relaxed; but Deborah sniffed, which was always an intimation that she intended to unburden her mind on an unpleasant subject.

“Well, sir,” she said, folding her arms and scratching her elbow, “I do think as offspring ain’t lumps of dirt to be trod on in this way. I arsk”—she flung out her hand towards Sylvia—“Is she your own or is she not?”

“She is my daughter,” said Aaron, mildly. “Why do you ask?”

“ ‘Cause you don’t take interest you should take in her marriage, which is made in heaven if ever marriage was.”

Norman raised his head like a war-horse at the sound of a trumpet-call. “Who talks of marriage?” he asked sharply.

“Dear father,” said Sylvia, gently, “did you not hear? I love Paul, and I want to marry him.”

Aaron stared at her. “He is not a good match for you,” was his reply.

“He is the man I love,” cried Sylvia, tapping with her pretty foot.

“Love,” said Norman, with a melancholy smile, “there is no such thing, child. Talk of hate—for that exists,” he clenched his hands again, “hate that is as cruel as the grave.”

“Well I’m sure, sir, and what ‘ave hates to do with my beauty there? As to love, exist it do, for Bart’s bin talked into filling his ‘eart with the same, by me. I got it out of a *Family Herald*,” explained Deborah, incoherently, “where gentry throw themselves on their knees to arsk ‘ands in marriage. Bart was down on his hunkers every night for two weeks before he proposed proper, and I ses, ses I—”

“Will you hold your tongue?” interrupted Aaron, angrily; “you gabble gabble till you make my head ache. You confuse me.”

“I want to clear your ‘ead,” retorted Miss Junk, “seeing you take no interest in my pretty’s livings.”

Norman placed his fingers under Sylvia’s chin, and tipped it up so that he could gaze into her eyes. “Child, do you love him?” he asked gravely.

“Oh, father!” whispered Sylvia, and said no more. The expression of her eyes was enough for Aaron, and he turned away with a sigh.

“You know nothing about him,” he said at length.

“Begging pardon, sir, for being a gabbler,” said Deborah, witheringly, “but know what he is we do—a fine young gent with long descents and stone figgers in churches, as Bart knows. Beecot’s his par’s name, as is fighting with Mr. Paul by reason of contrariness and ‘igh living, him being as stout as stout.”

“Perhaps you will explain, Sylvia,” said Aaron, turning impatiently from the handmaiden.

“I should have explained before,” said the girl, quietly and very distinctly. “I loved Paul from the moment I saw him enter the shop six months ago. He came again and again, and we often talked. Then he told me of his love, and I confessed mine. Deborah wanted to know who he was, and if he was a good man. From what I learned of Paul’s people he seemed to be all that was good and generous and high-minded and loving. Deborah sent Bart one holiday to Wargrove in Essex, where Paul’s parents live, and Bart found that Paul had left home because he wanted to be an author. Paul is very popular in Wargrove, and everyone speaks well of him. So Deborah thought we might be engaged, and—”

“And have you a word to say against it, sir?” demanded Deborah, bristling.

“No,” said Aaron, after a pause, “but you should have told me.”

“We should,” admitted Sylvia, quickly, “but Paul and I feared lest you should say ‘No.’”

“My child,” said the old man, gravely, “so long as you wed a kind and good man I have nothing to say. Sylvia, I have worked hard these many years and have made much money, which, by will, I have left to you. When I die you will be rich. He is poor.”

“Paul—yes, he is poor. But what of that?”

“Many fathers might think that an objection,” went on Aaron without noticing her remark. “But I do not. You shall marry Paul before I go to America.”

“Lor’!” cried Deborah, “whatever are you a-goin’ there for, sir?”

“That’s my business,” said Aaron, dryly, “but I go as soon as I can. I have sold the books; and the furniture of these rooms shall be disposed of before the end of the week. My gems I take to Amsterdam for sale, and I go abroad next week. When I return in a fortnight you can marry Mr. Beecot. He is a good young man. I quite approve of him.”

Deborah snorted. “Seems to me as though you was glad to get quit of my pretty,” she murmured, but too low to be overheard.

“Oh, father,” cried Sylvia, putting her arms round Norman’s neck, “how good you are! I *do* love him so.”

“I hope the love will continue,” said her father, cynically, and removing the girl’s arms, to the secret indignation of Deborah. “I shall call on Mr. Beecot to-morrow and speak to him myself about the matter. If we come to an arrangement, for I have a condition to make before I give my entire consent, I shall allow you a certain sum to live on. Then I shall go to America, and when I die you will inherit all my money—when I die,” he added, casting the usual look over his shoulders. “But I won’t die for many a long day,” he said, with a determined air. “At least, I hope not.”

“You are healthy enough, father.”

“Yes! Yes—but healthy people die in queer ways.”

Deborah intervened impatiently. “I’m glad you wish to make my lily-queen happy, sir,” said she, nodding, “but change your mind you may if Mr. Beecot don’t fall in.”

“Fall in?” queried Aaron.

“With this arrangements—what is they?”

Aaron looked undecided, then spoke impulsively, walking towards the door as he did so. “Let Mr. Beecot give me that opal serpent,” he said, “and he shall have Sylvia and enough to live on.”

“But, father, it is lost,” cried Sylvia, in dismay.

She spoke to the empty air. Norman had hastily passed through the door and was descending the stairs quicker than usual. Sylvia, in her eagerness to explain, would have followed, but Deborah drew her back with rough gentleness. “Let him go, lily-queen,” she said; “let sleeping dogs lie if you love me.”

“Deborah, what do you mean?” asked Sylvia, breathlessly.

“I don’t mean anything that have a meaning,” said Miss Junk, enigmatically, “but your par’s willing to sell you for that dratted brooch, whatever he wants it for. And you to be put against a brooch my honey-pot. I’m biling—yes, biling hard,” and Deborah snorted in proof of the extremity of her rage.

“Never mind, Debby. Father consents that I shall marry Paul, and will give us enough to live on. Then Paul will write great books, and his father will ask him home again. Oh—oh!” Sylvia danced round the room gaily, “how happy I am.”

“And happy you shall be if I die for it,” shouted Deborah, screwing up her face, for she was not altogether satisfied, “though mysteries I don’t hold with, are about. America—what’s he going to America for? and with that brooch, and him locking us up every night to sleep in cellars. Police-courts and Old Baileys,” said Miss Junk, frowning. “I don’t like it, Sunbeam, and when you’re married to Mr. Beecot I’ll be that happy as never was.”

Sylvia opened her grey eyes in wide surprise and a little alarm. “Oh, Debby, you don’t think there’s anything wrong with father?”

Miss Junk privately thought there was a good deal wrong, but she folded Sylvia in her stout arms and dismissed the question with a snort. “No, lovey, my own, there ain’t. It’s just my silly way of going on. Orange buds and brides the sun shines on, is your fortunes, Miss Sylvia, though how I’m going to call you Mrs. Beecot beats me,” and Deborah rubbed her nose.

“I shall always be Sylvia to you.”

“Bless you, lady-bird, but don’t ask me to live with Mr. Beecot’s frantic par, else there’ll be scratchings if he don’t do proper what he should do

and don't. So there." Deborah swung her arms like a windmill. "My mind's easy and dinner's waiting, for, love or no love, eat you must, to keep your insides' clockwork."

When Bart heard the joyful news he was glad, but expressed regret that Norman should go to America. He did not wish to lose his situation, and never thought the old man would take him to the States also. Deborah vowed that if Aaron did want to transport Bart—so she put it—she would object. Then she unfolded a scheme by which, with Bart's savings and her own, they could start a laundry. "And I knows a drying ground," said Deborah, while talking at supper to her proposed husband, "as is lovely and cheap. One of them suburbs on the line to Essex, where my pretty will live when her husband's frantic par makes it up. Jubileetown's the place, and Victoria Avenue the street. The sweetest cottage at twenty pun' a year as I ever set eyes on. And m'sister as is married to a bricklayer is near to help with the family."

"The family?" echoed Bart, looking scared.

"In course—they will come, though it's early to be thinking of names for 'em. I'll do the washing, Bart, and you'll take round the cart, so don't you think things 'ull be otherwise."

"I don't want 'em to," said Bart, affectionately. "I always loved you, Debby darling."

"Ah," said Miss Junk, luxuriously, "I've taught you to, in quite a genteel way. What a scrubby little brat you were, Bart!"

"Yuss," said Mr. Tawsey, eating rapidly. "I saw myself to-day."

"In a looking-glarse?"

"Lor', Debby—no. But there was a brat all rags and dirty face and sauce as I was when you saw me fust. He come into the shop as bold as brass and arsked fur a book. I ses, 'What do you want with a book?' and he ses, looking at the shelves so empty, 'I sees your sellin' off,' he ses, so I jumped up to clip him over the 'ead, when he cut. Tray's his name, Debby, and he's the kid as talked to that cold gent Mr. Beecot brought along with him when he got smashed."

“Tray—that’s a dog’s name,” said Deborah, “old dog Tray, and quite good enough for guttersnipes. As to Mr. Hay, don’t arsk me to say he’s good, for that he ain’t. What’s he want talking with gutter Trays?”

“And what do gutter Trays want with books?” asked Bart, “though to be sure ‘twas impertinence maybe.”

Deborah nodded. “That it was, and what you’d have done when you was a scrubby thing. Don’t bolt your food, but make every bit ‘elp you to ‘ealth and long living. You won’t ‘ave gormandising when we’ve got the laundry, I can tell you.”

Next day Aaron went off in the afternoon to Charing Cross Hospital, after holding a conversation with a broker who had agreed to buy the derelict furniture. The shop, being empty, was supposed to be closed, but from force of habit Bart took down the shutters and lurked disconsolately behind the bare counter. Several old customers who had not heard of the sale entered, and were disappointed when they learned that Aaron was leaving. Their lamentations made Bart quite low-spirited. However, he was polite to all, but his manners broke down when a Hindoo entered to sell boot-laces. “I ain’t got nothing to sell, and don’t want to buy nohow,” said Bart, violently.

The man did not move, but stood impassively in the doorway like a bronze statue. He wore a dirty red turban carelessly wound round his small head, an unclean blouse which had once been white, circled by a yellow handkerchief of some coarse stuff, dark blue trousers and slippers with curled-up toes on naked feet. His eyes were black and sparkling and he had a well-trimmed moustache which contrasted oddly with his shabby attire. “Hokar is poor: Hokar need money,” he whined in a monotone, but with his eyes glancing restlessly round the shop. “Give Hokar—give,” and he held out the laces.

“Don’t want any, I tell you,” shouted Bart, tartly. “I’ll call a peeler if you don’t git.”

“Ho! ho! who stole the donkey?” cried a shrill voice at the door, and from behind the hawker was poked a touzelled curly head, and a grinning face which sadly needed washing. “You leave this cove alone, won’t y? He’s a pal o’ mine. D’y see?”

“You git along with your pal then,” cried Bart, indignantly. “If he don’t understand King’s English, you do, Tray.”

Tray darted into the middle of the shop and made a face at the indignant shopman by putting his fingers in his mouth to widen it, and pulling down his eyes. Hokar never smiled, but showed no disposition to move. Bart, angered at this blocking up the doorway, and by Tray’s war dance, jumped the counter. He aimed a blow at the guttersnipe’s head, but missed it and fell full length. The next moment Tray was dancing on his body with his tongue out derisively. Then Hokar gave a weird smile. “Kalee!” he said to himself. “Kalee!”

How the scene would have ended it is impossible to say, but while Bart strove to rise and overturn Tray, Aaron walked in past the Indian. “What’s this?” he asked sharply. Tray stopped his dancing on Bart’s prostrate body and gave a shrill whistle by placing two dirty fingers in his mouth. Then he darted between Norman’s legs and made off. Hokar stood staring at the bookseller, and after a pause pointed with his finger. “One—eye,” he said calmly, “no good!”

Aaron was about to inquire what he meant by this insult, when the Indian walked to the counter and placed something thereon, after which he moved away, and his voice was heard dying away down the street. “Hokar is poor—Hokar need money. Hokar, Christian.”

“What’s this?” demanded Norman, again assisting Bart roughly to his feet.

“Blest if I know,” replied Tawsey, staring; “they’re mad, I think,” and he related the incoming of the Indian and the street arab. “As for that Tray,” said he, growling, “I’ll punch his blooming ‘ead when I meets him agin, dancing on me—yah. Allays meddlin’ that brat, jus’ as he wos when Mr. Beecot was smashed.”

“You saw that accident?” asked his master, fixing his one eye on him.

“Yuss,” said Bart, slowly, “I did, but Deborah she told me to say nothink. Mr. Beecot was smashed, and his friend, the cold eye-glarsed gent, pulled him from under the wheels of that there machine with Tray to help him, and between ‘em they carried him to the pavement.”

“Humph!” said Aaron, resting his chin on his hand and speaking more to himself than to his assistant, “so Tray was on the spot. Humph!” Bart, having brushed himself, moved behind the counter and took up what Hokar had left. “Why, it’s brown sugar!” he exclaimed, touching it with his tongue, “coarse brown sugar—a handful.” He stretched out his palm heaped with the sugar to his master. “What do that furrein pusson mean by leaving dirt about?”

“I don’t know, nor do I care,” snapped Aaron, who appeared to be out of temper. “Throw it away!” which Bart did, after grumbling again at the impudence of the street hawker.

Norman did not go upstairs, but descended to the cellar, where he busied himself in looking over the contents of the three safes. In these, were many small boxes filled with gems of all kind, cut and uncut: also articles of jewellery consisting of necklaces, bracelets, stars for the hair, brooches, and tiaras. The jewels glittered in the flaring gaslight, and Aaron fondled them as though they were living things. “You beauties,” he whispered to himself, with his one eye gloating over his hoard. “I’ll sell you, though it goes to my heart to part with lovely things. But I must—I must—and then I’ll go—not to America—oh, dear no! but to the South Seas. They won’t find me there—no—no! I’ll be rich, and happy, and free. Sylvia can marry and live happy. But the serpent,” he said in a harsh tone, “oh, the opal serpent! The pawnbroker’s shop. Stowley—yes—I know it. I know it. Stowley. They want it back; but they sha’n’t. I’ll buy it from Beecot by giving him Sylvia. It’s lost—lost.” He looked over his shoulder as he spoke in a terrified whisper. “Perhaps they have it, and then—then,” he leaped up and flung the armful of baubles he held on to the deal table, “and then—I must get away—away.”

He pulled out three or four coarse sacks of a small size and filled these with the jewellery. Then he tied a cord round the neck of each sack and sealed it. Afterwards, with a sigh, he closed the safe and turned down the gas. He did not leave by the trap, which led through the shop, but opened and locked the back door of the cellar, ascended the steps and went out into the street through the side passage. “If they come,” he thought as he walked into the gathering night, “they won’t find these. No! no!” and he hugged the bags closely.

Sylvia upstairs waited anxiously for the return of her father from the hospital, as she both wanted to hear how her lover was progressing and what he said about the permission to marry being given. But Aaron did not come to supper, as was his usual custom. Bart said, when inquiries were made, that the master had gone down into the cellar and was probably there. Meanwhile, according to his usual habit, he put up the shutters and departed. Sylvia and Deborah ate their frugal meal and retired to bed, the girl much disturbed at the absence of her father. Outside, in the street, the passers-by diminished in number, and as the night grew darker and the lamps were lighted hardly a person remained in Gwynne Street. It was not a fashionable thoroughfare, and after nightfall few people came that way. By eleven o'clock there was not a soul about. Even the one policeman who usually perambulated the street was conspicuous by his absence.

Sylvia, in her bed, had fallen into a troubled sleep, and was dreaming of Paul, but not happily. She seemed to see him in trouble. Then she woke suddenly, with all her senses alert, and sat up. Faintly she heard a wild cry, and then came the twelve strokes of the church bells announcing midnight. Breathlessly she waited, but the cry was not repeated. In the darkness she sat up listening until the quarter chimed. Then the measured footsteps of a policeman were heard passing down the street and dying away. Sylvia was terrified. Why, she hardly knew: but she sprang from her bed and hurried into Deborah's room. "Wake up," she said, "there's something wrong."

Deborah was awake in a moment and lighted the lamp. On hearing Sylvia's story she went down the stairs followed by the girl. The door at the bottom, strange to say, was not locked. Deborah opened this, and peering into the shop gave a cry of alarm and horror.

Lying on the floor was Aaron, bound hand and foot.

Chapter VII

A Terrible Night

"Go back!—go back, my precious!" cried Deborah, her first thought being how to spare Sylvia the sight.

But the girl, remembering that agonized cry which had awakened her, faint and far away as it sounded, pushed past the servant and ran into the middle of the shop. The lamp, held high by Deborah over her head, cast a bright circle of light on the floor, and in the middle of this Sylvia saw her father breathing heavily. His hands were bound behind his back in a painful way, his feet were tightly fastened, and his head seemed to be attached to the floor. At least, when the body (as it seemed from its stillness) suddenly writhed, it rolled to one side, but the head remained almost motionless. The two women hung back, clutching each other's hands, and were almost too horrified to move at the sight. "Look! Look!" cried Sylvia, gasping, "the mouth!" Deborah looked and gave a moan. Aaron's mouth was rigidly closed under a glittering jewel. Deborah bent down, still moaning, so great did the horror of the thing paralyse her speech, and saw the lights flash back from many diamonds: she saw bluish gleams and then a red sparkle like the ray of the setting sun. It was the opal serpent brooch, and Aaron's lips were fastened together with the stout pin. On his mouth and across his agonised face in which the one eye gleamed with terrific meaning the jewelled serpent seemed to writhe.

"Oh, poor soul!" cried Deborah, falling on her knees with the lamp still held above her head. "Sylvia see—"

The girl gasped again, and impulsively knelt also, trying with nerveless fingers to unfasten the cruel pin which sealed the man's lips. He still lived, for they heard him breathing and saw the gleaming eye: but even as they looked the face grew black: the eye opened and closed convulsively. Deborah set down the lamp and tried to raise the head. She could not lift it from the floor. Then the bound feet swung in the air and fell again with a dull thud. The eye remained wide open, staring in a glassy, manner: the breathing had stopped: and the body was motionless. "He's dead," said Deborah, leaping to her feet and catching away the girl. "Help! Help!"

Her loud voice rang fiercely through the empty shop and echoed round and round. But there came no answering cry. Not a sound could be heard in the street. On the bare floor was the lamp shining on that dreadful sight: the body with sealed lips, and the glittering jewel, and leaning against the wall were the two women, Deborah staring at her dead master, but with Sylvia's eyes pressed against her bosom so that

she might not witness the horror. And the stillness deepened weirdly every moment.

Sylvia tried to move her head, but Deborah pressed it closer to her breast. “Don’t, my pretty—don’t,” she whispered harshly.

“I must—I—ah!” the girl freed her head from those kind arms with a wrench, and looked at the gruesome sight. She staggered forward a few steps, and then fell back. Deborah received her in her arms, and, thankful that Sylvia had fainted, carried her up the stairs to lay the unconscious girl on her own bed. Then she descended rapidly, locked the door leading from the shop to the stairs, and again looked at the body. The time she had been away was about seven or eight minutes, and the body still remained with the one open eye staring meaninglessly at the ceiling. Deborah, drawn by fascination like a bird by a serpent, crept forward and touched the head. It moved, and she again tried to lift it. This time she found she could do so. The head she lifted against her breast, and then laid it down with horror when she found the bosom of her nightgown was stained with blood. Pulling her wits together, for she felt that she needed them every one, she examined the head and neck. To her horror she found round the throat a strong thin copper wire, which disappeared through a hole in the floor. Apparently this had been pulled so tightly as to keep the head down and to choke the old man, and so cruelly as to cut deeply into the flesh. With a moan of horror Deborah dropped the head and ran to the trap-door in the corner. If anywhere, those who had murdered Aaron Norman were lurking in the cellar. But the trap-door would not open, and then she remembered that it was closed by a bolt underneath. She could not reach the midnight assassin that way.

“The front door,” she gasped, and ran to unbolt it. The bolts were easily removed, but the door was also locked, and Aaron usually had the key deposited nightly in the cellar by Bart. Repugnant as it was for her to approach the dead body, Deborah again went forward and felt in the pockets and loose clothing. The man was completely dressed, even to an overcoat which he wore. But she could not find the key and wondered what she was to do. Probably the key had been hung up in the cellar as usual. Necessity being the mother of invention, she remembered that the window-glass was fragile, and ran up in the hope of breaking through. But the stout shutters were up, so Deborah found that she was sealed in

the house. Almost in a state of distraction, for by this time her nerve had given way, she unlocked the door to the stairs and ran up three steps at a time to the sitting-room. Here she opened the window and scrambled out on to the ledge among Sylvia's flower-pots. Just as she was wondering how she could get down, the measured tread of a policeman was heard, and by craning her neck Deborah saw him coming leisurely along the street, swinging his dark lantern on the windows and doors. It was a moonlight night and the street was extraordinarily well lighted as the moon shone straightly between the houses. Gathering her strength for a last effort, Deborah yelled as only she could yell, and saw the startled officer spinning round, looking up and down and sideways to see where the shrieks came from. "Up—up—oh, look up, you fool!" screamed Deborah. "Murder—oh, murder! Burst in the door, call the police, drat you! Help!—help!"

By this time she was the centre of a circle of bright light, for the policeman had located her, and his lantern was flashing on her white nightgown as she clung to the window-sill.

"What are you making that noise for?" called up the officer, gruffly.

"Murder, you fool!" screamed Deborah. "Master's murdered. Number forty-five—the door's locked—break it open. Police!—police!"

Before she finished the sentence the officer blew his whistle shrilly and ran to the door of the shop, against which he placed his shoulder. Deborah climbed in again by the window, and ran down again, but even then, in her excitement and horror, she did not forget to lock the door leading to the stairs, so that Sylvia might not be disturbed. As she descended she flung a thick shawl over her shoulders, which she had caught up when leaving her room, though for the rest she had nothing on but a nightgown. But the poor woman was too terrified to be troubled by any scruples at the moment, and reached the shop to hear heavy blows on the door. Between the thuds Deborah could hear footsteps running inward from every quarter. "I ain't got the key!" she shrieked through the keyhole; "break in the door, drat you! Murder!—murder!"

From the noise she made those without concluded that some terrible crime was taking place within, and redoubled their efforts. Deborah had just time to leap back after a final scream when the door fell flat on the

floor, and three policemen sprang into the room with drawn batons and their lights flashing like stars. The lamp was still on the floor shedding its heavy yellow light on the corpse. "Master!" gasped Deborah, pointing a shaking finger. "Dead—the—the cellar—the—" and here she made as to drop. A policeman caught her in his arms, but the woman shook herself free. "I sha'n't faint—no—I sha'n't faint," she gasped, "the cellar—look—look—" She ran forward and raised the head of the dead man. When the officers saw the dangling slack wire disappearing through a hole in the floor they grasped the situation. "The passage outside!" cried Deborah, directing operations; "the trap-door," she ran to it, "fast bolted below, and them murdering people are there."

"How many are there?" asked a policeman, while several officers ran round the back through the side passage.

"Oh, you dratted fool, how should I know!" cried Deborah, fiercely; "there may be one and there may be twenty. Go and catch them—you're paid for it. Send to number twenty Park Street, Bloomsbury, for Bart."

"Who is Bart?"

"Go and fetch him," cried Deborah, furious at this delay; "number twenty Park Street, Bloomsbury. Oh, what a night this is! I'm a-goin' to see Miss Sylvia, who has fainted, and small blame," and she made for the locked door. An officer came after her. "Go away," shrieked Deborah, pushing him back. "I've got next to nothink on, and my pretty is ill. Go away and do your business."

Seeing she was distracted and hardly knew what she was saying, the man drew back, and Deborah ran up the stairs to Sylvia's room, where she found the poor girl still unconscious.

Meanwhile, an Inspector had arrived, and one of the policemen was detailing all that had occurred from the time Deborah had given the alarm at the window. The Inspector listened quietly to everything, and then examined the body. "Strangled with a copper wire," he said, looking up. "Go for a doctor one of you. It goes through the floor," he added, touching the wire which still circled the throat, "and must have been pulled from below. Examine the cellar."

Even as he spoke, and while one zealous officer ran off for a medical man, there was a grating sound and the trap-door was thrown open. A policeman leaped into the shop and saluted when he saw his superior. By this time the gas had been lighted. "We've broken down the back door, sir," said he, "the cellar door—it was locked but not bolted. Nothing in the cellar, everything in order, but that wire," he pointed to the means used for strangling, "dangled from the ceiling and a cross piece of wood is bound to the lower end."

"Who does the shop belong to?"

"Aaron Norman," said the policeman whose beat it was; "he's a second-hand bookseller, a quiet, harmless, timid sort of man."

"Anyone about?"

"No, sir. I passed down Gwynne Street at about a quarter past twelve and all seemed safe. When I come back later—it might have been twenty minutes and more—say twenty-five—I saw the woman who was down here clinging to a window on the first floor, and shouting murder. I gave the summons, sir, and we broke open the door."

Inspector Prince laid down the dead man's head and rose to his feet with a nod. "I'll go upstairs and see the woman," he said; "tell me when the doctor comes."

Upstairs he examined the sitting-room, and lighted the gas therein; then he mounted another storey after looking through the kitchen and dining-room. In a bedroom he found an empty bed, but heard someone talking in a room near at hand. Flinging open the door he heard a shriek, and found himself confronted by Deborah, who had hastily flung on some clothes. "Don't come in," she cried, extending her arm, "for I'm just getting Miss Sylvia round."

"Nonsense," said the Inspector, and pushing her roughly aside he stepped into the room. On the bed lay Sylvia, apparently still unconscious, but as the man looked at her she opened her eyes with a long sigh. Deborah put her arms round the girl and began to talk to her in an endearing way. Shortly Sylvia sat up, bewildered. "What is it?" she asked. Then her eyes fell on the policeman. "Oh, where is my father?"

“He’s dead, pretty,” said Deborah, fondling her. “Don’t take on so.”

“Yes—I remember—the body on the floor—the serpent across the mouth—oh—oh!” and she fainted again.

“There!” cried Deborah, with bitter triumph, “see what you’ve done.”

“Come—come,” said Inspector Prince, though as gently as possible. “I am in charge of this case. Tell me what has happened.”

“If you’d use your blessed eyes you’d see murder has happened,” said Miss Junk, savagely. “Let me attend to my pretty.”

Just at this moment a tall young man entered the room. It was the doctor. “The policemen said you were up here,” he said in a pleasant voice. “I’ve examined the body, Inspector. The man is quite dead—he has been strangled—and in a cruel manner with that copper wire, which has cut into the throat, to say nothing of this,” and the doctor held out the brooch.

“That, drat it!” cried Deborah, vigorously, “it’s the cause of it all, I do believe, if I died in saying so,” and she began to rub Sylvia’s hands vigorously.

“Who is this young lady?” asked the doctor; “another patient?”

“And well she may be,” said Miss Junk. “Call yourself a doctor, and don’t help me to bring her to.”

“Do what you can,” said Prince, “and you,” he added to Deborah, “come down with me. I wish to ask you a few questions.”

Deborah was no fool and saw that the Inspector was determined to make her do what he wanted. Besides, Sylvia was in the hands of the doctor, and Deborah felt that he could do more than she, to bring the poor girl to her senses. After a few parting injunctions she left the room and went downstairs with the Inspector. The police had made no further discovery.

Prince questioned not only the Gwynne Street policeman, who had given his report, but all others who had been in the vicinity. But they could tell him nothing. No one suspicious had been seen leaving Gwynne Street

north or south, so, finding he could learn nothing in this direction, Prince turned his attention to the servant. “Now, then, what do you know?” he asked. “Don’t say anything likely to incriminate yourself.”

“Me!” shouted Deborah, bouncing up with a fiery face. “Don’t you be taking away my character. Why, I know no more who have done it than a babe unborn, and that’s stupid enough, I ‘opes, Mr. Policeman. Ho! indeed, and we pays our taxes to be insulted by you, Mr. Policeman.” She was very aggravating, and many a man would have lost his temper. But Inspector Prince was a quiet and self-controlled officer, and knew how to deal with this violent class of women. He simply waited till Deborah had exhausted herself, and then gently asked her a few questions. Finding he was reasonable, Deborah became reasonable on her part, and replied with great intelligence. In a few minutes the Inspector, by handling her deftly, learned all that had taken place on that terrible night, from the time Sylvia had started up in bed at the sound of that far-distant cry of a soul in agony. “And that, from what Miss Sylvia says,” ended Deborah, “was just before the church clock struck the hour of twelve.”

“You came down a quarter of an hour later?”

“I did, when Miss Sylvia woke me,” said Deborah; “she was frightened out of her seven senses, and couldn’t get up at once. Yes—it was about twenty minutes after the hour we come down to see—It,” and the woman, strong nerved as she was, shuddered.

“Humph,” said the Inspector, “the assassin had time to escape.”

“Begging your pardon, sir, them, or him, or her, or it as murdered master was below in the cellar when we saw the corp—not that it was what you’d call a corp then.”

“Will you say precisely what you mean?”

Deborah did so, and with such wealth of detail that even the hardened Inspector felt the creeps down his official back. There was something terribly merciless about this crime. The man had been bound like a sheep for the slaughter; his mouth had been sealed with the brooch so that he could not cry out, and then in the sight of his child and servant he had been slowly strangled by means of the copper wire which

communicated with the cellar. One of the policemen brought up an auger which evidently had been used to bore the hole for the wire to pass through, for the fresh sawdust was still in its whorls. "Who does this belong to?" Prince asked Deborah.

"It's Bart's," said Deborah, staring; "he was using it along with other tools to make some deal boxes for master, who was going away. I expect it was found in the cellar in the tool-box, for Bart allays brought it in tidy-like after he'd done his work in the yard, weather being fine, of course," ended Deborah, sniffing.

"Where is this Bart?"

"In bed like a decent man if he's to be my husband, which he is," said Miss Junk, tartly. "I told one of them idle bobbies to go and fetch him from Bloomsbury."

"One has gone," said another policeman. "Bart Tawsey isn't he?"

"Mr. Bartholemew Tawsey, if you please," said the servant, grandly. "I only hope he'll be here soon to protect me."

"You're quite safe," said Prince, dryly, whereat there was a smile on the faces of his underlings, for Deborah in her disordered dress and with her swollen, flushed, excited face was not comely. "But what about this brooch you say is the cause of it all?"

Deborah dropped with an air of fatigue. "If you kill me I can't talk of it now," she protested. "The brooch belonged to Mr. Paul Beecot."

"And where is he?"

"In the Charing Cross Hospital if you want to know, and as he's engaged to my pretty you needn't think he done it—so there."

"I am accusing no one," said the Inspector, grimly, "but we must get to the bottom of this horrible crime."

"Ah, well you may call it that," wailed Deborah, "with that serping on his poor mouth and him wriggling like an eel to get free. But 'ark, there's my pretty a-calling," and Miss Junk dashed headlong from the shop shouting comfort to Sylvia as she went.

Prince looked at the dead man and at the opal serpent which he held in his hand. "This at one end of the matter, and that at the other. What is the connecting link between this brooch and that corpse?"

Chapter VIII

The Verdict Of The Jury

As may be guessed, the murder of Aaron Norman caused a tremendous sensation. One day the name was unknown, the next and it was in the mouths of the millions. The strange circumstances of the crime, the mystery which shrouded it, the abominable cruelty of the serpent brooch having been used to seal the man's lips while he was being slowly strangled, deepened the interest immensely. Here, at last was a murder worthy of Wilkie Collins's or Gaboriau's handling; such a crime as one expected to read of in a novel, but never could hope to hear of in real life. Fact had for once poached on the domains of fiction.

But notwithstanding all the inquiries which were made, and all the vigilance of the police, and all the newspaper articles, and all the theories sent by people who knew nothing whatever of the matter, nothing tangible was discovered likely to lead to a discovery of the assassins or assassin. It was conjectured that two people at least had been concerned in the committal of the crime, as, weak physically though he was, the deceased would surely not have allowed himself to be bound by one person, however strong that person might be. In such a case there would certainly have been a scuffle, and as the daughter of the murdered man heard his cry for help—which was what Sylvia did hear—she would certainly have heard the noise of a rough-and-tumble struggle such as Norman would have made when fighting for his life. But that single muffled cry was all that had been heard, and then probably the brooch had been pinned on the mouth to seal it for ever. Later the man had been slowly strangled, and in the sight of his horrified daughter.

Poor Sylvia received a severe shock after witnessing that awful sight, and was ill for some days. The faithful Deborah attended to her like a slave, and would allow no one, save the doctor, to enter the sick-room. Bart Tawsey, who had been summoned to Gwynne Street from his bed, remained in the empty shop and attended to any domestic duties which Miss Junk required to be performed. She made him cook viands for Sylvia and for herself, and, as he had been trained by her before, to act

as an emergency cook, he did credit to her tuition. Also Bart ran messages, saw that the house was well locked and bolted at night, and slept on a hastily-improvised bed under the counter. Even Deborah's strong nerves were shaken by the horrors she had witnessed, and she insisted that Bart should remain to protect her and Sylvia. Bart was not over-strong, but he was wiry, and, moreover, had the courage of a cock sparrow, so while he was guarding the house Deborah had no fears, and could attend altogether to her sick mistress.

One of the first people to call on Miss Norman was a dry, wizen monkey of a man, who announced himself as Jabez Pash, the solicitor of the deceased. He had, so he said, executed Aaron's legal business for years, and knew all his secrets. Yet, when questioned by the police, he could throw no light on the murder. But he knew of something strange connected with the matter, and this he related to the detective who was now in charge of the case.

This officer was a chatty, agreeable, pleasant-faced man, with brown eyes, brown hair and brown skin. Also, to match his face, no doubt, he wore brown clothes, brown boots, a brown hat and a brown tie—in fact, in body, face and hands and dress he was all brown, and this prevalent color produced rather a strange effect. “He must ha' bin dyed,” said Miss Junk when she set eyes on him. “But brown is better nor black, Miss Sylvia, though black you'll have to wear for your poor par, as is gone to a better land, let us hope, though there's no knowing.”

The brown man, who answered to the name of Hurd, or, as he genially described himself, “Billy” Hurd, saw Mr. Pash, the lawyer, after he had examined everyone he could lay hold of in the hopes of learning something likely to elucidate the mystery. “What do you know of this matter, sir?” asked the brown man, pleasantly.

Pash screwed up his face in a manner worthy of his monkey looks. He would have been an absolute image of one with a few nuts in his cheek, and as he talked in a chattering sort of way, very fast and a trifle incoherent, the resemblance was complete. “I know nothing why my esteemed client should meet with such a death,” he said, “but I may mention that on the evening of his death he called round to see me and deposited in my charge four bags of jewels. At least he said they were jewels, for the bags are sealed, and of course I never opened them.”

“Can I see those bags?” asked Hurd, amiably.

The legal monkey hopped into the next room and beckoned Hurd to follow. Shortly the two were looking into the interior of a safe wherein reposed four bags of coarse white canvas sealed and tied with stout cords. “The odd thing is,” said Mr. Pash, chewing his words, and looking so absurdly like a monkey that the detective felt inclined to call him “Jacko,” “that on the morning of the murder, and before I heard anything about it, a stranger came with a note from my esteemed client asking that the bags should be handed over.”

“What sort of a man?”

“Well,” said Pash, fiddling with his sharp chin, “what you might call a seafaring man. A sailor, maybe, would be the best term. He was stout and red-faced, but with drink rather than with weather, I should think, and he rolled on his bow-legs in a somewhat nautical way.”

“What name did he give?” asked Hurd, writing this description rapidly in his note-book.

“None. I asked him who he was, and he told me—with many oaths I regret to say—to mind my own business. He insisted on having the bags to take back to Mr. Norman, but I doubted him—oh, yes,” added the lawyer, shrewdly, “I doubted him. Mr. Norman always did his own business, and never, in my experience of him, employed a deputy. I replied to the unknown nautical man—a sailor—as you might say; he certainly smelt of rum, which, as we know, is a nautical drink—well, Mr. Hurd, I replied that I would take the bags round to Mr. Norman myself and at once. This office is in Chancery Lane, as you see, and not far from Gwynne Street, so I started with the bags.”

“And with the nautical gentleman?”

“No. He said he would remain behind until I returned, so as to receive my apology when I had seen my esteemed client and become convinced of the nautical gentleman’s rectitude. When I reached Gwynne Street I found that Mr. Norman was dead, and at once took the bags back to replace them in this safe, where you now behold them.”

“And this sailor?” asked Hurd, eyeing Mr. Pash keenly.

The lawyer sucked in his cheeks and put his feet on the rungs of his chair. "Oh, my clerk tells me he left within five minutes of my departure, saying he could not wait."

"Have you seen him since?"

"I have not seen him since. But I am glad that I saved the property of my client."

"Was Norman rich?"

"Very well off indeed, but he did not make his money out of his book-selling business. In fact," said Pash, putting the tips of his fingers delicately together, "he was rather a good judge of jewels."

"And a pawnbroker," interrupted Hurd, dryly. "I have heard all about that from Bart Tawsey, his shopman. Skip it and go on."

"I can only go on so far as to say that Miss Norman will probably inherit a fortune of five thousand a year, beside the jewels contained in those bags. That is," said Mr. Pash, wisely, "if the jewels be not redeemed by those who pawned them."

"Is there a will?" asked Hurd, rising to take his leave.

Pash screwed up his eyes and inflated his cheeks, and wriggled so much that the detective expected an acrobatic performance, and was disappointed when it did not come off. "I really can't be sure on that point," he said softly. "I have not yet examined the papers contained in the safe of my deceased and esteemed client. He would never allow me to make his will. Leases—yes—he has some house-property—mortgages—yes—investments—yes—he entrusted me with all his business save the important one of making a will. But a great many other people act in the same strange way, though you might not think so, Mr. Hurd. They would never make a lease, or let a house, or buy property, without consulting their legal adviser, yet in the case of wills (most important documents) many prefer to draw them up themselves. Consequently, there is much litigation over wrongly-drawn documents of that nature."

“All the better for you lawyers. Well, I’m off to look for your nautical gentleman.”

“Do you think he is guilty?”

“I can’t say,” said Hurd, smiling, “and I never speak unless I am quite sure of the truth.”

“It will be hard to come at, in this case,” said the lawyer.

Billy the detective smiled pleasantly and shrugged his brown shoulders. “So hard that it may never be discovered,” he said. “You know many mysteries are never solved. I suspect this Gwynne Street crime will be one of them.”

Hurd had learned a great deal about the opal brooch from Sylvia and Deborah, and what they told him resulted in his visiting the Charing Cross Hospital to see Paul Beecot. The young man was much worried. His arm was getting better, and the doctors assured him he would be able to leave the hospital in a few days. But he had received a letter from his mother, whom he had informed of his accident. She bewailed his danger, and wrote with many tears—as Paul saw from the blotted state of the letter—that her domestic tyrant would not allow her to come to London to see her wounded darling. This in itself was annoying enough, but Paul was still more irritated and excited by the report of Aaron’s terrible death, which he saw in a newspaper. So much had this moved him that he was thrown into a high state of fever, and the doctor refused to allow him to read the papers. Luckily, Paul, for his own sake, had somewhat calmed down when Hurd arrived, so the detective was permitted to see him. He sat by the bedside and told the patient who he was. Beecot looked at him sharply, and then recognized him.

“You are the workman,” he said astonished.

“Yes, Mr. Beecot, I am. I hear that you have not taken my warning regarding your friend, Mr. Grexon Hay.”

“Ah! Then you knew his name all the time!”

“Of course I did. I merely spoke to you to set you on your guard against him. He’ll do you no good.”

“But he was at school with me,” said Beecot, angrily.

“That doesn’t make him any the better companion,” replied Hurd; “see here, Mr. Beecot, we can talk of this matter another time. At present, as I am allowed to converse with you only for a short time, I wish to ask you about the opal serpent.”

Paul sat up, although Hurd tried to keep him down. “What do you know of that?—why do you come to me?”

“I know very little and want to know more. As I told you, my name is Billy Hurd, and, as I did *not* tell you, I am the detective whom the Treasury has placed in charge of this case.”

“Norman’s murder?”

“Yes! Have you read the papers?”

“A few, but not enough. The doctors took them from me and—”

“Gently, Mr. Beecot. Let us talk as little as possible. Where did you get that brooch?”

“Why do you want to know? You don’t suspect me, I hope?”

Hurd laughed. “No. You have been in this ward all the time. But as the brooch was used cruelly to seal the dead man’s mouth, it seems to me, and to Inspector Prince, that the whole secret of the murder lies in tracing it to its original possessor. Now tell me all about it,” said Billy, and spread out his note-book.

“I will if you’ll tell me about Miss Norman. I’m engaged to marry her and I hear she is ill.”

“Oh, she is much better,” said Hurd, pausing pencil in hand, “don’t distress yourself. That young lady is all right; and when you marry her you’ll marry an heiress, as I learn from the lawyer who does the business of the deceased.”

“I don’t care about her being the heiress. Will you take a message to her from me?”

“Certainly. What is it?” Hurd spoke quite sympathetically, for even though he was a detective he was a human being with a kindly heart.

“Tell her how sorry I am, and that I’ll come and see her as soon as I can leave this confounded hospital. Thanks for your kindness, Mr. Hurd. Now, what do you wish to know? Oh, yes—about the opal serpent, which, as you say, and as I think, seems to be at the bottom of all the trouble. Listen,” and Paul detailed all he knew, taking the story up to the time of his accident.

Hurd listened attentively. “Oh,” said he, with a world of meaning, “so Mr. Grexon Hay was with you? Hum! Do you suppose he pushed you into the road on purpose?”

“No,” said Paul, staring, “I’m sure he didn’t. What had he to gain by acting in such a way?”

“Money, you may be sure,” said Hurd. “That gentleman never does anything without the hope of a substantial reward. Hush! We’ll talk of this when you’re better, Mr. Beecot. You say the brooch was lost.”

“Yes. It must have slipped out of my pocket when I fell under the wheels of that machine. I believe there were a number of loafers and ragged creatures about, so it is just possible I may hear it has been picked up. I’ve sent an advertisement to the papers.”

Hurd shook his head. “You won’t hear,” he said. “How can you expect to when you know the brooch was used to seal the dead man’s lips?”

“I forgot that,” said Paul, faintly. “My memory—”

“Is not so good as it was.” Hurd rose. “I’ll go, as I see you are exhausted. Good-bye.”

“Wait! You’ll keep me advised of how the case goes?”

“Certainly, if the doctors will allow me to. Good-bye,” and Hurd went away very well satisfied with the information he had obtained.

The clue, as he thought it was, led him to Wargrove, where he obtained useful information from Mr. Beecot, who gave it with a very bad grace, and offered remarks about his son’s being mixed up in the case, which

made Hurd, who had taken a fancy to the young fellow, protest. From Wargrove, Hurd went to Stowley, in Buckinghamshire, and interviewed the pawnbroker whose assistant had wrongfully sold the brooch to Beecot many years before. There he learned a fact which sent him back to Mr. Jabez Pash in London.

“I says, sir,” said Hurd, when again in the lawyer’s private room, “that nautical gentleman of yours pawned that opal serpent twenty years ago more or less.”

“Never,” said the monkey, screwing up his face and chewing.

“Yes, indeed. The pawnbroker is an old man, but he remembers the customer quite well, and his description, allowing for the time that has elapsed, answers to the man who tried to get the jewels from you.”

Mr. Pash chewed meditatively, and then inflated his cheeks. “Pooh,” he said, “twenty years is a long time. A man then, and a man now, would be quite different.”

“Some people never change,” said Hurd, quietly. “You have not changed much, I suspect.”

“No,” cackled the lawyer, rather amused. “I grew old young, and have never altered my looks.”

“Well, this nautical gentleman may be the same. He pawned the article under the name of David Green—a feigned one, I suspect.”

“Then you think he is guilty?”

“I have to prove that the brooch came into his possession again before I can do that,” said Hurd, grimly. “And, as the brooch was lost in the street by Mr. Beecot, I don’t see what I can do. However, it is strange that a man connected with the pawning of the brooch so many years ago should suddenly start up again when the brooch is used in connection with a terrible crime.”

“It is strange. I congratulate you on having this case, Mr. Hurd. It is an interesting one to look into.”

“And a mighty difficult one,” said Hurd, rather depressed. “I really don’t see my way. I have got together all the evidence I can, but I fear the verdict at the inquest will be wilful murder against some person or persons unknown.”

Hurd, who was not blind to his own limitations like some detectives, proved to be a true prophet. The inquest was attended by a crowd of people, who might as well have stayed away for all they learned concerning the identity of the assassin. It was proved by the evidence of Sylvia and Deborah how the murder had taken place, but it was impossible to show who had strangled the man. It was presumed that the assassin or assassins had escaped when Deborah went upstairs to shout murder out of the first-floor window. By that time the policeman on the Gwynne Street beat was not in sight, and it would have been easy for those concerned in the crime—if more than one—to escape by the cellar door, through the passage and up the street to mingle with the people in the Strand, which, even at that late hour, would not be deserted. Or else the assassin or assassins might have got into Drury Lane and have proceeded towards Oxford Street. But in whatever direction they went, none of the numerous policemen around the neighborhood on that fatal night had “spotted” any suspicious persons. It was generally assumed, from the peculiar circumstances of the crime, that more than one person was inculpated, and these had come out of the night, had committed the cruel deed, and then had vanished into the night, leaving no trace behind. The appearance of the fellow whom Mr. Pash called the nautical gentleman certainly was strange, and led many people to believe that robbery was the motive for the commission of the crime. “This man, who was powerful and could easily have overpowered a little creature like Norman, came to rob,” said these wiseacres. “Finding that the jewels were gone, and probably from a memorandum finding that they were in the possession of the lawyer, he attempted the next morning to get them—” and so on. But against this was placed by other people the cruel circumstances of the crime. No mere robbery would justify the brooch being used to pin the dead man’s lips together. Then, again, the man being strangled before his daughter’s eyes was a refinement of cruelty which removed the case from a mere desire on the part of the murdered to get money. Finally, one man, as the police thought, could not have carried out the abominable details alone.

So after questions had been asked and evidence obtained, and details shifted, and theories raised, and pros and cons discussed, the jury was obliged to bring in the verdict predicted by Mr. Hurd. "Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown," said the jury, and everyone agreed that this was the only conclusion that could be arrived at.

Of course the papers took up the matter and asked what the police were doing to permit so brutal a murder to take place in a crowded neighborhood and in the metropolis of the world. "What was civilisation coming to and—" etc., etc. All the same the public was satisfied that the police and jury had done their duty. So the inquest was held, the verdict was given, and then the remains of Aaron Norman were committed to the grave; and from the journals everyone knew that the daughter left behind was a great heiress. "A million of money," said the Press, and lied as usual.

Chapter IX

Castles In The Air

So Aaron Norman, the second-hand bookseller of Gwynne Street, was dead and buried, and, it may be said, forgotten. Sylvia and those connected with her remembered the old man and his unhappy end, but the public managed to forget all about the matter in a wonderfully short space of time. Other events took place, which interested the readers of the newspapers more, and few recalled the strange Gwynne Street crime. Many people, when they did think, said that the assassins would never be discovered, but in this they were wrong. If money could hunt down the person or persons who had so cruelly murdered Aaron Norman, his daughter and heiress was determined that money could not be better spent. And Billy Hurd, knowing all about the case and taking a profound interest in it by reason of the mystery which environed it, was selected to follow up what clues there were.

But while London was still seething with the tragedy and strangeness of the crime, Mr. Jabez Pash came to the heterogeneously-furnished sitting-room in Gwynne Street to read the will. For there was a will after all. Deborah, and Bart, who had witnessed it at the request of their master, told Mr. Pash of its existence, and he found it in one of the three safes in the cellar. It proved to be a short, curt document, such as no man in his senses would think of making when disposing of five

thousand a year. Aaron was a clever business man, and Pash was professionally disgusted that he had left behind him such a loose testament.

“Why didn’t he come to me and have it properly drawn up?” he asked as he stood in the cellar before the open safe with the scrap of paper in his hand.

Deborah, standing near, with her hands on her haunches, laughed heartily. “I think master believed he’s spent enough money with you, sir. Lor’ bless you, Mr. Pash, so long as the will’s tight and fair what do it matter? Don’t tell me as there’s anything wrong and that my pretty won’t come into her forthing?”

“Oh, the will’s right enough,” said Pash, screwing up his cheeks; “let us go up to the sitting-room. Is Miss Sylvia there?”

“That she are, sir, and a-getting back her pretty color with Mr. Paul.”

Pash looked suspiciously at the handmaiden. “Who is he?”

“Nobody to be spoke of in that lump of dirt way,” retorted Deborah. “He’s a gentleman who’s going to marry my pretty.”

“Oh, the one who had the accident! I met him, but forgot his name.”

Miss Junk nodded vigorously. “And a mercy it was that he wasn’t smashed to splinters, with spiled looks and half his limbses orf,” she said. “Why, bless you, Mr. Pash, could I let my sunbeam marry a man as wasn’t all there, ‘eart of gold though he may have? But the blessing of Providence kept him together,” shouted Deborah in a burst of gratitude, “and there he sits upstairs with arms to put about my lily-queen for the drying of her dear eyes.”

Mr. Pash was not at all pleased at this news and rubbed his nose hard. “If a proper will had only been made,” he said aggressively, “a proper guardian might have been appointed, and this young lady would not have been permitted to throw herself away.”

“Beggin’ your parding, Mr. Pash,” said Deborah, in an offended tone, “but this marriage is of my making, to say nothing of Heaven, which

brought him and my pretty together. Mr. Beecot ain't got money, but his looks is takin', and his 'eart is all that an angel can want. My pretty's chice," added the maiden, shaking an admonitory finger, "and my pretty's happiness, so don't you go a-spilin' of it."

"I have nothing to say, save to regret that a young lady in possession of five thousand a year should make a hasty contract like this," said Mr. Pash, dryly, and hopping up the cellar stairs.

"It wasn't hasty," cried Deborah, following and talking all the time; "six months have them dears billed and cooed lovely, and if my queen wants to buy a husband, why not? Just you go up and read the will proper and without castin' cold water on my beauty's warm 'eart, or trouble will come of your talkin'. I'm mild," said Deborah, chasing the little lawyer up the stairs leading to the first floor, "mild as flat beer if not roused: but if you make me red, my 'and flies like a windmill, and—"

Mr. Jabez Pash heard no more. He stopped his legal ears and fled into the sitting-room, where he found the lovers seated on a sofa near the window. Sylvia was in Paul's embrace, and her head was on his shoulder. Beecot had his arm in a sling, and looked pale, but his eyes were as bright as ever, and his face shone with happiness. Sylvia also looked happy. To know that she was rich, that Paul was to be her husband, filled the cup of her desires to the brim. Moreover, she was beginning to recover from the shock of her father's death, and was feverishly anxious to escape from Gwynne Street, and from the house where the tragedy had taken place.

"Well," said Mr. Pash, drawing a long breath and sucking in his cheeks, "you lose no time, young gentleman."

Paul laughed, but did not change his position. Sylvia indeed blushed and raised her head, but Paul still held her with his uninjured arm, defying Mr. Pash and all the world. "I am gathering rosebuds while I may, Mr. Pash," said he, misquoting Herrick's charming line.

"You have plucked a very pretty one," grinned the monkey; "but may I request the rosebud's attention?"

Sylvia extricated herself from her lover's arm with a heightened color, and nodded gravely. Seeing it was business, she had to descend from

heaven to earth, but she secretly hoped that this dull little lawyer, who was a bachelor and had never loved in his dry little life, would soon go away and leave her alone with Prince Charming. Deborah guessed these thoughts with the instinct of fidelity, and swooped down on her young mistress.

“It’s the will, poppet,” she whispered loudly, “but if it do make your dear head ache Mr. Beecot will listen.”

“I wish Mr. Beecot to listen in any case,” said Pash, dryly, “if he is to marry my young and esteemed client.”

“We are engaged with the consent of my poor father,” said Sylvia, taking Paul’s hand. “I shall marry no one but Paul.”

“And Paul will marry an angel,” said that young man, with a tender squeeze, “although he can’t keep her in bread-and-butter.”

“Oh, I think there will be plenty of bread-and-butter,” said the lawyer. “Miss Norman, we have found the will if,” added Mr. Pash, disdainfully, “this,” he held out the document with a look of contempt, “can be called a will.”

“It’s all right, isn’t it?” asked Sylvia, anxiously.

“I mean the form and the writing and the paper, young lady. It is a good will in law, and duly signed and witnessed.”

“Me and Bart having written our names, lovey,” put in Deborah.

Pash frowned her into silence. “The will,” he said, looking at the writing, “consists of a few lines. It leaves all the property of the testator to ‘my daughter.’”

“Your daughter!” screamed Deborah. “Why, you ain’t married.”

“I am reading from the will,” snapped Pash, coloring, and read again: “I leave all the real and personal property of which I may die possessed of to my daughter.”

“Sylvia Norman!” cried Deborah, hugging her darling.

“There you are wrong,” corrected Pash, folding up the so-called will, “the name of Sylvia isn’t mentioned.”

“Does that make any difference?” asked Paul, quietly.

“No. Miss Norman is an only daughter, I believe.”

“And an only child,” said Deborah, “so that’s all right. My pretty, you will have them jewels and five thousand a year.”

“Oh, Paul, what a lot of money!” cried Sylvia, appalled. “Whatever will we do with it all?”

“Why, marry and be happy, of course,” said Paul, rejoicing not so much on account of the money, although that was acceptable, but because this delightful girl was all his very—very own.

“The question is,” said Mr. Pash, who had been reflecting, and now reproduced the will from his pocket, “as to the name?”

“What name?” asked Sylvia, and Deborah echoed the question.

“Your name.” Pash addressed the girl direct. “Your father’s real name was Krill—Lemuel Krill.”

Sylvia looked amazed, Deborah uttered her usual ejaculation, “Lor’!” but Paul’s expression did not change. He considered that this was all of a piece with the murder and the mystery of the opal brooch. Undoubtedly Mr. Lemuel Krill, *alias* Aaron Norman, must have had good reason to change his name and to exhibit terror at the sight of the brooch. And the reason he dreaded, whatever it might be, had been the cause of his mysterious and tragic death. But Paul said nothing of these thoughts and there was silence for a few minutes.

“Lor,” said Deborah again, “and I never knew. Do he put that name to that, mister?” she asked, pointing to the will.

“Yes! It is signed Lemuel Krill,” said Pash. “I wonder you didn’t notice it at the moment.”

“Why, bless you, Mr. Pash, there weren’t no moment,” said Deborah, her hands on her hips as usual. “Master made that there will only a short time before he was killed.”

Pash nodded. “I note the date,” said he, “all in order—quite.”

“Master,” went on Deborah, looking at Paul, “never got over that there fainting fit you gave him with the serping brooch. And he writes out that will, and tells Bart and me to put our names to it. But he covered up his own name with a bit of red blotting-paper. I never thought but that he hadn’t put Aaron Norman, which was his name.”

“It was not his name,” said Pash. “His real name I have told you, and for years I have known the truth.”

“Do you know why he changed his name?” asked Beecot, quickly.

“No, sir, I don’t. And if I did, I don’t know if it would be legal etiquette to reveal the reason to a stranger.”

“He’s not a stranger,” cried Sylvia, annoyed.

“Well, then, to a young gentleman whom I have only seen twice. Why do you ask, Mr. Beecot?”

“I was wondering if the change of name had anything to do with the murder,” said Paul, hesitating.

“How could it,” said Pash, testily, “when the man never expected to be murdered?”

“Beggin’ your parding, Mr. Pash, but you’re all out,” said Deborah. “Master did expect to have his throat cut, or his ‘ead knocked orf, or his inside removed—”

“Deborah,” cried Paul, hastily, “you are making Sylvia nervous.”

“Don’t you worrit, pretty,” said the maiden, “it’s only silly old Debby’s way. But master, your par as was, my pretty, went to church and prayed awful against folk as he never named, to say nothin’ of lookin’ over the left shoulder blade and sleepin’ in the cellar bolted and barred, and

always with his eye on the ground sad like. Old Baileys and police-courts was in his mind, say what you like.”

“I say nothing,” rejoined Pash, putting on his hat and hopping to the door. “Mr. Lemuel Krill did not honor me with his confidence so far. He came here, over twenty years ago and began business. I was then younger than I am, and he gave me his business because my charges were moderate. I know all about him as Aaron Norman,” added Pash, with emphasis, “but as Lemuel Krill I, knowing nothing but the name, can say nothing. Nor do I want to. Young people,” ended the lawyer, impressively, “let sleeping dogs lie.”

“What do you mean?” asked Sylvia, looking startled.

“Nothing—he means nothing,” interposed Paul hastily, for the girl had undergone quite enough torments. “What about the change of name?”

“Ah yes!” said the lawyer, inquiringly. “Will you call yourself Krill or Norman, Miss Sylvia?”

“Seein’ her name’s to be changed to Beecot in a jiffy,” cried Deborah, “it don’t matter, and it sha’n’t matter. You leave Krill and its old Baileys, if old Baileys there are in it, alone, my lovey, and be Miss Norman till the passon and the clark, and the bells and the ringers, and the lawr and the prophets turn you into the loveliest bride as ever was,” and Deborah nodded vigorously.

“I wish father had mentioned my name in his will,” said Sylvia, in a low voice, “and then I should know what to call myself.”

Paul addressed the lawyer. “I know little about the legal aspect of this will”—

“This amateur will,” said Pash, slightly.

“But I should like to know if there will be any difficulty in proving it?”

“I don’t think so. I have not gone through all the safes below, and may come across the marriage certificate of Miss Krill’s—I beg pardon, Miss Norman’s—mother and father. Then there’s the birth certificate. We must prove that Miss Sylvia is the daughter of my late esteemed client.”

“What’s that?” shouted Deborah. “Why, I knowed her mother as died. She’s the daughter right enough, and—”

“There’s no need to shout,” chattered Pash, angrily. “I know that as well as you do; I must act, however, as reason dictates. I’ll prove the will and see that all is right.” Then, dreading Deborah’s tongue he hastily added “Good-day,” and left the room. But he was not to escape so easily. Deborah plunged after him and made scathing remarks about legal manners all the way down to the door.

Paul and Sylvia left alone looked and smiled and fell into one another’s arms. The will had been read and the money left to the girl, thereby the future was all right, so they thought that Pash’s visit demanded no further attention. “He’ll do all that is to be done,” said Paul. “I don’t see the use of keeping a dog and having to bark yourself.”

“And I’m really a rich woman, Paul,” said Sylvia, gladly.

“Really and truly, as I am a pauper. I think perhaps,” said Beecot, sadly, “that you might make a better match than—”

Sylvia put her pretty hand over his moustache. “I won’t hear it, Paul,” she cried vehemently, with a stamp of her foot. “How dare you? As if you weren’t all I have to love in the world now poor father—is—is de-a-d,” and she began to weep. “I did not love him as I ought to have done, Paul.”

“My own, he would not let you love him very much.”

“N-o-o,” said Sylvia, drying her eyes on Paul’s handkerchief, which he produced. “I don’t know why. Sometimes he was nice, and sometimes he wasn’t. I never could understand him, and you know, Paul, we didn’t treat him nicely.”

“No,” admitted Beecot, frankly, “but he forgave us.”

“Oh, yes, poor dear, he did! He was quite nice when he said we could marry and he would allow us money. You saw him?”

“I did. He came to the hospital. Didn’t he tell you when he returned, Sylvia?”

“I never saw him,” she wept. “He never came upstairs, but went out, and I went to bed. He left the door leading to the stairs open, too, on that night, a thing he never did before. And then the key of the shop. Bart used to hang it on a nail in the cellar and father would put it into his pocket after supper. Deborah couldn’t find it in his clothes, and when she went afterwards to the cellar it was on the nail. On that night, Paul, father did everything different to what he usually did.”

“He seems to have had some mental trouble,” said Paul, gently, “and I believe it was connected with that brooch. When he spoke to me at the hospital he said he would let you marry me, and would allow us an income, if I gave him the serpent brooch to take to America.”

“But why did he want the brooch?” asked Sylvia, puzzled.

“Ah!” said Beecot, with great significance, “if we could find out his reason we would learn who killed him and why he was killed.”

Sylvia wept afresh on this reference to the tragedy which was yet fresh in her memory: but as weeping would not bring back the dead, and Paul was much distressed at the sight of her tears, she dried her eyes for the hundredth time within the last few days and sat again on the sofa by her lover. There they built castles in the air.

“I tell you what, Sylvia,” said Paul, reflectively; “after this will business is settled and a few weeks have elapsed, we can marry.”

“Oh, Paul, not for a year! Think of poor father’s memory.”

“I do think of it, my darling, and I believe I am saying what your father himself would have said. The circumstances of the case are strange, as you are left with a lot of money and without a protector. You know I love you for yourself, and would take you without a penny, but unless we marry soon, and you give me a husband’s right, you will be pestered by people wanting to marry you.” Paul thought of Grexon Hay when he made this last remark.

“But I wouldn’t listen to them,” cried Sylvia, with a flush, “and Debby would soon send them away. I love you dearest, dear.”

“Then marry me next month,” said Paul, promptly. “You can’t stop here in this dull house, and it will be awkward for you to go about with Deborah, faithful though she is. No, darling, let us marry, and then we shall go abroad for a year or two until all this sad business is forgotten. Then I hope by that time to become reconciled to my father, and we can visit Wargrove.”

Sylvia reflected. She saw that Paul was right, as her position was really very difficult. She knew of no lady who would chaperon her, and she had no relative to act as such. Certainly Deborah could be a chaperon, but she was not a lady, and Pash could be a guardian, but he was not a relative. Paul as her husband would be able to protect her, and to look after the property which Sylvia did not think she could do herself. These thoughts made her consent to an early marriage. “And I really don’t think father would have minded.”

“I am quite sure we are acting as he would wish,” said Beecot, decisively. “I am so thankful, Sylvia sweetest, that I met you and loved you before you became an heiress. No one can say that I marry you for anything save your own sweet self. And I am doubly glad that I am to marry you and save you from all the disagreeable things which might have occurred had you not been engaged to me.”

“I know, Paul. I am so young and inexperienced.”

“You are an angel,” said he, embracing her. “But there’s one thing we must do”—and his voice became graver—“we must see Pash and offer a reward for the discovery of the person who killed your father.”

“But Mr. Pash said let sleeping dogs lie,” objected Sylvia.

“I know he did, but out of natural affection, little as your poor father loved you, we must stir up this particular dog. I suggest that we offer a reward of five hundred pounds.”

“To whom?” asked Sylvia, thoroughly agreeing.

“To anyone who can find the murderer. I think myself, that Hurd will be the man to gain the money. Apart from any reward he has to act on behalf of the Treasury, and besides, he is keen to discover the mystery.

You leave the matter to me, Sylvia. We will offer a reward for the discovery of the murderer of—”

“Aaron Norman,” said Sylvia, quickly.

“No,” replied her lover, gravely, “of Lemuel Krill.”

Chapter X

A Bolt From The Blue

Paul’s reason for advertising the name of Lemuel Krill was a very natural one. He believed that in the past of the dead man was to be found his reason for changing his name and living in Gwynne Street. And in that past before he became a second-hand bookseller and a secret pawnbroker might be found the motive for the crime. Therefore, if a reward was offered for the discovery of the murderer of Lemuel Krill, *alias* Aaron Norman, something might come to light relative to the man’s early life. Once that was known, the clue might be obtained. Then the truth would surely be discovered. He explained this to Hurd.

“I think you’re right, Mr. Beecot,” said the detective, in his genial way, and looking as brown as a coffee bean. “I have made inquiries from the two servants, and from the neighbors, and from what customers I could find. Aaron Norman certainly lived a very quiet and respectable life here. But Lemuel Krill may have lived a very different one, and the mere fact that he changed his name shows that he had something to conceal. When we learn that something we may arrive at the motive for the murder, and, given that, the assassin may be caught.”

“The assassin!” echoed Paul. “Then you think there was only one.”

Hurd shrugged his shoulders. “Who knows?” he said. “I speak generally. From the strange circumstances of the crime I am inclined to think that there is more than one person concerned in this matter. However, the best thing to be done is to have hand-bills printed offering the five hundred pounds reward. People will do a lot to earn so much money, and someone may come forward with details about Mr. Krill which will solve the mystery of Norman’s death.”

“I hope you will gain the reward yourself, Hurd.”

The detective nodded. "I hope so too. I have lately married the sweetest little wife in the world, and I want to keep her in the way she has been accustomed to be kept. She married beneath her, as I'm only a thief-catcher, and no very famous one either."

"But if you solve this mystery it will do you a lot of good."

"That it will," agreed Billy, heartily, "and it will mean advancement and extra screw: besides the reward if I can get it. You may be very sure, Mr. Beecot, that I'll do my best. Oh, by the way," he added, "have you heard that Mr. Pash is being asked for many of those jewels?"

"No. Who are asking for them? Not that nautical man?"

Hurd shook his head. "He's not such a fool," said he. "No! But the people who pledged the jewels are getting them back—redeeming them, in fact. Pash is doing all the business thoroughly well, and will keep what jewels remain for the time allowed by law, so that all those who wish to redeem them can do so. If not, they can be sold, and that will mean more money to Miss Norman—by the way, I presume she intends to remain Miss Norman."

"Until I make her Mrs. Beecot," said Paul, smiling.

"Well," replied Hurd, very heartily, "I trust you will both be happy. I think Miss Norman will get a good husband in you, and you will gain the sweetest wife in the world bar one."

"Everyone thinks his own crow the whitest," laughed Beecot. "But now that business is ended and you know what you are to do, will you tell me plainly why you warned me against Grexon Hay?"

"Hum," said the detective, looking at Paul with keen eyes, "what do you know about him, sir?"

Beecot detailed his early friendship with Hay at Torrington, and then related the meeting in Oxford Street. "And so far as I have seen," added Paul, justly, "there's nothing about the man to make me think he is a bad lot."

“It is natural you should think well of him as you know no wrong, Mr. Beecot. All the same, Grexon Hay is a man on the market.”

“You made use of that expression before. What does it mean?”

“Ask Mr. Hay. He can explain best.”

“I did ask him, and he said it meant a man who was on the marriage market.”

Hurd laughed. “Very ingenious and untrue.”

“Untrue!”

“Certainly. Mr. Hay knows better than that. If that were all he wouldn’t think a working man would warn anyone against him.”

“He guessed you were not a working man,” said Paul, “and intimated that he had a *liaison* with a married woman, and that the husband had set you to watch.”

“Wrong again. My interest in Mr. Hay doesn’t spring from divorce proceedings. He paints himself blacker than he is in that respect, Mr. Beecot. My gentleman is too selfish to love, and too cautious to commit himself to a divorce case where there would be a chance of damages. No! He’s simply a man on the market, and what that is no one knows better than he does.”

“Well, I am ignorant.”

“You shall be enlightened, sir, and I hope what I tell you will lead you to drop this gentleman’s acquaintance, especially now that you will be a rich man through your promised wife.”

“Miss Norman’s money is her own,” said Paul, with a quick flush. “I don’t propose to live on what she inherits.”

“Of course not, because you are an honorable man. But I’ll lay anything you like that Mr. Hay won’t have your scruples, and as soon as he finds your wife is rich he’ll try and get money from her through you.”

“He’ll fail then,” rejoined Beecot, calmly. “I am not up to your London ways, perhaps, but I am not quite such a fool. Perhaps you will enlighten me as you say.”

Hurd nodded and caught his smooth chin with his finger and thumb. “A man on the market,” he explained slowly, “is a social highwayman.”

“I am still in the dark, Hurd.”

“Well, to be more particular, Hay is one of those well-dressed blackguards who live on mugs. He has no money—”

“I beg your pardon, he told me himself that his uncle had left him a thousand a year.”

“Pooh, he might as well have doubled the sum and increased the value of the lie. He hasn’t a penny. What he did have, he got through pretty quickly in order to buy his experience. Now that he is hard up he practises on others what was practised on himself. Hay is well-bred, good-looking, well-dressed and plausible. He has well-furnished rooms and keeps a valet. He goes into rather shady society, as decent people, having found him out, won’t have anything to do with him. But he is a card-sharper and a fraudulent company-promoter. He’ll borrow money from any juggins who is ass enough to lend it to him. He haunts Piccadilly, Bond Street and the Burlington Arcade, and is always smart, and bland, and fascinating. If he sees a likely victim he makes his acquaintance in a hundred ways, and then proceeds to fleece him. In a word, Mr. Beecot, you may put it that Mr. Hay is Captain Hawk, and those he swindles are pigeons.”

Paul was quite startled by this revelation, and it was painful to hear it of an old school friend. “He does not look like a man of that sort,” he remonstrated.

“It’s not his business to look like a man of that sort,” rejoined the detective. “He masks his batteries. All the same he is one of the most dangerous men on the market at the present in town. A young peer whom he plucked two years ago lost everything to him, and got into trouble over some woman. It was a nasty case and Hay was mixed up in it. The relatives of the victim—I needn’t give his title—asked me to put things right. I got the young nobleman away, and he is now travelling to

acquire the sense he so sadly needed. I have given Mr. Hay a warning once or twice, and he knows that he is being watched by us. When he slips, as he is bound to do, sooner or later, then he'll have to deal with me. Oh I know how he hunts for clients in fashionable hotels, smart restaurants, theatres and such-like places. He is clever, and although he has fleeced several lambs since he plucked the pigeon I saved, he has, as yet, been too clever to be caught. When I saw you with him, Mr. Beecot, I thought it just as well to put you on your guard."

"I fear he'll get little out of me," said Paul. "I am too poor."

"You are rich now through your promised wife, and Hay will find it out."

"I repeat that Miss Norman's money has nothing to do with me. And I may mention that as soon as the case is in your hands, Mr. Hurd—"

"Which it is now," interpolated the detective.

"I intend to marry Miss Norman and then we will travel for a time."

"That's very wise of you. Give Hay a wide berth. Of course, if you meet him, you needn't tell him what I have told you. But when he tries to come Captain Hawk over you, be on your guard."

"I shall, and thanks for the warning."

So the two parted. Hurd went away to have the bills printed, and Paul returned to Gwynne Street to arrange with Sylvia about their early marriage. Deborah was in the seventh heaven of delight that her young mistress would soon be in a safe haven and enjoy the protection of an honorable man. Knowing that she would soon be relieved from care, she told Bart Tawsey that they would be married at the same time as the young couple, and that the laundry would be started as soon as Mr. and Mrs. Beecot left for the Continent. Bart, of course, agreed—he always did agree with Deborah—and so everything was nicely arranged.

Meanwhile Pash worked to prove the will, pay the death-duties, and to place Sylvia in full possession of her property. He found in one of the safes the certificate of the girl's birth, and also the marriage certificate of Aaron Norman in the name of Lemuel Krill. The man evidently had his doubts of the marriage being a legal one if contracted under his *alias*. He

had married Lillian Garner, who was described as a spinster. But who she was and where she came from, and what her position in life might be could not be discovered. Krill was married in a quiet city church, and Pash, having searched, found everything in order. Mrs. Krill—or Norman as she was known—lived only a year or two after her marriage, and then died, leaving Sylvia to the care of her husband. There were several nurses in succession, until Deborah grew old enough to attend alone on her young mistress. Then Norman dismissed the nurse, and Deborah had been Sylvia's slave and Aaron's servant until the tragic hour of his death. So, everything being in order, there was no difficulty in placing Sylvia in possession of her property.

Pash was engaged in this congenial work for several weeks, and during that time all went smoothly. Paul paid daily visits to the Gwynne Street house, which was to be vacated as soon as he made Sylvia his wife. Deborah searched for her laundry and obtained the premises she wanted at a moderate rental. Sylvia basked in the sunshine of her future husband's love, and Hurd hunted for the assassin of the late Mr. Norman without success. The hand-bills with his portrait and real name, and a description of the circumstances of his death, were scattered broadcast over the country from Land's End to John-O'Groats, but hitherto no one had applied for the reward. The name of Krill seemed to be a rare one, and the dead man apparently had no relatives, for no one took the slightest interest in the bills beyond envying the lucky person who would gain the large reward offered for the conviction of the murderer.

Then, one day Deborah, while cleaning out the cellar, found a piece of paper which had slipped down behind one of the safes. These had not been removed for many years, and the paper, apparently placed carelessly on top, had accidentally dropped behind. Deborah, always thinking something might reveal the past to Sylvia and afford a clue to the assassin, brought the paper to her mistress. It proved to be a few lines of a letter, commenced but never finished. But the few lines were of deep interest.

"My dear daughter," these ran, "when I die you will find that I married your mother under the name of Lemuel Krill. That is my real name, but I wish you to continue to call yourself Norman for necessary reasons. If the name of Krill gets into the papers there will be great trouble. Keep it

from the public. I can tell you where to find the reasons for this as I have written—” Here the letter ended abruptly without any signature. Norman apparently was writing it when interrupted, and had placed it unfinished on the top of the safe, whence it had fallen behind to be discovered by Deborah. And now it had strangely come to light, but too late for the request to be carried out.

“Oh, Paul,” said Sylvia, in dismay, when they read this together, “and the bills are already published with the real name of my father.”

“It is unfortunate,” admitted Paul, frowning. “But, after all, your father may have been troubled unnecessarily. For over the fortnight the bills have been out and no one seems to take an interest in the matter.”

“But I think we ought to call the bills in,” said Sylvia, uneasily.

“That’s not such an easy matter. They are scattered broadcast, and it will be next to impossible to collect them. Besides, the mischief is done. Everyone knows by this time that Aaron Norman is Lemuel Krill, so the trouble whatever it may be, must come.”

“What can it be?” asked the girl anxiously.

Paul shook his head. “Heaven only knows,” said he, with a heavy heart. “There is certainly something in your father’s past life which he did not wish known and which led to his death. But since the blow has fallen and he is gone, I do not see how the matter can affect you, my darling. I’ll show this to Pash and see what he says. I expect he knows more about your father’s past than he will admit.”

“But if there should be trouble, Paul—”

“You will have me to take it off your shoulders,” he replied, kissing her. “My dearest, do not look so pale. Whatever may happen you will always have me to stand by you. And Deborah also. She is worth a regiment in her fidelity.”

So Sylvia was comforted, and Paul, putting the unfinished letter in his pocket, went round to see Pash in his Chancery Lane office. He was stopped in the outer room by a saucy urchin with an impudent face and

a bold manner. “Mr. Pash is engaged,” said this official, “so you’ll ‘ave to wait, Mr. Beecot.”

Paul looked down at the brat, who was curly-headed and as sharp as a needle. “How do you know my name?” he asked. “I never saw you before.”

“I’m the new office-boy,” said the urchin, “wishin’ to be respectable and leave street-’awking, which ain’t what it was. M’name’s Tray, an’ I’ve seen you afore, mister. I ‘elped to pull you out from them wheels with the ‘aughty gent as guv me a bob fur doin’ it.”

“Oh, so you helped,” said Paul, smiling. “Well, here is another shilling. I am much obliged to you, Master Tray. But from what Deborah Junk says you were a guttersnipe. How did you get this post?”

“I talked m’self int’ it,” said Tray, importantly. “Newspapers ain’t good enough, and you gets pains in wet weather. So I turns a good boy”—he grinned evilly—“and goes to a ragged kids’ school to do the ‘oly. The superintendent ses I’m a promising case, and he arsked Mr. Pash, as is also Sunday inclined, to ‘elp me. The orfice-boy ‘ere went, and I come.” Tray tossed the shilling and spat on it for luck as he slipped it into the pocket of quite a respectable pair of trousers. “So I’m on m’waiy to bein’ Lord Mayor turn agin Wittington, as they ses in the panymine.”

“Well,” said Beecot, amused, “I hope you will prove yourself worthy.”

Tray winked. “Ho! I’m straight es long es it’s wuth m’while. I takes m’sal’ry ‘ome to gran, and don’t playi pitch an’ torse n’more.” He winked again, and looked as wicked a brat as ever walked.

Paul had his doubts as to what the outcome of Mr. Pash’s charity would be, and, being amused, was about to pursue the conversation, when the inner door opened and Pash, looking troubled, appeared. When he saw Paul he started and came forward.

“I was just about to send Tray for you,” said he, looking anxious. “Something unpleasant has come to light in connection with Krill.”

Beecot started and brought out the scrap of paper. “Look at that,” he said, “and you will see that the man warned Sylvia.”

Pash glanced hurriedly over the paper. “Most unfortunate,” he said, folding it up and puffing out his cheeks; “but it’s too late. The name of Krill was in those printed bills—a portrait also, and now—”

“Well, what?” asked Paul, seeing the lawyer hesitated.

“Come inside and you’ll see,” said Pash, and conducted Beecot into the inner room.

Here sat two ladies. The elder was a woman of over fifty, but who looked younger, owing to her fresh complexion and plump figure. She had a firm face, with hard blue eyes and a rather full-lipped mouth. Her hair was white, and there was a great deal of it. Under a widow’s cap it was dressed *à la* Marie Antoinette, and she looked very handsome in a full-blown, flowery way. She had firm, white hands, rather large, and, as she had removed her black gloves, these, Paul saw, were covered with cheap rings. Altogether a respectable, well-dressed widow, but evidently not a lady.

Nor was the girl beside her, who revealed sufficient similarity of features to announce herself the daughter of the widow. There was the same fresh complexion, full red lips and hard blue eyes. But the hair was of a golden color, and fashionably dressed. The young woman—she likewise was not a lady—was also in black.

“This,” said Pash, indicating the elder woman, who smiled, “is Mrs. Lemuel Krill.”

“The wife of the man who called himself Aaron Norman,” went on the widow; “and this,” she indicated her daughter, “is his heiress.”

Chapter XI

A Cuckoo In The Nest

Paul looked from the fresh-colored woman who spoke so smoothly and so firmly to the apish lawyer hunched in his chair with a sphinx-like look on his wrinkled face. For the moment, so taken aback was he by this astounding announcement, that he could not speak. The younger woman stared at him with her hard blue eyes, and a smile played round her full lips. The mother also looked at him in an engaging way, as

though she rather admired his youthful comeliness in spite of his well-brushed, shabby apparel.

“I don’t know what you mean,” said Beecot at length, “Mr. Pash?”

The lawyer aroused himself to make a concise statement of the case. “So far as I understand,” he said in his nervous, irritable way, “these ladies claim to be the wife and daughter of Lemuel Krill, whom we knew as Aaron Norman.”

“And I think by his real name also,” said the elder woman in her deep, smooth contralto voice, and with the display of an admirable set of teeth. “The bills advertising the reward, and stating the fact of the murder, bore my late husband’s real name.”

“Norman was not your husband, madam,” cried Paul, indignantly.

“I agree with you, sir. Lemuel Krill was my husband. I saw in the newspapers, which penetrate even into the quiet little Hants village I live in, that Aaron Norman had been murdered. I never thought he was the man who had left me more than twenty years ago with an only child to bring up. But the bills offering the reward assured me that Norman and Krill are one and the same man. Therefore,” she drew herself up and looked piercingly at the young man, “I have come to see after the property. I understand from the papers that my daughter is an heiress to millions.”

“Not millions,” said Pash, hastily. “The newspapers have exaggerated the amount. Five thousand a year, madam, and it is left to Sylvia.”

“Who is Sylvia?” asked Mrs. Krill, in the words of Shakespeare’s song.

“She is the daughter of Mr. Norman,” said Paul, quickly, “and is engaged to marry me.”

Mrs. Krill’s eyes travelled over his shabby suit from head to foot, and then back again from foot to head. She glanced sideways at her companion, and the girl laughed in a hard, contemptuous manner. “I fear you will be disappointed in losing a rich wife, sir,” said the elder woman, sweetly.

“I have not lost the money yet,” replied Paul, hotly. “Not that I care for the money.”

“Of course not,” put in Mrs. Krill, ironically, with another look at his dress.

“But I *do* care for Sylvia Norman—”

“With whom I have nothing to do.”

“She is your husband’s daughter.”

“But not mine. This is my daughter, Maud—the legal daughter of Lemuel and myself,” she added meaningly.

“Good heavens, madam,” cried Beecot, his face turning white, “what do you mean?”

Mrs. Krill raised her thick white eyebrows, and shrugged her plump shoulders, and made a graceful motion with her white, be-ringed hand. “Is there any need for me to explain?” she said calmly.

“I think there is every need,” cried Beecot, sharply. “I shall not allow Miss Norman to lose her fortune or—”

“Or lose it yourself, sir. I quite understand. Nevertheless, I am assured that the law of the land will protect, through me, my daughter’s rights. She leaves it in my hands.”

“Yes,” said the girl, in a voice as full and rich and soft as her smooth-faced mother, “I leave it in her hands.”

Paul sat down and concealed his face with a groan. He was thinking not so much of the loss of the money, although that was a consideration, as of the shame Sylvia would feel at her position. Then a gleam of hope darted into his mind. “Mr. Norman was married to Sylvia’s mother under his own name. You can’t prove the marriage void.”

“I have no wish to. When did this marriage take place?”

Beecot looked at the lawyer, who replied. “Twenty-two years ago,” and he gave the date.

Mrs. Krill fished in a black morocco bag she carried and brought out a shabby blue envelope. "I thought this might be needed," she said, passing it to Pash. "You will find there my marriage certificate. I became the wife of Lemuel Krill thirty years ago. And, as I am still living, I fear the later marriage—" She smiled blandly and shrugged her shoulders again. "Poor girl!" she said with covert insolence.

"Sylvia does not need your pity," cried Beecot, stung by the insinuation.

"Indeed, sir," said Mrs. Krill, sadly, and with the look of a treacherous cat, "I fear she needs the pity of all right-thinking people. Many would speak harshly of her, seeing what she is, but my troubles have taught me charity. I repeat that I am sorry for the girl."

"And again I say there is no need," rejoined Paul, throwing back his head; "and you forget, madam, there is a will."

Mrs. Krill's fresh color turned to a dull white, and her hard eyes shot fire. "A will," she said slowly. "I shall dispute the will if it is not in my favor. I am the widow of this man and I claim full justice. Besides," she went on, wetting her full lips with her tongue, "I understood from the newspapers that the money was left to Mr. Krill's daughter."

"Certainly. To Sylvia Krill."

"Norman, sir. She has no right to any other name. But I really do not see why I should explain myself to you, sir. If you choose to give this girl your name you will be doing a good act. At present the poor creature is—nobody." She let the last word drop from her lips slowly, so as to give Paul its full sting.

Beecot said nothing. He could not dispute what she said. If this woman could prove the marriage of thirty years ago, then Krill, or Norman as he called himself, had committed bigamy, and, in the hard eyes of the law, Sylvia was nobody's child. And that the marriage could be proved Paul saw well enough from the looks of the lawyer, who was studying the certificate which he had drawn from the shabby blue envelope. "Then the will—the money is left to Sylvia," he said with obstinacy. "I shall defend her rights."

“Of course,” said Mrs. Krill, significantly. “I understand that a wife with five thousand—”

“I would marry Sylvia without a penny.”

“Indeed, sir, that is the only way in which you can marry her. If you like I shall allow her twenty pounds for a trousseau.”

Paul rose and flung back his head again. “You have not got the money yet, madam,” he said defiantly.

Not at all disturbed, Mrs. Krill smiled her eternal smile. “I am here to get it. There is a will, you say,” she added, turning to Pash. “And I understand from this gentleman,” she indicated Beecot slightly, “that the money is left to Mr. Krill’s daughter. Does he name Maud or Sylvia?”

Pash slapped down the certificate irritably. “He names no one. The will is a hasty document badly worded, and simply leaves all the testator died possessed of to—my daughter.”

“Which of course means Maud here. I congratulate you, dear,” she said, turning to the girl, who looked happy and flushed. “Your father has made up to us both for his cruelty and desertion.”

Seeing that there was nothing to be said, Paul went to the door. But there his common sense left him and he made a valedictory speech. “I know that Mr. Krill left the money to Sylvia.”

“Oh, no,” said the widow, “to his daughter, as I understand the wording of the will runs. In that case this nameless girl has nothing.”

“Pash!” cried Beecot, turning despairingly to the little solicitor.

The old man shook his head and sucked in his cheeks. “I am sorry, Mr. Beecot,” said he, in a pitying tone, “but as the will stands the money must certainly go to the child born in wedlock. I have the certificate here,” he laid his monkey paw on it, “but of course I shall make inquiries.”

“By all means,” said Mrs. Krill, graciously. “My daughter and myself have lived for many years in Christchurch, Hants. We keep the inn there—not the principal inn, but a small public-house on the outskirts of

the village. It will be a change for us both to come into five thousand a year after such penury. Of course, Mr. Pash, you will act for my daughter and myself.”

“Mr. Pash acts for Sylvia,” cried Paul, still lingering at the door. The lawyer was on the horns of a dilemma. “If what Mrs. Krill says is true I can’t dispute the facts,” he said irritably, “and I am unwilling to give up the business. Prove to me, ma’am, that you are the lawful widow of my late client, and that this is my late esteemed client’s lawful daughter, and I will act for you.”

Mrs. Krill’s ample bosom rose and fell and her eyes glittered triumphantly. She cast a victorious glance at Beecot. But that young man was looking at the solicitor. “Rats leave the sinking ship,” said he, bitterly; “you will not prosper, Pash.”

“Everyone prospers who protects the widow and the orphan,” said Pash, in a pious tone, and so disgusted Paul that he closed the door with a bang and went out. Tray was playing chuck-farthing at the door and keeping Mr. Grexon Hay from coming in.

“You there, Beecot?” said this gentleman, coldly. “I wish you would tell this brat to let me enter.”

“Brat yourself y’ toff,” cried Tray, pocketing his money. “Ain’t I a-doin’ as my master tells me? He’s engaged with two pretty women”—he leered in a way which made Paul long to box his ears—“so I don’t spile sport. You’ve got tired of them, Mr. Beecot?”

“How do you know Mr. Beecot’s name?” asked Hay, calmly.

“Lor’, sir. Didn’t you and me pull him from under the wheels?”

“Oh,” said Grexon, suddenly enlightened, “were you the boy? Since you have washed your face I didn’t recognize you. Well, Beecot, you look disturbed.”

“I have reason to. And since you and this boy pulled me from under the wheels of the motor,” said Paul, glancing from one to the other, “I should like to know what became of the brooch.”

“I’m sure I don’t know,” said Grexon, quietly. “We talked of this before. I gave it as my opinion, if you remember, that it was picked up in the street by the late Aaron Norman and was used to seal his mouth. At least that is the only way in which I can conjecture you lost it.”

“You never saw it drop from my pocket?”

“I should have picked it up and returned it had I seen it,” said Hay, fixing his eye-glass. “Perhaps this boy saw it.”

“Saw what?” asked Tray, who was listening with both his large ears.

“An old blue-velvet case with a brooch inside,” said Beecot, quickly.

Tray shook his head vigorously. “If I’d seen it I’ ha’ nicked it,” he said impudently; “catch me givin’ it back t’ y’, Mr. Beecot. There’s a cove I knows—a fence that is—as ‘ud give me lots fur it. Lor’,” said Tray, with deep disappointment, “to think as that dropped out of your pocket and I never grabbed it. Wot crewel luck—ho!” and he spat.

Paul looked hard at the boy, who met his gaze innocently enough. Apparently he spoke in all seriousness, and really lamented the lost chance of gaining a piece of jewellery to make money out of. Moreover, had he stolen the brooch, he would hardly have talked so openly of the fence he alluded to. Hay the young man could not suspect, as there was positively no reason why he should steal so comparatively trifling an article. Sharper as he was, Hay flew at higher game, and certainly would not waste his time, or risk his liberty, in stealing what would bring him in only a few shillings.

“Why don’t you ask the detectives to search for the brooch,” said Hay, smiling.

“It is in the detective’s possession,” said Paul, sullenly; “but we want to know how it came to pin Norman’s lips together.”

“I can’t imagine, unless he picked it up. If lost at all it must have been lost in the street the old man lived in, and you told me he wanted the brooch badly.”

“But he wasn’t on the spot?”

“Wot,” cried Tray, suddenly, “the one-eyed cove? Ho, yuss, but warn’t he? Why, when they was a-gitin’ the ambulance, an’ the peelers was a-crowdin’ round, he come dancing like billeo out of his shorp.”

Beecot thought this was strange, as he understood from Deborah and Bart and Sylvia that Norman had known nothing of the accident at the time. Then again Norman himself had not mentioned it when he paid that visit to the hospital within a few hours of his death. “I don’t think that’s true,” he said to Tray sharply.

“Oh, cuss it,” said that young gentleman, “wot d’ I care. Th’ ole cove come an’ danced in the mud, and then he gits int’ his shorp again. Trew is trew, saiy wot y’ like, mister—ho.”

Beecot turned his back on the boy. After all, he was not worth arguing with, and a liar by instinct. Still, in this case he might have spoken the truth. Norman might have appeared on the scene of the accident and have picked up the brooch. Paul thought he would tell Hurd this, and, meantime, held out his hand to Hay. In spite of the bad character he had heard of that young man, he saw no reason why he should not be civil to him, until he found him out. Meantime, he was on his guard.

“One moment,” said Grexon, grasping the outstretched hand. “I have something to say to you,” and he walked a little way with Paul. “I am going in to see Pash on business which means a little money to me. I was the unfortunate cause of your accident, Beecot, so I think you might accept twenty pounds or so from me.”

“No, thank you all the same,” said Paul gratefully, yet with a certain amount of caution. “I can struggle along. After all, it was an accident.”

“A very unfortunate one,” said Hay, more heartily than usual. “I shall never forgive myself. Is your arm all right?”

“Oh, much better. I’ll be quite cured in a week or so.”

“And meantime how do you live?”

“I manage to get along,” replied Paul, reservedly. He did not wish to reveal the nakedness of the land to such a doubtful acquaintance.

“You are a hard-hearted sort of chap,” said Hay coldly, but rather annoyed at his friendly advances being flouted. “Well, then, if you won’t accept a loan, let me help you in another way. Come and dine at my rooms. I have a young publisher coming also, and if you meet him he will be able to do something for you. He’s under obligations to me, and you may be certain I’ll use all my influence in your favor. Come now—next Tuesday—that’s a week off—you can’t have any engagement at such a long notice.”

Paul smiled. “I never do have any engagements,” he said with his boyish smile, “thank you. I’ll look in if I can. But I am in trouble, Grexon—very great trouble.”

“You shouldn’t be,” said Hay, smiling. “I know well enough why you will not accept my loan. The papers say Sylvia, your Dulcinea, has inherited a million. You are to marry her. Unless,” said Hay, suddenly, “this access of wealth has turned her head and she has thrown you over. Is she that sort of girl?”

“No,” said Paul quietly, “she is as true to me as I am to her. But you are mistaken as to the million. It is five thousand a year, and she may not even inherit that.”

“What do you mean?”

“I am not at liberty to say. But with regard to your dinner,” added Paul, hastily changing the conversation, “I’ll come if I can get my dress-suit out of pawn.”

“Then I count on you,” said Hay, blandly, “though you will not let me help you to obtain the suit. However, this publisher will do a lot for you. By Jove, what a good-looking girl.”

He said this under his breath. Miss Maud Krill appeared on the doorstep where the two young men stood and stumbled against Grexon in passing. His hat was off at once, and he apologized profusely. Miss Krill, who seemed a young woman of few words, as Paul thought from her silence in the office, smiled and bowed, but passed on, without saying a “thank you.” Mrs. Krill followed, escorted by the treacherous Pash who was all smiles and hand-washings and bows. Apparently he was quite convinced that the widow’s story was true, and Paul felt sick at the news

he would have to tell Sylvia. Pash saw the young man, and meeting his indignant eyes darted back into his office like a rabbit into its burrow. The widow sailed out in her calm, serene way, without a look at either Paul or his companion. Yet the young man had an instinct that she saw them both.

“That’s the mother I expect,” said Hay, putting his glass firmly into his eye; “a handsome pair. Gad, Paul, that young woman—eh?”

“Perhaps you’d like to marry her,” said Paul, bitterly.

Hay drew himself up stiffly. “I don’t marry stray young women I see on the street, however attractive,” he said in his cold voice. “I don’t know either of these ladies.”

“Pash will introduce you if you make it worth his while.”

“Why the deuce should I,” retorted Hay, staring.

“Well,” said Beecot, impulsively telling the whole of the misfortune that had befallen him, “that is the wife and that is the daughter of Aaron Norman, *alias* Krill. The daughter inherits five thousand a year, so marry her and be happy.”

“But your *Dulcinea*?” asked Grexon, dropping his eye-glass in amazement.

“She has me and poverty,” said Paul, turning away. Nor could the quiet call of Hay make him stop. But at the end of the street he looked back, and saw Grexon entering the office of the lawyer. If Hay was the man Hurd said he was, Paul guessed that he would inquire about the heiress and marry her too, if her banking account was large and safe.

Chapter XII

The New Life

For obvious reasons Beecot did not return to Gwynne Street. It was difficult to swallow this bitter pill which Providence had administered. In place of an assured future with Sylvia, he found himself confronted with his former poverty, with no chance of marrying the girl, and with the obligation of telling her that she had no right to any name. Paul was

by no means a coward, and his first impulse was to go at once and inform Sylvia of her reverse of fortune. But it was already late, and he thought it would be only kind to withhold the bad news till the morrow, and thus avoid giving the disinherited girl a tearful and wakeful night. Therefore, after walking the Embankment till late, Paul went to his garret.

To the young man's credit it must be said that he cared very little for the loss of the money, although he grieved on Sylvia's account. Had he been able to earn a small income, he would have married the girl and given her the protection of his name without the smallest hesitation. But he was yet unknown to fame; he was at variance with his father, and he could scarcely bring Sylvia to share his bitter poverty—which might grow still more bitter in that cold and cheerless garret.

Then there was another thing to consider. Paul had written to his father explaining the circumstances of his engagement to Sylvia, and asking for the paternal blessing. To gain this, he mentioned that his promised wife had five thousand a year. Bully and tyrant as Beecot senior was, he loved money, and although well off, was always on the alert to have more brought into the family. With the bribe of a wealthy wife, Paul had little doubt but what the breach would be healed, and Sylvia welcomed as the sweetest and most desirable daughter-in-law in the world. Then Paul fancied the girl would be able to subdue with her gentle ways the stubborn heart of his father, and would also be able to make Mrs. Beecot happy. Indeed, he had received a letter from his mother congratulating him on his wealthy match, for the good lady wished to see Paul independent of the domestic tyrant. Also Mrs. Beecot had made many inquiries about Sylvia's goodness and beauty, and hoped that he had chosen wisely, and hinted that no girl living was worthy of her son, after the fashion of mothers. Paul had replied to this letter setting forth his own unworthiness and Sylvia's perfections, and Mrs. Beecot had accepted the good news with joy. But the letter written to Beecot senior was yet unanswered, and Paul began to think that not even the chance of having a rich daughter-in-law would prevail against the obstinacy of the old gentleman.

But when he reached his garret, after that lonely and tormenting walk on the Embankment, he found a letter from his father, and opened it with some trepidation. It proved to contain joyful news. Mr. Beecot thanked

Heaven that Paul was not such a fool as he had been of yore, and hinted that this sudden access of sense which had led him to engage himself to a wealthy girl had come from his father and not from his mother. He—Beecot senior—was aware that Paul had acted badly, and had not remembered what was due to the best of fathers; but since he was prepared to settle down with a rich wife, Beecot senior nobly forgave the past and Paul's many delinquences (mentioned in detail) and would be glad to welcome his daughter-in-law. Then Beecot, becoming the tyrant again, insisted that the marriage should take place in Wargrove, and that the fact of Sylvia's father being murdered should be suppressed. In fact, the old gentleman left nothing to the young couple, but arranged everything in his own selfish way, even to choosing, in Wargrove, the house they would inhabit. The house, he mentioned, was one of his own which could not be let on account of some trivial tale of a ghost, and Mr. Beecot would give this as a marriage gift to Paul, thus getting rid of an unprofitable property and playing the part of a generous father at one and the same time. In spite of his bucolic ways and pig-headed obstinacy and narrow views, Beecot senior possessed a certain amount of cunning which Paul read in every line of the selfish letter before him.

However, the main point was, that the old gentleman seemed ready to overlook the past and to receive Sylvia. Paul wanted to return to his home, not so much on account of his father, as because he wished to smooth the remaining years of his mother, and he knew well that Sylvia with her gentle ways and heart of gold would make Mrs. Beecot happy. So long as Paul loved the girl he wished to marry, the mother was happy; but Beecot senior had an eye to the money, and thus was ready to be bribed into forgiveness and decent behavior. Now all this was altered. From the tone of the letter, Paul knew his father would never consent to his marrying a girl not only without a name, but lacking the fortune which alone rendered her desirable in his eyes. Still, the truth would have to be told, and if Beecot senior refused to approve of the marriage, the young couple would have to do without his sanction. The position, thought Paul, would only make him work the harder, so that within a reasonable time he might be able to provide a home for Sylvia.

So, the young man facing the situation, bravely wrote to his father and explained how the fortune had passed from Sylvia, but declared, with all the romance of youth, that he intended to marry the girl all the same. If Beecot senior, said Paul, would permit the marriage, and allow the

couple a small income until the husband could earn enough to keep the pot boiling, the writer would be grateful. If not, Paul declared firmly that he would work like a slave to make a home for his darling. But nothing in the world would make him give up Sylvia. This was the letter to his father, and then Paul wrote one to his mother, detailing the circumstances and imploring her to stand by him, although in his own sinking heart he felt that Mrs. Beecot was but a frail reed on which to lean. He finished these letters and posted them before midnight. Then he went to bed and dreamed that the bad news was all moonshine, and that Sylvia and he were a happy rich married pair.

But the cold grey searching light of dawn brought the actual state of things again to his mind and so worried him that he could hardly eat any breakfast. He spent the morning in writing a short tale, for which he had been promised a couple of sovereigns, and took it to the office of the weekly paper which had accepted it, on his way to Gwynne Street. Paul's heart was heavy, thinking of what he had to tell, but he did not intend to let Sylvia see that he was despondent. On turning down the street he raised his head, assumed a smile and walked with a confident step into the shop.

As he entered he heard a heavy woman plunge down the stairs, and found his arm grasped by Deborah, very red-faced and very furious, the moment he crossed the threshold. Bart could be heard knocking boxes together in the cellar, as he was getting Deborah's belongings ready for removal to Jubileetown, where the cottage, and the drying ground for the laundry, had already been secured through Pash. But Paul had no time to ask what was going on. A glance at the hand-maiden's tearful face revealed that she knew the worst, in which case Sylvia must also have heard the news.

"Yes," cried Deborah, seeing the sudden whiteness of Paul's cheeks, and shaking him so much as to hurt his injured arm, "she knows, she do—oh, lor', bless us that things should come to this—and there she's settin' a-crying out her beautiful eyes for you, Mr. Beecot. Thinking of your throwin' her over, and if you do," shouted Deborah, with another shake, "you'd better ha' bin smashed to a jelly than face me in my presingt state. Seein' you from the winder I made bold to come down and arsk your intentings; for if them do mean no marriage and the breaking of my

pretty's 'eart, never shall she set eyes agin on a double-faced Jonah, and—and—" Here Deborah gasped for breath and again shook Paul.

"Deborah," he said, in a quiet voice, releasing himself, "I love Sylvia for herself and not for her money."

Deborah threw her brawny arms in the air and her apron over her red head. "I knowed it—oh, yuss, indeed," she sobbed in muffled tones. "Ses I, I ses, Mr. Paul's a gentleman whatever his frantic par may be and marry you, my own lovey, he will, though not able to afford the marriage fees, the same as will come out of Debby's pocket, though the laundry go by the board. 'Eaven knows what we'll live on all the same, pore wurkhus ijets as me an' Bart are, not bein' able to make you an' Miss Sylvia 'appy. Miss Sylvia Krill an' Norman both," ended Deborah with emphasis, "whatever that smooth cat with the grin and the clawses may say, drat her fur a slimy tabby—yah!"

"I see you know all," said Paul, as soon as he could slip in a word.

"Know all," almost yelled Deborah, dragging down the apron and revealing flashing eyes, "and it's a mussy I ain't in Old Bailey this very day for scratching that monkey of a Pash. Oh, if I'd known wot he wos never should he 'ave got me the laundry, though the same may have to go, worse luck. Ho, yuss! he come, and she come with her kitting, as is almost as big a cat as she is. Mrs. Krill, bless her, oh, yuss, Mrs. Krill, the sneakin', smiling Jezebel."

"Did she see Sylvia?" asked Beecot, sharply.

"Yuss, she did," admitted Deborah, "me lettin' her in not knowin' her scratchin's. An' the monkey an' the kitting come too—a-spyin' out the land as you may say. W'en I 'eard the noos I 'owled Mr. Paul, but my pretty she turned white like one of them plaster stateys as boys sell cheap in the streets, and ses she, she ses, 'Oh Paul'—if you'll forgive me mentioning your name, sir, without perliteness."

"Bless her, my darling. Did she think of me," said Beecot, tenderly.

"Ah, when do she not think of you, sir? 'Eart of gold, though none in her pocket by means of that Old Bailey woman as is a good match fur my Old Bailey master. Ho! he wos a bad 'un, and 'ow Miss Sylvia ever come

to ‘ave sich a par beats me. But I thank ‘eaven the cat ain’t my pretty’s mar, though she do ‘ave a daughter of her own, the painted, stuck-up parcel of bad bargains.”

Paul nodded. “Calling names won’t do any good, Deborah,” he said sadly; “we must do the best we can.”

“There ain’t no chance of the lawr gettin’ that woman to the gallers I ‘spose, sir?”

“The woman is your late master’s lawful wife. Pash seems to think so and has gone over to the enemy”—here Deborah clenched her mighty fists and gasped. “Sylvia’s mother was married later, and as the former wife is alive Sylvia is—”

“No,” shouted Deborah, flinging out her hand, “don’t say it.”

“Sylvia is poor,” ended Paul, calmly. “What did you think I was about to say, Deborah?”

“What that cat said, insulting of my pretty. But I shoved her out of the door, tellin’ her what she were. She guv me and Bart and my own sunbeam notice to quit,” gasped Deborah, almost weeping, “an’ quit we will this very day, Bart bein’ a-packin’ at this momingt. ‘Ear ‘im knocking, and I wish he wos a-knockin’ at Mrs. Krill’s ‘ead, that I do, the flauntin’ hussy as she is, drat her.”

“I’ll go up and see Sylvia. No, Deborah, don’t you come for a few minutes. When you do come we’ll arrange what is to be done.”

Deborah nodded acquiescence. “Take my lovely flower in your arms, sir,” she said, following him to the foot of the stairs, “and tell her as your ‘eart is true, which true I knowed it would be.”

Beecot was soon in the sitting-room and found Sylvia on the sofa, her face buried in her hands. She looked up when she recognized the beloved footsteps and sprang to her feet. The next moment she was sobbing her heart out on Paul’s faithful breast, and he was comforting her with all the endearing names he could think of.

“My own, my sweet, my dearest darling,” whispered Paul, smoothing the pretty brown hair, “don’t weep. You have lost much, but you have me.”

“Dear,” she wept, “do you think it is true?”

“I am afraid it is, Sylvia. However, I know a young lawyer, who is a friend of mine, and I’ll speak to him.”

“But Paul, though my mother may not have been married to my father—”

“She *was*, Sylvia, but Mrs. Krill was married to him earlier. Your father committed bigamy, and you, poor child, have to pay the penalty.”

“Well, even if the marriage is wrong, the money was left to us.”

“To you, dear,” said Beecot, leading her to the sofa, “that is, the money was left in that loosely-worded will to ‘my daughter.’ We all thought it was you, but now this legal wife has come on the scene, the money must go to her daughter. Oh, Sylvia,” cried Paul, straining her to his breast, “how foolish your father was not to say the money was left to ‘my daughter Sylvia.’ Then everything would have been right. But the absence of the name is fatal. The law will assume that the testator meant his true daughter.”

“And am I not his true daughter?” she asked, her lips quivering.

“You are my own darling, Sylvia,” murmured Paul, kissing her hair; “don’t let us talk of the matter. I’ll speak to my lawyer friend, but I fear from the attitude of Pash that Mrs. Krill will make good her claim. Were there a chance of keeping you in possession of the money, Pash would never have left you so easily.”

“I am so sorry about the money on your account, Paul.”

“My own,” he said cheerily, “money is a good thing, and I wish we could have kept the five thousand a year. But I have you, and you have me, and although we cannot marry for a long time yet—”

“Not marry, Paul! Oh, why not?”

“Dearest, I am poor, I cannot drag you down to poverty.”

Sylvia looked at him wide-eyed. “I am poor already.” She looked round the room. “Nothing here is mine. I have only a few clothes. Mr. Pash said that Mrs. Krill would take everything. Let me marry you, darling,” she whispered coaxingly, “and we can live in your garret. I will cook and mend, and be your own little wife.”

Beecot groaned. “Don’t tempt me, Sylvia,” he said, putting her away, “I dare not marry you. Why, I have hardly enough to pay the fees. No, dear, you must go with Debby to her laundry, and I’ll work night and day to make enough for us to live on. Then we’ll marry, and—”

“But your father, Paul?”

“He won’t do anything. He consented to our engagement, but solely, I believe, because he thought you were rich. Now, when he knows you are poor—and I wrote to tell him last night—he will forbid the match.”

“Paul!” She clung to him in sick terror.

“My sweetest”—he caught her in his arms—“do you think a dozen fathers would make me give you up? No, my love of loves—my soul, my heart of hearts—come good, come ill, we will be together. You can stay with Debby at Jubileetown until I make enough to welcome you to a home, however humble. Dear, be hopeful, and trust in the God who brought us together. He is watching over us, and, knowing that, why need we fear? Don’t cry, darling heart.”

“I’m not crying for crying,” sobbed Sylvia, hiding her face on his breast and speaking incoherently; “but I’m so happy—”

“In spite of the bad news?” asked Paul, laughing gently.

“Yes—yes—to think that you should still wish to marry me. I am poor—I—I—have—no name, and—”

“Dearest, you will soon have my name.”

“But Mrs. Krill said—”

“I don’t want to hear what she said,” cried Paul, impetuously; “she is a bad woman. I can see badness written all over her smiling face. We won’t think of her. When you leave here you won’t see her again. My

own dear little sweetheart,” whispered Paul, tenderly, “when you leave this unhappy house, let the bad past go. You and I will begin a new life. Come, don’t cry, my pet. Here’s Debby.”

Sylvia looked up, and threw herself into the faithful servant’s arms. “Oh, Debby, he loves me still; he’s going to marry me whenever he can.”

Deborah laughed and wiped Sylvia’s tears away with her coarse apron, tenderly. “You silly flower,” she cried caressingly; “you foolish queen of ‘oney bees, of course he have you in his ‘eart. You’ll be bride and I’ll be bridesmaid, though not a pretty one, and all will be ‘oney and sunshine and gates of pearl, my beauty.”

“Debby—I’m—I’m—so happy!”

Deborah placed her young mistress in Paul’s arms. “Then let ‘im make you ‘appier, pretty lily of the valley. Lor’, as if anything bad ‘ud ever come to you two while silly old Debby have a leg to stan’ on an’ arms to wash. Though the laundry—oh, lor’!” and she rubbed her nose till it grew scarlet, “what of it, Mr. Beecot, I do ask?”

“Have you enough money to pay a year’s rent?”

“Yes, me and Bart have saved one ‘undred between us. Rent and furniture and taxes can come out of it, sure. And my washin’s what I call washin’,” said Deborah, emphatically; “no lost buttings and tored sheets and ragged collars. I’d wash ag’in the queen ‘erself, tho’ I ses it as shouldn’t. Give me a tub, and you’ll see if the money don’t come in.”

“Well, then, Deborah, as I am too poor to marry Sylvia now, I want her to stop with you till I can make a home for her.”

“An’ where else should she stop but with her own silly, foolish Debby, I’d like to know? My flower, you come an’ be queen of the laundry.”

“I’ll keep the accounts, Debby,” said Sylvia, now all smiling.

“You’ll keep nothin’ but your color an’ your dear ‘eart up,” retorted Debby, sniffing; “me an’ Bart ‘ull do all. An’ this blessed day we’ll go to Jubileetown with our belongings. And you, Mr. Beecot?”

“I’ll come and see you settled, Deborah, and then I return to earn an income for Sylvia. I won’t let you keep her long.”

“She’ll stop as long as she have the will,” shouted Debby, hugging Sylvia; “as to that Krill cat—”

“She can take possession as soon as she likes. And, Deborah,” added Paul, significantly, “for all that has happened, I don’t intend to drop the search for your late master’s murderer.”

“It’s the Krill cat as done it,” said Debby, “though I ain’t got no reason for a-sayin’ of such a think.”

Chapter XIII

The Detective’s Views

As Paul expected, the next letter from his father contained a revocation of all that had pleased him in the former one. Beecot senior wrote many pages of abuse—he always did babble like a complaining woman when angered. He declined to sanction the marriage and ordered his son at once—underlined—to give up all thought of making Sylvia Norman his wife. It would have been hard enough, wrote Beecot, to have received her as a daughter-in-law even with money, seeing that she had no position and was the daughter of a murdered tradesman, but seeing also that she was a pauper, and worse, a girl without a cognomen, he forbade Paul to bestow on her the worthy name of Beecot, so nobly worn by himself. There was much more to the same effect, which Paul did not read, and the letter ended grandiloquently in a command that Paul was to repair at once to the Manor and there grovel at the feet of his injured father.

To this despotic epistle the young man answered in a few lines. He said that he intended to marry Sylvia, and that nothing would make him give her up, and that he would not meet his father again until that father remembered that his son was an Englishman and not a slave. Paul signed his letter without the usual “your affectionate son,” for he felt that he had small love for this imperious old man who declined to control his passions. So he now, knew the worst. The breach between himself and his father was wider than ever, and he had only his youth and his brains to depend upon, in making a living for himself and a

home for Sylvia. Strange to say, Paul's spirits rose, and he braced himself bravely to do battle with fortune for his beloved.

Sylvia, under the charge of Deborah, and escorted by Bart Tawsey, had duly left Gwynne Street, bag and baggage, and she was now established in Rose Cottage, Jubileetown. The house was a small one, and there was not a single rose in the garden around it. Indeed, as the cottage had been newly erected, there was not even a garden, and it stood amidst a bare acre with a large drying-ground at the back. But the cottage, on the outskirts of the new suburb, was, to all intents and purposes, in the country, and Sylvia's weary eyes were so gladdened by green fields and glorious trees that she forgot the nakedness of her immediate surroundings. She was assigned the best room in the small abode, and one of the first things she did was to write a letter to Paul asking him to repair to Rose Cottage to witness the marriage of Deborah and Bart. The handmaiden thought this was necessary, so that she could make full use of her intended husband.

"If he wasn't here allays," said the bride-elect, "he'd be gadding about idling. I know him. An' me getting a business together won't be easy unless I've got him at 'and, as you may say, to take round the bills, let alone that he ought to sleep in the 'ouse in case burglars gits in. And sleep in the 'ouse without the blessin' of matrimony he can't, my pretty, so that's all about it."

Deborah, as an American would say, was a "hustler," and having made up her mind, she did not let grass grow under her feet. She called on the vicar of the parish and explained herself at great length, but suppressed the fact that she had formerly lived in Gwynne Street. She did not want the shadow of the murder to cast a gloom over her new home, and therefore said nothing about the matter. All the vicar, good, easy soul, knew, was that Deborah had been a servant in a respectable family (whereabouts not mentioned); that the father and mother had died, and that she had brought the only daughter of the house to live with her and be treated like a lady. Then Deborah demanded that the banns should be put up, and arranged that Bart should take up his abode in the parish for the necessary time. This was done, and for three Sundays Deborah had the pleasure of hearing the banns announced which foretold that Bart Tawsey and herself would soon be man and wife. Then the marriage took place.

The future Mrs. Tawsey had no relatives, but Bart produced a snuffy old grandmother from some London slum who drank gin during the wedding-feast, much to the scandal of the bride. Paul acted as best man to Bart, and Sylvia, in her plain black dress, was bridesmaid. Mrs. Purr, the grandmother, objected to the presence of black at a wedding, saying it was unlucky, and told of many fearful incidents which had afterwards occurred to those who had tolerated such a funeral garb. But Deborah swept away all opposition.

“What!” she shouted in her usual style, “not ‘ave my own sweet pretty to arsk a blessing on my marriage, and she not able to git out of ‘er blacks? I’m astonished at you, Mrs. Purr, and you an old woman as oughter know better. I doubt if you’re Bart’s granny. I’ve married into an ijit race. Don’t talk to me, Mrs. Purr, if you please. Live clean an’ work ‘ard, and there’s no trouble with them ‘usbands. As ‘as to love, honor and obey you.”—And she sniffed.

“Them words you ‘ave t’ saiy,” mumbled Mrs. Purr.

“Ho,” said Deborah, scornfully, “I’d like to see me say ‘em to sich a scrub as Bart.”

But say them she did at the altar, being compelled to do so by the vicar. But when the ceremony was over, the newly-made Mrs. Tawsey took Bart by the arm and shook him. He was small and lean and of a nervous nature, so he quivered like a jelly in his wife’s tremendous grip. Deborah was really ignorant of her own strength.

“You ‘ark to me, Bart,” said she, while the best man and bridesmaid walked on ahead talking lovingly. “I said them words, which you oughter ‘ave said, ‘cause you ain’t got no memory t’ speak of. But they ain’t my beliefs, but yours, or I’ll know the reason why. Jes’ you say them now. Swear, without Billingsgate, as you’ll allays love, honor an’ obey your lovin’ wife.”

Bart, still being shaken, gasped out the words, and then gave his arm to the lady who was to rule his life. Deborah kissed him in a loud, hearty way, and led him in triumph to the cottage. Here Mrs. Purr had prepared a simple meal, and the health of the happy pair was proposed by Paul. Mrs. Purr toasted them in gin, and wept as she did so. A dismal, tearful old woman was Mrs. Purr, and she was about to open her mouth,

in order to explain what she thought would come of the marriage, when Mrs. Tawsey stopped her.

“None of them groans,” cried Deborah, with vigor. “I won’t have my weddings made funerals. ‘Old your tongue, Mrs. Purr, and you, Bart, jes’ swear to love, honor an’ obey my pretty as you would your own lawful wife, and the ceremonies is hoff.”

Bart performed the request, and then Paul, laughing at the oddity of it all, took his leave. On walking to the gate, he was overtaken by Mrs. Purr, who winked mysteriously. “Whatever you do, sir,” said the lean old creature, with many contortions of her withered face, “don’t have nothin’ to do with Tray.”

“Tray,” echoed Paul in surprise. “Mr. Pash’s office boy?”

“Him and none other. I knows his grandmother, as ‘as bin up for drunk two hundred times, and is proud of it. Stretchers is as common to her, sir, as kissings is to a handsome young gent like you. An’ the boy takes arter her. A deep young cuss,” whispered Granny Purr, significantly.

“But why should I beware of him?” asked Beecot, puzzled.

“A nod’s a wink to a blind ‘un,” croaked Mrs. Purr, condensing the proverb, and turning away. “Jus’ leave that brat, Tray, to his own wickedness. They’ll bring him to the gallers some day.”

“But I want to know—”

“Ah, well, then, you won’t, sir. I ses what I ses, and I ses no more nor I oughter say. So good-night, sir,” and Mrs. Purr toddled up the newly-gravelled path, and entered the cottage, leaving an odor of gin behind her.

Beecot had half a mind to follow, so strange was the hint she had given him. Apparently, she knew something which connected him with Tray, and Paul wondered for the fiftieth time, if the boy had picked up the opal brooch. However, he decided to leave the matter alone for the present. Mrs. Purr, whom Deborah had engaged to iron, was always available, and Paul decided, that should anything point to Tray’s being implicated in the finding of the opal serpent, that he would hand him over to Hurd,

who would be better able to deal with such a keen young imp of the gutter. Thus making up his mind, Paul dismissed all thought of Mrs. Purr's mysterious utterance, and walked briskly to the nearest bus-stand, where he took a blue vehicle to the Bloomsbury district. All the way to his garret he dreamed of Sylvia, and poor though was the home he had left her in, he was thankful that she was there in the safe shelter of Mrs. Deborah Tawsey's arms.

It was five o'clock when Paul arrived at the door of the stairs leading to his attic, and here he was touched on the shoulder by no less a person than Mr. Billy Hurd. Only when he spoke did Paul recognize him by his voice, for the gentleman who stood before him was not the brown individual he knew as the detective. Mr. Hurd was in evening dress, with the neatest of patent boots and the tightest of white gloves. He wore a brilliantly-polished silk hat, and twirled a gold-headed cane. Also he had donned a smart blue cloth overcoat with a velvet collar and cuffs. But though his voice was the voice of Hurd, his face was that of quite a different person. His hair was dark and worn rather long, his moustache black and large, and brushed out *à la Kaiser*, and he affected an eyeglass as immovable as that of Hay's. Altogether a wonderfully changed individual.

"Hurd," said Paul, starting with surprise.

"It's my voice told you. But now—" he spoke a tone higher in a shrill sort of way and with a foreign accent—"would you me discover, mon ami?" he inquired, with a genuine Parisian shrug.

"No. Why are you masquerading as a Frenchman, Hurd?"

"Not Hurd in this skin, Mr. Beecot. Comte de la Tour, à votre service," and he presented a thin glazed card with a coronet engraved on it.

"Well, Count," said Beecot, laughing, "what can I do for you?"

"Come up to your room," said the pseudo count, mounting the stairs; "there's something to be talked over between us."

"No bad news, I hope?"

“Ah, my poor friend,” said the detective, in his usual genial voice, “you have had enough bad news, I am aware. To lose a lovely wife and a fine fortune at once. Eh, what a pity!”

“I have lost the money, certainly,” said Beecot, lighting his lamp, “but the wife will be mine as soon as I can save sufficient to give her a better home than this.”

Monsieur le Comte de la Tour sat down and gracefully flung open his overcoat, so as to expose a spotless shirt front. “What?” he asked, lifting his darkened eyebrows, “so you mean to marry that girl?”

“Of course,” said Paul, angrily; “do you think I’m a brute?”

“But the money?”

“What does that matter. I love her, not the money.”

“And the name. Her birth—”

“I’ll give her my own name and then we’ll see who will dare to say a word against my wife.”

Hurd stretched out his hand, and, grasping that of Beecot’s, shook it warmly. “Upon my word you are a man, and that’s almost better than being a gentleman,” he said heartily. “I’ve heard everything from Mr. Pash, and I honor you Mr. Beecot—I honor you.”

Paul stared. “You must have been brought up in a queer way, Hurd,” he said drily, “to express this surprise because a man acts as a man and not as a blackguard.”

“Ah, but you see in my profession I have mixed with blackguards, and that has lowered my moral tone. It’s refreshing to meet a straight, honorable man such as you are, Mr. Beecot. I liked you when first I set eyes on you, and determined to help you to discover the assassin of Aaron Norman—”

“Lemuel Krill you mean.”

“I prefer to call him by the name we both know best,” said Hurd, “but as I was saying, I promised to help you to find out who killed the man; now I’ll help you to get back the money.”

Paul sat down and stared. “What do you mean?” he asked. “The money can’t be got back. I asked a legal friend of mine, and put the case to him, since that monkey of a Pash has thrown us over. My friend said that as no name was mentioned in the will, Maud Krill would undoubtedly inherit the money. Besides, I learn that the certificate of marriage is all right. Mrs. Krill undoubtedly married Aaron Norman under his rightful name thirty years ago.”

“Oh, yes, that’s all right,” said Hurd, producing a dainty silver cigarette case, which was part of his “get-up.” “Mrs. Krill is the widow of the murdered man, and the silly way in which the will has been made gives the five thousand a year to her daughter, whom Mrs. Krill has under her thumb. It’s all right as I say. But I shouldn’t be surprised to learn that there were circumstances in Aaron Norman’s past life which led him to leave his wife, and which may lead Mrs. Krill into buying silence by giving Miss Norman half the income. You could live on two thousand odd a year, eh?”

“Not obtained in that way,” said Beecot, filling his pipe and passing a match to Hurd. “If the money comes legally to Sylvia, well and good; otherwise she will have nothing to do with it.”

Hurd looked round the bleak garret expressively and shrugged his shoulders again. “I think you are wrong, Mr. Beecot. You can’t bring her here.”

“No. But I may make enough money to give her a better home.”

“Can I help you?”

“I don’t see how you can. I want to be an author.”

“Well,” said Hurd, whose British speech was in strange contrast to his foreign appearance, “it’s not a bad game to be an author if you get a good serial connection. Oh, don’t look surprised. I know about newspapers and publishers as I know about most things. See here, Mr. Beecot, have you ever tried your hand at a detective story?”

“No. I write on a higher level.”

“You won’t write on a more paying level,” replied Hurd, coolly. “I know a newspaper which will give you—if I recommend you, mind—one hundred pounds for a good detective yarn. You apply for it.”

“But I couldn’t make up one of those plots—so intricate.”

“Pooh. It’s a trick. You set your puppets in such and such a way and then mix them up. I’ll give you the benefit of my experience as a ‘tec, and with my plot and your own writing we’ll be able to knock up a story for the paper I talk of. Then, with one hundred pounds you’ll have a nest-egg to start with.”

“I accept with gratitude,” said Beecot, moved, “but I really don’t know why you should trouble about me.”

“Because you’re a white man and an honorable gentleman,” said the detective, emphatically. “I’ve got a dear little wife of my own, and she’s something like this poor Miss Norman. Then again, though you mightn’t think so, I’m something of a Christian, and believe we should help others. I had a hard life, Mr. Beecot, before I became a detective, and many a time have I learned that prayers can be answered. But this is all beside the question,” went on Hurd quickly, and with that nervous shame with which an Englishman masks the better part of himself. “I’ll see about the story for you. Meanwhile, I am going to a card-party to meet, incidentally, Mr. Grexon Hay.”

“Ah! You still suspect him?”

“I do, and with good reason. He’s got another mug in tow. Lord George Sandal, the son of Lord—well I needn’t mention names, but Hay’s trying to clear the young ass out, and I’m on the watch. Hay will never know me as the Count de la Tour. Not he, smart as he is. I’m fly!”

“Do you speak French well?”

“Moderately. But I play a silent part and say little. I shut my mouth and open my eyes. But what I came here to say is, that I intend to find out the assassin of Aaron Norman.”

“I can’t offer you a reward, Hurd,” said Paul, with a sigh.

“Oh, that’s all right. The widow, by the advice of Pash, has doubled the reward. One thousand pounds it is now—worth winning, eh?”

“Humph!” said Paul, moodily, “I shouldn’t think she loved her husband so much as that.”

Hurd’s brown eyes shot a red flame which showed that he was excited, though he was cool enough externally. “Yes,” he admitted in a careless manner, “she certainly does act the weeping widow in rather an exaggerated fashion. However, she’s got the cash now—or at least her daughter has, which is the same thing. The two have taken up their quarters in a fashionable hotel in the West End, and are looking for a house. The old woman manages everything, and she will be one too many for Mr. Hay.”

“What? Does he know Mrs. Krill? He said he didn’t.”

“Quite right. He didn’t when the ladies went first to Pash’s office. But Hay, on the look-out for a rich wife, got Pash to introduce him to the ladies, who were charmed with him. He’s making up to the daughter, even in the few weeks that have elapsed, and now is assisting them to find a house. The daughter loves him I fancy, but whether the mother will allow the marriage to take place I can’t say.”

“Surely not on such a short acquaintance.”

Hurd bent forward as about to say something, then changed his mind. “Really, I don’t know—Hay is fascinating and handsome. Have you been to see him yet?”

“No. He asked me, but all these troubles have put him out of my head. Why do you ask?”

“Because next time he invites you, go.”

“You warned me against him.”

“And I warn you again,” said the detective, dryly. “Don’t ask me to explain, for I can’t. But you go to see Hay when he invites you, and make yourself agreeable, especially to Mrs. Krill.”

“Am I likely to meet her?” asked Paul, with repugnance.

“Yes, I fancy so. After all, you are engaged to the daughter of the dead man, and Mrs. Krill—I don’t count Maud, who is a tool—is a deucedly clever woman. She will keep her eye on you and Miss Norman.”

“Why? She has the money and need take no further notice.”

Hurd closed one eye in a suggestive manner. “Mrs. Krill may not be so sure of the money, even though possession is nine points of the law. You remember that scrap of paper found by the maid?”

“In which Norman warned Sylvia against allowing his real name to become known? Yes.”

“Well, the letter wasn’t finished. The old man was interrupted, I suppose. But in the few lines of writing Norman says,” here Hurd took a scrap of paper—a copy—out of his book and read, “‘If the name of Krill gets into the papers there will be great trouble. Keep it from the public, I can tell you where to find the reasons for this as I have written’—and then,” said Hurd, refolding the paper, “the writing ends. But you can see that Aaron Norman wrote out an account of his reasons, which could not be pleasant for Mrs. Krill to hear.”

“I still don’t understand,” said Paul, hopelessly puzzled.

“Well,” said the detective, rising and putting on his smart hat, “it’s rather a muddle, I confess. I have no reason to suspect Mrs. Krill—”

“Good heavens, Hurd, you don’t think she killed her husband?”

“No. I said that I have no reason to suspect her. But I don’t like the woman at all. Norman left his wife for some unpleasant reason, and that reason, as I verily believe, has something to do with his death. I don’t say that Mrs. Krill killed him, but I do believe that she knows of circumstances which may lead to the detection of the criminal.”

“In that case she would save her thousand pounds.”

“That’s just where it is. If she does know, why does she double the reward? A straightforward woman would speak out, but she’s a crooked sort of creature; I shouldn’t like to have her for my enemy.”

“It seems to me that you do suspect her,” said Paul dryly, but puzzled.

Hurd shrugged his shoulders. “No, but I’m in a fix, that’s a truth,” said he, and sauntered towards the door. “I can’t see my way. There’s the clue of Mrs. Krill’s past to be followed up, and the hint contained in this scrap of paper. The old man may have left a document behind likely to solve the whole business. He hints as much here.”

“True enough, but nothing was found.”

“Then again,” went on Hurd, “the request for the jewels to be delivered to that sailor chap was in Norman’s handwriting and signed with his name.”

“A forgery.”

“No. Pash, who knows his writing better than any other man, says the document is genuine. Now then, Mr. Beecot, what made Aaron Norman write and sign those lines giving up his property—or a part of it—just before his death?”

“It may have been done in good faith.”

“No. If so, the messenger would not have cleared out when Pash started for Gwynne Street. That nautical gent knew what the lawyer would find at the house, and so made himself scarce after trying to get the jewels. This scrap of paper,” Hurd touched his breast, “and that request for the jewels in Pash’s possession. Those are my clues.”

“And the opal serpent?” asked Paul.

Hurd shook his head gloomily. “It’s connection with the matter is beyond me,” he confessed.

Chapter XIV

Mr. Hay’s Little Dinner

The detective was as good as his word. In a few days Paul was introduced to the editor of a weekly publication and obtained a commission for a story to be written in collaboration with Mr. Hurd. It seemed that the editor was an old acquaintance of Hurd’s and had been

extricated by him from some trouble connected with cards. The editor, to show his gratitude, and because that Hurd's experiences, thrown into the form of a story, could not fail to interest the public, was only too willing to make a liberal arrangement. Also Paul was permanently engaged to supply short stories, to read those that were submitted to the editor, and, in fact, he permanently became that gentleman's right hand. He was a kind, beery Bohemian of an editor, Scott by name, and took quite a fancy to Paul.

"I'll give you three pounds a week," said Scott, beaming through his large spectacles and raking his long gray beard with tobacco-stained fingers, "you can live on that, and to earn it you can give me your opinion on the stories. Then between whiles you can talk to Hurd and write this yarn which I am sure will be interesting. Hurd has had some queer experiences."

This was quite true. Hurd had ventured on strange waters, but the strangest he ever sailed on were those connected with the Gwynne Street case. These latter experiences he did not tell to Scott, who was incapable of holding his tongue, and secrecy, as the detective impressed on Paul, was absolutely necessary to the conduct of the case. "If we keep matters quiet," argued Hurd, "and let those concerned in the matter fancy the case has been dropped, we'll be able to throw them off their guard, and then they may betray themselves."

"I wish you would say if you think there is one person or two," said Paul, irritably, for his nerves were wearing thin under the strain. "You first talk of the assassin and then of the assassins."

"Well," drawled Hurd, smiling, "I'm in the dark, you see, and being only a flesh and blood human being, instead of a creation of one of you authors, I can only grope in the dark and look in every direction for the light. One person, two persons, three, even four may be engaged in this affair for all I know. Don't you be in a hurry, Mr. Beecot. I believe in that foreign chap's saying, 'Without haste without rest.'"

"Goethe said that."

"Then Goethe is a sensible man, and must have read his Bible. 'Make no haste in time of trouble,' says the Scriptures."

“Very good,” assented Beecot; “take your own time.”

“I intend to,” said Hurd, coolly. “Bless you, slow and sure is my motto. There’s no hurry. You are fixed up with enough to live on, and a prospect of making more. Your young lady is happy enough with that grenadier of a woman in spite of the humbleness of the home. Mrs. Krill and her daughter are enjoying the five thousand a year, and Mr. Grexon Hay is fleecing that young ass, Lord George Sandal, as easily as possible. I stand by and watch everything. When the time comes I’ll pounce down on—”

“Ah,” said Paul, “that’s the question. On whom?”

“On one or two or a baker’s dozen,” rejoined Hurd, calmly. “My chickens ain’t hatched yet, so I don’t count ‘em. By the way, is your old school-fellow as friendly as ever?”

“Yes. Why, I can’t understand; as he certainly will make no money out of me. He’s giving a small dinner to-morrow night at his rooms and has asked me.”

“You go,” said the detective, emphatically; “and don’t let on you have anything to do with me.”

“See here, Hurd, I won’t play the spy, if you mean that.”

“I don’t mean anything of the sort,” replied Hurd, earnestly, “but if you do chance to meet Mrs. Krill at this dinner, and if she does chance to drop a few words about her past, you might let me know.”

“Oh, I don’t mind doing that,” said Beecot, with relief. “I am as anxious to find out the truth about this murder as you are, if not more so. The truth, I take it, is to be found in Krill’s past, before he took the name of Norman. Mrs. Krill will know of that past, and I’ll try and learn all I can from her. But Hay has nothing to do with the crime, and I won’t spy on him.”

“Very good. Do what you like. But as to Hay, having nothing to do with the matter, I still think Hay stole that opal brooch from you when you were knocked down.”

“In that case Hay must know who killed Norman,” cried Paul, excited.

“He just does,” rejoined Hurd, calmly; “and now you can understand another reason why I take such an interest in that gentleman.”

“But you can’t be certain?”

“Quite so. I am in the dark, as I said before. But Hay is a dangerous man and would do anything to rake in the dollars. He has something to do with the disappearance of that brooch I am sure, and if so, he knows more than he says. Besides”—here Hurd hesitated—“No! I’ll tell you that later.”

“Tell me what?”

“Something about Hay that will astonish you and make you think he has something to do with the crime. Meanwhile, learn all you can from Mrs. Krill.”

“If I meet her,” said Paul, with a shrug.

Undoubtedly Hurd knew more than he was prepared to admit, and not even to Paul, staunch as he knew him to be, would he speak confidentially. When the time came the detective would speak out. At present he held his tongue and moved in clouds like a Homeric deity. But his eyes were on all those connected with the late Aaron Norman, indirectly or directly, although each and every one of them were unaware of the scrutiny.

Paul had no scruples in learning all he could from Mrs. Krill. He did not think that she had killed her husband, and probably might be ignorant of the person or persons who had slain the poor wretch in so cruel a manner. But the motive of the crime was to be found in Norman’s past, and Mrs. Krill knew all about this. Therefore, Paul was very pleased when he found that Mrs. Krill and her daughter were the guests at the little dinner.

Hay’s rooms were large and luxuriously furnished. In effect, he occupied a small flat in the house of an ex-butler, and had furnished the place himself in a Sybarite fashion. The ex-butler and his wife and servants looked after Hay, and in addition, that languid gentleman possessed a

slim valet, with a sly face, who looked as though he knew more than was good for him. Indeed, the whole atmosphere of the rooms was shady and fast, and Paul, simple young fellow as he was, felt the bad influence the moment he stepped into the tiny drawing-room.

This was furnished daintily and with great taste in color and furnishing. It was more like a woman's room, and Mr. Hay had spared no cost in making it pleasing to the eye and comfortable to the body. The prevailing tone was pale yellow, and the electric light suffused itself through lemon-shaded globes. The Louis Quinze furniture was upholstered in primrose, and there were many Persian praying mats and Eastern draperies about the place. Water-color pictures decked the walls, and numerous mirrors reflected the dainty, pretty apartment. A brisk fire was burning, although the evening was not cold, and everything looked delightfully pleasant. Paul could not help contrasting all this luxury and taste with his bare garret. But with Sylvia's love to warm his heart, he would not have changed places with Grexon Hay for all his splendor.

Two ladies were seated by the fire. Mrs. Krill in black, majestic and calm as usual. She wore diamonds on her breast and jewelled stars in her gray hair. Although not young, she was a wonderfully well-preserved woman, and her arms and neck were white, gleaming and beautifully shaped. From the top of her head to the sole of her rather large but well-shod foot, she was dressed to perfection, and waved a languid fan as she welcomed Paul, who was presented to her by the host. "I am glad to see you, Mr. Beecot," she said in her deep voice; "we had rather an unhappy interview when last we met. How is Miss Norman?"

"She is quite well," replied Paul, in as cordial a tone as he could command. For the sake of learning what he could, he wished to be amiable, but it was difficult when he reflected that this large, suave, smiling woman had robbed Sylvia of a fortune and had spoken of her in a contemptuous way. But Beecot, swallowing down his pride, held his little candle to the devil without revealing his repugnance too openly. And apparently Mrs. Krill believed that his composure was genuine enough, for she was quite at her ease in his presence.

The daughter was dressed like the mother, save that she wore pearls in place of diamonds. She talked but little, as usual, and sat smiling, the

young image of the older woman. Hay also introduced Paul to a handsome young fellow of twenty-one with rather a feeble face. This was Lord George Sandal, the pigeon Hay was plucking, and although he had charming manners and an assumption of worldly wisdom, he was evidently one of those who had come into the world saddled and bridled for other folk's riding.

A third lady was also present, who called herself Aurora Qian, and Hay informed his friend in a whisper that she was an actress. Paul then remembered that he had seen her name in the papers as famous in light comedy. She was pretty and kittenish, with fluffy hair and an eternal smile. It was impossible to imagine a greater contrast to the massive firmness of Mrs. Krill than the lively, girlish demeanor of the little woman, yet Paul had an instinct that Miss Qian, in spite of her profession and odd name and childish giggle, was a more shrewd person than she looked. Everyone was bright and merry and chatty: all save Maud Krill who smiled and fanned herself in a statuesque way. Hay paid her great attention, and Paul knew very well that he intended to marry the silent woman for her money. It would be hardly earned he thought, with such a firm-looking mother-in-law as Mrs. Krill would certainly prove to be.

The dinner was delightful, well cooked, daintily served, and leisurely eaten. A red-shaded lamp threw a rosy light on the white cloth, the glittering crystal and bright silver. The number of diners was less than the Muses, and more than the Graces, and everyone laid himself or herself out to make things bright. And again Maud Krill may be mentioned as an exception. She ate well and held her tongue, merely smiling heavily when addressed. Paul, glancing at her serene face across the rosy-hued table, wondered if she really was as calm as she looked, and if she really lacked the brain power her mother seemed to possess.

"I am glad to see you here, Beecot," said Hay, smiling.

"I am very glad to be here," said Paul, adapting himself to circumstances, "especially in such pleasant company."

"You don't go out much," said Lord George.

"No, I am a poor author who has yet to win his spurs."

“I thought of being an author myself,” said the young man, “but it was such a fag to think about things.”

“You want your material supplied to you perhaps,” put in Mrs. Krill in a calm, contemptuous way.

“Oh, no! If I wrote stories like the author johnnies I’d rake up my family history. There’s lots of fun there.”

“Your family mightn’t like it,” giggled Miss Qian. “I know lots of things about my own people which would read delightfully if Mr. Beecot set them down, but then—” she shrugged her dainty shoulders, “oh, dear me, what a row there would be!”

“I suppose there is a skeleton in every cupboard,” said Hay, suavely, and quite ignoring the shady tenant in his own.

“There’s a whole dozen cupboards with skeletons to match in my family,” said the young lord. “Why, I had an aunt, Lady Rachel Sandal, who was murdered over twenty years ago. Now,” he said, looking triumphantly round the table, “which of you can say there’s a murder in your family—eh, ladies and gentlemen?”

Paul glanced sideways at Mrs. Krill, wondering what she would say, and wondering also how it was that Lord George did not know she was the widow of the murdered Lemuel Krill, whose name had been so widely advertised. But Hay spoke before anyone could make a remark. “What an unpleasant subject,” he said, with a pretended shudder, “let us talk of less melodramatic things.”

“Oh, why,” said Mrs. Krill, using her fan. “I rather like to hear about murders.”

Lord George looked oddly at her, and seemed about to speak. Paul thought for the moment that he did know about the Gwynne Street crime and intended to remark thereon. But if so his good taste told him that he would be ill-advised to speak and he turned to ask for another glass of wine. Miss Aurora Qian looked in her pretty shrewd way from one to the other. “I just love the Newgate Calendar,” she said, clasping her hands. “There’s lovely plots for dramas to be found there. Don’t you think so, Mr. Beecot?”

“I don’t read that sort of literature, Miss Qian.”

“Ah, then you don’t know what people are capable of in the way of cruelty, Mr. Beecot.”

“I don’t want to know,” retorted Paul, finding the subject distasteful and wondering why the actress pressed it, as she undoubtedly did. “I prefer to write stories to elevate the mind.”

Miss Qian made a grimace and shot a meaning look at him. “It doesn’t pay,” she said, tittering, “and money is what we all want.”

“I fear I don’t care for money overmuch.”

“No,” said Mrs. Krill to him in an undertone, “I know that from the way you spoke in Mr. Pash’s office.”

“I was standing up for the rights of another.”

“You will be rewarded,” she replied meaningly, but what she did mean Paul could not understand.

The rest of the dinner passed off well enough, as the subject was changed. Lord George began to talk of racing, and Hay responded. Mrs. Krill alone seemed shocked. “I don’t believe in gambling,” she said icily.

“I hope you are not very down on it,” said Hay. “Lord George and I propose to play bridge with you ladies in the next room.”

“Maud can play and Miss Qian,” said the widow. “I’ll talk to Mr. Beecot, unless he prefers the fascination of the green cloth.”

“I would rather talk to you,” replied Paul, bowing.

Mrs. Krill nodded, and then went out of the room with the younger ladies. The three gentlemen filled their glasses with port, and Hay passed round a box of cigars. Soon they were smoking and chatting, in a most amicable fashion. Lord George talked a great deal about racing and cards, and his bad luck with both. Hay said very little and every now and then cast a glance at Paul, to see how he was taking the conversation. At length, when Sandal became a trifle vehement on the subject of his losses, Hay abruptly changed the subject, by refilling his glass and those

of his companions. "I want you to drink to the health of my future bride," he said.

"What," cried Paul, staring, "Miss Krill?"

"The same," responded Hay, coldly. "You see I have taken your advice and intend to settle. Pash presented me to the ladies when next they came to his office, and since then I have been almost constantly with them. Miss Krill's affections were disengaged, and she, therefore, with her mother's consent, became my promised wife."

"I wish you joy," said Lord George, draining his glass and filling another, "and, by Jove! for your sake, I hope she's got money."

"Oh, yes, she's well off," said Hay, calmly, "and you, Paul?"

"I congratulate you, of course," stammered Beecot, dazed; "but it's so sudden. You haven't known her above a month."

"Five weeks or so," said Hay, smiling, and sinking his voice lower, he added, "I can't afford to let grass grow under my feet. This young ass here might snap her up, and Mrs. Krill would only be too glad to secure a title for Maud."

"I say," said Lord George suddenly, and waking from a brown study, "who is Mrs. Krill? I've heard the name."

"It's not an uncommon name," said Hay, untruthfully and quickly. "She is a rich widow who has lately come to London."

"Where did she come from?"

"I can't tell you that. From the wilds of Yorkshire I believe. You had better ask her."

"Oh, by Jove, no, I wouldn't be so rude. But I seem to know the name." Paul privately thought that if he read the papers, he ought certainly to know the name, and he was on the point of making, perhaps an injudicious remark, but Hay pointedly looked at him in such a meaning way, that he held his tongue. More, when they left their wine for the society of the ladies, Hay squeezed his friend's arm in the passage.

“Don’t mention the death,” he said, using a politer word by preference. “Sandal doesn’t connect Mrs. Krill with the dead man. She wants to live the matter down.”

“In that case she ought to leave London for a time.”

“She intends to. When I make Maud my wife, we will travel with her mother for a year or two, until the scandal of the murder blows over. Luckily the name of Lemuel Krill was not mentioned often in the papers, and Sandal hasn’t seen a hand-bill that I know of. I suppose you agree with me that silence is judicious?”

“Yes,” assented Paul, “I think it is.”

“And you congratulate me on my approaching marriage?”

“Certainly. Now, perhaps, you will live like Falstaff when he was made a knight.”

Hay did not understand the allusion and looked puzzled. However, he had no time to say more, as they entered the drawing-room. Almost as soon as they did, Mrs. Krill summoned Paul to her side.

“And now,” she said, “let us talk of Miss Norman.”

Chapter XV

A New Clue

“I don’t wish to talk of Miss Norman,” said Paul, bluntly.

“Then you can be no true lover,” retorted the widow.

“I disagree with you. A true lover does not talk to all and sundry concerning the most sacred feelings of his heart. Moreover, your remarks at our last meeting were not to my taste.”

“I apologize,” said Mrs. Krill, promptly, “and will not offend in that way again. I did not know you then, but since Mr. Hay has spoken about you to me, I know and appreciate you, Mr. Beecot.”

But Paul was not to be cajoled in this manner. The more suave the woman was, the more he felt inclined to be on his guard, and he very

wisely obeyed the prompting of his instinct. “I fear you do *not* know me, Mrs. Krill,” said he as coldly as Hay could have spoken, “else you would hardly ask me to discuss with you, of all people, the lady whom I intend to make my wife.”

“You are rather a difficult man to deal with,” she replied, drawing her thick white eyebrows together. “But I like difficult men. That is why I admire Mr. Hay: he is not a silly, useless butterfly like that young lord there.”

“Silly he is not, but I doubt his being useful. So far as I can see Hay looks after himself and nobody else.”

“He proposes to look after my daughter.”

“So I understand,” replied Beecot, politely, “but that is a matter entirely for your own consideration.”

Mrs. Krill still continued to smile in her placid way, but she was rather nonplussed all the same. From the appearance of Beecot, she had argued that he was one of those many men she could twist round her finger. But he seemed to be less easily guided than she expected, and for the moment she was silent, letting her hard eyes wander towards the card-table, round which sat the four playing an eager and engrossing game of bridge. “You don’t approve of that perhaps?”

“No,” said Paul, calmly, “I certainly do not.”

“Are you a Puritan may I ask?”

Beecot shook his head and laughed. “I am a simple man, who tries to do his duty in this world,” said he, “and who very often finds it difficult to do that same duty.”

“How do you define duty, Mr. Beecot?”

“We are becoming ethical,” said Paul, with a smile. “I don’t know that I am prepared with an answer at present.”

“Then the next time we meet. For I hope,” said Mrs. Krill, smoothing her face to a smile—it had grown rather sombre—“that we shall often meet

again. You must come and see us. We have taken a house in Kensington.”

“Chosen by Mr. Hay?”

“Yes! He is our mentor in London Society. I don’t think,” added Mrs. Krill, studying his face, “that you like Mr. Hay.”

“As I am Mr. Hay’s guest,” said Paul, dryly, “that is rather an unkind question to ask.”

“I asked no question. I simply make a statement.”

Beecot found the conversation rather embarrassing. In place of his pumping Mrs. Krill, she was trying to pump him, which reversal of his design he by no means approved of. He changed the subject of conversation by drawing a powerfully attractive red herring across the trail. “You wish to speak to me about Miss Norman,” he remarked.

“I do,” answered Mrs. Krill, who saw through his design, “but apparently that subject is as distasteful as a discussion about Mr. Hay.”

“Both subjects are rather personal, I admit, Mrs. Krill. However, if you have anything to tell me, which you would like Miss Norman to hear, I am willing to listen.”

“Ah! Now you are more reasonable,” she answered in a pleased tone. “It is simply this, Mr. Beecot: I am very sorry for the girl. Through no fault of her own, she is placed in a difficult position. I cannot give her a name, since her father sinned against her as he sinned in another way against me, but I can—through my daughter, who is guided by me—give her an income. It does not seem right that I should have all this money—”

“That your daughter should have all this money,” interpolated Beecot.

“My daughter and I are one,” replied Mrs. Krill, calmly; “when I speak for myself, I speak for her. But, as I say, it doesn’t seem right we should be in affluence and Miss Norman in poverty. So I propose to allow her five hundred a year—on conditions. Will she accept, do you think, Mr. Beecot?”

“I should think her acceptance would depend upon the conditions.”

“They are very simple,” said Mrs. Krill in her deep tones, and looking very straightly at Paul. “She is to marry you and go to America.”

Beecot’s face did not change, since her hard eyes were on it. But he was puzzled under his mask of indifference. Why did this woman want Sylvia to marry him, and go into exile? He temporized. “With regard to your wish that Miss Norman should marry me,” said he, quietly, “it is of course very good of you to interest yourself in the matter. I fail to understand your reason, however.”

“Yet the reason is patent,” rejoined Mrs. Krill, just as quietly and quite as watchful as before. “Sylvia Norman is a young girl without much character——”

“In that I disagree with you.”

“Well, let us admit she has character, but she certainly has no experience. In the world, she is exposed to much trouble and, perhaps, may be, to temptation. Since her position is the fault of her father, and she is entirely innocent, I want her to have a happy life. For that reason I wish her to marry you.”

Paul bowed, not believing a word of this philanthropic speech. “Again, I say it is good of you,” said he with some irony; “but even were I out of the way, her nurse, Deborah Tawsey, would look after her. As matters stand, however, she will certainly become my wife as soon as we can afford a home.”

“You can afford it to-morrow,” said Mrs. Krill, eagerly, “if you will accept my offer.”

“A home in America,” said Paul, “and why?”

“I should think both of you would like to be away from a place where you have seen such a tragedy.”

“Indeed.” Paul committed himself to no opinion. “And, supposing we accept your offer, which I admit is a generous one, you suggest we should go to the States.”

“Or to Canada, or Australia, or—in fact—you can go anywhere, so long as you leave England. I tell you, Mr. Beecot, even at the risk of hurting your feelings, that I want that girl away from London. My husband treated me very badly—he was a brute always—and I hate to have that girl before my eyes.”

“Yet she is innocent.”

“Have I not said that a dozen times,” rejoined Mrs. Krill, impatiently. “What is the use of further discussion. Do you accept my offer?”

“I will convey it to Miss Norman. It is for her to decide.”

“But you have the right since you are to be her husband.”

“Pardon me, no. I would never take such a responsibility on me. I shall tell Miss Norman what you say, and convey her answer to you.”

“Thank you,” said Mrs. Krill, graciously. But she was annoyed that her golden bait had not been taken immediately, and, in spite of her suavity, Paul could see that she was annoyed, the more so when she began to explain. “Of course you understand my feelings.”

“I confess I don’t quite. Naturally, the fact that you are connected with the murder in the public eyes—”

“Pardon me,” said the woman, swiftly, “but I am not. The name of Krill has hardly been noticed. The public know that Aaron Norman was murdered. No one talks of Lemuel Krill, or thinks that I am the widow of the murdered man. Possibly I may come across some people who will connect the two names, and look askance at me, but the majority of people—such as Lord George there,” she pointed with her fan, “do not think of me in the way you say. As he did, they will think they remember the name—”

“Lord George did not say that to you,” said Paul, swiftly.

“No. But he did to Mr. Hay, who told me,” rejoined Mrs. Krill, quite as swiftly.

“To-night?” asked Beecot, remembering that Hay had not spoken privately to Mrs. Krill since they came in from the dining-room.

“Oh, no—on another occasion. Lord George has several times said that he has a faint recollection of my name. Possibly the connection between me and the murder may occur to his mind, but he is really so very stupid that I hope he will forget all about the matter.”

“I wonder you don’t change your name,” said Paul, looking at her.

“Certainly not, unless public opinion forces me to change it,” she said defiantly. “My life has always been perfectly open and above board, not like that of my husband.”

“Why did he change his name?” asked Beecot, eagerly—too eagerly, in fact, for she drew back.

“Why do you ask?” she inquired coldly.

Paul shrugged his shoulders. “An idle question, Mrs. Krill. I have no wish to force your confidence.”

“There is no forcing in the matter,” responded the woman. “I have taken quite a fancy to you, Mr. Beecot, and you shall know what I do.”

“Pray do not tell me if you would rather not.”

“But I would rather,” said Mrs. Krill, bluntly; “it will prevent your misconception of anything you may hear about us. My husband’s real name was Lemuel Krill, and he married me thirty years ago. I will be frank with you and admit that neither of us were gentlefolks. We kept a public-house on the outskirts of Christchurch in Hants, called ‘The Red Pig.’” She looked anxiously at him as she spoke.

“A strange name.”

“Have you never heard of it before?”

“No. Had I heard the name it would have remained in my memory, from its oddity.”

Paul might have been mistaken, but Mrs. Krill certainly seemed relieved. Yet if she had anything to conceal in connection with “The Red Pig,” why should she have mentioned the name.

“It is not a first-class hotel,” she went on smoothly, and again with her false smile. “We had only farm laborers and such like as customers. But the custom was good, and we did very well. Then my husband took to drink.”

“In that respect he must have changed,” said Paul, quickly, “for all the time I knew him—six months it was—I never saw him the worse for drink, and I certainly never heard from those who would be likely to know that he indulged in alcohol to excess. All the same,” added Paul, with an after-thought of his conversation with Sylvia in the Embankment garden, “I fancied, from his pale face and shaking hands, and a tightness of the skin, that he might drink.”

“Exactly. He did. He drank brandy in large quantities, and, strange to say, he never got drunk.”

“What do you mean exactly?” asked Beecot, curiously.

“Well,” said Mrs. Krill, biting the top of her fan and looking over it, “Lemuel—I’ll call him by the old name—never grew red in the face, and even after years of drinking he never showed any signs of intemperance. Certainly his hands would shake at times, but I never noticed particularly the tightness of the skin you talk of.”

“A certain shiny look,” explained Paul.

“Quite so. I never noticed it. But he never got drunk so as to lose his head or his balance,” went on Mrs. Krill; “but he became a demon.”

“A demon?”

“Yes,” said the woman, emphatically, “as a rule he was a timid, nervous, little man, like a frightened rabbit, and would not harm a fly. But drink, as you know, changes a nature to the contrary of what it actually is.”

“I have heard that.”

“You would have seen an example in Lemuel,” she retorted. “When he drank brandy, he became a king, a sultan. From being timid he became bold; from not harming anyone he was capable of murder. Often in his fits did he lay violent hands on me. But I managed to escape. When

sober, he would moan and apologize in a provokingly tearful manner. I hated and despised him,” she went on, with flashing eyes, but careful to keep her voice from reaching the gamblers. “I was a fool to marry him. My father was a farmer, and I had a good education. I was attracted by the good looks of Lemuel, and ran away with him from my father’s farm in Buckinghamshire.”

“That’s where Stowley is,” murmured Paul.

“Stowley?” echoed Mrs. Krill, whose ears were very sharp. “Yes, I know that town. Why do you mention it?”

“The opal serpent brooch with which your husband’s lips were fastened was pawned there.”

“I remember,” said Mrs. Krill, calmly. “Mr. Pash told me. It has never been found out how the brooch came to fasten the lips—so horrible it was,” she shuddered.

“No. My father bought the brooch from the Stowley pawnbroker, and gave it to my mother, who sent it to me. When I had an accident, I lost it, but who picked it up I can’t say.”

“The assassin must have picked it up,” declared Mrs. Krill, decisively, “else it would not have been used in that cruel way; though why such a brooch should have been used at all I can’t understand. I suppose my husband did not tell you why he wanted to buy the brooch?”

“Who told you that he did?” asked Paul, quickly.

“Mr. Pash. He told me all about the matter, but not the reason why my husband wanted the brooch.”

“Pash doesn’t know,” said Beecot, “nor do I. Your husband fainted when I first showed him the brooch, but I don’t know why. He said nothing.”

Again Mrs. Krill’s face in spite of her care showed a sense of relief at his ignorance. “But I must get back to my story,” she said, in a hard tone, “we have to leave soon. I ran away with Lemuel who was then travelling with jewellery. He knew a good deal about jewellery, you know, which he turned to account in his pawnbroking.”

“Yes, and amassed a fortune, thereby.”

“I should never have credited him with so much sense,” said Mrs. Krill, contemptuously. “While at Christchurch he was nothing but a drunkard, whining when sober, and a furious beast when drunk. I managed all the house, and looked after my little daughter. Lemuel led me a dog’s life, and we quarrelled incessantly. At length, when Maud was old enough to be my companion, Lemuel ran away. I kept on ‘The Red Pig,’ and waited for him to return. But he never came back, and for over twenty years I heard nothing of him till I saw the hand-bills and his portrait, and heard of his death. Then I came to see Mr. Pash, and the rest you know.”

“But why did he run away?” asked Paul.

“I suppose he grew weary of the life and the way I detested him,” was her reply. “I don’t wonder he ran away. But there, I have told you all, so make what you can of it. Tell Miss Norman of my offer, and make her see the wisdom of accepting it. And now”—she rose, and held out her hand—“I must run away. You will call and see us? Mr. Hay will give you the address.”

“What’s that,” said Hay, leaving the card-table, “does Beecot want your address? Certainly.” He went to a table and scribbled on a card. “There you are. Hunter Street, Kensington, No. 32A. Do come, Beecot. I hope soon to call on your services to be my best man,” and he cast a coldly loving look on Maud, who simply smiled as usual.

By this time the card-party had broken up. Maud had lost a few pounds, and Lord George a great deal. But Miss Qian and Hay had won.

“What luck,” groaned the young lord. “Everything seems to go wrong with me.”

“Stop and we’ll try another game when the ladies have gone,” suggested Hay, his impassive face lighting up, “then Beecot—”

“I must go,” said the young gentleman, who did not wish to be called upon as a witness in a possible card scandal.

“And I’ll go too,” said Lord George. “Whenever I play with you, Hay, I always seem to lose.”

“What do you mean by that?” asked Grexon, fiercely.

“Oh, he doesn’t mean anything,” said Miss Qian, sweetly, and putting her cloak round her. “Mr. Beecot, just take me to my cab.”

“I’ll take you to your carriage,” said Hay, offering an arm to Mrs. Krill, which she accepted graciously.

Lord George followed, grumbling, with the ever-smiling Maud. Miss Qian skipped into a hansom, and offered Paul a drive back to town which he refused. As the cab was driving off she bent down and whispered, “Be careful,” with a side-glance at Hay.

Paul laughed. Everyone seemed to doubt Hay. But that gentleman handed Mrs. Krill and her daughter into their carriage, and looked towards Lord George. “You don’t want your revenge to-night?” he asked.

“No, confound you!” said the young man, sulkily.

“In that case I’ll drive into Kensington with Mrs. Krill, and borrow her carriage for a trip to Piccadilly. Good-night, Sandal. Good-night, Beecot.”

He waved his hand, and the ladies waved theirs, and then the three drove away. Lord George lighted a cigar, and putting his arm within that of Beecot, strolled down the road. “Come to my club,” he said.

“No, thank you,” answered Paul, politely, “I must get home.”

“But I wish you’d come. I hate being by myself and you seem such a good sort of chap.”

“Well,” said Beecot, thinking he might say a word in season to this young fool, “I don’t gamble.”

“Oh, you cry down that, do you?”

“Well, I think it’s foolish.”

“It is,” assented Lord George, frankly, “infernally foolish. And Hay has all the luck. I wonder if he plays square.”

This was dangerous ground, and Paul shied. "I really can't say," he said coldly, "I don't play cards."

"But what do you know of Hay?" asked Sandal.

"Only that he was at school with me at Torrington. We met by accident the other day, and he asked me to dinner."

"Torrington. Yes. I had a brother at that school once," said Lord George, "but you and Hay wouldn't get on well together, I should think. You're straight, and he's—"

"You forget, we have been dining with him," said Paul, quickly.

"What of that. I've dined often and have paid pretty dearly for the privilege. I must have lost at least five thousand to him within the last few months."

"In that case I should advise you to play cards no more. The remedy is easy," said Paul, dryly.

"It isn't so easy to leave off cards," rejoined Sandal, gloomily. "I'm that fond of gambling that I only seem to live when I've got the cards or dice in my hand. I suppose it's like dram-drinking."

"If you take my advice, Lord George, you'll give up card-playing."

"With Hay, do you mean?" asked the other, shrewdly.

"With anyone. I know nothing about Hay beyond what I have told you."

"Humph," said Sandal, "I don't think you're a chap like him at all. I may look a fool, but I ain't, and can see through a brick wall same as most Johnnies."

"Who can't see at all," interpolated Paul, dryly.

"Ha! ha! that's good. But I say about this Hay. What a queer lot he had there to-night."

"I can't discuss that," said Paul, stiffly. He was not one to eat a man's bread and salt and then betray him.

Sandal went on as though he hadn't heard him. "That actress is a jolly little woman," said he. "I've seen her at the Frivolity—a ripping fine singer and dancer she is. But those other ladies?"

"Mrs. and Miss Krill."

The young lord stopped short in the High Street. "Where have I heard that name?" he said, looking up to the stars; "somewhere—in the country maybe. I go down sometimes to the Hall—my father's place. I don't suppose you'd know it. It's three miles from Christchurch."

"In Hants," said Paul, feeling he was on the verge of a discovery.

"Yes. Have you been there?"

"No. But I have heard of the place. There's an hotel there called 'The Red Pig,' which I thought—"

"Ha!" cried young Sandal, stopping again, and with such a shout that passers-by thought he was drunk. "I remember the name. 'The Red Pig'; a woman called Krill kept that."

"She can hardly be the same," said Paul, not wishing to betray the lady.

"No. I guess not. She'd hardly have the cheek to sit down with me if she did. But Krill. Yes, I remember—my aunt, you know."

"Your aunt?"

"Yes," said Sandal, impatiently, "she was murdered, or committed suicide in that 'Red Pig' place. Rachel Sandal—with her unlucky opals."

"Her unlucky opals! What do you mean?"

"Why, she had a serpent set with opals she wore as a brooch, and it brought her bad luck."

Chapter XVI

Sylvia's theory

It was close upon midnight when Paul reached his garret. Sandal drove him in a hansom as far as Piccadilly Circus, and from that place Beecot

walked through Oxford Street to Bloomsbury. He had not been able to extract further information of any importance from the young lord. It appeared that Lady Rachel Sandal, in love with an inferior, had quarrelled with her father, and had walked to Christchurch one night with the intention of joining the man she wished to marry in London. But the night was stormy and Lady Rachel was a frail woman. She took refuge in "The Red Pig," intending to go the next morning. But during the night she was found strangled in the bedroom she had hired. Sandal could give no details, as the events happened before he was born, and he had only heard scraps of the dreadful story.

"Some people say Lady Rachel was murdered," explained Sandal, "and others that she killed herself. But the opal brooch, which she wore, certainly disappeared. But there was such a scandal over the affair that my grandfather hushed it up. I can't say exactly what took place. But I know it happened at a small pub kept by a woman called Krill. Do you think this woman is the same?"

"It's hardly likely," said Paul, mendaciously. "How could a woman who kept a small public house become suddenly rich?"

"True," answered Lord George, as they stopped in the Circus, "and she'd have let on she knew about my name had she anything to do with the matter. All the same, I'll ask her."

"Do so," said Paul, stepping out of the cab. He was perfectly satisfied that Mrs. Krill was quite equal to deceiving Sandal. The wonder was, that she had not held her peace to him about "The Red Pig."

"You won't come on to my club?" asked Sandal, leaning out of the cab.

"No, thank you," replied Paul. "Good-night," and he walked away.

The fact is Beecot wished to put on paper all that he had heard that night and send it to Hurd. As soon as he reached his attic he set to work and wrote out a detailed account of the evening.

"You might find out if Lady Rachel committed suicide or whether she was strangled by someone else," ended Beecot. "Certainly the mention of the serpent brooch is curious. This may be the event in Norman's past life which led him to change his name."

Paul wrote much more and then went out to post the letter. It was after midnight when he did, so there was not much chance of Hurd getting the letter before the second or third post the next day. But Paul felt that he had done his duty, and had supplied the information as speedily as possible, so he went to sleep with a quiet mind, in spite of the excitement of the evening. But next morning he was unable to sit down to his desk as usual, and felt disinclined to go to the newspaper office, so he walked to Jubileetown to see how Sylvia was getting along. Deborah met him at the gate.

“Well I never, Mr. Beecot,” said Mrs. Tawsey, with her red arms akimbo in her usual attitude; “this is a sight for sore eyes. Won’t my pretty be ‘appy this day, say what you may. She’s a-makin’ out bills fur them as ‘ad washin’ done, bless her ‘eart for a clever beauty.”

“How is business?” asked Paul, entering the gate, which Deborah opened.

“Bless you, Mr. Beecot, I’ll be a lady of forting soon,” answered the proprietress of the laundry, “the way washing ‘ave come in is jest amazin’. One ‘ud think folk never ‘ad no linen done up afore, and that they never did ‘ave,” said Deborah, rubbing her nose hard, “in my way, which is a way. If you’d only send along your shirts, Mr. Beecot, I’d be proud to show you what can be done with fronts, an’ no thumbnails down them to spile their loveliness.”

Paul did not reply to this, but laughed absently. He was wondering if Deborah had ever heard her master drop any hint as to his having come from the place where Mrs. Krill resided, and asked the question on the spur of the moment.

“Do you know Christchurch in Hants?”

Deborah rubbed her nose harder and looked at him doubtfully.

“Me as said as I’d no relatives must tell the truth now, as I ‘ave,” said she rather incoherently, “for my sister, Tilly Junk, worked for someone in that there place for years. But we never got on well, she being upsettin’ and masterful, so arsk her to my weddin’ I didn’t, and denied relatives existing, which they do, she bein’ alive ten years ago when she larst wrote.”

“You have not heard from her since?” asked Paul, inquisitively.

“Sir, you may burn me or prison me or put me in pillaries,” said Mrs. Tawsey, “but deceive you I won’t. Me an’ Tilly not bein’ of ‘appy matchin’ don’t correspond. We’re Londing both,” exclaimed Deborah, “father ‘avin’ bin a ‘awker, but why she went to the country, or why I stopped in Gwynne Street, no one knows. And may I arsk, Mr. Beecot, why you arsk of that place?”

“Your late master came from Christchurch, Mrs. Tawsey. Did you never hear him mention it?”

“That I never did, for close he was, Mr. Beecot, say what you like. I never knowed but what he’d pawned and sold them bookses all his blessed life, for all the talkin’ he did. If I’d ha’ knowd,” added Deborah, lifting her red finger, “as he’d bin married afore and intended to cast out my lovely queen, I’d ha’ strangled him myself.”

“He had no intention of casting out Sylvia,” said Paul, musingly; “he certainly left the money to her.”

“Then why ‘ave that other got it?”

“Sylvia’s name wasn’t mentioned, and Miss Krill is legally entitled as the legitimate daughter.”

“Call her what you like, she’s a cat as her mother is afore her,” said Mrs. Tawsey, indignantly, “and not young at that. Thirty and over, as I’m a livin’ woman.”

“Oh, I don’t think Miss Krill is as old as that.”

“Being a man you wouldn’t, sir, men bein’ blind to wrinklins and paint. But paint she do, the hussey, and young she ain’t. Over thirty—if I die for the sayin’ of it.”

“But Mrs. Krill was married to your master only thirty years ago.”

“Then more shame to ‘er,” snapped Deborah, masterfully; “for she ain’t an honest woman if the signs of age is believing. Will I write to my sister Tilly, as I don’t love Mr. Beecot, and arsk if she knowed master when he

wos in that there place, which she can't 'ave, seeing she's bin there but ten year, and he away twenty?"

"No, Deborah, you'd better say nothing. The case is in Hurd's hands. I'll tell him what you say, and leave the matter to him. But you must be deceived about Miss Krill's age."

"I've got two eyes an' a nose," retorted Mrs. Tawsey, "so don't talk of deceivin's. Thirty and more she is, the hussey, let her Jezebel of a mar lie as she like, an' can say what you will, Mr. Beecot. But there's my pretty smilin' from the winder and the tub's a-waitin'; so you go in and smooth 'er to affections, while I see that Mrs. Purr irons the shirts, which she do lovely there's no denyin'. Hoh!" and Deborah plunged round the corner of the house, rampant and full of corn.

Paul walked through the newly-created garden, in which he saw many proofs of Sylvia's love for flowers, and reached the door in time to take the girl in his arms. She was flushed and joyful, and her eyes were as bright as stars. "Paul, darling," she said, as they entered the sitting-room, where she was struggling with the accounts, "I'm so glad you are here. What's nine times nine?"

"Eighty-one," said Paul, looking at the long list of figures Sylvia had been trying to add up. "Why do you make your head ache with these accounts, darling?"

"I must help Debby, Paul, and I get on very well with the aid of an arithmetic." And she pointed to a small school book which she had evidently been studying.

"Let me take the burden from your shoulders," said her lover, smiling, and sat down at the table which was strewn with bills. In about an hour he had arranged all these, and had made them out neatly to Deborah's various customers. Then he directed the envelopes, and Sylvia sealed them up. All the time they laughed and chatted, and despite the dull toil thoroughly enjoyed themselves. "But I am glad to see, Sylvia," said Beecot, pointing to three library volumes lying on the sofa, "that you enjoy yourself occasionally."

“Oh!” said Sylvia, pouncing on these, “I’m so glad you spoke, Paul; I wanted to say something to you. *The Confessions of a Thug*,” she read out, and looked at Paul. “Have you read it?”

Beecot nodded. “By Colonel Meadows Taylor. A very interesting book, but rather a bloodthirsty one for you, dearest.”

“Debby got it,” confessed Miss Norman, “along with some other books from a literary customer who could not pay his bill. It is very strange, Paul, that *The Confessions of a Thug* should be amongst the books.”

“Really I don’t see why,” smiled Beecot, fingering the old-fashioned volumes.

“It’s the finger of Fate, Paul,” said Sylvia, solemnly. Then seeing her lover look puzzled, “I mean, that I should find out what goor is?”

“Goor?” Paul looked more puzzled than ever.

“It’s an Indian word,” explained Sylvia, “and means coarse sugar. The Thugs eat it before they strangle anyone.”

“Oh,” laughed Beecot, “and you think your father was strangled by a Thug? My dear child, the Thugs were stamped out years ago. You’ll read all about it in the preface of that book, if I remember. But it’s long since I read the work. Besides, darling,” he added, drawing her to him caressingly, “the Thugs never came to England.”

“Paul,” said Sylvia, still more solemnly and resenting the laugh, “do you remember the Thug that came into the shop—”

“Oh, you mean the street-hawker that Bart spoke of. Yes, I remember that such an Indian entered, according to Bart’s tale, and wanted to sell boot-laces, while that young imp, Tray, was dancing on poor Bart’s body. But the Indian wasn’t a Thug, Sylvia.”

“Yes, he was,” she exclaimed excitedly. “Hokar, he said he was, and Hokar was a Thug. Remember the handful of coarse brown sugar he left on the counter? Didn’t Bart tell you of that?”

Paul started. “Yes, by Jove! he did,” was his reply.

“Well, then,” said Sylvia, triumphantly, “that sugar was goor, and the Thugs eat it before strangling anyone, and father was strangled.”

Beecot could not but be impressed. “It is certainly very strange,” he said, looking at the book. “And it was queer your father should have been strangled on the very night when this Indian Hokar left the sugar on the counter. A coincidence, Sylvia darling.”

“No. Why should Hokar leave the sugar at all?”

“Well, he didn’t eat it, and therefore, if he was a Thug, he would have done so, had he intended to strangle your father.”

“I don’t know,” said Sylvia, with a look of obstinacy on her pretty face. “But remember the cruel way in which my father was killed, Paul. It’s just what an Indian would do, and then the sugar—oh, I’m quite sure this hawker committed the crime.”

Beecot shook his head and strove to dissuade her from entertaining this idea. But Sylvia, usually so amenable to reason, refused to discard her theory, and indeed Paul himself thought that the incident of the sugar was queer. He determined to tell Hurd about the matter, and then the hawker might be found and made to explain why he had left the goor on the counter. “But the sect of the Thugs is extinct,” argued Paul, quickly; “it can’t be, Sylvia.”

“But it is,” she insisted, “I’m sure.” And from this firm opinion he could not move her. Finally, when he departed, he took the books with him, and promised to read the novel again. Perhaps something might come of Sylvia’s fancy.

The lovers spent the rest of the time in talking over their future, and Beecot looked hopefully towards making sufficient money to offer Sylvia a home. He also described to her how he had met Mrs. Krill and related what she was prepared to do. “Do you think we should accept the five hundred a year, Paul,” said Sylvia, doubtfully; “it would put everything right, and so long as I am with you I don’t care where we live.”

“If you leave the decision to me, darling,” said Paul, “I think it will be best to refuse this offer. Something is wrong, or Mrs. Krill would not be so anxious to get you out of the country.”

“Oh, Paul, do you think she knows anything about the murder?”

“No, dear. I don’t think that. Mrs. Krill is far too clever a woman to put her neck in danger. But there may be a chance of her daughter losing the money. Sylvia,” he asked, “you saw Maud Krill. How old would you take her to be?”

“Oh, quite old, Paul,” said Sylvia, decisively; “she dresses well and paints her face; but she’s forty.”

“Oh, Sylvia, not so much as that.”

“Well, then, thirty and over,” insisted Sylvia. “Debby thinks the same as I do.”

“Don’t you think Debby’s zeal may lead her to exaggerate?”

“It doesn’t lead me to exaggerate,” said Sylvia, slightly offended; “and I have eyes in my head as well as Debby. That girl, or that woman, I should say, is over thirty, Paul.”

“In that case,” said Beecot, his color rising, “I fancy I see the reason of Mrs. Krill’s desire to get you out of the country. Maud,” he added deliberately, “may not be your father’s daughter after all.”

“What makes you think that?”

“Well. According to the marriage certificate, and to Mrs. Krill’s admission, she was married to your father thirty years ago. If Maud is over thirty—can’t you see, Sylvia?”

“Yes.” Sylvia colored. “You mean she may be the same as I am?”

“Not exactly, dear,” replied Paul, soothing her. “I mean that Mrs. Krill may have been a widow and have had her little girl with her when she married your father. In that case Maud certainly could not get the money, and so Mrs. Krill wants you to leave England.”

“In case I would get it,” said Sylvia, excited.

Paul looked puzzled and rather sad. “I can’t say, dear,” he replied doubtfully. “Certainly the money is left to ‘my daughter,’ but as the

marriage with your mother unfortunately is void, I fear you would not inherit. However,” he said grimly, “there would be a certain pleasure in taking the money from that woman. Maud is a mere puppet in her hands,” he laughed. “And then Hay would marry a poor bride,” he ended maliciously.

Sylvia could not quite understand all this, and gave up trying to solve the problem with a pretty gesture of indifference. “What will you do, Paul?” she asked.

“I’ll see Hurd and tell him what you and Deborah say about the age of Maud Krill.”

“Why not see Mr. Pash?”

“Because he is a traitor,” replied Beecot, darkly, “and, knowing he has lost your confidence, he will certainly try and give Maud Krill possession of the money. No, I’ll speak to Hurd, who is my friend and yours. He is clever and will be able to unravel this tangle.”

“Tell him about the goor also, Paul.”

“Yes. I’ll explain everything I can, and then I’ll get him to go down to Christchurch and see what happened there, when your father lived with Maud’s mother.”

“What did happen, Paul?” asked Sylvia, anxiously.

“Nothing,” he replied with an assumption of carelessness, for he did not want to tell the girl about the fate of Lady Rachel Sandal, “but we may find in your father’s past life what led to his murder.”

“Do you think Mrs. Krill had anything to do with it?”

“My own, you asked that question before. No, I don’t. Still, one never knows. I should think Mrs. Krill is a dangerous woman, although I fancy, too clever to risk being hanged. However, Hurd can find out if she was in town on the night your father was killed.”

“That was on the sixth of July,” said Sylvia.

“Yes. And he was murdered at twelve.”

“After twelve,” said Sylvia. “I heard the policeman on his beat at a quarter-past, and then I came down. Poor father was strangled before our very eyes,” she said, shuddering.

“Hush, dear. Don’t speak of it,” said Paul, rising. “Let us talk of more interesting subjects.”

“Paul, I can think of nothing till I learn who killed my poor father, and why he was killed so cruelly.”

“Then we must wait patiently, Sylvia. Hurd is looking after the matter, and I have every confidence in Hurd. And, by Jove!” added Beecot, with an after-thought, “Mrs. Krill doubled the reward. Were she concerned in the matter she would not risk sharpening the wits of so clever a man as Hurd. No, Sylvia, whosoever strangled your father it was not Mrs. Krill.”

“It was this Indian,” insisted Sylvia, “and he’s a Thug.”

Paul laughed although he was far from thinking she might be wrong. Of course it seemed ridiculous that a Thug should strangle the old man. In the first place, the Thugs have been blotted out; in the second, if any survived, they certainly would not exercise their devilish religion in England, and in the third, Hoken, putting aside his offering strangled victims to Bhowanee, the goddess of the sect, had no reason for slaying an unoffending man. Finally, there was the sailor to be accounted for—the sailor who had tried to get the jewels from Pash. Paul wondered if Hurd had found out anything about this individual. “It’s all very difficult,” sighed Beecot, “and the more we go into the matter the more difficult does it get. But we’ll see light some day. Hurd, if anyone, will unravel the mystery,” and Sylvia agreed with him.

Chapter XVII

Hurd’s Information

For the next day or two Paul was kept closely to work in the office, reading a number of tales which were awaiting his judgment. After hours, he several times tried to see Billy Hurd, but was unable to meet him. He left a note at the Scotland Yard office, asking if Hurd had received his communication regarding Mrs. Krill, and if so, what he proposed to do concerning it. Hurd did not reply to this note, and Paul

was growing puzzled over the silence of the detective. At length the answer came, not in writing, but in the person of Hurd himself, who called on Beecot.

The young man had just finished his frugal meal and was settling down to an evening's work when there came a knock to the door. Hurd, dressed in his usual brown suit, presented himself, looking cool and composed. But he was more excited than one would imagine, as Paul saw from the expression of his eyes. The detective accepted a cup of coffee and lighted his pipe. Then he sat down in the arm-chair on the opposite side of the fireplace and prepared to talk. Paul heaped on coals with a lavish hand, little as he could afford this extravagance, as the night was cold and he guessed that Hurd had much to say. So, on the whole, they had a very comfortable and interesting conversation.

"I suppose you are pleased to see me?" asked Hurd, puffing meditatively at his briar.

Paul nodded. "Very glad," he answered, "that is, if you have done anything about Mrs. Krill?"

"Well," drawled the detective, smiling, "I have been investigating that murder case."

"Lady Rachel Sandal's?" said Beecot, eagerly. "Is it really murder?"

"I think so, though some folks think it suicide. Curious you should have stumbled across that young lord," went on Hurd, musingly, "and more curious still that he should have been in the room with Mrs. Krill without recollecting the name. There was a great fuss made about it at the time."

"Oh, I can understand Lord George," said Beecot, promptly. "The murder, if it is one, took place before he was born, and as there seems to have been some scandal in the matter, the family hushed it up. This young fellow probably gathered scraps of information from old servants, but from what he said to me in the cab, I think he knows very little."

"Quite enough to put me on the track of Lemuel Krill's reason for leaving Christchurch."

“Is that the reason?”

“Yes. Twenty-three years ago he left Christchurch at the very time Lady Rachel was murdered in his public-house. Then he disappeared for a time, and turned up a year later in Gwynne Street with a young wife whom he had married in the meantime.”

“Sylvia’s mother?”

“Exactly. And Miss Norman was born a year later. She’s nearly twenty-one, isn’t she?”

“Yes. She will be twenty-one in three months.”

Hurd nodded gravely. “The time corresponds,” said he. “As the crime was committed twenty-three years back and Lord George is only twenty, I can understand how he knows so little about it. But didn’t he connect Mrs. Krill with the man who died in Gwynne Street?”

“No. She explained that. The name of Krill appeared only a few times in the papers, and was principally set forth with the portrait, in the hand-bills. I shouldn’t think Lord George was the kind of young man to bother about hand-bills.”

“All the same, he might have heard talk at his club. Everyone isn’t so stupid.”

“No. But, at all events, he did not seem to connect Mrs. Krill with the dead man. And even with regard to the death of his aunt, he fancied she might not be the same woman.”

“What an ass he must be,” said Hurd, contemptuously.

“I don’t think he has much brain,” confessed Paul, shrugging his shoulders; “but he asked me if I thought Mrs. Krill was the same as the landlady of ‘The Red Pig,’ and I denied that she was. I don’t like telling lies, but in this case I hope the departure from truth will be pardoned.”

“You did very right,” said the detective. “The fewer people know about these matters the better—especially a chatterbox like this young fool.”

“Do you know him?”

“Yes, under the name of the Count de la Tour. But I know of him in another way, which I’ll reveal later. Hay is still fleecing him?”

“He is. But Lord George seems to be growing suspicious of Hay,” and Paul related the conversation he had with the young man.

Hurd grunted. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I want to catch Hay red-handed, and if Lord George grows too clever I may not be able to do so.”

“Well,” said Paul, rather impatiently, “never mind about that fellow just now, but tell me what you have discovered.”

“Oh, a lot of interesting things. When I got your letter, of course I at once connected the opal serpent with Aaron Norman, and his change of name with the murder. I knew that Norman came to Gwynne Street over twenty years ago—that came out in the evidence connected with his death. Therefore, putting two and two together, I searched in the newspapers of that period and found what I wanted.”

“A report of the case?”

“Precisely. And after that I hunted up the records at Scotland Yard for further details that were not made public. So I got the whole story together, and I am pretty certain that Aaron Norman, or as he then was, Lemuel Krill, murdered Lady Rachel for the sake of that precious brooch.”

“Ah,” said Paul, drawing a breath, “now I understand why he fainted when he saw it again. No wonder, considering it was connected in his mind with the death of Lady Rachel.”

“Quite so. And no wonder the man kept looking over his shoulder in the expectation of being tapped on the shoulder by a policeman. I don’t wonder also that he locked up the house and kept his one eye on the ground, and went to church secretly to pray. What a life he must have led. Upon my soul, bad as the man was, I’m sorry for him.”

“So am I,” said Paul. “And after all, he is Sylvia’s father.”

“Poor girl, to have a murderer for a father!”

Beecot turned pale. "I love Sylvia for herself," he said, with an effort, "and if her father had committed twenty murders I would not let her go. But she must never know."

"No," said Hurd, stretching his hand across and giving Paul a friendly grip, "and I knew you'd stick to her. It wouldn't be fair to blame the girl for what her father did before she was born."

"We must keep everything from her, Hurd. I'll marry her and take her abroad sooner than she should learn of this previous murder. But how did it happen?"

"I'll tell you in a few minutes." Hurd rose and began to pace the narrow limits of the attic. "By the way, do you know that Norman was a secret drinker of brandy?"

Paul nodded, and told the detective what he had learned from Mrs. Krill. Hurd was much struck with the intelligence. "I see," said he; "what Mrs. Krill says is quite true. Drink does change the ordinary nature into the opposite. Krill sober was a timid rabbit; Krill drunk was a murderer and a thief. Good lord, and how he drank!"

"How do you know?"

"Well," confessed Hurd, nursing his chin, "Pash and I went to search the Gwynne Street house to find, if possible, the story alluded to in the scrap of paper Deborah Junk found. We couldn't drop across anything of that sort, but in Norman's bedroom, which nobody ever entered, we found brandy bottles by the score. Under the bed, ranged along the walls, filling cupboards, stowed away in boxes. I had the curiosity to count them. Those we found, ran up to five hundred, and Lord knows how many more he must have got rid of when he found the bottles crowding him inconveniently."

"I expect he got drunk every night," said Paul, thinking. "When he locked up Sylvia and Deborah in the upper room—I can understand now why he did so—he could go to the cellar and take possession of the shop key left on the nail by Bart. Then, free from all intrusion, he could drink till reeling. Not that I think he ever did reel," went on Beecot, mindful of what Mrs. Krill had said; "he could stand a lot, and I expect the brandy only converted him into a demon."

“And a clever business man,” said Hurd. “You know Aaron Norman was not clever over the books. Bart sold those, but from all accounts he was a Shylock when dealing, after seven o’clock, in the pawnbroking way. I understand now. Sober, he was a timid fool; drunk, he was a bold, clever villain.”

“My poor Sylvia, what a father,” sighed Paul; “but this crime—”

“I’ll tell you about it. Lemuel Krill and his wife kept ‘The Red Pig’ at Christchurch, a little public house it is, on the outskirts of the town, frequented by farm-laborers and such-like. The business was pretty good, but the couple didn’t look to making their fortune. Mrs. Krill was a farmer’s daughter.”

“A Buckinghamshire farmer,” said Paul.

“How do you know? oh!”—on receiving information—“Mrs. Krill told you so? Well, considering the murder of Lady Rachel, she would have done better to hold her tongue and have commenced life with her dead husband’s money under a new name. She’s a clever woman, too,” mused Hurd, “I can’t understand her being so unnecessarily frank.”

“Never mind, go on,” said Paul, impatiently.

Hurd returned to his seat and re-filled his pipe. “Well, then,” he continued, “Krill got drunk and gave his wife great trouble. Sometimes he thrashed her and blacked her eyes, and he treated their daughter badly too.”

“How old was the daughter?”

“I can’t say. Why do you ask?”

“I’ll tell you later. Go on, please.”

“Well, then, Mrs. Krill always revenged herself on her husband when he was sober and timid, so the couple were evenly matched. Krill was master when drunk, and his wife mistress when he was sober. A kind of see-saw sort of life they must have led.”

“Where does Lady Rachel come in?”

“What an impatient chap you are,” remonstrated Hurd, in a friendly tone. “I’m coming to that now. Lady Rachel quarrelled with her father over some young artist she wanted to marry. He would not allow the lover to come to the Hall, so Lady Rachel said she would kill herself rather than give him up.”

“And she did,” said Paul, thinking of the suicide theory.

“There you go again. How am I to tell you all when you interrupt.”

“I beg your pardon. I won’t do so again.”

Hurd nodded smilingly and continued. “One night—it was dark and stormy—Lady Rachel had a row royal with her father. Then she ran out of the Hall saying her father would never see her alive again. She may have intended to commit suicide certainly, or she may have intended to join her lover in London. But whatever she intended to do, the rain cooled her. She staggered into Christchurch and fell down insensible at the door of ‘The Red Pig.’ Mrs. Krill brought her indoors and laid her on a bed.”

“Did she know who the lady was?”

Hurd shook his head. “She said in her evidence that she did not, but living in the neighborhood, she certainly must have seen Lady Rachel sometimes. Krill was drunk as usual. He had been boozing all the day with a skipper of some craft at Southampton. He was good for nothing, so Mrs. Krill did everything. She declares that she went to bed at eleven leaving Lady Rachel sleeping.”

“Did Lady Rachel recover her senses?”

“Yes—according to Mrs. Krill—but she refused to say who she was, and merely stated that she would sleep at ‘The Red Pig’ that night and would go on to London next morning. Mrs. Krill swore that Lady Rachel had no idea of committing suicide. Well, about midnight, Mrs. Krill, who slept in one room with her daughter, was awakened by loud shouts. She sprang to her feet and hurried out, her daughter came also, as she had been awakened and was terrified. Mrs. Krill found that her husband was raving mad with drink and smashing the furniture in the room below. The skipper—”

“What was the skipper’s name?”

“Jessop—Jarvey Jessop. Well, he also, rather drunk, was retiring to bed and stumbled by chance into Lady Rachel’s room. He found her quite dead and shouted for assistance. The poor lady had a silk handkerchief she wore tied tightly round her throat and fastened to the bedpost. When Jessop saw this, he ran out of the inn in dismay. Mrs. Krill descended to give the alarm to her neighbors, but Krill struck her down, and struck his daughter also, making her mouth bleed. An opal brooch that Lady Rachel wore was missing, but Mrs. Krill only knew of that the next day. She was insensible from the blow given by Krill, and the daughter ran out to get assistance. When the neighbors entered, Krill was gone, and notwithstanding all the search made for him he could not be found.”

“And Jessop?”

“He turned up and explained that he had been frightened on finding the woman dead. But the police found him on his craft at Southampton, and he gave evidence. He said that Krill when drunk, and like a demon, as Mrs. Krill told you, had left the room several times. The last time he came back, he and the skipper had a final drink, and then Jessop retired to find—the body. It was supposed by the police that Krill had killed Lady Rachel for the sake of the brooch, which could not be discovered—”

“But the brooch—”

“Hold on. I know what you are about to say. We’ll come to that shortly. Let me finish this yarn first. It was also argued that, from Lady Rachel’s last words to her father, and from the position of the body—tied by the neck to the bedpost—that she had committed suicide. Mrs. Krill, as I said, declared the deceased lady never mentioned the idea of making away with herself. However, Krill’s flight and the chance that, being drunk, he might have strangled the lady for the sake of the brooch while out of the room, made many think he was the culprit, especially as Jessop said that Krill had noticed the brooch and commented on the opals.”

“He was a traveller in jewels once, according to his wife.”

“Yes, and left that to turn innkeeper. Afterwards he vanished, as I say, and became a pawnbroker in Gwynne Street. Well, the jury at the inquest could not agree. Some thought Lady Rachel had committed suicide, and others that Krill had murdered her. Then the family didn’t want a scandal, so in one way and another the matter was hushed up. The jury brought in a verdict of suicide by a majority of one, so you can see how equally they were divided. Lady Rachel’s body was laid in the family vault, and nothing more was heard of Lemuel Krill.”

“What did Mrs. Krill do?”

“She stopped on at the inn, as she told you. People were sorry for her and helped her, so she did very well. Mother and daughter have lived at ‘The Red Pig’ all these years, highly respected, until they saw the hand-bills about Krill. Then the money was claimed, but as the circumstance of Lady Rachel’s fate was so old, nobody thought of mentioning it till this young lord did so to you, and I—as you see—have hunted out the details.”

“What is your opinion, Hurd?” asked Paul, deeply interested.

“Oh, I think Krill murdered the woman and then cut to London. That accounts for his looking over his shoulder, etc., about which we talked.”

“But how did he get money to start as a bookseller? Premises are not leased in Gwynne Street for nothing.”

“Well, he might have got money on the brooch.”

“No. The brooch was pawned by a nautical gentleman.” Paul started up. “Captain Jessop, perhaps. You remember?” he said excitedly.

“Ah,” said Hurd, puffing his pipe with satisfaction, “I see you understand. I mentioned that about the brooch to hear what you would say. Yes, Jessop must have pawned the brooch at Stowley, and it must have been Jessop who came with the note for the jewels to Pash.”

“Ha,” said Paul, walking excitedly about the room. “Then it would seem that Jessop and Krill were in league?”

“I think so,” said Hurd, staring at the fire. “And yet I am not sure. Jessop may have found that Krill had killed the woman, and then have made him give up the brooch, which he afterwards pawned at Stowley. Though why he should go near Mrs. Krill’s old home, I can’t understand.”

“Is Stowley near her old home?”

“Yes—in Buckinghamshire. However, after pawning the brooch I expect Jessop lost sight of Krill till he must have come across him a few days before the crime. Then he must have made Krill sign the paper ordering the jewels to be given up by Pash, so that he might get money.”

“A kind of blackmail in fact.”

“Well,” said Hurd, doubtfully, “after all, Jessop might have killed Krill himself.”

“But how did Jessop get the brooch?”

“Ah, that I can’t tell you, unless Norman himself picked it up in the street. We must find these things out. I’m going to Christchurch to make inquiries. I’ll let you know what I discover,” and Hurd rose.

“One minute,” said Paul, hastily. “Do you think Miss Krill is the dead man’s child?”

“Of course. She’s as like her mother as two peas. Why do you ask?”

Paul detailed what Sylvia and Deborah had said. “So if she is over thirty,” said Beecot, “she can’t be Krill’s child, or else she must have been born before Krill married his wife. In either case, she has no right to the money.”

“It’s strange,” said Hurd, musingly. “I’ll have to look into that. Meanwhile, I’ve got plenty to do.”

“There’s another thing I have to say.”

“You’ll confuse me, Beecot. What is it?”

“The sugar and that hawker,” and Paul related what Sylvia had said about Thuggism. Hurd sat down and stared. “That must be bosh,” he

said, looking at the novel, “and yet it’s mighty queer. I say,” he took the three volumes, “will you lend me these?”

“Yes. Be careful. They are not mine.”

“I’ll be careful. But I can’t dip into them just yet, nor can I go into the Hindoo business, let alone this age of Miss Krill. The first thing I have to do is to go to Christchurch and see—”

“And see if Mrs. Krill was at home on the night of the sixth of July.”

Hurd started. “Oh,” said he, dryly, “the night the crime was committed, you mean? Well, I didn’t intend to look up that point, as I do not see how Mrs. Krill can be implicated. However, I’ll take a note of that,” and this he did, and then continued. “But I’m anxious to find Jessop. I shouldn’t be at all surprised to learn that he committed the double crime.”

“The double crime?”

“Yes. He might have strangled Lady Rachel, and twenty years later have killed Krill. I can’t be sure, but I think he is the guilty person.”

Chapter XVIII

At Christchurch, Hants

The next afternoon Hurd was on his way to the former abode of Mrs. Krill. During the journey he glanced at his notes and arranged what inquiries he should make. It struck him as strange that Mrs. Krill should have told Paul of her association with “The Red Pig,” considering the reputation of the place, in connection with Lady Rachel Sandal’s murder—or suicide. It would have been better had Mrs. Krill changed her name by letters patent and have started a new life on her dead husband’s money. The detective could not understand the reason for this unnecessary frankness.

Before leaving town he took the precaution to call on Pash and note down a description of the sailor—presumably Jessop—who had tried to obtain possession of the jewels on the morning after the crime had been committed in Gwynne Street. He learned that the man (who had given no name) was tall and stout, with the flushed skin of a habitual drinker

of strong waters, and reddish hair mixed with grey. He also had a scar running from his right temple to his mouth, and although this was partly concealed by a beard, yet it was distinctly visible. The man was dressed in blue serge, carried his large hands slightly clenched, and rolled in his gait. Hurd noted these things down, and had little doubt but what he would recognize the man if he came across him. Connecting him with the individual who had pawned the brooch at Stowley, Hurd fancied he might be Jessop. He resolved to look for him in Southampton, as, judging from the evidence given at the inquest on Lady Rachel's remains, that was the port of call for the mariner.

At the station immediately before that of Christchurch, Hurd glanced at a telegram which he produced out of his pocket-book, and then leaned out of the carriage window. A pretty, daintily-dressed little woman saw him and at once entered the carriage with a gay laugh. She was Miss Aurora Qian, and Paul would have been considerably astonished had he overheard her conversation with Mr. Hurd. But the detective and the actress had the compartment to themselves, and talked freely.

"It's the safest place to talk in," explained Miss Qian, producing a bag of chocolate and eating during the conversation. "Of course, I told the landlady at 'The Red Pig' that my brother was coming down, so we can go there right enough. But walls have ears. I don't think railway carriages have, though, and we have much to say, Billy."

"Have you found out anything, Aurora?" asked Hurd.

Miss Qian nodded. "A great deal considering I have been in the place only twenty-four hours. It's a good thing I'm out of an engagement, Billy, or I shouldn't have time to leave London or to look after that man Hay. I *am* a good sister."

"Well, you are. But there's money in the business also. If I can get that thousand pounds, you'll have your share."

"I know you'll treat me straight, Billy," said the actress, with much satisfaction. "I always say that my brother is as square a man as I know."

"The deuce you do," said Hurd, rather vexed. "I hope you don't go telling everyone that I am your brother, Aurora?"

“Only one or two special friends—not Hay, you may be sure. Nor does that nice Mr. Beecot know that we are brother and sister.”

“You’d best keep it dark, and say nothing, Aurora. It’s just as well you left the private detective business and went on the stage. You talk too much.”

“Oh, no, I don’t,” retorted Miss Qian, eating a sweet. “Don’t be nasty, Billy, or I’ll tell you nothing.”

Her brother shrugged his shoulders. He was very fond of Aurora, but he saw her many faults, and she certainly had too long a tongue for one engaged in private matters. “What about Hay?” he asked.

Aurora raised her eyes. “I thought you wanted to know of my discoveries at Christchurch,” she said, pouting.

“Well, I do. But Hay?—”

“Oh, he’s all right. He’s going to marry Miss Krill and her money, and is getting cash together by fleecing young Sandal. That fool *will* play, and keeps losing his money, although I’ve warned him.”

“Then don’t warn him. I wish to catch Hay red-handed.”

“Ah,” Miss Qian nodded, “you may catch him red-handed in a worse matter than gambling.”

“Aurora, you don’t mean to say he has anything to do with the murder of Aaron Norman?”

“Well, I don’t go so far as to say that, Billy. But when I got settled in the private sitting-room of ‘The Red Pig’ on the plea that I had come down for a change of air, and expected my brother—”

“Which you do without any lies.”

“Yes, that’s all right, Billy,” she said impatiently. “Well, the first thing I clapped eyes on was a portrait of Grexon Hay in a silver frame on the mantelpiece.”

“Hum,” said Hurd, nursing his chin in his hand, “he may have given that to Miss Krill during the engagement.”

“I daresay,” rejoined the actress, tartly, “for he has been engaged for many a long day—say two years.”

“I thought so,” said Hurd, triumphantly. “I always fancied the meeting at Pash’s office was a got-up thing.”

“What made you think so?”

“Because, when disguised as the Count de la Tour, I overheard Hay address Miss Krill as Maud, and it was the first time she and her mother came to his rooms. Sandal was there, and gambling went on as usual. I lost money myself,” said Hurd, with a grimace, “in order to make Hay think I was another pigeon to pluck. But the mention of the Christian name on so short an acquaintance showed me that Hay and Miss Krill had met before. I expect the meeting at Pash’s office was a got-up game.”

“You said that before, Billy. How you repeat yourself! Yes. There’s an inscription on the portrait—‘From Grexon to Maud with much love’—sweet, isn’t it? when you think what an icicle the man is. There is also a date—two years ago the photograph was given. I admired the photograph and asked the landlady who was the swell.”

“What’s the landlady’s name?”

“Matilda Junk.”

Hurd almost jumped from his seat. “That’s queer,” he said, “the woman who is devoted to Miss Norman and who nursed her since she was a baby is called Deborah Junk.”

“I know that,” said Aurora, “I’m not quite a fool, Billy. I mentioned Deborah Junk, whom I saw at the inquest on Norman’s body. The landlady said she was her sister, but she had not heard of her for ages. And this Matilda is just like Deborah in looks—a large Dutch doll with beady eyes and a badly painted face.”

“Well, that’s a point,” said Hurd, making a note. “What did she say about the photograph?”

“Oh, that it was one of Mr. Hay who was Miss Krill’s young man, and that they had been engaged for two years—”

“Matilda seems to be a chatterbox.”

“She is. I got a lot out of her.”

“Then there can be nothing to conceal on the part of Mrs. Krill?”

“Well,” said Aurora, throwing the empty sweetmeat bag out of the window and brushing her lap, “so far as I can discover, Mrs. Krill is a perfectly respectable person, and has lived for thirty years as the landlady of ‘The Red Pig.’ Matilda acknowledged that her mistress had inherited the money of Lemuel Krill, and Matilda knows all about the murder.”

“Matilda is wrong,” said the detective, dryly; “Miss Krill gets the money.”

Aurora smiled. “From what I heard, Miss Krill has to do what her mother tells her. She’s nobody and her mother is all the world. Matilda confessed that her mistress had behaved very well to her. When the money came, she gave up ‘The Red Pig’ to Matilda Junk, who is now the landlady.”

“With a proviso she should hold her tongue.”

“No. Mrs. Krill, so far as I can learn, has nothing to conceal. Even if it becomes known in London that she was the landlady of a small pub, I don’t think it will matter.”

“Did you ask questions about Lady Rachel’s murder?”

“No. You gave me only a hint when you sent me down. I didn’t like to venture on ground I wasn’t sure of. I’m more cautious than you.”

“Well, I’ll tell you everything now,” said Hurd, and gave a rapid sketch of what he had learned from the newspapers and the Scotland Yard papers relative to the Sandal affair. Aurora nodded.

“But Matilda Junk said nothing of that. She merely stated that Mr. Lemuel Krill had gone to London over twenty years ago, and that his wife knew nothing of him until she saw the hand-bills.”

“Hum,” said Hurd again, as the train slowed down to the Christchurch station, “it seems all fair and above board. What about Jessop?”

“Knowing so little of the Lady Rachel case, I didn’t inquire about him,” said Aurora. “I’ve told you everything.”

“Anyone else stopping at the inn?”

“No. And it’s not a bad little place after all. The rooms are clean and the food good and the charges low. I’d rather stop at ‘The Red Pig,’ small as it is, than at the big hotel. The curries—oh, they are delightfully hot!” Miss Qian screwed her small face into a smile of ecstasy. “But, then, a native makes them.”

Hurd started. “Curries—a native?”

“Yes—a man called Hokar.”

“Aurora, that’s the man who left the sugar on the counter of Norman’s shop. I forgot you don’t know about that,” and Hurd rapidly told her of the episode.

“It’s strange,” said Miss Qian, nodding with a faraway look. “It would seem that Mrs. Krill knew of the whereabouts of her husband before she saw the hand-bills.”

“And possibly about the murder also,” said Hurd.

Brother and sister looked at one another; the case was becoming more and more interesting. Mrs. Krill evidently knew more than she chose to admit. But at this moment the train stopped, and they got out. Hurd took his handbag and walked into the town with his pretty sister tripping beside him. She gave him an additional piece of information before they arrived at “The Red Pig.” “This Hokar is not at all popular,” she said; “they say he eats cats and dogs. Yes. I’ve talked to several old women, and they say they lost their animals. One cat was found strangled in the yard, and—”

“Strangled!” interrupted the detective. “Hum, and the man’s an Indian, possibly a Thug.”

“What’s a Thug?” asked Aurora, staring.

Hurd explained. "I ran through the book lent by Beecot last night," he added, "and was so interested I sat up till dawn—"

"You do look chippy," said his sister, candidly, "but from what you say, there are no Thugs living."

"No, the author says so. Still, it's queer, this strangling, and then the cruel way in which the man was murdered. Just what a Hindoo would do. The sugar too—"

"Oh, nonsense! Hoka left the sugar by mistake. If he had intended to murder Norman he wouldn't have given himself away."

"I expect he never thought anyone would guess he was a Thug. The novel is not one usually read nowadays. It was the merest chance that Miss Norman came across it and told Beecot."

"I don't believe in such coincidences," said Aurora, dryly; for in spite of her fluffy, kittenish looks, she was a very practical person. "But here we are at 'The Red Pig.' Nice and comfy, isn't it?"

The inn was certainly very pretty. It stood on the very verge of the town, and beyond stretched fields and hedgerows. The house itself was a white-washed, thatched, rustic cottage, with a badly painted sign of a large red sow. Outside were benches, where toppers sat, and the windows were delightfully old-fashioned, diamond-paned casements. Quite a Dickens inn of the old coaching days was "The Red Pig."

But Hurd gave the pretty, quaint hostel only a passing glance. He was staring at a woman who stood in the doorway shading her eyes with the palm of her hand from the setting sun. In her the detective saw the image of Deborah Junk, now Tawsey. She was of the same gigantic build, with the same ruddy face, sharp, black eyes and boisterous manner. But she had not the kindly look of Deborah, and of the two sisters Hurd preferred the one he already knew.

"This is my brother, Miss Junk," said Aurora, marching up to the door; "he will only stay until to-morrow."

“You’re welcome, sir,” said Matilda in a loud and hearty voice, which reminded the detective more than ever of her sister. “Will you please walk in and ‘ave some tea?”

Hurd nodded and repaired to the tiny sitting-room, where he saw the photograph of Hay on the mantelpiece. Aurora, at a hint from her brother, went to her bedroom to change her dress, and Hurd spoke to Matilda, when she brought in the tray. “I know your sister,” said he.

Miss Junk nearly dropped the tray. “Lor’, now, only think! Why, we ain’t wrote to one another for ten years. And I left London eleven years back. And how is she, sir? and where is she?”

“She is well; she has a laundry in Jubileetown near London, and she is married to a fellow called Bart Tawsey.”

“Married!” cried Matilda, setting down the tray and putting her arms akimbo, just like Deborah, “lor’, and me still single. But now I’ve got this ‘ouse, and a bit put by, I’ll think of gittin’ a ‘usband. I ain’t a-goin’ to let Debby crow over me.”

“Your sister was in the service of Mr. Norman before she took up the laundry,” observed Hurd, pouring out a cup of tea.

“Was she, now? And why did she leave?”

The name of Norman apparently was unknown to Matilda, so Hurd tried the effect of another bombshell. “Her master was murdered under the name of Lemuel Krill.”

“Mercy,” Matilda dropped into a chair, with a thud which shook the room; “why, that’s my ladies’ husband and father.”

“What ladies?” asked Hurd, pretending ignorance.

“My ladies, Mrs. Krill and Miss Maud. They had this ‘ouse, and kep’ it for years respectable. I worked for ‘em ten, and when my ladies comes in for a forting, for a forting there is, they gave me the goodwill of ‘The Red Pig.’ To think of Debby being the servant of poor Mr. Krill as was killed. Who killed ‘im?”

“Doesn’t your mistress know?”

“She,” cried Matilda, indignantly, and bouncing up. “Why, she was always a-lookin’ for him, not as she loved him over much. And as he is dead, sir, it’s no more as what he oughter be, seeing as he killed a poor lady in this very ‘ouse. You’ll sleep in ‘er room to-night,” added Matilda, as if that was a pleasure. “Strangled, she was.”

“I think I heard of that. But Lady Rachel Sandal committed suicide.”

Matilda rubbed her nose, after the Deborah fashion. “Well, sir, my ladies were never sure which it was, and, of course, it was before my time considerable, being more nor twenty year back. But the man as did it is dead, and lef’ my ladies his money, as he oughter. An’ Miss Maud’s a-goin’ to marry a real gent”—Matilda glanced at the photograph—“I allays said he wos a gent, bein’ so ‘aughty like, and wearing evening dress at meals, late.”

“Was he ever down here, this gentleman?”

“He’s been comin’ and goin’ fur months, and Miss Maud loves ‘im somethin’ cruel. But they’ll marry now an’ be ‘appy.”

“I suppose your ladies sometimes went to see this gent in town?”

“Meanin’ Mr. Hay,” said Matilda, artlessly. “Well, sir, they did, one at a time and then together. Missis would go and miss would foller, an’ miss an’ missus together would take their joy of the Towers an’ shops and Madame Tusord’s and sich like, Mr. Hay allays lookin’ after ‘em.”

“Did they ever visit Mr. Hay in July?”

“No, they didn’t,” snapped Matilda, with a change of tone which did not escape Hurd; “and I don’t know, sir, why you arsk them questions.”

“My good woman, I ask no questions. If I do, you need not reply. Let us change the subject. My sister tells me you make good curries in this hotel.”

“Hokar do, me bein’ but a plain cook.”

“Oh! He’s an Indian?”

“Yes, he is, sir. A pore Indian castaway as missus took up with when he come here drenched with rain and weary. Ah, missus was allays good and kind and Christian-like.”

Privately Hurd thought this description did not apply very well to the lady in question, but he was careful not to arouse Matilda’s suspicions again by contradicting her. He pretended to joke. “I wonder you don’t marry this Indian, and keep him here always to make the curries I have heard of.”

“Me marry a black!” cried Matilda, tossing her rough head. “Well, sir, I never,” her breath failed her, “an’ him goin’ about the country.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“What I say,” said Miss Junk; “he’ll stop here, Christian-like, for days, and then go orf to sell things as a ‘awker. My par was a ‘awker, sir, but a white, white man of the finest.”

Hurd was about to ask another question when a husky voice was heard singing somewhat out of tune. “What’s that?” asked Hurd, irritably.

“Lor’, sir, wot nervses you ‘ave. ‘Tis only Cap’n Jessop makin’ hisself ‘appy-like.”

“Captain Jessop,” Hurd laughed. He had run down his man at last.

Chapter XIX

Captain Jessop

Apparently Matilda Junk was quite ignorant of anything being wrong about her ladies, although she did shirk the question regarding their possible visit to London in July. However, Hurd had learned that Grexon Hay not only was an old friend, but had been engaged to Maud for many months. This information made him the more certain that Hay had robbed Beecot of the opal brooch at the time of the accident, and that it had passed from Mr. Hay’s hands into those of the assassin.

“I wonder if Mrs. Krill murdered her husband in that cruel way,” thought the detective, sitting over his tea; “but what could have been her object? She could have gone up on learning from Hay that Aaron

Norman was her husband—as I believe she did—and could then have made him give her the money, by threatening him with the murder of Lady Rachel. I daresay Aaron Norman in his Krill days did strangle that lady to get the opal brooch and his wife could have used what she knew to govern him. There was no need of murder. Hum! I'll see about getting the truth out of Hay. Aurora," he cried. "Oh, there you are," he added, as she entered the room. "I want you to go back to town this night."

"What for, Billy?"

"Can you get Hay into trouble?"

Aurora nodded. "I have proofs of his cheating Lord George and others, if that's what you mean," she said; "but you didn't want them used."

"Nor do I. He's such an eel, he may wriggle out of our clutches. But can't you give a party and invite Lord George and Hay, and then get them to play cards. Should Hay cheat, denounce him to George Sandal."

"What good would that do?" asked Miss Qian, with widely open eyes.

"It will make Hay confess about the brooch to save himself from public shame. His reputation is his life, remember, and if he is caught red-handed cheating, he'll have to clear out of town."

"Pooh, as if that mattered. He's going to marry Miss Krill."

"If Miss Krill keeps the money, and I doubt if she will."

"But, Billy—"

"Never mind. Don't ask me any more questions, but go and pack. This Captain Jessop is in the bar drinking. I may probably have to arrest him. I got a warrant on the chance of finding him here. I can arrest him on suspicion, and won't let him go until I get at the truth. Your business is to bring Hay to his knees and get the truth out of him about the opal serpent. You know the case?"

"Yes," grumbled Aurora, "I know the case. But I don't like this long journey to-night."

“Every moment is precious. If I arrest Jessop, Matilda Junk will tell her ladies, who will speak to Hay, and then he may slip away. As the brooch evidence is so particular, and, as I believe he can give it, if forced, you can see the importance of losing no time.”

Miss Qian nodded and went away to pack. She wanted money and knew Billy would give her a goodly share of the reward. In a few minutes Miss Junk, of “The Red Pig,” learned that Miss Qian was suddenly summoned to town and would leave in an hour. Quite unsuspectingly she assisted her to pack, and shortly Aurora was driving in a hired vehicle to the railway station on her way to trap Grexon Hay.

When she was safely off the premises, Hurd walked to the telegraph office, and sent a cipher message to the Yard, asking for a couple of plain clothes policemen to be sent down. He wanted to have Hokar and Miss Matilda Junk watched, also the house, in case Mrs. Krill and her daughter should return. Captain Jessop he proposed to look after himself. But he was in no hurry to make that gentleman’s acquaintance, as he intended to arrest him quietly in the sitting-room after dinner. Already he had informed Matilda that he would ask a gentleman to join him at the meal and taste Hokar’s curry.

The thought of the curry brought the Indian to his mind, and when he got back to the Red Pig, he strolled round the house, inspecting the place, but in reality keeping eyes and ears open to talk to the Hindoo. Thinking he might meet the man some time, Hurd had carefully learned a few phrases relating to Thuggism—in English of course, since he knew nothing of the Indian tongues. These he proposed to use in the course of conversation with Hokar and watch the effect. Soon he found the man sitting cross-legged under a tree in the yard, smoking. Evidently his work for the day was over, and he was enjoying himself. Remembering the description given by Bart, the detective saw that this was the very man who had entered the shop of Aaron Norman. He wore the same dress and looked dirty and disreputable—quite a waif and a stray.

“Hullo,” said Hurd, casually, “what are you doing. Talk English, eh?”

“Yes, sir,” said Hokar, calmly. “I spike good Englis. Missionary teach Hokar Englis.”

“I’m glad of that; we can have a chat,” said Hurd, producing his pipe. He also produced something else with which he had provided himself on the way back from the post-office. In another minute Hoken was staring at a small parcel of coarse brown sugar. With all his Oriental phlegm the man could not keep his countenance. His eyes rolled until they threatened to drop out of his head, and he looked at Hurd with a certain amount of fear. “Goor,” said that gentleman, pointing to the sugar with the stem of his pipe, “goor!”

Hoken turned green under his dark skin, and half-rose to go away, but his legs failed him, and he sat still trying to recover himself. “So you worship Bhowanee?” went on his tormentor.

The Indian’s face expressed lively curiosity. “The great goddess.”

“Yes. Kalee, you know. Did you make Tupounee after you used your roomal on Aaron Norman?”

Hoken gave a guttural cry and gasped. Tupounee is the sacrifice made by the Thugs after a successful crime, and roomal the handkerchief with which they strangled their victims. All this was information culled from Colonel Meadow Taylor’s book by the accomplished detective. “Well,” said Hurd, smoking placidly, “what have you to say, Mr. Hoken?”

“I know nozzin’,” said the man, sullenly, but in deadly fear.

“Yes, you do. Sit still,” said Hurd, with sudden sternness. “If you try to run away, I’ll have you arrested. Eyes are on you, and you can’t take a step without my knowing.”

Some of this was Greek to the Indian, owing to his imperfect knowledge of English. But he understood that the law would lay hold of him if he did not obey this Sahib, and so sat still. “I know not anysing,” he repeated, his teeth chattering.

“Yes, you do. You’re a Thug.”

“Zer no Thug.”

“I agree with you,” said Hurd; “you are the last of the Mohicans. I want to know why you offered Aaron Norman to Bhowanee?”

Hokar made a strange sign on his forehead at the mention of the sacred name, and muttered something—perhaps a prayer—in his native tongue. Then he looked up. “I know nozzing.”

“Don’t repeat that rubbish,” said Hurd, calmly; “you sold boot laces in the shop in Gwynne Street on the day when its master was killed. And he was the husband of the lady who helped you—Mrs. Krill.”

“You say dat,” said Hokar, stolidly.

“Yes, and I can prove it. The boy Tray—and I can lay my hands on him—saw you, also Bart Tawsey, the shopman. You left a handful of sugar, though why you did so instead of eating it, I can’t understand.”

Hokar’s face lighted up, and he showed his teeth disdainfully. “Oh, you Sahibs know nozzin’!” said he, spreading out his lean brown hands. “Ze shops—ah, yis. I there, yis. But I use no roomal.”

“Not then, but you did later.”

Hokar shook his head. “I use no roomal. Zat Sahib one eye—bad, ver bad. Bhowanee, no have one eye. No Bhungees, no Bhats, no—”

“What are you talking about?” said Hurd, angrily. His reading had not told him that no maimed persons could be offered to the goddess of the Thugs. Bhungees meant sweepers, and Bhats bards, both of which classes were spared by the stranglers. “You killed that man. Now, who told you to kill him?”

“I know nozzin’, I no kill. Bhowanee no take one-eye mans.”

For want of an interpreter Hurd found it difficult to carry on the conversation. He rose and determined to postpone further examination till he would get someone who understood the Hindoo tongue. But in the meantime Hokar might run away, and Hurd rather regretted that he had been so precipitate. However, he nodded to the man and went off, pretty sure he would not fly at once.

Then Hurd went to the village police-office, and told a bucolic constable to keep his eye on Miss Junk’s “fureiner,” as he learned Hokar was called. The policeman, a smooth-faced individual, promised to do so,

after Hurd produced his credentials, and sauntered towards “The Red Pig,” at some distance from the detective’s heels. A timely question about the curry revealed, by the mouth of Miss Junk, that Hokar was still in the kitchen. “But he do seem alarmed-like,” said Matilda, laying the cloth.

“Let’s hope he won’t spoil the curry,” remarked Hurd. Then, knowing Hokar was safe, he went into the bar to make the acquaintance of his other victim.

Captain Jarvey Jessop quite answered to the description given by Pash. He was large and sailor-like, with red hair mixed with grey and a red beard that scarcely concealed the scar running from temple to mouth. He had drunk enough to make him cheerful and was quite willing to fall into conversation with Hurd, who explained himself unnecessarily. “I’m a commercial gent,” said the detective, calling for two rums, plain, “and I like talking.”

“Me, too,” growled the sailor, grasping his glass. “I’m here on what you’d call a visit, but I go back to my home to-morrow. Then it’s ho for Callao,” he shouted in a sing-song voice.

Hurd knew the fierce old chanty and sized Captain Jarvey up at once. He was of the buccaneer type, and there was little he would not do to make money and have a roaring time. Failing Hokar, with his deadly handkerchief, here was the man who might have killed Aaron Norman. “Drink up,” shouted Hurd in his turn, “we’ll have some more.

*“On no condition, is extradition,
Allowed in Callao.”*

“Gum,” said Captain Jessop, “you know the chanty.”

Hurd winked. “I’ve bin round about in my time.”

Jessop stretched out a huge hand. “Put it there, mate,” said he, with a roar like a fog-horn, “and drink up along o’ me. My treat.”

Hurd nodded and became jovial. “On condition you join me at dinner. They make good curries here.”

“I’ve had curry,” said Captain Jessop, heavily, “in Colombo and Hong-Kong frequent, but Hoken’s curries are the best.”

“Ah!” said Hurd in a friendly curious way, “so you know this shanty?”

Jessop looked at him with contempt. “Know this shanty,” said he, with a grin, “why, in coorse, I do. I’ve been swinging my hammock here time in and out for the last thirty year.”

“You’ll be a Christchurch man, then?”

“Not me, mate. I’m Buckinghamshire. Stowley born.”

Hurd with difficulty suppressed a start. Stowley was the place where the all-important brooch had been pawned by a nautical man, and here was the man in question. “I should have thought you’d lived near the sea,” he said cautiously, “say Southampton.”

“Oh, I used t’go there for my ship,” said the captain, draining his glass, “but I don’t go there no more.”

“Retired, eh?”

Jessop nodded and looked at his friend—as he considered Hurd, since the invitation to dinner—with a blood-shot pair of eyes. “Come storm, come calm,” he growled, “I’ve sailed the ocean for forty years. Yes, sir, you bet. I was a slip of a fifteen cabin-boy on my first cruise, and then I got on to being skipper. Lord,” Jessop smacked his knee, “the things I’ve seen!”

“We’ll have them to-night after dinner,” said Hurd, nodding; “but now, I suppose, you’ve made your fortune.”

“No,” said the captain, gloomily, “not what you’d call money. I’ve got a stand-by, though,” and he winked.

“Ah! Married to a rich wife?”

“Not me. I’ve had enough of marriage, having been the skipper of a mermaid with a tongue. No, sir,” he roared out another line of some song floating in his muzzy head, “a saucy bachelor am I,” then changed to gruff talk, “and I intends being one all my days. Stand-by, I have—

t'ain't a wife, but I can draw the money regular, and no questions asked." Again he winked and drank another glass.

Hurd reflected that perhaps Jessop had killed Aaron Norman for Mrs. Krill, and she was paying him blood-money. But he did not dare to press the question, as Jessop was coming perilously near what the Irish call "the cross drop." He therefore proposed an adjournment to the sitting-room. Jessop agreed quite unsuspectingly, not guessing he was being trapped. The man was so large and uncouth that Hurd felt behind his waist to see that his revolver was loose and could be used should occasion arise.

Miss Junk brought in the dinner with her own fair hands, and explained that Hokar had made the curry, but she didn't think it was as good as usual. "The man's shakin' like a jelly," said Matilda. "I don't know why."

The detective nodded, but did not encourage conversation. He was quite sure that Hokar was being watched by the smooth-faced policeman, and could not get away. Besides, he wished to talk to Captain Jessop. Miss Junk, seeing that she was not needed, retreated, after bringing in the curry, and left the gentlemen to help themselves. So here was Hurd in a pleasant room, seated before a well-spread table, and with a roaring fire at his back, waiting his opportunity to make Captain Jarvey Jessop confess his share in the dual murders of Lady Rachel Sandal and Aaron Norman.

Chapter XX

Part Of The Truth

Captain Jessop ate as greedily as he drank strong waters, and did full justice to the curry, which was really excellent. Hurd did not broach any unpleasant topic immediately, as he wished the man to enjoy his meal. If Jessop was guilty, this dainty dinner would be the last of its kind he would have for many a long day. Moreover, Hurd wished to learn more of the mariner's character, and plied him with questions, which the unsuspecting sailor answered amiably enough.

"Me an' you might become mates, as it were," said Jessop, extending his large hand again and again. "Put it there."

“Well, we’d want to know something more about one another to become real mates,” laughed Hurd.

“Oh, you’re a commercial traveller, as you say, and I’m the captain of as fine a barkey as ever sailed under Capricorn. Leastways I was, afore I gave up deep-sea voyages.”

“You must miss the ocean, living at Stowley.”

“Inland it is,” admitted the mariner, pulling out a dirty clay pipe, at the conclusion of the meal, “and ocean there ain’t round about fur miles. But I’ve got a shanty there, and live respectable.”

“You are able to, with the stand-by,” hinted Hurd.

Jessop nodded and crammed black tobacco, very strong and rank, into the bowl of his pipe with a shaking hand. “It ain’t much,” he admitted; “folks being stingy. But if I wants more,” he struck the table hard, “I can get it. D’ye see, Mister Commercial?”

“Yes, I see,” replied Hurd, coolly. Jessop was again growing cross, and the detective had to be careful. He knew well enough that next morning, when sober, Jessop would not be so disposed to talk, but being muzzy, he opened his heart freely. Still, it was evident that a trifle more liquor would make him quarrelsome, so Hurd proposed coffee, a proposition to which the sailor graciously assented.

“Cawfee,” he observed, lighting his pipe, and filling the room with evil-smelling smoke, “clears the ‘ead, not as mine wants clearing, mind you. But cawfee ain’t bad, when rum ain’t t’ be ‘ad.”

“You’ll have more rum later,” hinted Hurd.

“Put it there,” said Jessop, and again the detective was forced to wince at the strong grip of a horny hand.

Miss Junk appeared in answer to the tinkle of the bell and removed the food. Afterwards she brought in coffee, hot and strong and black, and Jessop drank two cups, with the result that he became quieter. Then the two men settled down for a pleasant conversation. At least, Jessop thought so, for he frequently expressed the friendliest sentiments

towards his host. Then Matilda appeared with a bottle of rum, a kettle and two glasses. When she departed, Hurd intimated that he would not require her services again that night. This he whispered to her at the door, while Jessop was placing the kettle on the fire, and before returning to his seat, he quietly turned the key. So he had the mariner entirely to himself and got to business at once while the kettle boiled.

“You have known this place for years I believe,” said Hurd, taking a chair opposite to that of Jessop. “Did you ever drop across a man, who used to live here, called Lemuel Krill?”

The other man started. “Whatever makes you arsk that?” he inquired in a husky voice.

“Well, you see, as a commercial I trade in books, and had to do with a second-hand bookseller in Gwynne Street, Drury Lane. It seems that he was murdered,” and he eyed Jessop attentively.

The sailor nodded and composed himself with a violent effort. “Yes,” said he in his husky voice, “so I heard. But what’s he got to do with Lemuel Krill?”

“Oh,” said Hurd, carelessly, “it is said Aaron Norman was Krill.”

“Might ha’ bin. I don’t know myself,” was the gruff reply.

“Ah! Then you did not know Lemuel Krill?”

“Well,” admitted the captain, reluctantly, “I did. He wos the landlord of this here pub, and a cuss to drink. Lor’, ‘ow he could drink, and did too. But he run away from his wife as used to keep this shanty, and she never heard no more of him.”

“Until she found he was rich and could leave her five thousand a year,” said Hurd, absently; “so like a woman.”

“You seem to know all about it, mister?” said the sailor, uneasily.

“Yes, I read the papers. A queer case that of Norman’s death. I expect it was only right he should be strangled seeing he killed Lady Rachel Sandal in the same way.”

Jessop, resting his hands on the arms of his chair, pushed it back and stared with a white face. "You know of that?" he gasped.

"Why not? It was public talk in this place over twenty years ago. I understand you have been here-abouts for thirty years," went on Hurd, carelessly, "possibly you may recollect the case."

Jessop wiped his forehead. "I heard something about it. That there lady committed suicide they say."

"I know what they say, but I want to know what you say?"

"I won't be arsked questions," shouted the captain, angrily.

"Don't raise your voice," said the detective, smoothly; "we may as well conduct this conversation pleasantly."

"I don't converse no more," said Jessop in a shaky voice, and staggered to his feet, rapidly growing sober under the influence of a deadly fear. Hurd did not move as the man crossed the room, but felt if the key was safe in his pocket. The sailor tried to open the door, and then realized that it was locked. He turned on his host with a volley of bad language, and found himself facing a levelled revolver.

"Sit down," said Hurd, quietly; "go back to your chair."

Jessop, with staring eyes and outspread hands, backed to the wall. "Who are you anyhow?" he demanded, hardly able to speak.

"Perhaps that will tell you," said Hurd, and threw the warrant on the table. Jessop staggered forward and looked at it. One glance was sufficient to inform him what it was, and he sank back into his chair with a groan, leaving the warrant on the table. Hurd picked it up and slipped it into his pocket. He thought Jessop might destroy it; but there was no fight in the mariner.

"And now that we understand one another," said Hurd, putting away his weapon, "I want to talk."

"Sha'n't talk," said Jessop, savagely.

"Oh, yes, I think so; otherwise I can make things unpleasant for you."

“You can’t arrest me. I’ve done nothing.”

“That may be so, but arrest you I can and I have done so now. Tomorrow morning you will go to London in charge of a plain-clothes policeman, while I go to Stowley.”

“To my crib. No, I’m blest if you do.”

“I sha’n’t go immediately to your crib,” rejoined Hurd, dryly, “though I may do so later. My first visit will be to that old pawnbroker. I think if I describe you—and you are rather a noticeable man, Captain Jessop—he will recognize the individual who pawned an opal serpent brooch with him shortly after the death of Lady Rachel Sandal, to whom the said brooch belonged.”

“It’s a lie,” said Jessop hoarsely, and sober enough now.

“Quite so, and perhaps it is also a lie that a man resembling yourself tried to get certain jewellery from a lawyer called Pash—”

Jessop lost his self-control, which he was trying desperately to preserve, and rose to his feet, white-faced and haggard. “Who are you?” he shouted, “who are you?”

“Doesn’t the warrant tell you,” replied his companion, not at all upset. “My name is Billy Hurd. I am the detective in charge of the Norman murder case. And I’ve been looking for you for a long time, Mr. Jessop.”

“I know nothing about it.”

“Yes, you do; so sit down and talk away.”

“I’ll break your head,” cried the captain, swinging his huge fists.

“Try,” Hurd whipped out his revolver, but did not rise, “at the risk of getting a bullet through you. Pshaw, man, don’t be a fool. I’m making things as easy for you as possible. Create a disturbance, and I’ll hand you over to the police. A night in the village lock-up may cool your blood. Sit down I tell you.”

The sailor showed his teeth like those of a snarling dog and made as to strike the seated detective; but suddenly changing his mind, for he saw

well enough in what danger he stood, he dropped into his chair, and, covering his face with his hands, groaned aloud. Hurd put away his revolver. "That's better," said he, pleasantly; "take a tot of rum and tell me all you know."

"I'm innocent," groaned Jessop.

"Every man is innocent until convicted by a jury," said Hurd, calmly. "Consider me a jury and I'll size up your case, when I hear all. Are you innocent of both murders?"

"Lady Rachel committed suicide," said Jessop, raising a haggard face. "Yes—I stick to that, sir. As to Krill's death in London, I didn't touch him; I swear I didn't."

"But you saw him on that night?"

"How can you prove that?"

"Very simply. Norman—or Krill if you prefer the old name—took certain jewellery to Pash for safe keeping shortly before his death. You presented to Pash a paper, undeniably written and signed by the old man, saying that the jewellery was to be given up to bearer. Now, before taking the jewellery to Pash, Krill could not have written that paper, so you must have seen him during the few hours which elapsed between his visit to Pash and his death."

This was clearly argued, and Jessop could not contradict. "I left him quite well and hearty."

"In the cellar in Gwynne Street?"

"Yes, in the cellar," admitted Jessop.

"At what time?"

"About half-past eight—say between eight and nine."

"Well, what happened?" asked Hurd, smoking quietly.

The sailor twisted his big hands and groaned. Then he laid his head on the table and began to sob, talking brokenly and huskily. "I'm done for,"

he gasped. "I'd know'd it would come—no—I ain't sorry. I've had a nightmare of a time. Oh—since I pawned that brooch—"

"Ah. Then you did pawn the brooch at Stowley?"

Jessop sat up and wiped his eyes. "Yes, I did. But I pulled my cap down over my eyes and buttoned up my pea-jacket. I never thought old Tinker would ha' knowed me."

"Wasn't it rather rash of you to pawn the brooch in a place where you were well known?"

"I wasn't well known. I only come at times, and then I went away. Old Tinker hadn't seen me more nor once or twice, and then I pulled down my cap and—" Jessop, badly shaken, was beginning to tell the episode over again, when Hurd stopped him.

"See here," said the detective. "You say that you are innocent?"

"I swear that I am," gasped Jessop.

"Well, then, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. My business is not to hang innocent people. Take a glass of rum and tell me all you know, beginning with your first meeting with Krill and running down through the death of Lady Rachel to your last meeting in the Gwynne Street cellar."

"And when you know all?"

"Then I'll see what is to be done."

"Will you arrest me?"

"I have arrested you. Don't make conditions with me, man," said Hurd, with a stern face. "The night is growing late and I want to get to the bottom of this business before we go to bed. Take some rum."

Seeing there was nothing for it but to make a clean breast, Captain Jarvey Jessop wasted no further time in useless lamentation. He could have smashed Hurd easily enough, even though there was the risk of being shot. But the fracas would bring others on the scene, and Jessop knew he could not deal with the police. Therefore, he took a stiff peg and

became quieter. In fact, when once started on his confession, he appeared to be rather relieved.

“It’s been a nightmare,” said he, wiping his forehead. “I’m glad it’s come to the lawr, that I am. I met Krill, as he wos then, some twenty-five year back by chance, as you may say”—he cast a strange look at the detective, which the latter noted—“yes, by chance, Mr. Hurd. I found he kep’ the pub here, and this bein’ no distance from Southampton I took to runnin’ down here when the barkey was at anchor. Me an’ Krill became great mates, and I’d what you might call free quarters here—yes, sir—it’s a frozen fact.”

“Very generous of Mr. Krill,” remarked Hurd, dryly, and wondering what the man was keeping back.

“Oh, he was right enough as a mate when not drunk; but the liquor made a howling dorg of him. I’ve seen many drunk in many places,” said Jessop, “but anyone who held his liquor wuss nor Krill I never did see. He’d knife you as soon as look at you when drunk.”

“But he evidently preferred strangling.”

“Hold on, mate,” said Jessop, with another deep pull at the rum. “I’m comin’ to that night. We wos both on the bust, as y’may say, and Mrs. Krill she didn’t like it, so got to bed with the child.”

“How old was the child?”

“Maud? Oh, you might say she was thirteen or fifteen. I can’t be sure of her age. What’s up?”

For Hurd, seeing in this admission a confirmation that Maud was either not Krill’s child or was illegitimate, and could not inherit the money, had showed his feelings. However, he made some trivial excuse, not wishing to be too confidential, and begged Jessop to proceed.

“Well, mate,” said the captain, filling another glass of rum, “y’see the lady had come earlier and had been put to bed by the missus. I never saw her myself, being drinking in this very room along o’ Krill. But *he* saw her,” added Jessop, emphatically, “and said as she’d a fine

opal brooch, which he wish he'd had, as he wanted money and the missus kept him tight."

"Krill was a judge of jewels?"

"Travelled in jewels once," said the captain. "Bless you, he could size up a precious stone in no time. But he sat drinking with me, and every now and then got out of the room, when he'd stop away for perhaps a quarter of an hour at the time."

"Did he mention the opal brooch again?"

"No," said Jessop, after reflection, "he didn't. But he got so drunk that he began to show fight, as he always did when boozy, though a timid chap when sober. I concluded, wishing no row, to git to my hammock, and cut up stairs. Then I went by mistake into the room of that pore lady, carrying a candle, and saw her tied to the bedpost stone dead, with a silk handkerchief round her neck. I shouted out blue murder, and Mrs. Krill with the kid came tumbling down. I was so feared," added Jessop, wiping his forehead at the recollection, "that I ran out of doors."

"What good would that do?"

"Lor', I dunno," confessed the man, shivering, "but I was skeered out of my life. It wos rainin' pitchforks, as y'might say, and I raced on through the rain for an hour or so. Then I thought, as I wos innocent, I'd make tracks back, and I did. I found Krill had cut."

"Did his wife tell you?"

"Oh, she wos lying on the floor insensible where he'd knocked her down. And the kid—lor'," Jessop spat, "she was lying in the corner with her lips fastened together with the brooch."

"What?" cried Hurd, starting to his feet. "The same as her—the same as Norman's was?"

Jessop nodded and drank some rum. "Made me sick it did. I took th' brooch away and slipped it into my pocket. Then the kid said her father had fastened her lips together and had knocked her mother flat when she interfered. I brought Mrs. Krill round and then left her with the kid,

and walked off to Southampton. The police found me there, and I told them what I tell you.”

“Did you tell about the brooch?”

“Well, no, I didn’t,” confessed Jessop, coolly, “an’ as the kid and the mother said nothing, I didn’t see why I shouldn’t keep it, wantin’ money. So I went to Stowley and pawned it, then took a deep sea voyage for a year. When I come back, all was over.”

“Do you think Krill murdered the woman?” asked Hurd, passing over for the moment the fact that Jessop had stolen the brooch.

“He said he didn’t,” rejoined the man with emphasis, “but I truly believe, mister, as he did, one of them times, when mad with drink and out of the room. He wanted the brooch, d’ye see, though why he should have lost the loot by sealin’ the kid’s mouth with it I can’t say.”

“When did you come across Krill again?”

“Ho,” said Jessop, drawing his hand across his mouth, “‘twas this way, d’ye see. I come round here lots, and a swell come too, a cold—”

“Grexon Hay,” said Hurd, pointing to the photograph.

“Yes. That’s him,” said Jessop, staring, “and I hated him just, with his eye-glass and his sneerin’ ways. He loved the kid, now a growed, fine gal, as you know, and come here often. In June—at the end of it anyhow—he comes and I hears him tells Mrs. Krill, who was always looking for her husband, that a one-eyed bookseller in Gwynne Street, Drury Lane, had fainted when he saw the very identical brooch showed him by another cove.”

“Beecot. I know. Didn’t you wonder how the brooch had left the pawnshop?” asked Hurd, very attentive.

“No, I didn’t,” snarled Jessop, who was growing cross. “I knew old Tinker’s assistant had sold the brooch and he didn’t oughter t’ have done it, as I wanted it back. Mrs. Krill asked me about the brooch, and wanted it, so I said I’d get it back. Tinker said it was gone, but wrote to the gent as bought it.”

“Mr. Simon Beecot, of Wargrove, in Essex.”

“That wos him; but the gent wouldn’t give it back, so I ‘spose he’d given it to his son. Well, then, when Mrs. Krill heard of the one-eyed man fainting at sight of the brooch, she knew ‘twas her husband, as he’d one eye, she having knocked the other out when he was sober.”

“Did she go up and see him?”

“Well,” said Jessop, slowly, “I don’t rightly know what she did do, but she went up. I don’t think she saw Krill at his shop, but she might have seen that Pash, who was Mr. Hay’s lawyer, and a dirty little ape o’ sorts he is.”

“Ha,” said Hurd, to himself, “I thought Pash knew about the women beforehand. No wonder he stuck to them and gave poor Miss Norman the go-bye,” he rubbed his hands and chuckled. “Well, we’ll see what will come of the matter. Go on, Jessop.”

“There ain’t much more to tell,” grumbled the captain. “I heard of this, and I wasn’t meant to hear. But I thought I’d go up and see if I could get money out of Krill by saying I’d tell about the murder of Lady Rachel.”

“You *are* a scoundrel,” said Hurd, coolly.

“I wos ‘ard up,” apologized the captain, “or I wouldn’t, not me. I’m straight enough when in cash. So I went up in July.”

“On the sixth of July?”

“If that was the day of the murder—yes. I went up and loafed round until it wos dark, and then slipped through that side passage at eight o’clock to see Krill.”

“How did you know where to find him?”

“Why, that Hay knew about the chap, and said as he did business in a cellar after eight. So Krill let me in, thinking, I ‘spose, I wos a customer. He’d been drinking a little and was bold enough. But when I said, as I’d say, he’d killed Lady Rachel, he swore he was an innercent babe, and cried, the drink dyin’ out of him.”

“The same as it died out of you lately,” said Hurd, smiling.

“Go slow,” grunted the captain, in a surly tone. “I ain’t afraid now, as I ain’t done nothing. I said to Krill I’d say nothin’ if he’d give me money. He wouldn’t, but said he’d placed a lot of pawned things with Pash, and I could have them. He then gave me a paper saying I was to have the things, and I went to Pash the next morning and had trouble. But I heard by chance,” again Jessop cast a strange look at Hurd, “that Krill had been murdered, so I didn’t wait for the lawyer to come back, but cut down to Southampton and went on a short voyage. Then I come here and you nabbed me,” and Jessop finished his rum. “That’s all I know.”

“Do you swear you left Aaron Norman alive?”

“Meaning Krill? I do. He wasn’t no use to me dead, and I made him give me the jewels Pash had, d’ye see.”

“But who warned you of the death when you were waiting?”

Jessop seemed unwilling to speak, but when pressed burst out, “‘Twas a measly little kid with ragged clothes and a dirty face.”

“Tray,” said Hurd. “Hum! I wonder how he knew of the murder before it got into the papers?”

Chapter XXI

Miss Qian’s Party

Hurd’s sister was a clever young woman who in her time had played many parts. She began her career along with Hurd as a private detective, but when her brother joined the official service, Miss Hurd thought she would better her position by appearing on the stage, and, therefore, took the rather queer name of Aurora Qian. In her detective capacity she had often disguised herself when employed in obtaining evidence, and was remarkably talented in changing her face and figure. This art she used with great success in her new profession, and speedily made her mark as an impersonator of various characters out of novels. As Becky Sharp, as Little Dorrit, she was said to be inimitable, and after playing under several managements, she started, in the phrase of the profession, “a show of her own,” and rapidly made money.

But her great faults amongst others were vanity and extravagance, so she was always in need of money, and when chance offered, through her brother, to make any, she was not averse to returning to the spy business. Thus it came about that she watched Mr. Grexon Hay for many a long day and night, and he never suspected the pretty, fluffy, kittenish Miss Qian was in reality an emissary of the law. Consequently, when Aurora asked him to a card-party at her rooms, Hay accepted readily enough, although he was not in need of money at the time.

Miss Qian occupied a tiny flat on the top of a huge pile of buildings in Kensington, and it was furnished in a gimcrack way, with more show than real value, and with more color than taste. Every room was of a different hue, with furniture and hangings to match. The drawing-room was pink, the dining-room green, her bedroom blue, the entrance hall yellow, and the extra sleeping apartment used by her companion, Miss Stably, was draped in purple. Some wit called the flat "the paint-box," and indeed so varied were its hues that it was not a bad title to give it.

Like the Becky Sharp whom she impersonated with such success, Miss Qian possessed a sheep-dog, not because she needed one, being very well able to look after herself, but because it sounded and looked respectable. Miss Stably, who filled this necessary office, was a dull old lady who dressed excessively badly, and devoted her life to knitting shawls. What she did with these when completed no one ever knew: but she was always to be found with two large wooden pins rapidly weaving the fabric for some unknown back. She talked very little, and when she did speak, it was to agree with her sharp little mistress. To make up for speaking little, she ate a great deal, and after dinner with her eternal knitting in her bony hands and a novel on her lap, was entirely happy. She was one of those neutral-tinted people, who seem not good enough for heaven and not sufficiently bad for the other place. Aurora often wondered what would become of Miss Stably when she departed this life, and left her knitting behind her. The old lady herself never gave the matter a thought, but lived a respectable life of knitting and eating and novel reading, with a regular visit to church on Sunday where she worshipped without much idea of what the service was about.

This sort of person exactly suited Miss Qian, who wanted a sheep-dog who could neither bark nor bite, and who could be silent. These qualifications were possessed by the old lady, and for some years she

had trailed through a rather giddy world at Aurora's heels. In her own dull way she was fond of the young woman, but was far from suspecting that Aurora was connected in an underhand manner with the law. That knowledge would indeed have shaken Miss Stably to the soul, as she had a holy dread of the law, and always avoided the police-court column when she read the newspapers.

This was the old lady who sat in the pink drawing-room to play propriety for Miss Qian. Lord George Sandal was present, looking rather washed out, but as gentlemanly as ever. Hay, with his fixed eye-glass and eternally cold smile was there, and a third young man, who adored Miss Qian, thinking her to be merely an actress, simpered across the card-table at his goddess. The four were playing a game which involved the gaining and losing of much money, and they had been engaged for about an hour. Miss Stably having eaten a good dinner and commenced a new shawl was half dosing in the corner, and paying absolutely no attention to the players.

"It's a good thing we're hanging on our own hooks in this game," said Miss Qian, who smoked a dainty cigarette. "Were I your partner, Sandal," she always addressed her friends in this free-and-easy fashion, "I'd be losing money. What luck you have!"

"I never do seem to win," lamented Lord George. "Whenever I think I've got a good hand, the thing pans out wrong."

"Hay has got all the money," said the simpering admirer who answered to the name of Tempest. "He and you, Miss Qian, are the winners."

"I've made very little," she replied. "Hay's raking in the dollars hand over fist."

"Lucky in love, unlucky at cards," said Hay, who did not like his good fortune to be commented upon, for reasons which Miss Qian knew. "It's the reverse with me—I'm lucky at cards—"

"And lucky in love, too," interrupted Aurora, with a grimace, "seeing you're going to marry that Krill heiress—if she is an heiress."

"What do you mean?" asked Hay, who was dealing a new round.

“Go on with the game and don’t ask questions,” said Miss Qian, in a saucy manner. “Sandal, don’t stare round, but keep your eye on the cards,” and she winked stealthily at the young lord, while Hay was exchanging a word with Tempest. The young man, who had spoken privately to her immediately before the dinner, knew well what she meant. Had Hay been likewise “in the know,” he would scarcely have done what he did do, and which Sandal saw him do in a few minutes.

Hay was rapidly dealing, and the cards were flying like leaves. A pile of gold stood beside Hay’s elbow, and some silver near Tempest. The game commenced, and soon the players were engrossed, heedless of the patent snoring of Miss Stably, who, poor old thing, had succumbed to the lateness of the hour. Suddenly Lord George, who had been very vigilant, felt his foot touched under the table by Miss Qian. He rose at once and snatched up the gold standing near Hay.

“What’s that for?” demanded Hay, angrily.

“You’re cheating,” said Sandal, “and I don’t play with you any more.”

“That’s a lie. I did not cheat.”

“Yes, you did,” cried Miss Qian, bending forward and seizing the cards; “we’ve been watching you. Tempest—”

“I saw it all right,” said the other. “You took up that king—”

“And it’s marked,” said Aurora. “I believe Hay’s got cards up his sleeve. Examine the cards.”

Hay, very pale, but still keeping his countenance, tried to object, but the two young men seized and held him, while Miss Qian, with a dexterity acquired in detective circles, rapidly searched his pockets.

“Here’s another pack,” she cried, and shook an ace and two kings out of the detected swindler’s sleeve, “and these cards—”

Sandal took one and went to the lamp. “Marked, by Jove!” he cried, but with a stronger oath; “here’s a pin-prick.”

“You are mistaken,” began Hay, quite pale.

“No,” said Tempest, coolly, “we’re not. Miss Qian told us you cheated, and we laid a trap for you. You’ve been trying this double card and marked card dodge several times this very evening.”

“And he’s tried it lots of times before,” said Aurora, quickly. “I have been at several places where Hay scooped the pool, and it was all cheating.”

“If it was,” said Hay, with quivering lips, “why didn’t you denounce me then and there?”

“Because I denounce you now,” she said; “you’re cooked, my man. These boys will see that the matter is made public.”

“By Jove, yes!” cried Sandal, with a look of abhorrence at Hay, “and I’ll prosecute you to get back those thousands you won off me.”

“I never did—”

“You’ve been rooking this boy for months,” cried Miss Qian. “Here, Tempest, get a constable. We’ll give him in charge for swindling.”

“No! no!” cried Hay, his nerve giving way under the threatened exposure; “you’ll have your money back, Sandal, I swear.”

“Lord George to you now, you blackguard; and how can you pay me the money when I know you haven’t got a cent?”

“He intends to get it from the heiress,” sniggered Aurora.

“Oh, dear me!” rose the plaintive voice of the sheep-dog, “what is it, Aurora? Anything wrong?”

“We’ve caught Hay cheating, that’s all, and the police—”

“Oh, Aurora, don’t bring up the police.”

“No, don’t,” said Hay, who was now trembling. “I’ll do whatever you like. Don’t show me up—I’m—I’m going to be married soon.”

“No, you sha’n’t marry,” cried Tempest, sharply; “I’ll see this girl myself and save her from you.”

“You can’t prove that I cheated,” said Hay, desperately.

“Yes, we can,” said George. “I, and Miss Qian, and Tempest all saw you cheat, and Miss Qian has the marked cards.”

“But don’t expose me. I—I—” Hay broke down and turned away with a look of despair on his face. He cursed himself inwardly for having ventured to cheat when things, by the marriage with Maud Krill, would have soon been all right for him. “Miss Qian,” he cried in a tone of agony, “give me another chance.”

Aurora, playing her own game, of which the two young men were ignorant, appeared to repent. She beckoned to Miss Stably. “Take Mr. Hay into the dining-room,” she said, “and I’ll see what I can do. But you try and bolt, Hay, and the news will be all over the West End tomorrow.”

“I’ll stop,” said Hay, whose face was colorless, and, without another word, he followed the sheep-dog into the dining-room in an agony of mind better imagined than described. Then Miss Qian turned her attention to her guests:

“See here, boys,” she said frankly, “this is a dirty business, and I don’t want to be mixed up with it.”

“But Hay should be exposed,” insisted Sandal; “he’s been rooking me, I do believe, for months.”

“Serve you jolly well right,” said Aurora, heartlessly. “I warned you again and again against him. But if there’s a row, where do I come in?”

“It won’t hurt you,” said Tempest, eagerly.

“Oh, won’t it? Gambling in my flat, and all the rest of it. You boys may think me free and easy but I’m straight. No one can say a word against me. I’m not going to be made out an adventuress and a bad woman for the sake of that swindler, Hay. So you boys will just hold your tongues.”

“No,” said Sandal, “my money—”

“Oh, bother your money. One would think you were a Jew. I’ll see that Hay pays it back. He’s going to marry this Krill girl, and she’s able to supply the cash.”

“But the girl shouldn’t be allowed to marry Hay,” said Tempest.

“Don’t you burn your fingers with other people’s fire,” said Aurora, sharply. “This girl’s in love with him and will marry him in spite of everything. But I don’t care a cent for that. It’s myself I’m thinking of. If I get your money back, Sandal, will you hold your tongue?”

Lord George, thinking of what his noble father would say were he involved in a card scandal connected with an actress, thought it just as well to agree. “Yes,” said he, hesitatingly, “I’ll not say a word, if you get the money back. But don’t you let Hay speak to me again in public or I’ll kick him.”

“That’s your affair and his,” said Aurora, delighted at having gained her point; “but you hold your tongue, and you, Tempest?”

“I’ll not say a word either,” said the young man, with a shrug, “though I don’t see why you should save this blackguard’s reputation.”

“It’s my own I’m thinking of, so don’t you make any mistake. And now I have both your promises?”

“Yes,” said Sandal and Tempest, thinking it best to hush the matter up; “but Hay—”

“I’ll see to him. You two boys clear out and go home to bed.”

“But we can’t leave you alone with Hay,” said Tempest.

“I’ll not be alone with him,” cried the little woman, imperiously; “my companion is with me. What do you mean?”

“He might do you some harm.”

“Oh! might he? You take me for a considerable idiot, I suppose. You get along, boys, and leave me to fix up things.”

Both young men protested again; but Aurora, anxious for her conversation with Hay, bundled them out of the flat and banged the door to, when she heard them whistling below for a hansom. Then she went to the dining-room.

“You come along to the drawing-room,” she said to Hay. “Miss Stably, stop here.”

“I haven’t got my shawl,” bleated the old lady.

“Oh, bother,” Aurora ran to the other room, snatched up the shawl and saw Miss Stably sitting down to knit, while she led Hay back into the drawing-room. He looked round when he entered.

“Where are they?” he asked, sitting down.

“Gone; but it’s all right. I’ve made them promise not to say—”

Grexon Hay didn’t let her finish. He fell on his knees and kissed her hand. His face was perfectly white, but his eyes were full of gratitude as he babbled his thanks. No one could have accused him of being cold then. But Miss Qian did not approve of this emotion, natural though it was.

“Here, get up,” she said, snatching her hand away. “I’ve got to speak straight to you. I’ve done a heap for you, now you’ve got to do a heap for me.”

“Anything—anything,” said Hay, whose face was recovering its normal color. “You have saved me—you have.”

“And much of a thing you are to save. You’ll be cheating again in a week or so.”

“No,” cried Hay, emphatically, “I swear I’ll not touch a card again. I’ll marry Maud and turn respectable. Oh, what a lesson I’ve had! You are sure those fellows won’t speak?”

“No. That’s all right. You can go on swindling as before, only,” Miss Qian raised a finger, “you’ll have to pay Sandal back some cash.”

“I’ll do that. Maud will lend me the money. Does he want all?”

“Oh, a couple of thousand will shut his mouth. I’ll not see you left. It’s all right, so sit up and don’t shake there like a jelly.”

“You’re very kind to me,” said Hay, faintly.

“Don’t you make any mistake. So far as I am concerned you might stick in the mud forever. I helped you, because I want you to help me. I’m in want of money—”

“I’ll give you some.”

“Picked from that girl’s pockets,” said Aurora, dryly, “no, thank you. It might dirty my fingers. Listen—there’s a reward offered for the discovery of the murderer of Aaron Norman. I want to get that thousand pounds, and you can help me to.”

Hay started to his feet with amazement. Of all the requests she was likely to make he never thought it would be such a one. “Aaron Norman’s murder,” he said, “what do you know of that?”

“Very little, but you know a lot.”

“I don’t, I swear I don’t.”

“Pish,” said Miss Qian, imperiously, “remember I’ve got the whip-hand, my boy. Just you tell me how Mrs. Krill came to strangle the—”

“Mrs. Krill?” Hay turned white again, and his eye-glass fell. “She had nothing to do with the matter. I swear—”

“Strikes me you swear too much, Mr. Hay. What about that opal brooch you stole from Beecot when he had the smash?”

“I didn’t steal it. I never saw it at the time of the accident.”

“Then you got that boy Tray to steal it.”

“I knew nothing about the boy. Besides, why should I steal that opal serpent brooch?”

“You wanted to buy it from Beecot, anyhow?”

Hay looked puzzled. “Yes, for a lady.”

“Mrs. Krill?”

“I admit that Mrs. Krill wanted it. She had associations connected with that brooch.”

“I know,” interrupted Aurora, glancing at the clock, “don’t waste time in talking of Lady Rachel Sandal’s death—”

“How do you know about that?” stammered Hay, completely nonplussed.

“I know a mighty lot of things. I may as well tell you,” added Miss Qian, coolly, “since you daren’t split, that I’ve got a lot to do with the secret detective service business. I’m helping another to hunt out evidence for this case, and I guess you know a lot.”

The man quailed. He knew that he did not stand well with the police and dreaded what this little fluffy woman should do. Aurora read his thoughts. “Yes,” she said, “we know a heap about you at the Scotland Yard Office, and if you don’t tell me all you know, I’ll make things hot for you. This cheating to-night is only one thing. I know you are ‘a man on the market,’ Mr. Hay.”

“What do you wish to hear?” asked Hay, collapsing.

“All about Mrs. Krill’s connection with this murder.”

“She has nothing to do with it. Really, she hasn’t. Aaron Norman was her husband right enough—”

“And he ran away from her over twenty years ago. But who told Mrs. Krill about him?”

“I did,” confessed Hay, volubly and seeing it was best for him to make a clean breast of it. “I met the Krills three years ago when I was at Bournemouth. They lived in Christchurch, you know.”

“Yes. Hotel-keepers. Well, what then?”

“I fell in love with Maud and went to Christchurch to stop at ‘The Red Pig.’ She loved me, and in a year we became engaged. But I had no money to marry her, and she had none either. Then Mrs. Krill told me of her husband and of the death of Lady Rachel.”

“Murder or suicide?”

“Suicide, Mrs. Krill said,” replied Hay, frankly. “She told me also about the opal brooch and described it. I met Beecot by chance and greeted him as an old school-fellow. He took me to his attic and to my surprise showed me the opal brooch. I wanted to buy it for Mrs. Krill, but Beecot would not sell it. When next I met him, he told me that Aaron Norman had fainted when he saw the brooch. I thought this odd, and informed Mrs. Krill. She described the man to me, and especially said that he had but one eye. I went with Beecot to the Gwynne Street shop, and a single glance told me that Aaron Norman was Lemuel Krill. I told his wife, and she wanted to come up at once. But I knew that Aaron was reported rich—which I had heard through Pash—and as he was my lawyer, I suggested that the Krills should go and see him.”

“Which they did, before the murder?”

“Yes. Pash was astonished, and when he heard that Mrs. Krill was the real wife, he saw that Aaron Norman, as he called himself, had committed bigamy, and that Sylvia—”

“Yes, you needn’t say it,” said Miss Qian, angrily, “she’s worth a dozen of that girl you are going to marry. But why did you pretend to meet Mrs. Krill and her daughter for the first time at Pash’s?”

“To blind Beecot. We were standing at the door when the two came out, and I pretended to see them for the first time. Then I told Beecot that I had been introduced to Maud at Pash’s office. He’s a clever chap, Beecot, and, being engaged to Sylvia Norman, I thought he might find out too much.”

“About the murder?”

Hay rose and looked solemn. “I swear I know nothing of that,” he said decidedly, “and the Krills were as astonished as I, when they heard of the death. They were going to see him by Pash’s advice, and Mrs. Krill was going to prosecute him for bigamy unless he allowed her a good income. Death put an end to all that, so she made up the story of seeing the hand-bills, and then of course the will gave the money to Maud, who was engaged to me.”

“The will or what was called a will, gave the money to Sylvia,” said Aurora, emphatically; “but this brooch—you didn’t take it?”

“No, I swear I didn’t. Mrs. Krill wanted it, but I never knew it was of any particular importance. Certainly, I would never have risked robbing Beecot, and I never told that boy Tray to rob either.”

“Then who took the brooch.”

“I can’t say. I have told you all I know.”

“Hum,” said Aurora, just like her brother, “that will do to-night; but if I ask any more questions you’ll have to answer, so now you can go. By the way, I suppose the brooch made you stick to Beecot?”

“Yes,” said Hay, frankly; “he was of no use to me. But while he had the brooch I stuck to him to get it for Mrs. Krill.”

“Queer,” said Aurora. “I wonder why she wanted it so much!” but this question Hay was unable to answer.

Chapter XXII

Further Evidence

After all, Hurd did not send Jessop to town as he threatened to do. Evidently the captain had told him all he knew, and appeared to be innocent of Krill’s death. But, in spite of his apparent frankness the detective had an idea that something was being kept back, and what that something might be, he determined to find out. However, his thoughts were turned in another direction by a note from Beecot addressed to him at “The Red Pig,” asking him to come at once to the Jubileetown Laundry. “I believe we have discovered the person who stole the opal brooch from me,” wrote Paul, “and Deborah has made a discovery connected with Norman which may prove to be of service.”

Wondering what the discovery might be, and wondering also who had taken the brooch, Hurd arranged that Jessop and Hoken should remain at Christchurch under the eyes of two plain-clothes officials. These managed their duties so dexterously that Matilda Junk was far from guessing what was going on. Moreover, she informed the detective, who she thought was a commercial gent, that she intended to pay a visit to her sister, Mrs. Tawsey, and demanded the address, which Hurd gave readily enough. He thought that if Matilda knew anything—such as the

absence of Mrs. Krill from the hotel during the early part of July—Deborah might induce her to talk freely.

Hokar had proved a difficult subject. Whether he was too grateful to Mrs. Krill to speak out, or whether he really did not understand what was asked of him, he certainly showed a talent for holding his tongue. However, Hurd saw well enough that the man was afraid of the Sahib's law, and when matters came to a crisis would try and prove his innocence even at the cost of implicating others. Therefore, with an easy mind the detective left these two witnesses being watched at Christchurch and repaired to town, where Aurora informed him of the interview with Hay. Billy approved of the way in which his sister had managed matters.

"I guessed that Hay was the man who put Mrs. Krill on the track of her husband," he said, with satisfaction; "but I wasn't quite sure how he spotted the man."

"Oh, the one eye identified him," said Aurora, who was eating chocolate as usual, "and Norman's fainting at the sight of the brooch confirmed Hay's belief as to who he was. I wonder he didn't make a bargain with Norman on his own."

Hurd shook his head. "It wouldn't have paid so well," said he, wisely. "Norman would have parted only with a small sum, whereas this murder will bring in Hay a clear five thousand a year when he marries the girl. Hay acted cleverly enough."

"But I tell you Hay has nothing to do with the murder."

"That may be so, though I don't trust him. But Mrs. Krill might have strangled her husband so as to get the money."

"What makes you think she did?" asked Aurora, doubtfully.

"Well, you see, from what Jessop says, Mrs. Krill is devotedly attached to Maud, and she may have been anxious to revenge her daughter on Krill. He acted like a brute and fastened the child's lips together, so Mrs. Krill treated him in the same way."

“Hum,” said Miss Qian, reflectively, “but can you prove that Mrs. Krill was in town on the night of the murder?”

“That’s what I’m going to find out,” said Hurd. “All you have to do is to keep your eyes on Hay—”

“Oh, he won’t cut, if that’s what you mean. He thinks everything is square, now that I’ve got those boys to stop chattering. He’ll marry Maud and annex the money.”

“He may marry Maud,” said Hurd, emphatically, “but he certainly won’t get the five thousand a year. Miss Norman will.”

“Hold on,” cried Aurora, shrewdly. “Maud may not be Lemuel Krill’s child, or she may have been born before Krill married the mother, but in any case, Sylvia Norman isn’t the child of a legal marriage. Krill certainly committed bigamy, so his daughter Sylvia can’t inherit.”

“Well,” said Hurd, “I can’t say. I’ll see Pash about the matter. After all, the will left the money to ‘my daughter,’ and that Sylvia is beyond doubt, whatever Maud may be. And I say, Aurora, just you go down to Stowley in Buckinghamshire. I haven’t time to look into matters there myself.”

“What do you want me to do there?”

“Find out all about the life of Mrs. Krill before she married Krill and came to Christchurch. She’s the daughter of a farmer. You’ll find the name in this.” Hurd passed along a copy of the marriage certificate which Mrs. Krill had given to Pash. “Anne Tyler is her maiden name. Find out what you can. She was married to Krill at Beechill, Bucks.”

Miss Qian took the copy of the certificate and departed, grumbling at the amount of work she had to do to earn her share of the reward. Hurd, on his part, took the underground train to Liverpool Street Station, and then travelled to Jubileetown. He arrived there at twelve o’clock and was greeted by Paul.

“I’ve been watching for you all the morning,” said Beecot, who looked flushed and eager. “Sylvia and I have made such a discovery.”

Hurd nodded good-humoredly as he entered the house and shook hands with the girl.

“Miss Norman has been doing some detective business on her own account,” he said, smiling. “Hullo, who is this?”

He made this remark, because Mrs. Purr, sitting in a corner of the room with red eyes, rose and dropped a curtsy.

“I’m called to tell you what I do tell on my Bible oath,” said Mrs. Purr, with fervor.

“Mrs. Purr can give some valuable evidence,” said Paul, quickly.

“Oh, can she? Then I’ll hear what she has to say later. First, I must clear the ground by telling you and Miss Norman what I have discovered at Christchurch.”

So Mrs. Purr, rather unwillingly, for she felt the importance of her position, was bundled out of the room, and Hurd sat down to relate his late adventures. This he did clearly and slowly, and was interrupted frequently by exclamations of astonishment from his two hearers. “So there,” said the detective, when finishing, “you have the beginning of the end.”

“Then you think that Mrs. Krill killed her husband?” asked Paul, dubiously.

“I can’t say for certain,” was the cautious reply; “but I think so, on the face of the evidence which you have heard. What do you say?”

“Don’t say anything,” said Sylvia, before Paul could reply. “Mr. Hurd had better read this paper. It was found by Deborah in an old box belonging to my father, which was brought from Gwynne Street.”

She gave the detective several sheets of blue foolscap pinned together and closely written in the shaky handwriting of Aaron Norman. Hurd looked at it rather dubiously. “What is it?” he asked.

“The paper referred to in that unfinished scrap of writing which was discovered behind the safe,” explained Paul. “Norman evidently wrote it out, and placed it in his pocket, where he forgot it. Deborah found it in

an old coat, she discovered in a box of clothes brought from Gwynne Street. They were Norman's clothes and his box, and should have been left behind."

"Debby won't hear of that," said Sylvia, laughing. "She says Mrs. Krill has got quite enough, and she took all she could."

"What's all this writing about?" asked Hurd, turning over the closely-written sheets. "To save time you had better give me a précis of the matter. Is it important?"

"Very I should say," responded Paul, emphatically. "It contains an account of Norman's life from the time he left Christchurch."

"Hum." Hurd's eyes brightened. "I'll read it at my leisure, but at the present moment you might say what you can."

"Well, you know a good deal of it," said Paul, who did the talking at a sign from Sylvia. "It seems that Norman—we'd better stick to the old name—left Christchurch because he was afraid of being accused of murdering Lady Rachel."

"Was she really murdered?"

"Norman doesn't say. He swears he knows nothing about the matter. The first intimation he had was when Jessop came down with the news after blundering into the wrong bedroom. But he hints that Mrs. Krill killed her."

"Can he prove that?"

"No. He can't give any proof, or, at all events, he doesn't. He declares that when his wife and daughter—"

"Oh! does he call Maud his daughter?"

"Yes! We can talk of that later," said Paul, impatiently. "Well, then, Norman says he went fairly mad. Jessop had bolted, but Norman knew he would not give the alarm, since he might be accused himself of killing Lady Rachel. Maud, who had seen the body, wanted to run out and call the neighbors."

“How old does Norman say she was?”

“About fifteen; quite old enough to make things unpleasant.”

“Then she can’t inherit the money,” said Hurd, decisively.

“No,” cried Beecot, quickly, “both Sylvia and I think so. But to go on with Norman’s confession. He would not let Maud go. She began to scream, and he feared lest she should alarm the neighbors. He tied a handkerchief across her lips, but she got free, and again began to scream. Then he cruelly fastened her lips together with the opal brooch.”

“Where did he get that, if innocent?”

“He declared that he spied it on the floor of the sitting-room, near his wife’s feet, and then hints that she strangled Lady Rachel to get it and turn it into money as she was desperately in need of cash for Maud. Mrs. Krill idolized the child.”

“I know that,” snapped Hurd. “Go on.”

“When Norman fastened the child’s lips together, Mrs. Krill threw herself on him in a rage. He knocked her insensible, and then ran away. He walked through the night, until, at dawn, he came to a distant railway station. There he took a ticket and went to London. He concealed himself until there was no chance of his being discovered, and besides, saw the verdict of the jury in the newspapers. But he was determined he would not go back to his wife, because she threatened him.”

“In what way?”

“Ah,” said Paul, while Sylvia shuddered, “in a strange way. When he fastened the child’s lips together, Mrs. Krill said that she would do the same to him one day and with the same brooch.”

Hurd uttered an exclamation. “So that was why she wanted the brooch so much?” he exclaimed eagerly.

“Yes. And she told Hay she wanted it though she did not reveal her reason. She said if she got the brooch he would be allowed to marry

Maud, with whom Hay was deeply in love. Hay stumbled across me by accident, and I happened to have the brooch. The rest you know.”

“No,” said Hurd, “I don’t know how the brooch came into the possession of Mrs. Krill again, to use in the cruel way she threatened.”

“Well,” said Sylvia, quickly, “we aren’t sure if Mrs. Krill *did* get the brooch.”

“The evidence is against her,” said Hurd; “remember the threat—”

“Yes, but wait till you hear Mrs. Purr,” said Paul, “but just a moment, Hurd. You must learn how Norman laid the foundations of his fortune.”

“Ah, I forget! Well?” and the detective settled himself to listen further.

“He was hard up and almost starving for a long time after he came to London,” explained Paul, “then he got a post in a second-hand bookshop kept by a man called Garner in the Minories. He had a daughter, Lillian—”

“My mother,” put in Sylvia, softly.

“Yes,” went on Beecot, quickly, “and this girl being lonely fell in love with Norman, as he now called himself. He wasn’t an attractive man with his one eye, so it is hard to say how Miss Garner came to love him. But she married him in the end. You’ll find everything explained at length in the paper we gave you. Then old Garner died, and Lillian inherited a considerable sum of money, together with the stock. Her husband removed the books to Gwynne Street and started business. But with the money he began to trade in jewels, and you know how he got on.”

“That’s all plain enough,” said Hurd, putting the confession of Norman into his pocket. “I suppose the man dreaded lest his first wife should turn up.”

“Yes! And that’s why he fainted when he saw the brooch. Not knowing that Jessop had removed it from Maud’s mouth and pawned it—”

“I’m not so sure of that,” said Hurd, quickly. “Bart overheard him talking of Stowley and the pawnbroker there.”

“Well,” said Paul, with a shrug, “he says nothing about it in the confession. Perhaps he did trace the brooch to the Stowley shop, but if so, I wonder he did not get it, seeing he wanted it. But when he saw it in my possession, he thought I might know of Mrs. Krill and might put her on the track. Hence his fainting. Later, he learned how I became possessed of it, and tried to buy it. Then came the accident, and I really believed for a time that Hay had stolen it.”

“Aurora says he swore he did not.”

“And he didn’t,” said Paul, going to the door. “Mrs. Purr!”

“You don’t mean to say that old woman priggled it?” asked Hurd.

“No. But she warned me against that boy Tray on the day Deborah was married. Later, I asked her what she meant, and she then told me that she had learned from Tray’s grandmother, a drunken old thief, how the boy brought home the opal brooch, and—”

Here Mrs. Purr, who had entered and was dropping curtseys to the majesty of the law, as represented by Hurd, thought an undue advantage was being taken of her position. She wished to talk herself, and interrupted Paul, in a shrill voice.

“Granny Clump, she is,” said Mrs. Purr, folding her hands under her apron. “Tray’s gran’mother, as ‘is name is Tray Clump, I swear on my Bible oath. A wicked old woman as is famous for drink—”

“I’ve heard of her,” said the detective, remembering; “she’s been up heaps of times.”

“And grows no better,” wailed Mrs. Purr, bibulously, for she had been strengthening herself for the interview with frequent libations of gin. “Oh, what a thing strong drink is, sir! But Granny Clump, bein’ ill with the lungses, and me bein’ ‘elpful in sich cases, ‘aving bin a nuss, when young, as I won’t deceive you by denying, called on me to be a good Smart ‘un. And I wos, though she swore awful, saying she wanted gin an’ jellies, an’ could ‘ave ‘ad them, if that limb—so did she name Tray, gentlemen both—’ad only ‘anded to ‘er the rich brooch he brought ‘ome, just afore he went to earn a decent livin’ at the lawr orfice, which ‘is name is Pash—”

“Ha,” said Hurd, thoughtfully, “I’ll see the boy.”

“You can see him now,” said Beecot, unexpectedly. “When I learned this from Mrs. Purr and knew you were coming, I sent a message to Pash’s office for the boy. He came up quite unsuspectingly, but he refused to speak. I shut him up in a back room, and Deborah has been watching him—”

“An’ the languige of that blessed limb!” exclaimed Mrs. Purr, raising her hands.

“Bring him in,” said Hurd. “Miss Norman, if the boy uses bad language, you needn’t stay.”

Sylvia, having heard what Tray could do in this way, needed no further hint. She left the room gladly, and told Deborah to bring along her prisoner. Shortly, the noise of kicking and strong language was heard coming nearer, and Deborah, with a red face and a firm mouth, appeared at the door, holding aloft a small boy who was black in the face with rage. “There,” said Deborah, flinging Tray in a heap at the detective’s feet, “if me an’ Bart ‘ave sich a brat, I ‘ope he dies in his cradle, instead of growing to a galler’s thief in th’ use of words which make me shudder, let alone my pretty. Ugh!” she shook her fist at Tray. “You Old Bailey viper, though young at that.”

“Here,” said Tray, rising, much dishevelled, but with a white face, “let me go. I’ll ‘ave the lawr of you.”

“I’ll attend to that, my lad,” said Hurd, dryly. “Now, then, where did you get that brooch?”

“Sha’n’t tell,” snapped the boy, and put his tongue out.

Hurd gave him a smack with an open hand on the side of his face, and Master Clump began to blubber.

“Assalting me—oh, won’t you ketch it,” he raged in his puny wrath. “My master’s a law-cove, and he’ll ‘ave y’ up before the beak.”

“You answer my questions,” said Hurd, sternly, “or you’ll get another clout. You know who I am well enough. Make a clean breast of it, you imp, or I’ll lock you up.”

“If I make a clean breast will you let me cut?” asked Tray, beginning to whimper, but with a cunning gleam in his eyes.

“I’ll see, when I know what you have to say.”

Tray looked round the room to see if there was any way of escape. But Paul guarded the closed window and Deborah, itching to box his ears, stood before the door. Before him was the stern-faced detective with whom Tray knew well enough he dare not trifle. Under these circumstances he made the best of a bad job, and told what he knew although he interpolated threats all the time. “Wot d’y want with me?” he demanded sulkily.

“Where did you find that brooch?”

“I prigged it from Mr. Beecot’s pocket when he wos smashed.”

“Did Mr. Hay tell you to steal it?”

“No, he didn’t.”

“Then how did you know the brooch was in my pocket?” asked Paul.

“I was a-dodgin’ round the shorp,” snapped Tray, “and I ‘eard Mr. Norman an’ Mr. Beecot a-talkin’ of the brooch; Mr. Beecot said as he ‘ad the brooch in ‘is pocket—”

“Yes, I certainly did,” said Paul, remembering the conversation.

“Well, when the smash come, I dodged in and prigged it. T’wos easy ‘nough,” grinned Tray, “for I felt it in ‘is bres’ poket and collared it. I wanted to guv it t’ th’ ole man, thinkin’ he’d pay fur it, as he said he would. But arter the smash I went ‘ome t’ m’ grann’ and hid the brooch. W’en I wos a-lookin’ at it at night, I sawr ‘er a-lookin’ at it, and she grabbed it. I cut away with m’own property, not wishin’ to be robbed by the ole gal.”

“What did you do then?”

Tray wiped his mouth with the back of his sleeve. "I 'eard that Mr. Norman was dead—"

"Yes, and you told Jessop so in the office. How did you know?"

"'Cause I went to the shorp in th' mornin' to sell the brooch to th' ole man. He was a goner, so I cut to Mr. Pash, as wos his lawyer, and said I'd sell 'im the brooch."

"What?" cried Hurd, rising. "You gave the brooch to Mr. Pash?"

"Yuss. He said he'd 'ave me up for stealin', and wouldn't guv me even a bob fur it. But he said I'd be his noo orfice boy. I thought I'd be respectable, so I went. And now," ended Master Clump in a sullen manner, "you knows all, and I ain't done nothin', so I'm orf."

Deborah caught him by the tail of his jacket as he made a dart at the door and swung him into the middle of the room. Hurd laid hands on him. "You come along with me," he said. "I'll confront you with Pash."

Tray gave a howl of terror. "He'll kill me," he shouted, "as he killed the old cove. Yuss. *He* did it. Pash did it," and he howled again.

Chapter XXIII

What Pash Said

In a smoking compartment, which the three had to themselves, Hurd resumed his examination of Tray. They were now on their way to Liverpool Street and thence the detective intended to convey the boy to Pash's office in Chancery Lane. Paul sat in one corner much excited over the turn events had taken. He began to think that the assassin of Aaron Norman would be found after all. More, he believed that Sylvia would yet inherit the five thousand a year she was entitled to, morally, if not legally. Hurd, in another corner, pulled Tray roughly towards him, and shook his finger in the lad's face. The boy was sulky and defiant, yet there was a trace of fear in his eyes, and the reason of this Hurd wished to learn.

"You're a young liar," said Hurd, emphatically, "and not a clever one either. Do you think to play the fool with me?"

"I've tole you all straight," grumbled Tray.

"No, you haven't. Anyone can see that you've made a mistake. I leave it to Mr. Beecot yonder."

"I was about to draw your attention to the mistake," said Paul; "you mean the discrepancy in time."

Master Clump started and became more sulky than ever. He cast down his cunning eyes and shuffled with his feet while Hurd lectured him. "You know well enough," said the detective, sharply, "that the brooch was boned by you on the very evening when the murder took place. It was then that Mr. Beecot met with his accident. Therefore, you could not have given the brooch to Mr. Pash the *next* morning, as it had been used on the previous night."

"Sha'n't say anythin' more," retorted Tray, defiantly.

"Oh, won't you?" cried Hurd, ironically, "we'll see about that. You told that lie about the time to account for your knowing of the murder before anyone else did."

"No," said Tray, decidedly, "I did go to the shorp in th' mornin'."

"That you may have done, but not to sell the brooch. Mr. Pash had taken it from you on the previous night."

"He didn't," denied the boy.

"Then in that case you've told a lie. Pash never had the brooch, and has nothing to do with the murder."

"He *did* prig the brooch from me, and he *did* kill the ole cove."

"Well, we'll see what Mr. Pash will say when you accuse him," said Hurd; "but I don't believe one word of it. It's my opinion that you gave that brooch to a third party on the same evening as you stole it. Now, then, who did you give it to?"

"Mr. Pash," persisted Tray.

"On the same evening?"

There was no reply to this. Tray set his lips firmly and refused to speak. Hurd shook an admonitory finger again. "You can't play fast and loose with me, my lad," he said grimly; "if you didn't part with that brooch, you must be mixed up in the crime yourself. Perhaps you pinned the poor wretch's mouth together. It's just the sort of cruel thing a young Cain like you would do."

"I didn't," said Master Clump, doggedly; "you take me to master, and I'll tell him what I tells you. He's the one."

Hurd shook the boy to make him talk more, but Tray simply threw himself on the floor of the carriage and howled. The detective therefore picked him up and flung him into a corner. "You stop there, you little ruffian," he said, seriously annoyed at the boy's recalcitrants; "we'll speak again when we are in Mr. Pash's office." So Tray curled up on the cushion, looked savagely at the detective and held his tongue.

"What do you think will be the end of all this?" asked Paul, when Master Clump was thus disposed of.

"Lord knows," replied Hurd, wiping his face. "I never had a harder case to deal with. I thought Hay had a hand in it, but it seems he hadn't, bad lot as he is, asking your pardon, Mr. Beecot, since you're his friend."

"That I am not," disclaimed Beecot, emphatically; "there's a young lawyer I know, Ford is his name. I went to see him as to what chances Sylvia had of getting the money. He was at school with me, and remembered Hay. He said that Hay was dismissed from Torrington School for stealing."

"Didn't you know that yourself?"

"No, I had left the school—I was ill at home with scarlet fever. But Hay apparently always has been a bad lot. He and that Krill pair are well matched, for I believe the mother is bad, even if the daughter Maud isn't. By the way her age—?"

Hurd nodded. "I believe she was fifteen at the time of the death of Lady Rachel. If so, she can't be legitimate or may not be the daughter of Aaron Norman. However, I've asked my sister to look up Mrs. Krill's past life in Stowley, where she comes from."

“But she wasn’t married to Krill at Stowley?”

“No. But she lived there as Anne Tyler. From the certificate she was married to Krill at a small parish church twenty miles from Stowley, so Aurora will go there. But I want her to stop at Stowley first and learn all she can about Anne Tyler.”

“Beechill’s the name of the parish in which she was married to Krill before she came to Christchurch,” said Paul, musingly, “so I expect they lived there. Miss Qian might search also for the certificate of Maud Krill’s birth.”

“I told her to, and, failing that, she’s to search in Christchurch. We must get the certificate of birth somehow.”

“Hurd,” said Paul, rather diffidently, “I hope you won’t be annoyed, but I have already asked my friend Ford to give notice to Pash to produce the certificate.”

“Well,” replied the detective, “you might have told me; but no great harm is done. What does Pash say?”

“I don’t know. Ford has not let me know yet. Here we are.”

This remark was caused by the stopping of the train at Liverpool Street Station. A number of people were returning from their employment in the city to the country, and the platforms were crowded. Hurd grasped Master Clump by the arm and marched him along. But in the confusion of finding his ticket at the barrier, he happened to let go, almost without thinking. In a moment Tray had darted through the barrier and was lost in the crowd. Hurd sprang after him, and left Paul to explain. He hurriedly did so, and then went out to see if the detective had caught the boy.

Hurd was nowhere to be seen, neither was Tray. The crowd was increasing thick, and Beecot was at a loss what to do. After waiting for an hour without finding the pair, he thought he would go to Pash’s office. It might be that Hurd, having caught Tray, would take him there at once, leaving Beecot to follow. So Paul got on to the metropolitan railway and alighted at the Temple Station. Thence he walked up to the office in Chancery Lane.

“Where’s Tray?” asked Paul, of the one clerk in the outer room, who was writing for dear life.

“I don’t know, sir,” said the clerk; “he went out this morning and hasn’t been back all day. Mr. Pash is very angry with him.”

Apparently Hurd had not caught the boy yet, or if he had, did not intend to bring him to the office. “Can I see Mr. Pash?” asked Paul, thinking he might as well make some use of his time.

The clerk inquired if the solicitor would see Beecot, and presently ushered him into the inner room, where Pash sat looking more like a monkey than ever. He did not appear at all pleased to see the young man, and sucked in his cheek with a crabbed air.

“Well, Mr. Beecot, what can I do for you?” he snarled.

“You might be civil in the first place,” said Paul quietly, taking a chair. “You haven’t behaved over well to Miss Norman and me.”

“Oh,” said Pash, coolly, “have you come to reproach me with that?”

“I never waste time,” rejoined Paul, equally coolly. “I’ll leave you to your conscience.”

Pash shrugged his shoulders and put his feet on the rungs of his chair. “I think my conscience can stand that,” he said; “it’s business, Mr. Beecot, business. By the way, I have received a request from Mr. Ford of Cheapside to produce the certificate of birth of Miss Krill. What is the meaning of that?”

“I think you know very well, Mr. Pash.”

“I profess my ignorance,” said Pash, ironically, although he looked uneasy, and was apparently lying.

“In that case you had better wait till you hear from Mr. Ford.”

“Are you employing Mr. Ford, may I ask?”

Paul nodded. “On behalf of Miss Norman,” said he, coldly.

“Ah,” sneered the monkey, “you think you’ll get the money.”

“Wait till you hear from Mr. Ford,” retorted Paul again, and enjoyed the baffled expression on Mr. Pash’s wrinkled face. “By the way, sir, why did you not tell Hurd that Tray gave you the opal brooch?”

Pash turned all the colors of the rainbow. “Does that brat I took into my office out of charity dare to say that he did.”

“He does, and what is more, Mr. Hurd is bringing him here to make the statement, face to face with you. I am determined to get to the bottom of this case, sir, for Miss Norman’s sake. And the possession of the brooch forms an important link.”

“How so?”

“The person who had that brooch on the evening of the sixth of July murdered Norman,” said Paul, calmly.

Pash jumped up and chattered like a baboon in a rage. “Do you mean to accuse me?” he demanded. “Take care—take care.”

“I don’t accuse you. Tray does.”

“It’s a lie—a lie—”

“Don’t excite yourself, Mr. Pash. You’ll need all your wits to convince Hurd. Tray accuses you, and Hurd suspects you. I have nothing to do with the matter.”

“You put Hurd up to this,” foamed Pash, hardly able to speak.

“Pardon me. Hurd is working for the reward offered by your client. Don’t you think it was rather foolish of her to offer such a large reward, Mr. Pash, even though she did so to avert suspicion?”

The solicitor changed color again. “I don’t understand you.”

Paul shrugged his shoulders and rose to go. “Perhaps Mr. Hurd will explain,” he said, and made for the door.

Pash, with his monkey face much perplexed, sat hunched in his chair, biting his fingers. As Paul laid his hand on the knob, he called him back. "I can explain," he said nervously.

"Not to me," said Paul, coldly.

"I prefer to do so to you," said the lawyer, hurriedly.

"Why to me particularly?"

"Because I don't think I have acted very well towards Miss Norman, and, as you are to marry her, you may be able to arrange—"

"To make peace I suppose you mean," burst out Beecot; "no, Mr. Pash, you have acted like a scoundrel. You left that poor girl in the lurch as soon as you found that Miss Krill was—as you thought—legally entitled to the money."

"What do you mean by hinting she isn't?"

"Because you know very well what her age is," retorted Paul. "This matter will be shifted to the bottom, Mr. Pash, by my friend Ford, and if things are as I think they are, Miss Krill won't keep that money. You know very well—"

"Miss Norman won't get the money either," snarled Pash, "I know that very well. Leastways," he added, "without my assistance."

"More of your crooked ways," said Paul, indignantly. "Tell what you like to Hurd. I refuse to listen."

As he spoke he opened the door and found himself facing Hurd who was red and hot. The detective stepped into the office, and as he passed Paul, whispered, "Hold your tongue about the boy," then he turned to Mr. Pash. "Well, sir," he puffed, "I have had a job catching up Mr. Beecot. No doubt you know why I have come?"

"No," said Pash, dryly; "I don't see Tray."

"Tray will keep. I've got him safe under lock and key. Before bringing you face to face with him I thought it best to give you an opportunity of clearing yourself."

“Of what?” asked Pash, in a brazen manner.

Hurd looked at Beecot who spoke. “Mr. Pash knows very well that Tray accuses him of the crime,” he said. “I told him so, and he professed his readiness to explain to you.”

“Ah,” said Hurd, “shut the door, Mr. Beecot. No need to let all London know the truth.”

“I don’t know it,” said Pash, as Paul closed the door and returned to his seat.

“Very good,” rejoined the detective, calmly, “we’ll assume for the sake of argument that you did not strangle Norman.”

“That I certainly did not.”

“Then you know who did. Come, sir,” Hurd became stern; “this boy Tray says he gave the opal brooch to you. And I believe he did. You would not have taken him into your office—a boy off the streets, and with a bad character at that—unless you wanted to bribe him to hold his tongue.”

“I had no need to bribe,” said Pash, gnawing his finger nails and rather cowed by this direct attack. “The boy *did* show me the opal brooch, and I took it from him to return to Norman.”

“When did you receive it?” asked Hurd, pulling out his book. “Be careful, Mr. Pash, I’ll take down what you say.”

“I have nothing to conceal,” said Pash, in quite an unnecessarily injured manner. “I had employed the boy on several errands, and he knew I was Norman’s lawyer. On the evening of the sixth of July—”

“And the evening of the murder,” said Hurd; “are you sure?”

“I’ll take my oath on it. The boy told me that Mr. Beecot had met with an accident and that a blue velvet case containing a brooch had fallen out of his pocket.”

“It was stolen,” said Beecot, hastily.

“Tray was not such a fool as to tell me that,” replied the lawyer, dryly; “he said that he picked the case up out of the mud, and took it home to his garret. His grandmother, who is a notorious thief, wanted to get it, and pawn it for drink, but Tray ran away with it and came to me about five o’clock. He gave me the brooch and asked me to take charge of it, as he expected to get money for it from Aaron Norman who wanted it.”

“Tray overheard my conversation with Norman,” said Paul, angrily, “and knew the brooch was mine—so did you, Mr. Pash.”

“Well,” said the solicitor, coolly, “what of that? Norman was my client and wanted the brooch. I intended to keep it and then see you, so that a sale might be arranged. Norman spoke to me about the brooch several times and wanted it for reasons you may not know.”

“Oh, yes, we know,” said Hurd, sardonically; “we know much more than you give us credit for, Mr. Pash. Well, you saw Norman about the jewel later that evening. I suppose you intend to tell us you gave him the brooch then.”

“I intend to tell nothing of the sort,” retorted Pash, after a few moments’ thought. “I see that things are coming to a crisis, and I would like to see Miss Norman reinstated in her rights.”

“Oh,” said Paul, indignantly, “and you did your best to give the money to Maud Krill!”

“Because I believed she was legally entitled to it,” explained Pash, lamely; “but since—no,” he broke off, “I’ll say nothing just now. I alone can put the matter right, and I refuse to do so unless I have Miss Norman’s promise that I shall keep the business.”

Paul would have refused then and there, but Hurd, more astute, interrupted his angry speech. “We’ll see about that later, Mr. Pash,” he said, soothingly; “meanwhile, what did you do with the brooch?”

“I laid it on the table there. The case was open, as I had been looking at it. I sent Tray out of the room and attended to my usual business. Several clients came and went, and I forgot about the opal serpent. Then I went to see my clerk outside about a deed. I was with him for some

minutes. When I recollected the brooch before I went home—for I intended to take it with me—”

“Stop,” interrupted Hurd, “you were here till Aaron Norman came along with the jewels, so you must have missed the brooch before he came or he would have taken it, seeing it was exposed on the table.”

“My esteemed client did not come till seven,” said Pash, annoyed at being detected in trickery. “He walked about with the bags of jewels for some time, not being able to make up his mind to give them to me, which he did for safe keeping.”

“Then he expected a visit from his wife?”

“I can’t say,” said the solicitor, with an air of fatigue. “He certainly hinted that he wanted the jewels placed away safely in case someone connected with the opal brooch should come.”

“Perhaps Captain Jessop, who did come,” said Paul, suddenly.

“He didn’t mention the name of Jessop,” snapped Pash. “Had he hinted at a sailor I would have known who my nautical visitor was.”

“We know all about that,” said Hurd, waving his hand; “But if Norman came to you at seven, how did you manage to prevent him meeting his wife in this office?”

“Oh, she was—What do you mean?” asked Pash, breaking off, and conscious that he was letting slip something he had rather had not been known.

Hurd saw the slip and Pash’s confusion and at once made every use of the opportunity. In fact, he played a game of bluff. Shaking his finger he approached the little lawyer. “Do you think I come here unprepared?” he asked, solemnly; “do you think I have not been to ‘The Red Pig’ at Christchurch and learned that Mrs. Krill knew of her husband’s whereabouts, through Hay, long before the day she came to you with the lying story about the hand-bills? Hay has confessed his share in the business of a false introduction to throw Mr. Beecot off the scent, seeing that he was defending Miss Norman’s interests. Do you think I don’t know that this woman Krill came to see you, through Hay, whose lawyer

you are? She was here on that fatal evening,” said Hurd, making a bold shot, “how did you prevent her seeing Norman?”

Pash was completely thrown off his balance by this volley of language and presumption of knowledge. “Mrs. Krill left at six,” he gasped, backing to the wall.

“And carried off the brooch?”

“I’m not sure—I can’t say—I *did* miss the brooch—”

“After Mrs. Krill left?”

“No, when Norman came. I intended to show him the brooch and found it gone.”

“Mrs. Krill left at six. Between six and seven did any other client come into the office?”

“Yes—no—I can’t say. Well,” Pash broke down in despair seeing that his lies were not believed, “I think Mrs. Krill did steal the brooch.”

“Quite so, and murdered her husband!” Hurd went to the door and took Beecot’s arm. “I only hope you won’t be brought up as an accessory before the fact, Mr. Pash,” and disregarding the lawyer’s exclamations he dragged Paul outside. In Chancery Lane he spoke. “I’ve bluffed him fine,” he said, “that boy is lost. Can’t see him anywhere. But we’re getting at the truth at last.”

Chapter XXIV

Mrs. Krill At Bay

Next day Hurd did not go to see Mrs. Krill as he had intended, but spent his time in hunting for the missing boy. Tray, however, was not to be found. Being a guttersnipe and accustomed to dealing with the police he was thoroughly well able to look after himself, and doubtless had concealed himself in some low den where the officers of the law would not think of searching for him. However, the fact remained that, in spite of the detective’s search, he could not be caught, and the authorities were much vexed. To unravel the case completely Tray was a necessary witness, especially as, even when examined at Jubileetown, Hurd

shrewdly suspected he had not confessed all the truth. However, what could be done was done, and several plain-clothes detectives were set to search for the missing boy.

Pash remained quiet for, at all events, the next four-and-twenty hours. Whether he saw Mrs. Krill or not during that time Hurd did not know and, truth to say, he cared very little. The lawyer had undoubtedly acted dishonestly, and if the matter were made public, there would be every chance that he would be struck off the rolls. To prevent this Pash was quite ready to sell Mrs. Krill and anyone else connected with the mystery. Also, he wished to keep the business of Miss Norman, supposing the money—as he hinted might be the case through his assistance—came back to her; and this might be used as a means to make him speak out. Hurd was now pretty sure that Mrs. Krill was the guilty person.

“She knew Pash through Hay,” argued the detective, while thinking over the case, “and undoubtedly came to see him before Norman’s death, so that Pash might suggest ways and means of getting the better of the old man by means of the bigamy business. Mrs. Krill was in the Chancery Lane office when the brooch left by Tray was on the table, and Mrs. Krill, anxious to get it, no doubt slipped it into her pocket when Pash was talking to his clerk in the outer room. Then I expect she decided to punish her husband by fastening his lips together as he had done those of her daughter twenty and more years ago. I can’t exactly see why she strangled him,” mused Hurd, “as she could have got the money without proceeding to such an extreme measure. But the man’s dead, and she killed him sure enough. Now, I’ll get a warrant out and arrest her straight away. There’s quite enough evidence to justify her being taken in charge. Hum! I wonder if she made use of that young devil of a Tray in any way? Well,” he rose and stretched himself, “I may force her to speak now that she is in a corner.”

Having made up his mind Hurd went to work at once, and the next day, late in the afternoon, he was driving in a cab to No. 32A Hunter Street, Kensington, with the warrant in his pocket. He also had with him a letter which he had received from Miss Qian, and written from Beechill in Buckinghamshire. Aurora had made good use of her time and had learned a number of facts connected with Mrs. Krill’s early life which Hurd thought would prove of interest to the woman. In one way and

another the case was becoming plain and clear, and the detective made sure that he would gain the reward. The irony of the thing was, that Mrs. Krill, with a view to throwing dust in the eyes of the law, had offered a bribe of one thousand pounds for the discovery of the assassin. She little thought when doing so that she was weaving a rope for her own neck.

Hurd had brought a plain-clothes policeman with him, and this man remained outside in a hansom while Hurd rang the bell. In a few minutes the door was opened and the detective sent up his card. Mrs. Krill proved to be at home and consented to receive him, so, shortly, the man found himself in an elegantly-furnished drawing-room bowing before the silent and sedate daughter.

“You wish to see my mother,” said Maud, with her eternal smile. “She will be down in a few minutes.”

“I await her convenience,” said Hurd, admiring the handsome looks of the young woman, although he plainly saw that she was—as he phrased it—“no chicken.”

After a few words Miss Krill rang the bell. “I want these things taken away,” she said, pointing to a workbasket and some millinery with which she had been engaged when Hurd was announced, “then I shall leave you to speak to my mother.”

The detective wondered if she was too fine a lady to remove these things herself, but his surprise ceased when the door opened and no less a person than Matilda Junk appeared. He guessed at once that the landlady of “The Red Pig” had come up to see her sister and had related details about her visitor. Probably Mrs. Krill guessed that Hurd had been asking questions, and Matilda had been introduced to see if he was the man. He became certain of this when Miss Junk threw up her hands. “The commercial gent,” she exclaimed.

“Oh, no,” said Maud, smiling smoothly. “This is Mr. Hurd, the detective, who is searching for the assassin of my dear father.”

“Lor,” said Matilda, growing red. “And he’s the man as came to ask questions at the ‘otel. I do call it bold of you, Mister Policeman.”

“Well,” said Hurd, swinging his hat lazily, and looking from one to the other, quite taking in the situation, “you answered very few of my questions, so that is all right.”

“Why did you go down to Christchurch?” asked Miss Krill.

“If I have to find out who killed your father,” said Hurd, with an accent on the word “father,” “it was necessary that I should learn about his past life as Lemuel Krill.”

“My mother could have informed you, sir.”

“I guessed as much, and, as Miss Junk would not speak, I have come to question Mrs. Krill. Ah, here she is.” Hurd rose and bowed. “I am glad to see you, madam.”

Mrs. Krill, who was as plump and smiling and smooth-faced and severe as ever, bowed and rubbed her white hands together. At a sign from Maud, Matilda gathered up the fancy work and went out of the room with many backward glances. These were mostly indignant, for she was angry at Hurd’s deception. “Do you wish my daughter to stay?” asked Mrs. Krill, smoothly.

“That is as she pleases,” said the detective.

“No, thank you, mother,” said Maud, shuddering, “I have heard quite enough of my poor father’s terrible death,” and she swept out of the drawing-room with a gracious smile.

“The poor child is so sensitive,” sighed Mrs. Krill, taking a seat with her back to the window. Whether this was done to conceal her age, or the expression of her face during a conversation which could not fail to prove trying, Hurd was unable to determine. “I trust, Mr. Hurd, you have come with good news,” said the widow.

“What would you call good news?” asked the detective, dryly.

“That you had traced the assassin,” she replied coolly.

Hurd was amazed at this brazen assurance, and thought that Mrs. Krill must be quite convinced that she had covered up every trail likely to lead to the discovery of her connection with the murder.

“I’ll leave you to judge whether I have been successful,” he said calmly.

“I shall be pleased to hear,” was the equally calm reply. But as Mrs. Krill spoke she glanced towards a gorgeous tapestry curtain at the end of the room, and Hurd fancied he saw it shake. It suddenly occurred to him that Maud was behind. Why she should choose this secret way of listening when she could have remained it was difficult to say, and he half thought he was mistaken. However, listening openly or secretly, did not matter so far as the daughter was concerned, so Hurd addressed himself to Mrs. Krill in a loud and cheerful voice. She composed herself to listen with a bland smile, and apparently was quite ignorant that there was anything wrong.

“I was lately down at Christchurch, madam—”

“So my servant, Matilda Junk, said.”

“It was necessary that I should go there to search out your husband’s past life. In that past I fancied, might be found the motive for the commission of the crime.”

“I could have saved you the journey,” said Mrs. Krill, shrugging her plump shoulders. “I can tell you what you wish to know.”

“In that case I will relate all that I have learned, and perhaps you will correct me if I am wrong.”

Mrs. Krill bowed but did not commit herself to speech. For the sake of effect the detective took out a sheaf of notes, but in reality he had the various points of the case at his finger tips. “You will excuse me if I talk on very private matters,” he said, apologetically, “but as we are alone,” again Mrs. Krill glanced at the curtain and thereby confirmed Hurd’s suspicions of an unseen listener, “you will not mind my being, perhaps, personal.”

“Personal,” echoed Mrs. Krill, a keen look coming into her hard eyes, and she stopped rubbing her hands together.

“Well, yes,” admitted Hurd, with affected reluctance. “I had to look into your past as well as into that of your husband’s.”

Mrs. Krill's eyes grew harder than ever. She scented danger. "My past is a most uninteresting one," she said, coldly. "I was born at Stowley, in Buckinghamshire, and married Mr. Krill at Beechill, which is a few miles from that town. He was a traveller in jewellery, but as I did not like his being away from me, I induced him to rent 'The Red Pig' at Christchurch, to which we removed. Then he left me—"

"On account of Lady Rachel Sandal's murder?"

Mrs. Krill controlled herself excellently, although she was startled by this speech, as was evident from the expression of her eyes. "That poor lady committed suicide," she said deliberately. "The jury at the inquest brought in a verdict of suicide—"

"By a majority of one," added Hurd, quickly. "There seemed to be a considerable amount of doubt as to the cause of the death."

"The death was caused by strangulation," said Mrs. Krill, in hard tones. "Since you know all about the matter, you must be aware that I and my daughter had retired after seeing Lady Rachel safe and sound for the night. The death was discovered by a boon companion of my husband's, with whom he was drinking at the time."

"I know that. Also that you came down with your daughter when the alarm was given. I also know that Krill fastened your daughter's lips together with the opal brooch which was found in the parlor."

"Who told you that?" asked Mrs. Krill, agitated.

"Jessop—the boon companion you speak of."

"Yes," she said, suppressing her agitation with a powerful effort. "Matilda said you had him to dine with you. What else did he say?" she asked with some hesitation.

"Much less than I should have liked to know," retorted Hurd, prepared to throw off the mask; "but he told me a great deal which interested me very much. Amongst other things that Grexon Hay had been engaged to your daughter for two years."

"Well?" asked Mrs. Krill, coolly, "what of that?"

“Nothing particular,” rejoined Hurd, just as coolly, “only I wonder you took the trouble to pretend that you met Hay at Pash’s office for the first time.”

“That was some romantic rubbish of my daughter’s. There was no reason why we should not have acknowledged Mr. Hay as an old acquaintance.”

“None in the world that I can see,” said Hurd, smoothly. “He told you that Aaron Norman was your husband.”

“No,” said Mrs. Krill, decidedly, “I first heard of my husband by seeing a chance hand-bill—”

“Not at all,” answered Hurd, just as decidedly, “Hay has confessed.”

“There was nothing to confess,” cried Mrs. Krill, loudly and with emphasis.

“Oh, I think so,” said the detective, noting that she was losing her temper. “You didn’t want it known that you were aware of Norman’s identity before his death. Do you deny that?”

“I deny everything,” gasped Mrs. Krill, her hands trembling.

“That’s a pity, as I want you to corroborate certain facts connected with Anne Tyler. Do you know the name?”

“My maiden name,” said the widow, and a look of fear crept into her hard, staring eyes. “How did you come to know of it?”

“From the marriage certificate supplied by Pash.”

“He had no right to give it to you.”

“He didn’t. I possess only a copy. But that copy I sent down in charge of a certain person to Beechill. This person found that you were married as Anne Tyler to Lemuel Krill in the parish church, twenty miles from your birthplace.”

Mrs. Krill drew a long breath of relief. “Well?” she demanded defiantly, “is there anything wrong about that?”

“No. But this person also made inquiries at Stowley about you. You are the daughter of a farmer.”

“I mentioned that fact myself.”

“Yes. But you didn’t mention that your mother had been hanged for poisoning your father.”

Mrs. Krill turned ghastly pale. “No,” she said in a suffocating voice, “such is the case; but can you wonder that I forebore to mention that fact? My daughter knows nothing of that—nor did my husband—”

“Which husband do you mean, Krill or Jessop?” asked Hurd.

Mrs. Krill gasped and rose, swaying. “What do you mean, man?”

“This,” said the detective, on his feet at once; “this person hunted out the early life of Anne Tyler at Stowley. It was discovered that Anne was the daughter of a woman who had been hanged, and of a man who had been murdered. Also this person found that Anne Tyler married a sailor called Jarvey Jessop some years before she committed bigamy with Lemuel Krill in Beechill Church—”

“It’s a lie!” screamed Mrs. Krill, losing her self-control. “How dare you come here with these falsehoods?”

“They are not falsehoods, Anne Tyler, *alias* Anne Jessop, *alias* Anne Krill, etc.,” retorted Hurd, speaking rapidly and emphasizing his remarks with his finger in his usual fashion when in deadly earnest. “You were married to Jessop in Stowley Church; you bore him a daughter who was christened Maud Jessop in Stowley Church. The person I mentioned sent me copies of the marriage and birth certificates. So your marriage with Lemuel Krill was false, and his second marriage with Lillian Garner is a good one in law. Which means, Mrs. Jessop,” Hurd hurled the word at her and she shrank, “that Sylvia Norman or Sylvia Krill, as she rightfully is, owns that money which you wrongfully withhold from her. The will gave the five thousand a year to ‘my daughter,’ and Sylvia is the only daughter and only child—the legitimate child, mark you—of Lemuel Krill.”

“Lies—lies—lies!” raged Mrs. Krill, as she may still be called, though rightfully Jessop, “I’ll defend the case on my daughter’s behalf.”

“Your daughter, certainly,” said Hurd, “but not Krill’s.”

“I say yes.”

“And I say no. She was fifteen when Lady Rachel was murdered, as Jessop, her father, admitted. I knew the man was keeping something back, but I was far from suspecting that it was this early marriage. No wonder the man came to you and had free quarters at ‘The Red Pig.’ He could have prosecuted you for bigamy, just as you would have prosecuted Krill, had you not murdered him.”

Mrs. Krill gave a yell and her eyes blazed. “You hound!” she shouted, “do you accuse me of that?”

“I do more than accuse you, I arrest you.” Hurd produced the warrant. “A man is waiting in the cab. We’ll get a four-wheeler, and you’ll come along with me to gaol, Mrs. Jessop.”

“You can’t prove it—you can’t prove it,” she panted, “and I sha’n’t go—I sha’n’t—I sha’n’t!” and her eyes sought the tapestry.

“Miss Jessop can come out,” said Hurd, coolly, “and, as to your not coming, a few policemen will soon put that right.”

“How dare you insult me and my daughter?”

“Come, come,” said the detective, sternly, “I’ve had quite enough of this. You offered me one thousand pounds to learn who killed your so-called husband, Krill. I have earned the reward—”

“Not one shilling shall you have.”

“Oh, I think so. Miss Sylvia will pay it to me, and you—”

“I am innocent. I never touched the man.”

“A jury will decide that, Mrs. Jessop.”

“Krill—my name is Krill.”

Hurd laughed and turned towards the tapestry.

“What do you say, Miss Jessop?” he asked.

Seeing that further concealment was at an end, Maud lifted the tapestry, which concealed a small door, through which she had silently stolen to listen. She advanced calmly. “I have heard all your conversation with my mother,” she declared with flashing eyes, “and not one word of it is true. I am the daughter of Lemuel Krill.”

“You’ll find that hard to prove in the face of your birth certificate and your mother’s marriage to Captain Jessop, your father.”

“It will all be put right.”

“Quite so, and Miss Norman will get the money.”

“That girl—never!” cried Maud, fiercely. She looked very like her mother at the moment, but the more angry she grew the calmer became Mrs. Krill, who kept darting anxious glances at her daughter. “And you sha’n’t take my mother away,” she cried threateningly.

“I don’t want to make a scandal in the neighborhood,” said Hurd, taking a small whistle from his pocket, “but if I blow this my man out there will call the nearest policeman, and then—”

“There is no need,” interrupted Mrs. Krill, who had recovered her self-control. “Maud, come over beside me. On what grounds, Mr. Hurd, do you accuse me of the crime? I was not in town on—”

“Oh, yes, you were, Mrs. Jessop. Pash can prove that you were in his office and took the brooch left by Tray from the table. I don’t know where you stopped on that night—”

“At Judson’s Hotel, Strand,” cried Maud, placing herself beside her mother, “and anyone there can prove that my mother and myself were within doors after we came from Terry’s Theatre, where we spent the evening. As my father—for Krill *was* my father—was killed after twelve, and we were both in bed in one room before then, your accusation falls to the ground. My mother was with me, and she did not leave the whole evening. Next day we went to Christchurch.”

Hurd was rather staggered by the positive way in which the young woman spoke. But the facts were too plain for him to hesitate. "I must trouble you to come along with me," he said. "No, don't go!"

"To put on my cloak and hat?" urged Mrs. Krill. "I'll come quietly enough. I don't want a scandal. I am sure when the magistrate hears what I have to say he will let me go free."

"I trust so. But you must not leave the room. Matilda will, no doubt, bring your things."

Mrs. Krill touched the electric button of the bell, while Maud walked up and down, deathly white and fuming. "Mr. Hay shall see to this," she said in a cold rage.

"Mr. Hay will have quite enough to do to look after himself," said the detective, coolly; "you had better let your mother go quietly, and I won't say anything to Matilda Junk."

"Yes, do, Maud," urged the mother, placing an imploring hand on her tall daughter's shoulder; "it's better so. Everything will be put right when the magistrate hears my story."

"What will you tell him, mother?" asked Maud.

"That I am innocent, and that I am, as you are, ignorant of who killed your unfortunate father."

Matilda entered the room and heard that Mrs. Krill had to go out on business with Mr. Hurd. On receiving her orders she departed, and presently returned with the cloak and hat. Mrs. Krill, who was now quite cool, put these on. Hurd could not but admire the brave way in which she faced the terrible situation. Maud seemed to be far more upset, and Hurd wondered if the young woman knew the truth. Mrs. Krill kept soothing her. "It will be all right, my love. Don't excite yourself. It will be all right," she said several times.

Miss Junk departed, and Mrs. Krill said that she was ready to depart. Hurd offered her his arm, which she rejected, and walked to the door with a firm step, although her face was rather white. At the door she caught her daughter round the neck and kissed her several times, after

which she whispered earnestly in her ear, and then went down the stairs with the detective in attendance. Maud, with white lips and cheeks, but with dry eyes, followed. When her mother was safely in the cab, the plain-clothes policeman alighted, so that Hurd might take his place. Maud came quietly down the steps and seized the detective by the arm.

“You have ruined my mother,” she said in a cold, hard tone; “you have robbed me of my money and of the chance of marrying the man I love. I can’t hurt you; but that girl, Sylvia—she shall never get one penny—so, remember!”

Hurd shook her off, and, stepping into the cab, drove away. Mrs. Krill looked apprehensively at him. “What did Maud say?” she asked. Hurd told her, and Mrs. Krill closed her lips firmly. “Maud is quite right,” she said with a strange smile. “Sylvia will never get the money.”

Chapter XXV

A Cruel Woman

“Jus’ say your meanin’, my pretty queen,” said Mrs. Tawsey, as she stood at the sitting-room door, and watched Sylvia reading an ill-written letter. “It’s twelve now, and I kin be back by five, arter a long, and enjiable tork with Matilder.”

“You certainly must go,” replied Sylvia, handing back the letter. “I am sure your sister will be glad to see you, Debby.”

Deborah sniffed and scratched her elbow. “Relatives ain’t friends in our family,” she said, shaking her head, “whatever you may say, my deary-sweet. Father knocked mother int’ lunatics arter she’d nagged ‘im to drunk an’ police-cells. Three brothers I ‘ad, and all of ‘em that ‘andy with their fistises as they couldn’t a-bear to live in ‘armony without black eyes and swolled bumps all over them. As to Matilder, she an’ me never did, what you might call, hit it orf, by reason of ‘er not givin’ way to me, as she should ha’ done, me bein’ the youngest and what you might call the baby of the lot. We ain’t seen each other fur years, and the meetin’ will be cold. She’ll not have much forgiveness fur me bein’ a bride, when she’s but a lone cross-patch, drat her.”

“Don’t quarrel with her, Debby. She has written you a very nice letter, asking you to go down to Mrs. Krill’s house in Kensington, and she really wants to see you before she goes back to Christchurch to-night.”

“Well, I’ll go,” said Deborah, suddenly; “but I don’t like leavin’ you all by your own very self, my sunflower.”

“I’ll be all right, Debby. Paul comes at four o’clock, and you’ll be back at five.”

“Sooner, if me an’ Matilder don’t hit if orf, or if we hit each other, which, knowin’ ‘er ‘abits, I do expects. But Bart’s out till six, and there won’t be anyone to look arter them as washes—four of ‘em,” added Mrs. Tawsey, rubbing her nose, “and as idle as porkpines.”

“Mrs. Purr can look after them.”

“Look arter gin more like,” said Deborah, contemptuously. “She’s allays suckin’, sly-like, tryin’ to purtend as it’s water, as if the smell didn’t give it away, whatever the color may be. An’ here she is, idling as usual. An’ may I arsk, Mrs. Purr ma’am,” demanded Deborah with great politeness, “wot I pays you fur in the way of ironin’?”

But Mrs. Purr was too excited to reply. She brushed past her indignant mistress and faced Sylvia, waving a dirty piece of paper. “Lor’, miss,” she almost screamed, “you do say as you want t’know where that limb Tray ‘ave got to—”

“Yes—yes,” said Sylvia, rising, “he escaped from Mr. Hurd, and we want to find him very much.”

“It’s a letter from ‘im,” said Mrs. Purr, thrusting the paper into Sylvia’s hand; “tho’ ‘ow he writes, not ‘avin’ bin to a board school, I dunno. He’s in a ken at Lambith, and ill at that. Want’s me t’go an’ see ‘im. But I can’t leave the ironin’.”

“Yuss y’ can,” said Deborah, suddenly; “this erringd is ness’ary, Mrs. Purr ma’am, so jes’ put on your bunnet, an’ go to Mr. Hurd as ‘as ‘is orfice at Scotlan’ Yard, and take ‘im with you.”

“Oh! but I couldn’t—”

“You go,” advised Mrs. Tawsey. “There’s five pounds offered for the brat’s bein’ found.”

“Five pun!” gasped Mrs. Purr, trembling. “Lor’, and me ‘avin’ a chanct of gittin’ it. I’ll go—I’ll go. I knows the Yard, ‘avin’ ‘ad summat to do with them dirty perlice in my time. Miss Sylvia—”

“Yes, go, Mrs. Purr, and see Mr. Hurd. He’ll give you the five pounds if you take him to Tray.” Sylvia handed back the paper. “Tray seems to be ill.”

“Ill or well, he sha’n’t lose me five pun, if I ‘ave to drag ‘im to the lock-up m’self,” said Mrs. Purr, resolutely. “Where’s my bunnet—my shawl—oh lor’—five pun! Them is as good allays gits rewards,” and she hurried out, hardly able to walk for excitement.

“There’s a nice ole party fur you, Miss Sylvia?”

“Debby,” said the girl, thoughtfully. “You take her to the Yard to see Mr. Hurd, and then go to Kensington to speak with your sister.”

“Well, I’ll go, as importance it is,” said Mrs. Tawsey, rubbing her nose harder than ever. “But I ‘opes you won’t be lone, my poppet-dovey.”

“Oh, no,” said Sylvia, kissing her, and pushing her towards the door. “I’ll look after those four women in the wash-house, and read this new book I have. Then I must get tea ready for Paul, who comes at four. The afternoon will pass quite quickly.”

“I’ll be back at five if I can, and earlier if Matilder ain’t what she oughter be,” said Mrs. Tawsey, yielding. “So make yourself ‘appy, honey, till you sees me smilin’ again.”

In another quarter of an hour Mrs. Tawsey, dressed in her bridal gown and bonnet so as to crush Matilda with the sight of her splendor, walked down the garden path attended by Mrs. Purr in a snuffy black shawl, and a kind of cobweb on her head which she called a “bunnet.” As Deborah was tall and in white and Mrs. Purr small and in black, they looked a strange pair. Sylvia waved her hand out of the window to Debby, as that faithful creature turned her head for a final look at the young mistress she idolized. The large, rough woman was dog-like in her fidelity.

Sylvia, left alone, proceeded to arrange matters. She went to the wash-house, which was detached from the cottage, and saw that the four women, who worked under Deborah, were busy. She found them all chattering and washing in a cheerful way, so, after a word or two of commendation, she returned to the sitting-room. Here she played a game of patience, arranged the tea-things although it was yet early, and finally settled down to one of Mrs. Henry Wood's interesting novels. She was quite alone and enjoyed the solitude. The wash-house was so far away, at the end of the yard, that the loud voices of the workers could not be heard. The road before Rose Cottage was not a popular thoroughfare, and it was rarely that anyone passed. Out of the window Sylvia could see a line of raw, red-brick villas, and sometimes a spurt of steam, denoting the presence of the railway station. Also, she saw the green fields and the sere hedges with the red berries, giving promise of a hard winter. The day was sunny but cold, and there was a feeling of autumnal dampness in the air. Deborah had lighted a fire before she went, that her mistress might be comfortable, so Sylvia sat down before this and read for an hour, frequently stopping to think of Paul, and wonder if he would come at the appointed hour of four or earlier. What with the warmth, and the reading, and the dreaming, she fell into a kind of doze, from which she was awakened by a sharp and peremptory knock. Wondering if her lover had unexpectedly arrived, though she did not think he would rap in so decided a manner, Sylvia rubbed the sleep out of her pretty eyes and hurried to the door. On the step she came face to face with Miss Maud Krill.

"Do you know me, Miss Norman?" asked Maud, who was smiling and suave, though rather white in the face.

"Yes. You came with your mother to Gwynne Street," replied Sylvia, wondering why she had been honored with a visit.

"Quite so. May I have a few minutes' conversation with you?"

"Certainly." Sylvia saw no reason to deny this request, although she did not like Miss Krill. But it struck her that something might be learned from that young woman relative to the murder, and thought she would have something to tell Paul about when he arrived. "Will you walk in, please," and she threw open the sitting-room door.

“Are you quite alone?” asked Maud, entering, and seating herself in the chair near the fire.

“Quite,” answered Sylvia, stiffly, and wondering why the question was asked; “that is, the four washerwomen are in the place at the back. But Mrs. Tawsey went to your house to see her sister.”

“She arrived before I left,” said Maud, coolly. “I saw them quarrelling in a most friendly way. Where is Mr. Beecot?”

“I expect him later.”

“And Bart Tawsey who married your nurse?”

“He is absent on his rounds. May I ask why you question me in this way, Miss Krill?” asked Sylvia, coldly.

“Because I have much to say to you which no one else must hear,” was the calm reply. “Dear me, how hot this fire is!” and she moved her chair so that it blocked Sylvia’s way to the door. Also, Miss Krill cast a glance at the window. It was not snibbed, and she made a movement as if to go to it; but, restraining herself, she turned her calm, cold face to the girl. “I have much to say to you,” she repeated.

“Indeed,” replied Sylvia, politely, “I don’t think you have treated me so well that you should trouble to converse with me. Will you please to be brief. Mr. Beecot is coming at four, and he will not be at all pleased to see you.”

Maud glanced at the clock. “We have an hour,” she said coldly; “it is just a few minutes after three. My business will not take long,” she added, with an unpleasant smile.

“What is your business?” asked Sylvia, uneasily, for she did not like the smile.

“If you will sit down, I’ll tell you.”

Miss Norman took a chair near the wall, and as far from her visitor as was possible in so small a room. Maud took from her neck a black silk handkerchief which she wore, evidently as a protection against the cold, and folding it lengthways, laid it across her lap. Then she looked at

Sylvia, in a cold, critical way. “You are very pretty, my dear,” she said insolently.

“Did you come to tell me that?” asked the girl, firing up at the tone.

“No. I came to tell you that my mother was arrested last night for the murder of *our* father.”

“Oh,” Sylvia gasped and lay back on her chair, “she killed him, that cruel woman.”

“She did not,” cried Maud, passionately, “my mother is perfectly innocent. That blackguard Hurd arrested her wrongfully. I overheard all the conversation he had with her, and know that he told a pack of lies. My mother did *not* kill our father.”

“My father, not yours,” said Sylvia, firmly.

“How dare you. Lemuel Krill was my father.”

“No,” insisted Sylvia. “I don’t know who your father was. But from your age, I know that you are not—”

“Leave my age alone,” cried the other sharply, and with an uneasy movement of her hands; “we won’t discuss that, or the question of my father. We have more interesting things to talk about.”

“I won’t talk to you at all,” said Sylvia, rising.

“Sit down and listen. You *shall* hear me. I am not going to let my mother suffer for a deed she never committed, nor am I going to let you have the money.”

“It is mine.”

“It is not, and you shall not get it.”

“Paul—Mr. Beecot will assert my rights.”

“Will he indeed,” said the other, with a glance at the clock; “we’ll see about that. There’s no time to be lost. I have much to say—”

“Nothing that can interest me.”

“Oh, yes. I think you will find our conversation very interesting. I am going to be open with you, for what I tell you will never be told by you to any living soul.”

“If I see fit it shall,” cried Sylvia in a rage; “how dare you dictate to me.”

“Because I am driven into a corner. I wish to save my mother—how it is to be done I don’t know. And I wish to stop you getting the five thousand a year. I know how *that* is to be done,” ended Miss Krill, with a cruel smile and a flash of her white, hungry-looking teeth; “you rat of a girl—”

“Leave the room.”

“When I please, not before. You listen to me. I’m going to tell you about the murder—”

“Oh,” said Sylvia, turning pale, “what do you mean?”

“Listen,” said the other, with a taunting laugh, “you’ll be white enough before I’ve done with you. Do you see this,” and she laid her finger on her lips; “do you see this scar? Krill did that.” Sylvia noticed that she did not speak of Krill as her father this time; “he pinned my lips together when I was a child with that opal serpent.”

“I know,” replied Sylvia, shuddering, “it was cruel. I heard about it from the detective and—”

“I don’t wish for your sympathy. I was a girl of fifteen when that was done, and I will carry the scar to my grave. Child as I was then, I vowed revenge—”

“On your father,” said Sylvia, contemptuously.

“Krill is not my father,” said Maud, changing front all at once; “he is yours, but not mine. My father is Captain Jessop. I have known this for years. Captain Jessop told me I was his daughter. My mother thought that my father was drowned at sea, and so married Krill, who was a traveller in jewellery. He and my mother rented ‘The Red Pig’ at Christchurch, and for years they led an unhappy life.”

“Oh,” gasped Sylvia, “you confess. I’ll tell Paul.”

“You’ll tell no one,” retorted the other woman sharply. “Do you think I would speak so openly in order that you might tell all the world with your gabbling tongue? Yes, and I’ll speak more openly still before I leave. Lady Rachel Sandal did not commit suicide as my mother said. She was strangled, and by me.”

Sylvia clapped her hands to her face with a scream. “By you?”

“Yes. She had a beautiful brooch. I wanted it. I was put to bed by my mother, and kept thinking of the brooch. My mother was down the stairs attending to your drunken father. I stole to Lady Rachel’s room and found her asleep. I tried to take the brooch from her breast. She woke and caught at my hand. But I tore away the brooch and before Lady Rachel could scream, I twisted the silk handkerchief she wore, which was already round her throat, tighter. I am strong—I was always strong, even as a girl of fifteen. She was weak from exhaustion, so she soon died. My mother came into the room and saw what I had done. She was terrified, and made me go back to bed. Then she tied Lady Rachel by the silk handkerchief to the bedpost, so that it might be thought she had committed suicide. My mother then came back to me and took the brooch, telling me I might be hanged, if it was found on me. I was afraid, being only a girl, and gave up the brooch. Then Captain Jessop raised the alarm. I and my mother went downstairs, and my mother dropped the brooch on the floor, so that it might be supposed Lady Rachel had lost it there. Captain Jessop ran out. I wanted to give the alarm, and tell the neighbors that Krill had done it—for I knew then he was not my father, and I saw, moreover, how unhappy he made my mother. He caught me,” said Maud, with a fierce look, “and bound a handkerchief across my mouth. I got free and screamed. Then he bound me hand and foot, and pinned my lips together with the brooch which he picked off the floor. My mother fought for me, but he knocked her down. Then he fled, and after a long time Jessop came in. He removed the brooch from my mouth and unbound me. I was put to bed, and Jessop revived my mother. Then came the inquest, and it was thought that Lady Rachel had committed suicide. But she did not,” cried Maud, exultingly, and with a cruel light in her eyes, “I killed her—I—”

“Oh,” moaned Sylvia, backing against the wall with widely open eyes; “don’t tell me more—what horrors!”

“Bah, you kitten,” sneered Maud, contemptuously, “I have not half done yet. You have yet to hear how I killed Krill.”

Sylvia shrieked, and sank back in her chair, staring with horrified eyes at the cruel face before her.

“Yes,” cried Maud, exultingly, “I killed him. My mother suspected me, but she never knew for certain. Listen. When Hay told me that Krill was hiding as Norman in Gwynne Street I determined to punish him for his cruelty to me. I did not say this, but I made Hay promise to get me the brooch from Beecot—on no other condition would I marry him. I wanted the brooch to pin Krill’s lips together as he had pinned mine, when I was a helpless child. But your fool of a lover would not part with the brooch. Tray, the boy, took it from Beecot’s pocket when he met with that accident—”

“How do you know Tray?”

“Because I met him at Pash’s office several times when I was up. He ran errands for Pash before he became regularly employed. I saw that Tray was a devil, of whom I could make use. Oh, I know Tray, and I know also Hokar the Indian, who placed the sugar on the counter. He went to the shop to kill your father at my request. I wanted revenge and the money. Hokar was saved from starvation by my good mother. He came of the race of Thugs, if you know anything about them—”

“Oh,” moaned Sylvia, covering her face again.

“Ah, you do. So much the better. It will save my explaining, as there is not much time left before your fool arrives. Hokar saw that I loved to hurt living creatures, and he taught me how to strangle cats and dogs and things. No one knew but Hokar that I killed them, and it was thought he ate them. But he didn’t. I strangled them because I loved to see them suffer, and because I wished to learn how to strangle in the way the Thugs did.”

Sylvia was sick with fear and disgust. “For God’s sake, don’t tell me any more,” she said imploringly.

But she might as well have spoken to a granite rock. “You shall hear everything,” said Maud, relentlessly. “I asked Hokar to strangle Krill. He

went to the shop, but, when he saw that Krill had only one eye, he could not offer him to the goddess Bhowanee. He came to me at Judson's hotel, after he left the sugar on the counter, and told me the goddess would not accept the offering of a maimed man. I did not know what to do. I went with my mother to Pash's office, when she was arranging to prosecute Krill for bigamy. I met Tray there. He told me he had given the brooch to Pash, and that it was in the inner office. My mother was talking to Pash within and I chatted to Tray outside. I told Tray I wanted to kill Krill, and that if he would help me, I would give him a lot of money. He agreed, for he was a boy such as I was when a girl, fond of seeing things suffer. You can't wonder at it in me," went on Miss Krill, coolly; "my grandmother was hanged for poisoning my grandfather, and I expect I inherit the love of murder from her—"

"I won't listen," cried Sylvia, shuddering.

"Oh, yes, you will. I'll soon be done," went on her persecutor, cruelly. "Well, then, when I found Tray was like myself I determined to get the brooch and hurt Krill—hurt him as he hurt me," she cried vehemently. "Tray told me of the cellar and of the side passage. When my mother and Pash came out of the inner office and went to the door, I ran in and took the brooch. It was hidden under some papers and had escaped my mother's eye. But I searched till I got it. Then I made an appointment with Tray for eleven o'clock at the corner of Gwynne Street. I went back to Judson's hotel, and my mother and I went to the theatre. We had supper and retired to bed. That is, my mother did. We had left the theatre early, as my mother had a headache, and I had plenty of time. Mother fell asleep almost immediately. I went downstairs veiled, and in dark clothes. I slipped past the night porter and met Tray. We went by the side passage to the cellar. Thinking we were customers Krill let us in. Tray locked the door, and I threw myself on Krill. He had not been drinking much or I might not have mastered him. As it was, he was too terrified when he recognized me to struggle. In fact he fainted. With Tray's assistance I bound his hands behind his back, and then we enjoyed ourselves," she rubbed her hands together, looking more like a fiend than a woman.

Sylvia rose and staggered to the door. "No more—no more."

Maud pushed her back into her chair. “Stop where you are, you whimpering fool!” she snarled exultingly, “I have you safe.” Then she continued quickly and with another glance at the clock, the long hand of which now pointed to a quarter to four, “with Tray’s assistance I carried Krill up to the shop. Tray found an auger and bored a hole in the floor. Then I picked up a coil of copper wire, which was being used in packing things for Krill to make his escape. I took it up. We laid Krill’s neck over the hole, and passed the wire round his neck and through the hole. Tray went down and tied a cross stick on the end of the wire, so that he could put his weight on it when we strangled—”

“Oh—great heaven,” moaned Sylvia, stopping her ears.

Maud bent over her and pulled her hands away. “You *shall* hear you little beast,” she snarled. “All the time Krill was sensible. He recovered his senses after he was bound. I prolonged his agony as much as possible. When Tray went down to see after the wire, I knelt beside Krill and told him that I knew I was not his daughter, that I intended to strangle him as I had strangled Lady Rachel. He shrieked with horror. That was the cry you heard, you cat, and which brought you downstairs. I never expected that,” cried Maud, clapping her hands; “that was a treat for Krill I never intended. I stopped his crying any more for assistance by pinning his mouth together, as he had done mine over twenty years before. Then I sat beside him and taunted him. I heard the policeman pass, and the church clock strike the quarter. Then I heard footsteps, and guessed you were coming. It occurred to me to give you a treat by strangling the man before your eyes, and punish him more severely, since the brooch stopped him calling out—as it stopped me—me,” she cried, striking her breast.

“Oh, how could you—how could—”

“You feeble thing,” said Maud, contemptuously, and patting the girl’s cheek, “you would not have done it I know. But I loved it—I loved it! That was living indeed. I went down to the cellar and fastened the door behind me. Tray was already pressing on the cross stick at the end of the wire, and laughed as he pressed. But I stopped him. I heard you and that woman enter the shop, and heard what you said. I prolonged Krill’s agony, and then I pressed the wire down myself for such a time as I thought it would take to squeeze the life out of the beast. Then with Tray

I locked the cellar door and left by the side passage. We dodged all the police and got into the Strand. I did not return to the hotel, but walked about with Tray all the night talking with—joy,” cried Maud, clapping her hands, “with joy, do you hear. When it was eight I went to Judson’s. The porter thought I had been out for an early walk. My mother—”

Here Maud broke off, for Sylvia, who was staring over her shoulder out of the window saw a form she knew well at the gate. “Paul—Paul,” she shrieked, “come—come!”

Maud whipped the black silk handkerchief round the girl’s neck. “You shall never get that money,” she whispered cruelly, “you shall never tell anyone what I have told you. Now I’ll show you how Hocar taught me,” she jerked the handkerchief tight. But Sylvia got her hand under the cruel bandage and shrieked aloud in despair. At once she heard an answering shriek. It was the voice of Deborah.

Maud darted to the door and locked it. Then she returned and, flinging Sylvia down, tried again to tighten the handkerchief, her face white and fierce and her eyes glittering like a demon’s.

“Help—help!” cried Sylvia, and her voice grew weaker. But she struggled and kept her hands between the handkerchief and her throat. Maud tried to drag them away fiercely. Deborah was battering frantically at the door. Paul ran round to the window. It was not locked, and Maud, struggling with Sylvia had no time to close it. With a cry of alarm Paul threw up the window and jumped into the room. At the same moment Deborah, putting her sturdy shoulder to the frail door, burst it open. Beecot flung himself on the woman and dragged her back. But she clung like a leech to Sylvia with the black handkerchief in her grip. Deborah, silent and fierce, grabbed at the handkerchief, and tore it from Maud’s grasp. Sylvia, half-strangled, fell back in a faint, white as a corpse, while Paul struggled with the savage and baffled woman.

“You’ve killed her,” shouted Deborah, and laid her strong hands on Maud, “you devil!” She shook her fiercely. “I’ll kill you,” and she shook her again.

Paul threw himself on his knees beside the insensible form of Sylvia and left Deborah to deal with Maud. That creature was gasping as Mrs. Tawsey swung her to and fro. Then she began to fight, and the two

women crashed round the little room, upsetting the furniture. Paul took Sylvia in his arms, and shrank against the wall to protect her.

A new person suddenly appeared. No less a woman than Matilda. When she saw Maud in Deborah's grip she flew at her sister like a tigress and dragged her off. Maud was free for a moment. Seeing her chance she scrambled out of the window, and ran through the garden down the road towards the station. Perhaps she had a vague idea of escape. Deborah, exerting her great strength, threw Matilda aside, and without a cry ran out of the house and after the assassin who had tried to strangle Sylvia. Matilda, true to her salt, ran also, to help Maud Krill, and the two women sped in the wake of the insane creature who was swiftly running in the direction of the station. People began to look round, a crowd gathered like magic, and in a few moments Maud was being chased by quite a mob of people. She ran like a hare. Heaven only knows if she hoped to escape after her failure to kill Sylvia, but she ran on blindly. Into the new street of Jubileetown she sped with the roaring mob at her heels. She darted down a side thoroughfare, but Deborah gained on her silently and with a savage look in her eyes. Several policemen joined in the chase, though no one knew what the flying woman had done. Maud turned suddenly up the slope that led to the station. She gained the door, darted through it, upset the man at the barrier and with clenched fists stood at bay, her back to the rails. Deborah darted forward—Maud gave a wild scream and sprang aside: then she reeled and fell over the platform. The next moment a train came slowing into the station, and immediately the wretched woman was under the cruel wheels. When she was picked up she was dead and almost cut to pieces. Lady Rachel and Lemuel Krill were revenged.

Chapter XXVI

A Final Explanation

Sylvia was ill for a long time after that terrible hour. Although Maud had not succeeded in strangling her, yet the black silk handkerchief left marks on her neck. Then the struggle, the shock and the remembrance of the horrors related by the miserable woman, threw her into a nervous fever, and it was many weeks before she recovered sufficiently to enjoy life. Deborah never forgave herself for having left Sylvia alone, and nursed her with a fierce tenderness which was the result of remorse.

“If that wretch ‘ad killed my pretty,” she said to Paul, “I’d ha’ killed her, if I was hanged fur it five times over.”

“God has punished the woman,” said Paul, solemnly. “And a terrible death she met with, being mutilated by the wheels of the train.”

“Serve ‘er right,” rejoined Deborah, heartlessly. “What kin you expect fur good folk if wicked ones, as go strangulating people, don’t git the Lord down on ‘em. Oh, Mr. Beecot,” Deborah broke down into noisy tears, “the ‘orrors that my lovely one ‘ave tole me. I tried to stop her, but she would tork, and was what you might call delirious-like. Sich murders and gory assassins as wos never ‘eard of.”

“I gathered something of this from what Sylvia let drop when we came back from the station,” said Beecot, anxiously. “Tell me exactly what she said, Deborah.”

“Why that thing as is dead, an’ may she rest in a peace, she don’t deserve, tole ‘ow she murdered Lady Rachel Sandal an’ my ole master.”

“Deborah,” cried Beecot, amazed. “You must be mistaken.”

“No, I ain’t, sir. That thing guv my lily-queen the ‘orrors. Jes you ‘ear, Mr. Beecot, and creeps will go up your back. Lor’ ‘ave mercy on us as don’t know the wickedness of the world.”

“I think we have learned something of it lately, Mrs. Tawsey,” was Paul’s grim reply. “But tell me—”

“Wot my pore angel sunbeam said? I will, and if it gives you nightmares don’t blame me,” and Mrs. Tawsey, in her own vigorous, ungrammatical way, related what she had heard from Sylvia. Paul was struck with horror and wanted to see Sylvia. But this Deborah would not allow. “She’s sleepin’ like a pretty daisy,” said Mrs. Tawsey, “so don’t you go a-disturbin’ of her nohow, though acrost my corp you may make a try, say what you like.”

But Paul thought better of it, thinking Sylvia had best be left in the rough, kindly hands of her old nurse. He went off to find Hurd, and related all that had taken place. The detective was equally horrified along with Beecot when he heard of Sylvia’s danger, and set to work to

prove the truth of what Maud had told the girl. He succeeded so well that within a comparatively short space of time, the whole matter was made clear. Mrs. Jessop, *alias* Mrs. Krill, was examined, Tray was found and questioned, Matilda was made to speak out, and both Jessop and Hoken had to make clean breasts of it. The evidence thus procured proved the truth of the terrible confession made by Maud Jessop to the girl she thought to strangle. Hurd was amazed at the revelation.

“Never call me a detective again,” he said to Paul. “For I am an ass. I thought Jessop might be guilty, or that Hoken might have done it. I could have taken my Bible oath that Mrs. Krill strangled the man; but I never for one moment suspected that smiling young woman.”

“Oh,” Paul shrugged his shoulders, “she was mad.”

“She must have been,” ruminated the detective, “else she wouldn’t have given herself away so completely. Whatever made her tell Miss Norman what she had done?”

“Because she never thought that Sylvia would live to tell anyone else. That was why she spoke, and thought to torture Sylvia—as she did—in the same way as she tortured that wretched man Lemuel. If I hadn’t come earlier to Rose Cottage than usual, and if Deborah had not met me unexpectedly at the station, Sylvia would certainly have been killed. And then Maud might have escaped. She laid her plans well. It was she who induced Matilda to get her sister to come to Kensington for a chat.”

“But Matilda didn’t know what Maud was up to?”

“No. Matilda never guessed that Maud was guilty of two murders or designed to strangle Sylvia. But Maud made use of her to get Deborah out of the house, and it was Maud who made Tray send the letter asking Mrs. Purr to come to him, so that she also might be out of the way. In fact Maud arranged so that everyone should be away and Sylvia alone. If she hadn’t wasted time in telling her fearful story, she might have killed my poor love. Sylvia was quite exhausted with the struggle.”

“Well,” said Hurd. “I went with the old woman to the address given in that letter which Tray got written for him. He wasn’t there, however, so I might have guessed it was a do.”

“But you have caught him?”

“Yes, in Hunter Street. He was loafing about there at night waiting for Maud, and quite ignorant of her death. I made him tell me everything of his connection with the matter. He’s as bad a lot as that girl, but she had some excuse, seeing her grandmother was a murderess; Tray is nothing but a wicked little imp.”

“Will he be hanged?”

“No, I think not. His youth will be in his favor, though I’d hang him myself had I the chance, and so put him beyond the reach of hurting anyone. But I expect he’ll get a long sentence.”

“And Mrs. Krill?”

“Mrs. Jessop you mean. Hum! I don’t know. She apparently was ignorant that Maud killed Krill, though she might have guessed it, after the way in which Lady Rachel was murdered. I daresay she’ll get off. I’m going to see her shortly and tell her of the terrible death of her daughter.”

Paul did not pursue the conversation. He was sick with the horror of the business, and, moreover, was too anxious about Sylvia’s health to take much interest in the winding up of the case. That he left in the hands of Hurd, and assured him that the thousand pounds reward, which Mrs. Krill had offered, would be paid to him by Miss Norman.

Of course, Pash had known for some time that Maud was too old to have been born of Mrs. Jessop’s second marriage with Krill; but he never knew that the widow had committed bigamy. He counted on keeping her under his thumb by threatening to prove that Maud was not legally entitled to the money. But when the discovery was made at Beechill and Stowley Churches by Miss Qian, the monkey-faced lawyer could do nothing. Beecot could have exposed him, and for his malpractices have got him struck off the rolls; but he simply punished him by taking away Sylvia’s business and giving it to Ford. That enterprising young solicitor speedily placed the monetary affairs on a proper basis and saw that Sylvia was properly reinstated in her rights. Seeing that she was the only child and legal heiress of Krill, this was not difficult. The two women who had illegally secured possession of the money had spent a great deal

in a very wasteful manner, but the dead man's investments were so excellent and judicious that Sylvia lost comparatively little, and became possessed of nearly five thousand a year, with a prospect of her income increasing. But she was too ill to appreciate this good fortune. The case got into the papers, and everyone was astonished at the strange sequel to the Gwynne Street mystery. Beecot senior, reading the papers, learned that Sylvia was once more an heiress, and forthwith held out an olive branch to Paul. Moreover, the frantic old gentleman, as Deborah called him, really began to feel his years, and to feel also that he had treated his only son rather harshly. So he magnanimously offered to forgive Paul on no conditions whatsoever. For the sake of his mother, the young man buried the past and went down to be received in a stately manner by his father, and with joyful tears by his mother. Also he was most anxious to hear details of the case which had not been made public. Paul told him everything, and Beecot senior snorted with rage. The recital proved too much for Mrs. Beecot, who retired as usual to bed and fortified herself with sal volatile; but Paul and his respected parent sat up till late discussing the matter.

“And now, sir,” said Beecot senior, grasping the stem of his wine glass, as though he intended to hurl it at his son, “let us gather up the threads of this infamous case. This atrocious woman who tried to strangle your future wife?”

“She has been buried quietly. Her mother was at the funeral and so was the father.”

“A pretty pair,” gobbled the turkey-cock, growing red. “I suppose the Government will hang the pair?”

“No. Captain Jessop can't be touched as he had nothing to do with the murder, and Sylvia and myself are not going to prosecute him for his attempt to get the jewels from Pash.”

“Then you ought to. It's a duty you owe to society.”

Paul shook his head. “I think it best to leave things as they are, father,” he said mildly, “especially as Mrs. Jessop, much broken in health because of her daughter's terrible end, has gone back with her husband to live at his house in Stowley.”

“What,” shouted Beecot senior, “is that she-devil to go free, too?”

“I don’t think she was so bad as we thought,” said Paul. “I fancied she was a thoroughly bad woman, but she really was not. She certainly committed bigamy, but then she thought Jessop was drowned. When he came to life she preferred to live with Krill, as he had more money than Jessop.”

“And, therefore, Jessop, as you say, had free quarters at ‘The Red Pig.’ A most immoral woman, sir—most immoral. She ought to be ducked.”

“Poor wretch,” said Paul, “her mind has nearly given way under the shock of her daughter’s death. She loved that child and shielded her from the consequences of killing Lady Rachel. The Sandal family don’t want the case revived, especially as Maud is dead, so Mrs. Jessop—as she is now—can end her days in peace. The Government decided to let her go under the circumstances.”

“Tush,” said Beecot senior, “sugar-coated pills and idiocy. Nothing will ever be done properly until this Government goes out. And it will,” striking the table with his fist, “if I have anything to do with the matter. So Mrs. Krill or Jessop is free to murder, and—”

“She murdered no one,” interposed Paul, quickly; “she knew that her daughter had killed Lady Rachel, and shielded her. But she was never sure if Maud had strangled Krill, as she feared to ask her. But as the girl was out all night at the time of the murder, Mrs. Jessop, I think, knows more than she chooses to admit. However, the Treasury won’t prosecute her, and her mind is now weak. Let the poor creature end her days with Jessop, father. Is there anything else you wish to know?”

“That boy Tray?”

“He was tried for being an accessory before the crime, but his counsel put forward the plea of his age, and that he had been under the influence of Maud. He has been sent to a reformatory for a good number of years. He may improve.”

“Huh!” grunted the old gentleman, “and silk purses may be made out of sow’s ears; but not in our time, my boy. We’ll hear more of that juvenile scoundrel yet. Now that, that blackguard, Hay?”

“He has gone abroad, and is likely to remain abroad. Sandal and Tempest kept their word, but I think Hurd put it about that Hay was a cheat and a scoundrel. Poor Hay,” sighed Paul, “he has ruined his career.”

“Bah! he never had one. If you pity scoundrels, Paul, what are you to think of good people?”

“Such as Deborah who is nursing my darling? I think she’s the best woman in the world.”

“Except your mother?”

Paul nearly fell from his seat on hearing this remark. Beecot senior certainly might have been in earnest, but his good opinion did not prevent him still continuing to worry Mrs. Beecot, which he did to the end of her life.

“I suppose that Matilda Junk creature had nothing to do with the murder?” asked Beecot, after an embarrassing pause—on his son’s part.

“No. She knew absolutely nothing, and only attacked Deborah because she fancied Deborah was attacking Maud. However, the two sisters have made it up, and Matilda has gone back to ‘The Red Pig.’ She’s as decent a creature as Deborah, in another way, and was absolutely ignorant of Maud’s wickedness. Hurd guessed that when she spoke to him so freely at Christchurch.”

“And the Thug?”

“Hokar? Oh, he is not really a Thug, but the descendant of one. However, they can’t prove that he strangled anything beyond a few cats and dogs when he showed Maud how to use the roomal—that’s the handkerchief with which the Thugs strangled their victims.”

“I’m not absolutely ignorant,” growled his father. “I know that. So this Hokar goes free?”

“Yes. He would not strangle Aaron Norman because he had but one eye, and Bhowanee won’t accept maimed persons. Failing him, Maud had to attend to the job herself, with the assistance of Tray.”

“And this detective?”

“Oh, Ford, with Sylvia’s sanction, has paid him the thousand pounds, which he shares with his sister, Aurora Qian. But for her searching at Stowley and Beechill, we should never have known about the marriage, you know.”

“No, I don’t know. They’re far too highly paid. The marriage would have come to light in another way. However, waste your own money if you like; it isn’t mine.”

“Nor mine either, father,” said Paul, sharply. “Sylvia will keep her own fortune. I am not a man to live on my wife. I intend to take a house in town when we are married, and then I’ll still continue to write.”

“Without the spur of poverty you’ll never make a hit,” grinned the old gentleman. “However, you can live where you please. It’s no business of mine but I demand, as your indulgent father, that you’ll bring Sylvia down here at least three times a year. Whenever she is well I want to see her.”

“I’ll bring her next week,” said Paul, thinking of his mother. “But Deborah must come too. She won’t leave Sylvia.”

“The house is big enough. Bring Mrs. Tawsey also—I’m rather anxious to see her. And Sylvia will be a good companion for your mother.”

So matters were arranged in this way, and when Paul returned to town he went at once to tell Sylvia of the reconciliation. He found her, propped up with pillows, seated by the fire, looking much better, although she was still thin and rather haggard. Deborah hovered round her and spoke in a cautious whisper, which was more annoying than a loud voice would have been. Sylvia flushed with joy when she saw Paul, and flushed still more when she heard the good news.

“I am so glad, darling,” she said, holding Paul’s hand in her thin ones. “I should not have liked our marriage to have kept you from your father.”

Mrs. Tawsey snorted. “His frantic par,” she said, “ah, well, when I meet ‘im, if he dares to say a word agin my pretty—”

“My father is quite ready to welcome her as a daughter,” said Paul, quickly.

“An’ no poor one either,” cried Deborah, triumphantly. “Five thousand a year, as that nice young man Mr. Ford have told us is right. Lor’! my lovely queen, you’ll drive in your chariot and forget Debby.”

“You foolish old thing,” said the girl, fondly, “you held to me in my troubles and you shall share in my joy.”

“Allays purvidin’ I don’t ‘ave to leave the laundry in charge of Bart an’ Mrs. Purr, both bein’ infants of silliness, one with gin and t’other with weakness of brain. It’s well I made Bart promise to love, honor and obey me, Mr. Beecot, the same as you must do to my own lily flower there.”

“No, *I* am to love, honor and obey Paul,” cried Sylvia.

“When?” he asked, taking her in his arms.

“As soon as I can stand at the altar,” she replied, blushing, whereat Deborah clapped her hands.

“Weddin’s an’ weddin’s an’ weddin’s agin,” cried Mrs. Tawsey, “which my sister Matilder being weary of ‘er spinstering ‘ome ‘ave made up ‘er mind to marry the fust as offers. An’ won’t she lead ‘im a dance neither—oh, no, not at all.”

“Well, Deborah,” said Beecot, “we have much to be thankful for, all of us. Let us try and show our gratitude in our lives.”

“Ah, well, you may say that,” sighed Mrs. Tawsey, in a devout manner. “Who’d ha’ thought things would have turned out so ‘appy-like indeed. But you go on with your billin’, my lovely ones, and I’ll git th’ mutting broth to put color int’ my pretty’s cheeks,” and she bustled out.

Sylvia’s heart was too full to say anything. She lay in Paul’s strong arms, her cheek against his. There she would remain for the rest of her life, protected from storm and tempest. And as they sat in silence, the chimes of an ancient grandfather’s clock, Deborah’s chief treasure, rang out twice, thrice and again. Paul laughed softly.

“It’s like wedding-bells,” he whispered, and his future wife sighed a sigh of heart-felt joy.

THE END

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