



Neither Sir Jeffery nor Beryl dared to look at one another during this description, and at the close neither said a word.

Both knew the dagger only too well. Like the bracelet, it had been bought when on the wedding tour in America, and the fellow to it had been given by Sir Jeffery to Beryl's father, and at the present moment in the collection of arms at Lyeover Court.

Mr. Gifford himself seemed to feel that there was some strong reason for the action, and he made haste to break it.

"I must go. There's a lot to do. I thought I'd better bring these two things here," he said, pointing to the bit of lace and the little gold trinket, "and I'd have had the other if it hadn't been that it would have been seen at once. I'll keep this bit of lace. I shall want that, and you'd better say nothing about it. I suppose you want me to go on with the matter, Sir Jeffery?" And he looked up as if waiting for instructions.

"Yes, you must go through with it. Sift it to the bottom."

"There's not much to sift now. The man who puts his hand on the owner of that dagger and that little trinket, and that scrap of lace won't have any difficulty in finding the murderers of the Frenchman."

His two hearers shuddered at the words.

"I'm not at all sure that you're right," said Sir Jeffery, "but you must find out at any cost. Of course," he added, with some hesitation, "you understand that you are acting privately, for me, and you have no need to tell anything of what you find out to any one else. Your fees will be paid by me."

The man's eyes gleamed in an instant with a sort of restrained aversion.

"I have done my best, Sir Jeffery. I know the extreme pain and trouble which may often be saved by a little silence. If you will excuse me now, I will go. You know all so far. I had better be out and doing, because the police make such noise, and went away, and Sir Jeffery and Beryl remained agitated at the story to which they had listened and all that it threatened.

Sir Jeffery was standing by the window, leaning against the side shutter, and pressing his hand heavily against his head, while Beryl sat quite still in her chair by the table, pressing her hands together feverishly in her lap and feeling so chilled that she trembled violently.

"She must be mad! It is the only possible cause," burst from Sir Jeffery like a man of pain.

Then a knock was heard at the door, and Mr. Gifford came back into the room again, shut the door carefully behind him and advanced right into the middle of the room before he spoke.

"Excuse me, Sir Jeffery, but there's a point which you'll perhaps like to have put very plain to you. I don't ask any questions about ownership of that dagger, but of course you'll see that a great deal must turn on it. I don't know whether you think that the grave complications which would certainly arise if it were proved to belong to any one particular can be in any way avoided, but if that can be done it should be done, and that without a minute's needless delay. I thought I'd mention the point; that's all."

Sir Jeffery hung his head in bitter humiliation.

But Beryl jumped up.

"Are you going?" he asked as if disappointed at her leaving him. "I want to talk all this over with you. It's not to be broken to the mother, too," he said.

"I shall come back again, but I must go home. For one thing I want to see how my father is," she answered without meeting his eyes.

She went out to her carriage, and, getting in, told the coachman to drive home as quickly as possible. In an inconceivably short time she was back again, and she found Sir Jeffery still pining the room where she had left him, sitting down the fears which would force themselves upon him as the result of Mr. Gifford's discoveries.

"What have you been doing, Beryl?" he asked as she entered.

"I have been home, Jeffery. Mr. Gifford started an idea in my thoughts, and I have been home to carry it out. Let us be frank with one another in this terrible business. Have you any idea of what it all means or of what we can do?"

"There is only one possible explanation—if this man's thoughts have any foundation—only one. My poor wife has gone mad, and all these awful consequences are the outcome. I have been thinking and thinking and thinking about it all until I am almost mad myself. And he threw up his hands with a gesture of despair. "It is horrible, horrible beyond belief, horrible! And I feel as helpless as a child."

"Well, I have thought of one thing that we can do," said Beryl, "and I have been home to prepare for it."

"What is it?" asked Sir Jeffery eagerly.

"It is not necessary to believe all that Mr. Gifford says and seems to think, but we may act as though what he believes is correct and do what we can to make any proof much harder. You heard what he said about the dagger, and we know to whom it really belongs, and we know what people will think if it is found out that such a weapon were taken from the man's house."

"How can they help finding that out?" burst in Sir Jeffery.

"I have been thinking of that, and that was why I went home. You remember you brought home two of those daggers from America and that one of them was given to me, and I thought that if it was placed where the other ought to be, supposing, as we fear, it is not there, it would help to turn aside suspicion, for a time at any rate."

"You are a true friend, Beryl!" exclaimed Sir Jeffery, taking her hand and pressing it. "Let us go at once and put it there. It was always kept in that old oak cabinet in the blue drawing room."

They went at once to the room and found the dagger gone, as they had expected, and the cabinet locked, but with the key in the lock in the middle.

In a moment the dagger which Beryl had brought was put into the place of the other, the outline of the weapon showing on the plush lining exactly the spot where it had lain.

Sir Jeffery looked at the door of the cabinet and put the key in his pocket with a sigh of relief.

"I thought your wife would help me, Beryl," he said, feeling very grateful to her. "You were always a clever counselor."

"I have had another idea," she said. "That little gold filigree ball was taken off one of the pair of bracelets of which Lola gave me one. I have brought it with me, and I should like to put it back among her jewelry, as it will draw away another of the links which seem to have had such effect upon Mr. Gifford. Even if the rest of the bracelet

should be found and this is here among her jewelry there is no connection shown."

"You are right, certainly right," exclaimed Sir Jeffery. "Let us go to her room and put it there."

"They went up without saying anything more, and after searching in the room, they found the jewelry for the bracelet they put Beryl's among them."

"What shall we do about the mother, Jeffery?" asked Beryl when they had looked up the jewels.

"I will not tell her more than is necessary, but if there is to be any real trouble through this, of course she will have to be told. I am afraid for her, and she will feel it the more keenly and brood on it so much because she is alone."

"My father is much better. If you like, I will stay with her tonight and much of tomorrow, but I must drive back first and tell papa."

"You will take one great load off my shoulders if you will," said Sir Jeffery, inexpressibly thankful to her.

"I will go to her now," said the girl quietly, "and will tell her all that need be told and as gradually as possible."

They had reached the bottom of the staircase. The landlady stood in the great hall, Beryl being two or three steps above him, with her hand on the balustrade, in the act of turning back to go to Lady Walcott.

"Your presence in the house is a great comfort, Beryl," said the landlady. "I can't thank you yet as I would."

"I am sorry for all the trouble that has come to you, Jeffery," she answered, "but I can help you, of course you know I will. There is no need for any mention of thanks between such old friends."

At that moment there was a commotion in the hall, and Mr. Gifford entered, followed by a police inspector.

"Here is Sir Jeffery himself," said the inspector, "and the private detective."

"The inspector would like to see you, sir, about this most distressing affair," said the landlady to Sir Jeffery.

"If it is convenient, Sir Jeffery," added the inspector, "I will call on you."

"Certainly, inspector, certainly," replied the landlady. "Come into the study. And, bracing himself for the interview, he led the way, followed by the two men, while Beryl went on slowly up the stairs.

As she looked at them across the hall Mr. Gifford, who was the last of the three, turned for a second and shrugged his shoulders and lifted his hands with a gesture which said more than words that something serious had happened.

Then, full of disquiet, she went on to Lady Walcott's room.

CHAPTER XXI.

Before going into her old friend's room Beryl walked up and down the long, broad corridor for some minutes, plunged in the deepest thought.

She was half bewildered by the rapidity with which the terrible events were crowding one upon the other, and it seemed to her almost impossible that barely two days had passed since she had had the interview with Pierre Turrian which appeared to have precipitated all the trouble that had followed.

Out of the chaos of violence and mystery and death it was with the greatest difficulty that she could evolve any coherent plans and ideas.

Holding the secret key to Lola's actions and her connection with the Frenchman, Beryl did not for the moment believe in Sir Jeffery's theory of madness. Whatever she might be, Lola was no more mad than Beryl herself.

Yet the girl shuddered at the alternative belief which this necessitated. She recalled the story which Pierre Turrian had told at the dinner table and the incident which he had afterwards denied—that Lola had in truth thought and sought to kill him by stamping on the floor when he hung helplessly clinging to the rock ledge at her feet.

If she could do that—

If she was mad, it was only in the sense of being daggered to momentary madness of passion in which she might have driven this dagger into her persecutor's heart, as she had before crushed his fingers in her paroxysm.

It was an awful deed; but, knowing the man, Beryl could not bring herself to say it was all an impossible thing for Lola to have done, and her feeling for the unfortunate victim of this villain's cruel cunning was much more than of pity and of remorse.

For his pity short at the commission of the crime.

If she could have gone to her now and helped her, Beryl felt that she would do so cheerfully. It was a fearful deed to have wrought, but Lola had been driven to bay.

Beryl had been glad thus to have an opportunity of fending off some of the suspicion which had threatened her, and she vowed to do all she could to help her in any way.

The sin had been grievous, but the punishment had been swift to follow and terrible to bear, and so far as lay in her power Beryl vowed that she would lighten rather than increase it.

The question was, however, where Lola had fled. It was clear that she must have gone away during the night after she had been seen by Sir Jeffery. Her course up to that time was plain enough to Beryl. The Frenchman had manifested himself to torment her in consequence of his failure to get Beryl herself out of the way. In the middle of the interview between the two Sir Jeffery had appeared and turned the Frenchman out of the house. Then he had written to Lola to meet him, and she, fearing possibly some violence or maybe moved by a desire for revenge, had taken her dagger with her. They had met by the cottage, and in a moment of passion she had stabbed him and killed him. Then, when making off, he had tried to leave the wood and had been frightened by the appearance of Sir Jeffery.

Owing to his trouble with the restive horse, he had been unable to follow her at once, and she had thus hidden and managed to evade him, slipping out of the wood in the darkness and away

probably to some railway station. That was the manifest reason of the conduct which to Sir Jeffery had seemed like the planless and purposeless wanderings of a lunatic.

Beryl's heart bled as she thought of what Lola must have suffered during the night and since the moment of the terrible deed in Ash Tree wood.

The girl went in to Lady Walcott unhesitating how much to tell her of all that had happened.

The old lady welcomed her warmly. She loved the girl, and now in the time of the sorrow and trouble which had fallen on the family she was infinitely glad of the comfort of her presence.

"This is a sad house, Beryl," she said after she had kissed her and made her bring a stool and sit close by her. "I have been sitting alone here thinking all my poor brain reels and is dizzy with it all. How is Jeffery now? Where is he? He has been like one distracted. Oh, Beryl, how could she treat him so?"

"There is much that we cannot yet

understand, dear," answered Beryl soothingly. "Do you know Jeffery's thoughts? He fears that Lola has for the time gone out of her mind."

"No; it is not that," said the old lady decisively. "You don't think that, I am sure. She has deceived him. She is mad, Beryl—bad to the core. She comes of a bad stock and is bad herself. That Frenchman is mixed up in this in some way. I never liked him—always suspected him, with his handsome face and his lying tongue."

"She loved Jeffery," began Beryl, when Lady Walcott burst in bitterly: "Yes, as Duiliah loved Sanson or Jael Siera and as Alice used to love the fools she turned to swine. Women don't elope from those they love and with those they hate, do they? You sense, child! When you're lived as long in the world as I have, you'll learn to love those who turn to swine. Women don't elope from those they love and with those they hate, do they? You sense, child! When you're lived as long in the world as I have, you'll learn to love those who turn to swine. Women don't elope from those they love and with those they hate, do they? You sense, child! When you're lived as long in the world as I have, you'll learn to love those who turn to swine."

"You must have sympathy for the woman who wrongs and shames my son," was the angry reply.

"You have no strength to close your heart against the plaint of genuine and desolate misery."

Lady Walcott shook her head and made as if to reply again sternly, but, meeting Beryl's eyes, said nothing and contented herself with the unspoken assertion of her sternness.

"You must banish all that hardness," said Beryl after a pause, "and collect all your strength of endurance. There is more trouble than even this fight of Sir Jeffery's wife. This Frenchman who left yesterday dead—did suddenly under circumstances which suggest that he was killed by violence."

"Is there no end to the scandal which that man brings upon us?" exclaimed Lady Walcott, wringing her hands. "How did it happen? Tell me."

Beryl told as much of the case as she thought necessary and parried the questions which Lady Walcott put to her, and she was still occupied thus when a servant knocked at the door and said that Sir Jeffery wished to see her in the library.

With Sir Jeffery matters had reached a point that seemed to promise an ugly crisis.

The local inspector was a man of some surface shrewdness, and as he was very anxious to find an opportunity of helping forward his own promotion and thought he could see in this case one that might help him he was resolved to make as much of it as possible. At the same time he had all an English police man's respect for a baronet of such wealth and influence as Sir Jeffery Walcott.

"I have come to ask you, Sir Jeffery, whether you can give me any information as to the unfortunate affair. I believe you identify the deceased man."

"Oh, yes. He is M. Pierre Turrian, a Frenchman or a Swiss, I think—a musician—who has been staying in this country in pursuit of some musical object, and for the last three days has been stopping here in the manor. He left yesterday suddenly."

"Can you tell me why he left?"

"I had words with him and told him to go."

"Can you tell me what the quarrel was about?"

"I can, if necessary, but it was a purely private matter. It is a purely private matter."

"I should like to know."

"Very well, then; I will consider about telling you."

The inspector received the answer with a bow.

"Do you know of any one who knew him at all, and who might under any circumstances have a grudge against him?"

"No, of no one. I should think I was as hot against him as any one could be," said Sir Jeffery, with a grim smile. "I have written him yesterday. I may say that I returned home in time to find him insulting my wife, and, in fact, assaulting her, and I have whipped him and turned him out of the house. That is the whole matter."

"Will it be convenient for me to see Lady Walcott presently?"

"No, I am sorry to say. For the present it is impossible. She has left the manor."

"Left the manor?" echoed the inspector in manifest surprise. "Do you mean—in what sense do you mean left?" he asked, changing the form of his question.

"I mean only that she has left the manor and that for the moment I do not know where she is."

Inspector Bordenham concealed the surprise which this fact made upon him by stopping over his notebook and making an elaborate note.

"This is very surprising intelligence, Sir Jeffery," he said at length.

"It is a very painful fact, inspector," replied the baronet.

"Will you tell me under what circumstances she left and whether you connect the fact in any way with the man who is dead?"

"Certainly I do not," answered Sir Jeffery promptly and firmly. "I cannot say exactly what are the circumstances which have led to her leaving the manor—I shall be able to do so in a day or two, of course—but I am certain there can be no more connection than that of a coincidental time."

"Did her ladyship leave before or after this M. Turrian?"

"After. She did not go until the early evening, leaving word that she was going to Lyeover Court. It was some time before dinner. The man had been some some hours."

"Had there been any communication between the Frenchman and her ladyship?"

"None to my knowledge. There has been some whisper to that effect, but I do not attach any belief to it whatever."

"Will you tell me what were the relations between her ladyship and this French gentleman? Were they cordial?"

"On the contrary, my wife objected very strongly to his coming to the

house, and, to my infinite regret, it was by my wish and invitation and quite against her wish that he came to stay here."

"Who saw him last when he left here?"

"Two servants. I told them to turn him out of the premises."

"Can I see them?"

In reply Sir Jeffery rang the bell, and the two men were summoned and questioned by the inspector and then sent away.

"Could you tell me how Lady Walcott was dressed when she left here?"

"No, I cannot. I did not see her after about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, but her maid may have seen her, and, if you like, you can see her and question her."

He rang the bell and sent for her, but

when she came she could throw no light on the matter of dress.

"I did not see my lady after I gave her the letter which was brought for her."

"What letter was that?" cried the inspector sharply.

"I do not know, sir. I don't read my mistress' letters. I know no more than that I think it was the letter contained in the envelope which I found in her ladyship's room in the evening and gave to this gentleman," pointing to Mr. Gifford.

"Very well; that will do. Thank you," said the inspector, dismissing her.

When she had gone, he turned to Mr. Gifford.

"What envelope is that? You didn't tell me."

"Didn't? Well, that was stupid! I meant to. She gave me an envelope addressed in an ordinary hand and with nothing in it, and I tore it up, thinking nothing of it." He told the tale, with all the air of one committing a blunder and thinks to face it out doggedly.

"You made a bad blunder when you did that, Mr. Gifford," said the inspector severely. "You should have seen the importance of little things as I recall in a lady's hand. However, if you choose to think I've done wrong, do it and welcome. And he sneered as if in some contemptuous indifference to the inspector's opinion."

"There was let me addressed to my wife on that afternoon in a lady's hand," said Sir Jeffery. "I myself gave it to her. It was from Miss Beryl Lyeover, and I believe I heard my wife say that in Miss Lyeover's letter she had gone over to see her at the Court. Miss Lyeover is in the manor now, Mr. Bordenham, if you would like to see her."

"I should," the latter said, and then Beryl, as she was waiting the inspector or took from his pocket a small parcel and opened it, and Mr. Gifford began to feel much keener interest than he had yet felt, because he knew that it contained the dagger which he had so often examined and the remaining portion of the gold filigree bracelet of which he himself had found the pendant.

"I may show you these while we are waiting," said the inspector. "This is the knife with which this man was killed, and this is a bracelet which was found near the body, as if dropped in a struggle of some kind. Do you recognize either of them? I ask because I have been told that they come from the man's house."

"At this moment Beryl entered the room, and Sir Jeffery and Mr. Gifford had their heads bent down examining the two articles closely.

"I wanted to ask you, Miss Lyeover, whether you saw anything of the matter of the dagger for a moment, about the letter which you wrote yesterday to Lady Walcott. Can you tell me what was in it?"

"I asked her to come to see me," replied Beryl.

"No, nor did she answer me in any way."

"She left word here that she was coming to you, and you are sure she did not?"

"I am quite sure," Beryl looked closely at the three men and saw that the matter had reached some sort of crisis.

"Then as to the weapon, Sir Jeffery, and the bracelet. Can you recognize them?"

"They are mine," interposed Beryl, speaking steadily and clearly. "At least that bracelet is mine, and that dagger is from our collection of curios at Lyeover Court."

"Are you sure?" asked the inspector, unable to conceal his intense surprise at the turn to matters which this answer gave.

"I am comparatively certain," answered Beryl. "At least I am so certain that I shall be surprised indeed if it is not this," touching the bracelet, "was given me by Sir Jeffery's wife when she returned from America, she having an almost exact duplicate, and this, pointing to the dagger, "the dagger you gave to papa, Jeffery, unless, of course, it's the fellow which you kept for yourself. But surely we can settle that easily. I think I know some little marks on it. Let us go and see whether the other is in its place or not. It was in the blue room, you know."

She spoke quite naturally and coolly and led the way to the cabinet.

"It's locked. Do you know who has the key, Jeffery?" she asked. "There is the dagger. I know this was ours."

Sir Jeffery produced the key, and the dagger was taken out and examined closely, first by the inspector and then by Mr. Gifford.

After that they went up stairs and looked for and of course found the bracelet among Lola's jewelry.

"I was sure of the bracelet, of course, and almost sure about the dagger. But now do you mean to tell me they have any sort of connection with this terrible deed?" she asked the inspector.

He explained how they had been found and then exclaimed in the tone of a man absolutely puzzled and bewildered: "Well, I can't understand it!"

Soon after he went away.

Then Mr. Gifford turned to Beryl, with a look of indescribable cunning and shrewdness in his eyes as he said: "I think you're one of the cleverest women in the world, but you made one mistake—there was no dust, not even a particle, on that dagger. But he didn't notice it. I was watching him."

And then, without giving her time to reply, he hurried away after the inspector.

To be continued.

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