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Yet no thought of recalling him entered his mind. He had gone—he had sent him away. It was the right thing to do, and hitherto she had never flinched at what she considered a duty.

Shirley never opened her lips during the drive back to Royal Heath. She sat looking straight before her, a weight of woe crushing her down. A terrible insurmountable barrier had suddenly sprung up between herself and Vivian West.

He was no longer free to come and go. However much she longed for him, he could not come to her.

She pictured him in a cell—alone—with common men to order him about.

The thought was anguish. Some of the house party came out to meet them as they arrived home, eager to hear the latest news.

Shirley slipped away to her room, while Sir Henry gave an account of what had occurred.

Some twenty minutes later, Madge followed her young sister.

She found her kneeling by the window, her elbows on the broad sill, her hands clasped about her head, her hat lying on the floor beside her, where she had flung it on entering the room.

She neither moved nor looked up, when Madge stood beside her.

'It is no use making yourself miserable,' the latter said, not unkindly. 'It is a most unfortunate affair; but it cannot be helped.'

'It is all my fault,' Shirley sobbed. 'If I had not told him about Gilbert, he would never have gone there.'

Madge sat down on the window-seat.

'I don't see how you can blame yourself. No one could have foreseen what was going to happen.'

'I felt something dreadful would come of it—I told you so. I remember now how I longed to go after him, and persuade him to return. Oh, if I only had!'

'It is foolish to fret like this, over what can't be helped. Nothing very awful has happened yet—I mean nothing very serious—and on Monday he will be released.'

'Not serious or awful to be put in prison?'

'He is only detained on suspicion. Of course it is abominable that they should have suspected him, and it means two miserable days for him, poor fellow; but they will soon pass away.'

Madge stooped, and, picking up the hat, smoothed the feathers with her small white hand.

The placid, contented action irritated Shirley, who was suffering as only warm-hearted, passionate people can suffer.

She seized the hat, and flung it across the room.

'Don't—I can't bear to see you—you treat it all as if it were nothing, while I feel as if I should never see him again. You are so certain he will be released on Monday. Why are you? If the evidence was all dead against him to day, why will it be different on Monday? He said it would be all different then; but I am sure, quite sure, he didn't think so. He said "good-bye" as if—as if it were for a very long time.'

The words came brokenly through stifled sobs.

Madge gently touched her slender heaving shoulder.

'You are not showing much pluck,' she said, reprovingly. 'Vivian was naturally down hearted. It is not so very agreeable to be suspected of murder for even a day. The dressing gown sounded some time ago I cannot stay longer now.'

'You won't expect me down this evening?'

'I shall think you very foolish if you stay up here and mope.'

'What else can I do? Do you think it would be possible for me to sit, and eat, and talk?'

'You should force yourself to do it. It will take your thoughts away from Vivian.'

Shirley slowly rose from her kneeling posture.

Her eyelids were red, her hair was dishevelled.

Madge, cool and trim, regarded her pityingly.

'You must bathe your eyes with some warm water and "eau-de-Cologne," she said.

Shirley turned away with an impatient gesture.

'Does it matter what I look like tonight?' she questioned. 'I am wretched. I only want to be alone. You mean to be kind. I know; but you don't understand what I feel. You have never loved anyone; you don't know what it is. I think I will go home, and then I shall not be in the way.'

'You will stay here,' Madge said, with a touch of authority in her tone; 'and on

Monday you will see what a silly child you have been.'

She was sorry for her. If she could have comforted her she would have done so; but, as Shirley said, she did not understand.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The papers were full of the Metherell Court mystery, and the arrest of Vivian West.

All the fashionable world, who, for one short season, had adorned the young artist, took an eager interest in the case.

It was so shocking—such a sudden and terrible ending to an exceptionally brilliant career.

For, strangely enough, the majority of those who had known him while he had been a universal favorite, were ready and willing to believe him guilty of a vile crime.

Strangely; but, after all, is it not the world's pleasant little way to believe the worst of everyone?

The case came before the magistrate on the Monday, but Vivian West was not released.

The examination was adjourned, and again adjourned, and, finally, after much suspense and delay, the prisoner was committed for trial.

Shirley received the news very quietly. Since that day of the request she had shed no tears; but her eyes had a look in them which made Madge uneasy.

It was she who broke the intelligence of Vivian's committal, striving vainly to soften the cruelty of the blow.

Shirley was pacing up and down the boudoir in a fever of unrest when Madge came to her.

She stood still as the door opened.

Her very heart seemed to cease beating. She knew she was going to hear the best or the worst.

Her eyes asked the question her lips refused to utter.

'Henry has come home,' Lady Ayerst said. 'They still insist upon detaining Vivian. It cannot be for much longer, Shirley. You must try to be brave and patient.'

'It is adjourned again?'

The hoarse voice sounded not at all like Shirley's.

'Yes, dear; that is, I believe they have decided he must go through a proper trial. It will be much better for him in the end. He will have justice done him then.'

Shirley paid no heed to her words.

She passed her hand over her eyes in a wild, helpless way.

'I must go to him,' she cried, piteously.

'Madge, if you have any kindly feeling, take me to him.'

'It is not possible, I would do so.'

'I will see him. I can't go on like this—it will kill me.'

'Be reasonable,' Madge implored. 'I am sure Henry will try to get you granted an interview. I doubt not he will be able to manage it. All that can be done will be done. Henry says that Duffrine, Vivian's solicitor, is a splendidly clever man. There is nothing really to fear. The waiting and anxiety are, of course, hard to bear. They are moving Heaven and earth, one may say, to discover Dorrien. He is the guilty man; there can be no shadow of doubt about that.'

So she talked, knowing full well that the shadow of doubt lay darkly upon Vivian West—so darkly, indeed, that those who had believed in his innocence, began to feel their faith shaken.

Everything pointed to fact that he, and he alone, had done the deed.

At his solicitor's earnest entreaty, he had told the cause of his anger on that fatal afternoon.

Shirley had to appear.

She stepped into the witness-box, she looked eagerly towards the prisoner.

He met her glance, and smiled reassuringly.

The moment her evidence had been given Sir Henry hurried her outside the court.

'You will not be wanted again,' he said.

'I'll put you into a cab, and send you down to the station. You will be able to catch the twelve-thirty.'

'Surely,' she cried, entreatingly. 'I may see him. I can't go away like this without speaking to him.'

He drew his thick black brows together in a frown.

'You really cannot,' he expostulated.

'You cannot be waiting about a place of this sort, on chance of seeing a man who is charged with murder.'

Her eyes flashed.

'If he were charged with fifty murders,' she declared, with suppressed passion, 'I would still think it an honor to see him.'

'You talk like a little fool,' he said rudely, 'and, honour or no honour, the authorities here won't allow you to see him.'

'Will you ask?'

He went unwillingly, in search of a policeman.

He very soon came across one, into whose hand he slipped half-a-sovereign, with the whispered injunction.

'Tell the young lady over there that she will not be allowed to see the prisoner.'

The man did so at once.

It was quite impossible, he said. It was against the rules.

After that, Shirley submitted to being placed in a cab and driven to the station.

It was market day, and the streets of the town were crowded.

She sat looking, with wide unseeing eyes, at the people elbowing their way along the pavement.

Now and again a hat was lifted to her, or the occupant of a passing carriage bowed and smiled; but she made no return—one face, one form, was before her eyes; she saw nothing else.

'Unless Dorrien can be found,' Sir Henry said on the evening of the day of which Vivian had been committed for trial, 'West will either hang for this, or remain under suspicion for the rest of his life. They may not be able to prove that he did the deed; at the same time I'm bothered if I can see how they can prove that he didn't.'

'They have not yet found the weapons which was used,' Lady Ayerst said.

They were seated at dinner.

The trial had been the ore theme of conversation.

There were but a few guests remaining at Royal Heath.

Many had gone at the beginning of the week, and those who were to have filled the vacant places had sent various excuses for not doing so, the simple truth being that they feared the house would be infected by dull while the fiancé of Lady Ayerst's sister was being tried for murder.

Lady Ayerst's circle of friends were worldly folk, caring for nothing but gaiety, and shunning all trouble and worry as they would a plague.

'Poor little Shirley!' said Madame de Lisle, who sat on Sir Henry's right; 'she does not appear to-night. She is sad, is she not?'

Sir Henry was helping himself to some peas from the silver dish the footman was holding.

'She is in love madame. Do you know what that means?'

'Ah I do not! Have I not been in love millions of times?'

'But you do not take the complaint very seriously.'

'Love is not serious. Those who take it so are the foolish ones, who crush a butterfly. What have they let? A mangled thing which gives them disappointment and disgust. Let love come lightly and go lightly. It is the way to be happy.'

Madame de Lisle was Sir Henry's latest favourite.

She was a handsome woman, with a vivacious manner and a wonderful taste in dress.

For the rest, she was rather inclined to be stout, had a wide mouth, with little pearls of teeth, near-sighted black eyes, and a wealth of autumn hair, worn parted down each side of her face.

She was a woman who other women did not like, but whom men found irresistible.

At present she was employed in captivating Sir Henry.

He was rich, and she loved handsome presents.

'I must get you to talk to my sister-in-law,' he said. 'She is crushing the butterfly with a vengeance.'

'She is young. In a little while she will be wiser; she will console herself with another, and think him, oh, so much more charming than the last.'

'The last is always the best,' said Sir Henry, and his eyes looked meaningfully over the brim of the glass he was holding to his lips.

'First' whispered Madame de Lisle.

'Ah, shocking!'

And the girl they were so lightly discussing was lying face downward, on her bed, dead and blind to all outward things broken hearted, hopeless, despairing.

She was still lying there when Madge passed the room to her own, looked in to say 'Good night.'

She imagined she had fallen asleep so, and gently shook her.

'Shirley, it is twelve o'clock; we are all going to bed.'

The face that was slowly lifted from the outstretched arms was a shock to her; it was pinched and drawn with suffering—the eyes looked dull and sunken.

She sat down beside her, and put her arm round her shoulders.

'You must not give way like this,' she said. 'It is wicked.'

Shirley paid no heed to her.

She brushed her ruffled hair from her forehead, and looked around the room as if it were strange to her.

'You have been asleep,' Madge said, cheerfully. 'Louise shall come and undress you.'

Shirley shook her head.

'I have not been asleep; I am not tired. I would rather you did not send Louise.'

'Will you go to bed at once, then?'

'Yes,' indifferently.

'And you won't think too much about this?'

'If you mean Vivian, I can think of nothing else.'

'It can do him no good, and it is making you ill.'

'When am I to see him?' Shirley questioned. 'Every moment now is torture.'

Her voice had no tone or life in it; it was just a poor little whisper.

'Henry will find out,' Madge answered, evasively.

She had agreed with her husband that it would be impossible for Shirley to go to the prison to see Vivian West.

'We are mixed up in this unpleasant af-

fair quite enough without any of that sort of thing,' Sir Henry had said. 'We can't have her name figuring in the papers in a sensational account of her visit to the prisoner. It is too absurd; you must tell her so.'

'She is so headstrong,' Lady Ayerst sighed. 'She will not listen to reason.'

'She will have to on this occasion.' 'Do not be hard on her, Henry; she is very unhappy, and, unless Vivian is acquitted without a shade of suspicion, the engagement must naturally be broken off. We know he is innocent; but, of course, it is what the world thinks.'

'I am not so sure, after all,' Sir Henry said, screwing up his eyes in a knowing way, 'that the world is not right time.'

Madge looked horrified.

'What! You think—'

'That the whole thing looks uncommonly funny. Yes; I can't believe that Metherell would have cried out "Help!—murder!" as he was heard to do, because he was receiving a few cuts with a stick. Then that broken link. No; there is more in it than we thought at first.'

'I cannot believe it,' Madge declared. 'It is simply a case of circumstantial evidence.'

He shrugged his shoulders.

'West met Metherell while he was in a towering passion. That little Rozier girl, in her evidence, said he looked furious.'

'Cora is the sort of person,' Madge said, disdainfully, 'who would take a wicked pleasure in making the worst of everything.'

'No doubt she feels bitter,' he responded indifferently. 'She has lost her chance of making a good match. She may not find another fool like Metherell.'

To say that Cora felt bitter but inadequately expressed her feelings.

When alone she would gnash her teeth with impotent rage, and behave like a maniac, shaking her clenched hands, and cursing under her breath.

The ground, as it were, had slipped from under her feet.

In the very hour of her triumph everything had failed her.

Gilbert, who was to have given her wealth, position, and title, was dead; Jim Hartland, the man she hated and feared, had escaped her; and her hold upon Sir Martin, which at one time had appeared so strong, was now of the most slender description—so slender, indeed, that she daily expected him to defy her, and cast her adrift.

With that fear of being cast adrift upon her, Cora kept out of the baronet's sight as much as possible, and, as a matter of fact, almost forgot her existence.

So the days dragged on.

August blazed it self out and the trial of Vivian West began.

Once again Shirley had to appear.

She went up to London with Sir Martin, and sat in the dreary waiting-room of the Old Bailey until Hatchette came to fetch her.

Without a word she got up and followed him; but, just as they were entering the court, she drew back overcome by a sudden faintness.

'I cannot—I cannot!' she gasped.

'They won't keep you many minutes, miss, he said encouragingly. 'You won't find it so very terrible.'

Shirley was thinking nothing of what she would have to do.

She had felt a momentary shrinking from seeing Vivian again.

She dreaded to look at him after the dreary weeks of prison life.

Would he be much changed?

Would the hateful degrading life have placed its mark upon him?

She was afraid to look, and, for the first moment or so, kept her eye fixed upon the man who began to question her.

When at length, she gained sufficient courage to look towards the dock, she scarcely recognised the man standing there for the dark beard that had grown about his chin.

He looked older, and careworn, but, if possible, even more strikingly handsome than ever.

He was standing in an attitude of unstudied grace and ease, his proud head thrown slightly back, his bright fearless eyes meeting hers compassionately, as if he knew how awful it was for her.

The question which was then being put to Shirley had to be repeated twice before she heard it, and she was sharply asked to pay attention to what was being said.

The trial took three days, and the whole of each of those days Shirley and Sir Martin spent at the Old Bailey, waiting, with fainting hearts, for the verdict.

Cora was there one day, but she effaced herself as much as possible, and left directly she had given her evidence, which was far more favourable to the prisoner than it had been before.

Oddly enough, Shirley felt happier during those three last days than she had been since the inquest.

She felt nearer to Vivian West.

Sir Martin was allowed to visit him, and carried messages from one to the other.

It was little enough to make one happy; but, after the terrible weeks of separation, it seemed almost like Heaven to be near him again.

Then came the last day; the trial was fast drawing to an end.

Shirley sat staring at the dingy buildings opposite, waiting for someone to come and tell her what the verdict was.

She dared not hope; it seemed to her, that afternoon, worse than madness to do so. The gloom of the long room deepened.

It was raining; the streets were sloppy and dismal; a stream of wet umbrellas for ever passed to and fro.

In a little while—in a few moments, she thought—it would all be over.

She tried to pray, but no words would come to her mind or lips.

She closed her eyes, and leant her head against the wall.

Then the sound of voices and hurrying aroused her.

She started up.

People were passing the door, and going down stairs.

Sir Martin came in.

She looked eagerly beyond him.

He was alone.

She staggered a few steps forward, holding out her hands, and uttering little piteous moans.

Sir Martin caught her as she almost fell at his feet.

'It is over!' he cried, and the tears were coursing down his cheeks. 'Over and he is acquitted!'

For the space of a minute Shirley lost consciousness.

When she opened her eyes, Sir Martin was still supporting her and the tears of still wet upon his cheek.

'Thank God!' she heard him say, with deepest reverence.

And from her heart she echoed.—

'Thank God!'

'Oh, I am so happy!' she cried a moment later. 'I never thought to be so happy again. But, where is he—why does he not come?'

'He wanted me to take you back to the hotel. He will follow us there.'

'I want him now,' she said wistfully. It is cruel of him to keep me waiting even half an hour longer.'

'He says,' Sir Martin answered, 'that he smells of the prison. He will not come to you until he has washed away the taint.'

Shirley laughed.

It was the first time since that afternoon when they had parted after the inquest.

What years ago it seemed; what a lifetime of sorrow she had lived through since then!

It was all over now.

Her face was wreathed with smiles as she passed out of the gloomy building into the soaking street.

An hour later, Vivian was ushered into the sombrely-furnished room Sir Martin had engaged at the hotel.

Shirley was alone.

She flew to him like a half-frightened bird and nestled in his arms.

'You have come!' was all she said; but nothing could exceed the gladness of her tone.

'Come back at last,' he said, holding her closely to him. 'My poor little love, how white and thin you have grown!'

'And you,' she exclaimed, tenderly touching his face. 'Oh, Vivian, what an awful time it has been! I did not know the world could hold such misery. I grew afraid to think, or hope, or last.'

'It is over now.'

He shuddered as he thought of how his life had hung in the balance; of