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and then Dr. Browne spoke of his suspicions and his grounds for them, in detail, just as he had told them to his brother months ago.

'Now, Sir Patrick, I'm going to tell you something else,' he said, when he had concluded his story. 'Among the drugs that belonged to that find in woman's shape, there was one which had the effect of completely effacing the memory. A person subjected to it would lose all consciousness of his identity, would forget his own name, and cease to recognise his dearest friends.'

'Great Heaven! what a horrible drug!' exclaimed Sir Patrick, aghast. 'It is more than horrible. It is diabolic!' said Dr. Browne, with emphasis. 'If ever there was a fiend in woman's shape, Madeline Winter was one. It is an unspeakable mercy she is dead. Had she lived to maturer age, there is no saying how numerous, or how horrible, her crimes might have been. You have heard of monsters, in human shape, who have committed crimes for the mere love of crime. I verily believe that woman Winter, was one of these.'

'Yes; but as she is dead, why should you connect her with Miss Lisle?' 'I don't connect her with Miss Lisle. I only imagine that her knowledge of these vile drugs might be shared by someone else and that that someone may be seeking to injure this poor young lady.'

'I see. Well, Browne, I wish you could meet this girl, who calls herself Hilda Mostyn. If she is not Kate Lisle, I never saw a more wonderful resemblance in my life.'

'I should know her,' said Dr. Browne, eagerly. 'For one thing, there is a mark I could identify her by. I told you it was blood-poisoning she was suffering from, when I was called to her. The poison had been taken into the system through a small wound on the hand, a mere scratch just below the wrist. Undoubtedly that wound, small as it was, would leave a scar. Now, if there is such a scar on this girl's hand, should we not be justified in concluding she is really and truly Miss Kate Lisle, no matter what may be said to the contrary?'

'I should think so. But, Browne, what possible motive could anyone have for perpetrating such a crime?'

'That, of course, I cannot tell without knowing more of the young lady's antecedents. And that reminds me she did something very romantic, didn't she?—ran away to be married to a Frenchman, although she was engaged to Mr. Morewood, of Beech Royal.'

'Yes. I heard that much from an English friend some months ago; but I know no particulars. I thought it a great pity, for Morewood was a tremendously fine fellow.'

'If there has been foul play, you may depend it is connected in some way with the French lover,' said Dr. Browne, with decision. 'But I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll hang about this house among the hills until I see this young lady for myself. If I could have a little conversation with her, I should be able to tell whether her memory had been tampered with.'

'Ay, do, me boy!' cried Sir Patrick, eagerly. 'I'll stand by ye, and, if the pretty creature is being wronged, we'll get her righted somehow. Faith! it ye get into a scrimmage, I'll be the boy to help ye out of it, anyway.'

Dr. Browne laughed a little at the excitability of his Irish friend.

'I hope there'll be no 'scrimmage,' Sir Patrick. We must proceed very cautiously, and make sure of our ground at every step. It is all very mysterious, and we really haven't anything beyond suspicion to go upon. Nevertheless, in my own mind, I feel quite certain that poor young lady has some deadly enemy, and that she is the victim of foul play.'

The next day, Sir Patrick and Dr. Browne took their way to the lonely house among the hills.

They had brought a luncheon-basket with them, and, selecting a shady spot some little distance from the house, they encamped themselves very comfortably, and prepared to watch during the entire day, if need were, on the chance of seeing the girl who had called herself Hilda Mostyn.

They had chosen their point of vantage so well that, although they could see the house and garden distinctly, they themselves were quite concealed from observation.

There they watched and waited. A little after mid-day, the door of the white house opened, and a woman came forth—the same woman whom Sir Patrick had seen in the verandah yesterday.

She came down the garden with a slow and dignified step, and passing along the road, at no great distance from the grove of trees in which Dr. Browne and Sir Patrick had ensconced themselves.

They could see her distinctly.

A tall, noble-looking woman, of something over thirty, with a pale, clear skin, a fine mouth, dark, unfathomable eyes, and masses of raven-black hair.

'She reminds me of someone!' whispered Sir Patrick.

'Yes; and I think I can tell you whom,' said Dr. Browne, quietly. 'Lady Vere.'

'Sir Gerald's wife, you mean. Ah, yes!' exclaimed Sir Patrick, quite excitedly. 'Is it a mere coincidence, do you think, or is she a relation?'

'I should say she is a relation. If you remember, it was a cousin of Lady Vere Miss Lisle eloped with. This may be a sister of his; if so, she would be cousin to

Lady Vere, and that would account for the resemblance.'

The tall, dignified figure passed out of sight, and the two watchers again fixed their eyes on the villa, looking anxiously for some further signs of life within it.

'Surely the young lady will come out soon,' said Dr. Browne. 'It is hardly likely she stays inside the house all the day long.'

Even as he spoke, their patience was rewarded.

There was a flutter of a white dress on the verandah, and the next moment the girl came down the pathway.

She paused a moment or two at the gate, looking up the white, dusty road as though expecting someone; finally, she opened the gate and came out, not with the air of one who meditates a walk, but rather as though she meant to stroll up and down for a few minutes in sight of the house.

'She is expecting the lady back, and has come out to look for her,' said Sir Patrick. 'Now, Browne, it will, perhaps, be as well for me not to show myself, as I spoke to her only yesterday. You go down and speak to her, taking it for granted that she is, or was, Kate Lisle. Luckily, she is not wearing gloves, so you will be able to look at her hand.'

Dr. Browne nodded, and, emerging from the grove of trees, walked towards the house, arriving at the road just in time to meet the young lady, face to face, about a dozen yards from the garden-gate.

He stepped up to her with eagerly outstretched hand and a beaming smile.

'Miss Lisle, surely you haven't forgotten me—Doctor Browne, who attended you when you were so ill last year?'

The girl started visibly.

A very puzzled and faintly alarmed look crossed her face.

The next moment she smiled, but the smile was a sad one.

'You are mistaken,' she said. 'My name is not Lisle. I think I must be wonderfully like some other person, for, only yesterday, a gentleman spoke to me, believing I was Miss Lisle, whom he used to know.'

'The lady I knew was a Miss Kate Lisle. She was the daughter of the late Colonel Lisle, and was spending the winter with some friends in Hampshire—the Muggletons—who lived at a place called The Towers. She was engaged to be married to Mr. John Morewood, of Beech Royal.'

Dr. Browne delivered himself of all this information in a slow, impressive tone, looking intently at the girl meanwhile, in the hope of seeing some sign that one of those familiar names might open the cells where memory slept.

That this was, in truth, Kate Lisle, and no other, he was certain.

He recognised every feature, every look; and, moreover, on her wrist he saw, quite plainly, the tiny scar he so well remembered.

Equally certain was he that she was not wilfully deceiving him.

The poor girl actually believed that what she said was true.

She had lost all consciousness of her own previous identity.

Her memory had been stolen away by some devilish drug.

When he named John Morewood, a curiously wistful look came into her beautiful eyes.

She seemed to be trying to break some invisible chain that bound her.

She started; the colour rushed into her face, and she passed her hand over her forehead, in a bewildered fashion painful to see, just as she had done when Sir Patrick questioned her yesterday.

'I don't understand it at all,' she said, at length, in a very sad and wistful tone. 'I must be wonderfully like this young lady you used to know; but I don't think she can even be any relation of mine. I have no sister, and I don't think I have ever known anyone named Lisle.'

At this moment a voice called—'Miss Hilda! Miss Hilda!' and the woman who had interrupted Sir Patrick the day before, appeared in the verandah.

'I beg your pardon,' said the girl, hurriedly. 'I am wanted. My old nurse is calling me. I will wish you good afternoon.'

And, still with that wistfully troubled look on her face, she hurried back to the house.

Dr. Browne rejoined his friend, and told him what had taken place.

'I am as certain she is Miss Kate Lisle as that I am Doctor Thomas Browne,' he said with decision.

'Heaven preserve us! What is to be done?' ejaculated Sir Patrick. 'We couldn't very well fetch her away from them by force, eh, Browne? I'm quite ready to help you know!'

'No, no!' said Dr. Browne, laughing at the other's impulsiveness. 'We must be careful to keep within the law, especially as we're in a strange country. If the young lady herself seemed in the faintest degree dissatisfied with her position, it would be different. But, you see, she accepts it quite as a matter of course, and it were to declare, publicly, that she is not Hilda Mostyn, her own evidence would immediately contradict us.'

'Then what will we do?' asked Sir Patrick anxiously.

His honest Irish heart was overflowing with indignation, at the idea of leaving a woman in any peril.

He was as impulsively chivalrous as was ever a knight-errant in the days of old, and he would have rushed inside that innocent-looking villa straightway, and, knocking down every male being who opposed him, have brought Kate forth in safety by the strength of his own right arm.

Fortunately for the both, Dr. Browne had a little more prudence than the hot-headed tender-hearted Irish baronet.

'We must certainly keep within the law,' he repeated. 'Perhaps our best plan will be to communicate with the Muggletons in the first instance. They would very likely be able to give us some means of identification over and above what we ourselves possess. Perhaps Miss Vi Muggleton would even

come over here. I remember she was Miss Lisle's very dear friend.'

'We might find someone nearer home,' observed Sir Patrick, looking wistfully at the white villa, as though he longed to make a sudden raid upon it. 'Sir Gerald and Lady Vere are in Naples. They would come.'

'Nothing could be better,' said Dr. Browne. 'Lady Vere was deeply attached to Miss Lisle, and knew her, perhaps, even better than Miss Muggleton did.'

'I'll start for Naples tomorrow!' cried the energetic Sir Patrick. 'And you, me boy, must keep an eye on this place while I'm gone.'

'Splendid!' said Dr. Browne.

And forthwith they fell into an animated discussion of their plans, little dreaming that an event was nigh at hand—nay, had already taken place—which would effectually prevent any one of those plans from being carried out.

They had been walking very quickly up the side of the hill for about ten minutes, and were slackening speed a little to take breath, when a startling sound—a woman's voice, raised in a cry for help—rang on their ears.

'I'm afraid somebody's hurt!' said Dr. Browne, looking about him anxiously.

Again came the cry.

'Help! Help!' sounded over the lonely, silent hills.

'Come on!' cried Sir Patrick, making for the spot whence the cry came.

Dr. Browne followed closely, and, in a minute or two, they came in sight of a man lying on the ground, at the foot of a steep declivity, evidently badly injured, while a woman bent over him, with a look of agony.

As she turned her face wildly towards Sir Patrick and his friend, they with difficulty repressed an exclamation of surprise, for they recognized the woman as the one whom they had seen leave the white house a short time ago.

#### CHAPTER LXVI.

##### INSIDE THE WHITE HOUSE.

As Dr. Browne bent over the injured man, his face was very grave.

He saw in a moment the case was a serious one, and would probably have a fatal termination.

'How did it happen?' he questioned briefly.

The man was quite unconscious.

'He was coming down the hill,' the woman answered. 'He stumbled against a stone, and his gun went off. I fear he is dreadfully hurt. Oh! can you do anything for him?'

The woman's face was pale as death.

Her hands were clasped convulsively.

It was easy enough to see she was in deep distress of mind.

'I am a medical man,' said Dr. Browne, quietly, while Sir Patrick stood by, in sympathetic silence looking at the woman, and thinking how strongly she resembled Lady Vere.

'And will he—oh! will he live?' she panted, still clasping her hands convulsively together, and looking into the doctor's face with agony of fear in her eyes.

'I will do my best for him, You may rely on that; but I fear he is very seriously injured. He had better be removed to his home. Am I right in supposing you live at the house at the foot of the hill?'

'Yes,' she answered, with a sort of breathless wildness. 'Yes, that is our house. Would it be possible to take him there?'

'Quite possible. Sir Patrick will you take his feet—very gently, if you please—while I lift his head?'

Between them they lifted the injured man, and carried him to the house the woman was walking by their side with a look of stony grief upon her face.

The door of the house was opened by the woman, Nanetta.

She gave an exclamation of dismay at sight of the burden Sir Patrick and the doctor were carrying, but recovered her presence of mind very quickly, and went away to fetch the things Dr. Browne asked for.

In a few minutes the injured man had been laid on a mattress in one of the lower rooms.

He was still quite unconscious.

Dr. Browne, bending over him, tried to ascertain the extent of his injuries.

Once Sir Patrick saw the girl who called herself Hilda Mostyn.

She had evidently heard of the accident, and she just peeped in at the door with a pained, anxious look; but the tall dark woman signed to her to retire, and she obeyed immediately.

Sir Patrick felt certain this woman was the sister of the injured man.

It was midnight.

A solemn stillness reigned in the room where Louis Rochefort—for it was he, and none other—lay upon a mattress, palid and hollow-eyed, while the death lamps gathered on his brow.

Beside him stood Dr. Browne, a look of genuine compassion and concern on his kind, plain-featured face; and, at a little distance, the woman Leila stood, with her face bowed upon her hands, in an attitude of grief.

Rochefort had recovered consciousness an hour ago, and had straightway asked the doctor whether he had any chance of life.

Dr. Browne deemed it his duty to tell him the truth.

He told it as gently and as tenderly as possible.

A red spot glowed, for a moment, on Rochefort's cheek, then he turned very pale again, and, closing his eyes, uttered no further word.

The silence was becoming terribly oppressive to Dr. Browne.

He felt a conviction that this man, who was on the threshold of another world, was laboring under a heavy sense of guilt, and that, but for the presence of the woman, he would endeavour to find relief in confessing it before he died.

But she seemed resolved not to leave the doctor alone with her brother.

It was hours since they had laid the dying man on his bed, and, in all that time, she had not once stirred from the room.

If anything was needed, the woman, Nanetta, was summoned.

They had the same intensely dark eyes, and something of the same look about the broad, intellectual brow.

Greatly he wondered what their connection was with the girl, who, he was certain, was Kate Lisle.

During these few minutes Dr. Browne had been carefully probing for the bullet, which was lodged among the soft tissues in the lower part of the body.

Before he could trace it, the patient returned to consciousness, and moaned with pain.

The woman stepped forward, and laid her white shapely hand on his forehead.

'Louis!' she said, in a very musical voice. 'Louis, don't you know me?'

Sir Patrick cast a meaning glance at Dr. Browne.

He remembered that the man with whom Kate Lisle had eloped was a Louis Rochefort.

'Leila!' murmured the sufferer, and tried feebly, to put out his hand to her.

'I must have absolute quiet, if you please,' said Dr. Browne. 'Everything depends on that.' In a lower tone, he added in added in the woman's ear: 'The least excitement would prove fatal.'

He went on searching for the bullet; and the agony he was compelled to inflict was so intense that the man again swooned away.

'I fear I can do very little,' said Dr. Browne, gravely.

'Do you mean that he will die?' asked the woman.

Her voice was calm, but there was a world of sadness in her eyes.

'I fear he will. His injuries are terribly severe. It is impossible to extract the bullet, and he is bleeding inwardly. It is in kindness I tell you to prepare for the worst.'

'Will he suffer much?' she asked, a spasm crossing her features, as she looked at the pale, unconscious face upon the bed.

'I hope not—I am almost sure not. I shall stay with him, of course; and if you would like to send for further medical help—'

'No, no! what would be the use?' she said, with a curious bitterness. 'What is to be, will be! It's no use fighting with Fate! For months I have been expecting this!'

Dr. Browne looked the surprise he felt, but he did not question her as to the meaning of her strange speech.

'The gentleman is your brother, I think?' he said, after a momentary pause. She hesitated, visibly, then slowly answered—

'Yes.'

'Has he any relatives you would like to send for?'

Again something like a spasm of pain crossed her features.

'There's only one,' she said, speaking more as though she were communing with herself than answering him. 'Only one, and she—no, it is impossible. She could not come.'

She went to the side of the bed, fell on her knees, and laying her face close to that of the unconscious sufferer, seemed to be wrapped in silent grief.

Dr. Browne touched Sir Patrick on the arm and went out of the room with him.

'If you wouldn't mind going back—and seeing poor Lem,' he said, apologetically. 'He'll worry so if I don't turn up before bedtime.'

'My dear fellow, I'll go with all the pleasure in life,' said the warm-hearted Irishman. 'Don't you trouble about Lem. I'll see to him. I only wish I was leaving you with pleasanter work on your hands. Is there any hope for the poor soul?' and he pointed backwards to the door.

'Not a shred. He's bleeding to death as fast as he can, and no power can stop it. But did you hear what she said?'

'About expecting it?'

The doctor nodded.

'Yes. And I thought it very queer. Almost looks as though it wasn't an accident—as though there'd been foul play.'

'I don't know, I'm sure. There's a mystery somewhere. It's like enough I may unearth it before the night is gone. What an odd thing that we should get into this house in this way! Well, give my love to Lem, and tell him just how it is. Of course, I shall stay here as long as I can be of the slightest use. But that poor fellow's not long for this world. I question whether he'll last till morning.'

#### CHAPTER LXVII.

##### THE CONFESSION.

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If anything was needed, the woman, Nanetta, was summoned.

The girl who looked

had never once appeared since Sir Patrick went away.

At length, to break the oppressive silence, Dr. Browne bent over man, and, taking his hand, asked him very gently, whether there was anything he could do for him.

'If you could give me an easy mind, I would thank you,' he answered, gloomily. 'You can't do that, and there's nothing else I want.'

'Perhaps you would like to see a priest?' suggested Dr. Browne, perplexed to know what to say for the best.

'No, no!'

It was the woman who thus spoke, with a vehemence, an energy, which electrified the doctor.

A crimson spot glowed on her cheek.

Her great dark eyes were dilated with fear.

'No, no!' she repeated. 'Louis, tell him you have no such wish—that you have no belief in priestcraft.'

A slightly bitter smile crossed the wan features of the dying man.

'Have no fear, Leila. I have lived without priests and I will contrive to die without them. I want no mummery about my deathbed. I can die as I have lived—and yet—and yet—'

'And yet what?' questioned the woman coming closely to the bed and fixing her dark magnetic eyes upon him with so intent a look that Dr. Browne vaguely suspected that she was endeavoring to exercise some hypnotic influence on his dying patient.

'Nothing,' Rochefort answered, calmly. 'I will die as I have lived, Leila. Do not fear.'

As he spoke, he closed his eyes again, and, presently, sank into a doze, more like insensibility than sleep.

This lasted for, perhaps, half-an-hour, and Dr. Browne, standing on one side of the bed, while the woman stood on the other, was asking himself what would be the end of this eventful night.

If Kate Lisle had been the victim of a foul crime, this man was assuredly concerned in it.

Would he pass out of the world with sealed lips?

Could anything be done to induce him to confess his guilty secret?

While the doctor was thus questioning himself, Louis Rochefort opened his eyes with a violent start and shudder.

His face was convulsed with mental agony.

Great drops of perspiration broke out upon his brow.

'I have had a dream!' he cried. 'A horrible dream! Oh, God! how vivid it was! how terrible!'

After a moment or so, he fixed his eyes on the doctor with a wildly haggard look.

'Tell me,' he said, almost fiercely, 'tell me, do you believe there is a life after death? When the breath is shut of my body, I shall be a mere clod—shant I? There will be no awakening—no life beyond the grave?'

'Louis, you know there will not!' exclaimed his sister, eagerly.

He turned from her, and again fixed a haggard look on Dr. Browne.

'It was you I asked. Be honest and true with a dying man, and tell me what you really believe.'

'I dare not be anything but honest on such a point,' said the doctor, gravely. 'I am as certain there is a life after death as that night follows day.'

'Ah!'

Rochefort spoke with a little