Hand and Ring

"And this?" inquired Mr. Ferris taking up a sheet of paper written in a different handwriting from the rest.

"This is an attempt on the part of the old lady to put on paper the story which had been told her. She evidently thought herself too old to be entrusted with a secret so important, and, fearing loss of memory, or perhaps sudden death, took this means of explaining how she came into possession of her cousin's letters. Wise precaution. Without it we would have missed the clue to the widow's journal. For the old lady's brain gave way when she heard of the widow's death, and had it not been for a special stroke of good luck on my part, we might have remained some time longer in ignorance of what very valuable papers she secretly held in her possession."

Seeing from his look that he only waited their departure to do so, Mr. Gryce and his subordinates arose.

"I see," said he, "I have got to accept your conclusions. Well, there are those among the living who will be greatly relieved by these discoveries. I will try and think of that."

Yet, after the detectives were gone, and he sat down in solitude before these evidences of his friend's perfidy, it was many long and dreary moments before he could summon up courage to peruse them. The first bears date of fourteen years back, and was written after she came to Sibley:

"November 8th, 1867.—In the same town! Within a stone's throw of the court house, where, they tell me, his business will soon take him almost every day! Isn't it a triumph? and am I not to be congratulated upon my bravery in coming here? He hasn't seen me yet, but I have seen him. I crept out of the house at nightfall on purpose. He was sauntering down the street and he looked—it makes my blood boil to think of it—he looked happy."

"November 10th, 1867.—Clemmens, Clemmens that is my name, and I have taken the title of widow. What a fate for a woman with a husband in the next street! He saw me to-day. I met him in the open square, and I looked him right in the face. How he did quail! It just does me good to think of it! Perk and haughty as he is, he grew as white as a sheet when he saw me, and though he tried to put on airs and carry it off with a high hand, he failed, just as I knew he would when he came to meet me on even ground. Oh, I'll have my way now, and if I choose to stay in this place where I can keep my eye on him, he won't dare to say No. The only thing I fear is that he will do me a secret mischief some day. His look was just murderous when he left me."

"February 24th, 1868. Can I stand it? I ask myself that question every morning when I get up. Can I stand it? To sit alone in my little narrow room and know that he is going about as gay as you please with people who wouldn't look at me twice. It's awful hard; but it would be worse still to be where I couldn't see what he was up to. Then I should imagine all sorts of things. No, I will just grit my teeth and bear it. I'll get used to it after a while."

"October 7th, 1868. If he says he never loved me he lies. He did, or why did he marry me? I never asked him to. He teased me into it, saying my saucy ways had bewitched him. A month after, it was common ways, rude ways, such ways as he wouldn't have in a wife. That's the kind of man he is."

"May 11th, 1869. One thing I will say of him. He don't pay no head to women. He's too busy, I guess. He don't seem to think of anything but to get along, and he does get along remarkable. I'm awful proud of him. He's taken to defending criminals lately. They almost all get off."

"October 5th, 1870. He pays me but a pittance. How can I look like any thing, or hold my head up with the ladies here if I cannot get enough together to buy me a new fall hat. I will not go to church looking like a farmer's wife, if I haven't any education or any manners. I'm as good as any body here if they but knew it, and deserve to dress as well. He must give me more money."

"November 2d, 1870. No, he sha'n't give me a cent more. If I can't go to church I will stay at home. He sha'n't say I stood in his way of becoming a great man. He is too good for me. I saw it to-day when he got up in the court to speak. I was there with a thick veil over my face, for I was determined to know whether he was as smart as folks say or not. And he just is! Oh, how beautiful he did look, and how every body held their breaths while he was speaking! I felt like jumping up and saying: 'This is my husband; we were married three years ago.' Wouldn't I have raised a rumpus if I had! I guess the poor man he was pleading for would not have been remembered very long after that. My husband! the thought makes me laugh. No other woman can call him that, anyhow. He is mine, mine, mine, and I mean he shall stay so."

"January 9th, 1871. I feel awful blue to night. I have been thinking about those Hildreths. How they would like to have me dead! And so would Fremont, though he don't say nothing. I like to call him Fremont; it makes me feel as if he belonged to me. What if that wicked Gouverneur Hildreth should know I lived so much alone? I don't believe he would stop at killing me! And my husband! He is equal to telling me I have no protector. Oh, what a dreadful wickedness it is in me to put that down on paper! It isn't so—it isn't so; my husband wouldn't do me any harm if he could. If ever I'm found dead in my bed, it will be the work of that Toledo man and nobody else."

"March 2nd, 1872.—I hope I am going to have some comfort now. Fremont has begun to pay me more money. He had to. He isn't a poor man any more, and when he moves into his big house, I am going to move into a certain little cottage I have found, just around the corner. If I can't have no other pleasures, I will at least have a kitchen I can call my own, and a parlor too. What if there don't no company come to it; they would if they knew. I've just heard from Adelaide; she says Craik is getting to be a big boy, and is so smart."

"June 10th, 1872.—What's the use of having a home? I declare I feel just like breaking down and crying. I don't want company; if women folks, they're always talking about their husbands and children; and if men, they're always saying: 'My wife's this, and my wife's that.' But I do want him. It's my right; what if I couldn't say three words to him that was agreeable, I could look at him and think: 'This splendid gentleman is my husband, and I ain't so much alone in the world as folks think.' I'll put on my bonnet and run down the street. Perhaps I'll see him sitting in the club-house window!"

"Evening.—I hate him. He has a hard, cruel, wicked heart. When I got to the club house window he was sitting there, so I just went walking by, and he saw me and came out and hustled me away with terrible words, saying he wouldn't have me hanging round where he was; that I had promised not to bother him, and that I must keep my word, or he would see me—he didn't say where, but it's easy enough to guess. So—so! he thinks he'll put an end to my coming to see him, does he? Well, perhaps he can; but if he does, he shall pay for it by coming to see me. I'll not sit day in and day out alone without the glimpse of a face I love, not while I have a husband in the same town with me. He shall come, if it is only for a moment each day, or I'll dare everything and tell the world I am his wife."

"June 16th, 1872.—He had to consent! Meek as I have been, he knows it won't do to rouse me too much. So to-day he came in to dinner, and he had to acknowledge it was a good one. Oh, how I did feel when I saw his face on the other side of the table! I didn't know whether I hated him or loved him. But I am sure now I hated him, for he scarcely spoke to me all the time he was eating, and when he was through, he went away just as a stranger would have done. He means to act like a boarder, and, goodness me, he's welcome to if he isn't going to act like a husband! The harsh, selfish—Oh, oh, I love him!"

"August 8th, 1872.—It's no use; I'll never be a happy woman. Fremont has been in so regularly to dinner lately, and shown me such a kind face, I thought I would venture upon a little familiarity. It was only to lay my hand upon his arm, but it made him very angry, and I thought he would strike me. Am I then actually hateful to him? or is he so proud he cannot bear the thought of my having the right to touch him? I looked in the glass when he went out. I'm plain and homespun, that's a fact. Even my red cheeks are gone, and the dimples which once took his fancy. I shall never lay the tip of a finger on him again."

"February, 13th, 1873.—What shall I cook for him to-day? Something that he likes. It is my only pleasure, to see how he does enjoy my meals. I should think they would choke him; they do me sometimes. But men are made of iron—ambitious men, anyhow. Little they care what suffering they cause, so long as they have a good time and get all the praises they want. He gets them more and more every day. He will soon be as far above me as if I had married the President himself. Oh, sometimes when I think of it and remember he is my own husband, I just feel as if some awful fate was preparing for him or me!"

"June 7th, 1873. Would he send for me if he was dying? No. He hates me; he hates me."

"September 8th, 1874. Craik was here to-day; he is just going North to earn a few dollars in the logging business. What a keen eye he has for a boy of his years! I shouldn't wonder if he made a powerful smart man some day. If he's only good, too, and kind to his women-folks, I shan't mind. But a smart man who is all for himself is an awful trial to those who love him. Don't I know? Haven't I suffered? Craik must never be like him."

"December 21st, 1875.—One thousand dollars. That's a nice little sum to have put away in the bank. So much I got out of my husband's fame, anyhow. I think I will make my will, for I want Craik to have what I leave. He's a fine lad."

"February 19th, 1876.—I was thinking the other day, suppose I did die suddenly. It would be dreadful to have the name of Clemmens put on my tombstone! But it would be. Tremont would never let the truth be known, if he had to rifle my dead body for my marriage certificate. What shall I do, then? Tell everybody who I am? It seems just as if I couldn't. Either the whole world must know it, or just himself and me alone. Oh, I wish I had never been born!"

"June 17th, 1876.—Why was n't I made handsome and fine and nice? Think where I would be if I was! I'd be in that big house of his, curtseying to all the grand folks as go there. I went to see it last night. It was dark as pitch in the streets, and I went into the gate and all around the house. I walked upon the piazza, too, and rubbed my hand along the window-ledges and up and down the doors. It's mighty nice, all of it, and there she'n't be a square inch on that whole ground that my foot she'n't go over. I wish I could get inside the house once."

"July 1st, 1876.—I have done it. I went to see Mr. Orcutt's sister. I had a right. Isn't he away, and isn't he my boarder, and didn't I want to know when he was coming home? She's a soft, good-natured piece, and let me peek into the library without saying a word. What a room it is! I just felt like I'd been struck when I saw it and spied his chair sitting there, and all those books heaped around and the fine things on the mantel-shelf and the pictures on the walls. What would I do in such a place as this? I could keep it clean, but so could any gal he might hire. Oh, me! Oh, me! I wish he'd given me a chance. Perhaps if he had loved me I might have learned to be quiet and nice like that silly sister of his."

"January 12th, 1877.—Some women would take a heap of delight in having folks know they were the wife of a great man, but I find lots of pleasure in being so without folks knowing it. If I lived in his big house and was called Mrs. Orcutt, why, he would have nothing to be afraid of and might do as he pleased; but now he has to do what I please. Sometimes, when I sit down of an evening in my little sitting room to sew, I think how this famous man whom everybody is afraid of has to come and go just as humble me wants him to; and it makes me hug myself with pride. It's as if I had a string tied round his little finger, which I can pull now and then. I don't pull it much; but I do sometimes."

"March 30th, 1877.—Gouverneur Hildreth is dead. I shall never be his victim at any rate. Shall I ever be the victim of anybody? I don't feel as if I cared now. For one kiss I would sell my life and die happy.

"There is a young Gouverneur, but it will be years before he will be old enough to make me afraid of him."

"November 16th, 1878.—I should think that Fremont would be lonely in that big house of his. If he had a heart he would. They say he reads all the time. How can folks pore so over books? I can't. I'd rather sit in my chair and think. What story in all the books is equal to mine?"

"April 23rd, 1879.—I am growing very settled in my ways. Now that Tremont comes in almost every day, I'm satisfied not to see any other company. My house affairs keep me busy, too. I like to have it all nice for him. I believe I could almost be happy if he'd only smile once in a while when he meets my eye. But he never does. Oh, well, we all have our crosses, and he's a very great man."

"January 18th, 1880.—He went to a ball last night. What does it mean? He never seemed to care for things like that. Is there any girl he is after?"

"February 6th, 1880.—Oh, he has been riding with a lady, has he? It was in the next town, and he thought I would n't hear. But there's little he does that I don't know about; let him make himself sure of that. I even know her name; it is Selina Pratt. If he goes with her again, look out for a disturbance. I'll not stand his making love to another woman."

"May 20th, 1880.—My marriage certificate is missing. Can it be that Tremont has taken it? I have looked all through the desk where I have kept it for so many years, but I cannot find it. He was left alone in the house for a few minutes the other day. Could he have taken the chance to rob me of the only proof I have that we are man and wife? If he has he is a villian at heart, and is capable of doing anything, even of marrying this Pratt girl who he has taken riding again. The worst is that I dare not accuse him of having my certificate; for if he did n't take it and should find out it is gone, he 'd throw me off just as quick as if he had. What shall I do then? Something. He shall never marry another woman while I live."

"May 30th, 1880.—The Pratt girl is gone. If he cared for her it was only for a week. Like an old love I could mention. I think I feel safe again, only I am convinced some one ought to know my secret besides myself. Shall it be Emily? No. I'd rather tell her mother."

"June 9th, 1880.—I am going to Utica. I shall take these letters with me. Perhaps I shall leave them. For the last time, then, let me say 'I am the lawful wife of Fremont Benjamin Orcutt, the lawyer, who lives in Sibley, New York.' We were married on the 3rd of July, 1867, by a travelling minister, named George Sinclair.

MARY ANN ORCUTT, Sibley, N.Y."

CHAPTER XLV.

MR. GRYCE SAYS GOOD-BYE.

"Helen!"

"Yes, Imogene."

"What noise is that? The people seem to be shouting down the street. What does it mean?"

Helen Richmond, whom we better know as Helen Darling, looked at the worn, feverflushed countenance of her friend, and for a moment was silent; then she whispered:

"I have not dared to tell you before, you seemed so ill; but I can tell you now, because joyful news never hurts. The people shout because the long and tedious trial of an innocent man has come to an end. Craik Mansell was acquitted from the charge of murder this morning."

"Acquitted! O Helen!"

"Yes, dear. Since you have been ill, very strange and solemn revelations have come to light. Mr. Orcutt——"

"Ah!" cried Imogene, rising up in the great armchair in which she half-sitting and half-reclining. "I know what you are going to say. I was with Mr. Orcutt when he died. I heard him myself declare that fate had spoken in his death. I believe Mr. Orcutt to have been the murderer of Mrs. Clemmens, Helen."

"Yes there can be no doubt about that," was the reply.

"It has been proved then?"

"Yes."

Moved to the depths of her being, Imogene covered her face with her hands. Presently she murmured:

"I do not understand it. Why should such a great man as he have desired the death of a woman like her? He said it was all for my sake. What did he mean, Helen?"

"Don't you know?" questioned the other, anxiously.

"How should I? It is the mystery of mysteries to me."

"Ah, then you did not suspect that she was his wife?"

"His wife!"

Imogene rose in horror.

"Yes," repeated the little bride with decision. "She was his lawfully wedded wife. They were married as long ago as when we were little children."

"Married! And he dared to approach me with words of love! Dared to offer himself to me as a husband while his hands were still wet with the life-blood of his wife! O, the horror of it! The amazing wickedness and presumption of it!"

"He is dead," whispered the gentle little lady at her side.

With a sigh of suppressed feeling, Imogene sank back.

"I must not think of him," she cried. "I am not strong enough. I must think only of Craik. He has been acquitted, you say—acquitted."

"Yes, and the whole town is rejoicing."

A smile, exquisite as it was rare, swept like a sunbeam over Imogene's lips.

"And I rejoice with the rest," she cried. Then, as if she felt all speech to be a mockery, she remained for a long time silent, gazing with ever-deepening expression into the space before her, till Helen did not know whether the awe she felt creeping over her sprang from admiration of her companion's suddenly awakened beauty or from a recognition of the depths of that companion's emotions. At last Imogene spoke:

"How came Mr. Mansell to be acquitted? Mr. Gryce did not tell me to look for any such rehabilitation as that. The most he bade me expect was that Mr. Ferris would decline to prosecute Mr. Mansell any further, in which event he would be discharged."

"I know," said Helen, "but Mr. Mansell was not satisfied with that. He demanded a verdict from the jury. So Mr. Ferris, with great generosity, asked the Judge to recommend the jury to bring in a verdict of acquittal, and when the Judge hesitated to do this, the foreman of the jury himself rose and intimated that he thought the jury were ready with their verdict. The Judge took advantage of this, and the result was a triumphant acquittal."

"O Helen, Helen!"

"That was just an hour ago," cried the little lady, brightly, "but the people are not through shouting yet. There has been a great excitement in town these last few days."

"And I knew nothing of it!" exclaimed Imogene. Suddenly she looked at Helen. "How did you hear about what took place in the court room to-day?" she asked.

"Mr. Byrd told me."

"Ah, Mr. Byrd?"

"He came to leave a good-bye for you. He goes home this afternoon."

"I should like to have seen Mr. Byrd," said Imogene.

"Would you?" queried the little lady, quietly shaking her head. "I don't know; I think it is just as well you did not see him," said she.

But she made no such demur when a little while later Mr. Gryce was announced. The fatherly old gentleman had evidently been in that house before, and Mrs. Richmond was not the woman to withstand a man like him.

He came immediately into the room where Imogene was sitting. Evidently he thought as Helen did, that good news never hurts.

"Well!" he cried, taking her trembling hand in his, with his most expressive smile. "What did I tell you? Didn't I say that if you would only trust me all would come right? And it has, don't you see? Right as a trivet."

"Yes," she returned; "and I never can find words with which to express my gratitude. You have saved two lives Mr. Gryce; his—and mine."

"Pooh! pooh!" cried the detective good humoredly. "You must n't think too much of anything I have done. It was the falling flumb that did the business. If Mr. Orcutt's conscience had not been awakened by the stroke of death, I don't know where we should have been to-day. Affairs were beginning to look pretty dark for Mansell."

Imogene shuddered.

"But I haven't come here to call up unpleasant memories," he continued. "I come to wish you joy and a happy convalescence." And leaning toward her, he said, with a complete change of voice: "You know, I suppose, why Mr. Mansell presumed to think you guilty of this crime?"

"No," she murmured, wearily; "unless it was because the ring he believed me to have retained was found on the scene of the murder."

"Bah," cried Mr. Gryce, "he had a much better reason than that."

And with the air of one who wishes to clear up all misunderstandings, he told her the words which her lover had overheard Mrs. Clemmens say when he came up to her dining-room door.

The effect on Imogene was very great. Hoping to hide it, she turned away her face, showing in this struggle with herself something of the strength of her old days. Mr. Gryce watched her with interest.

"It is very strange," was her first remark. "I had such reasons for thinking him guilty; he such good cause for thinking me so. What wonder we doubted each other. And yet I can never forgive myself for doubting him; I am scarce forgive him for doubting me. If you see him——"

"If I see him?" interrupted the detective, with a smile.

"Yes," said she. "If you see him tell him that Imogene Dare thanks him for his noble conduct toward one he believed to be stained by so despicable a crime, and assure him that I think he was much more justified in his suspicions than I was in mine, for there were weaknesses in my character which he had ample opportunities for observing, while all that I knew of him was to his credit."

"Miss Dare," suggested the detective, "couldn't you tell him this much better yourself?"

"I shall not have the opportunity," she said.

"And why?" he inquired.

"Mr. Mansell and I have met for the last time. A woman who has stained herself by such declarations as I made use of in court the last time I was called to the stand has created a barrier between herself and all earthly friendship. Even he for whom I perjured myself so basely cannot overleap the gulf I dug between us two that day."

"But that is hard," said Mr. Gryce.

"My life is hard," she answered.

The wise old man, who had seen so much of life and knew the human heart so well, smiled, but did not reply. He turned instead to another subject.

"Well," he declared, "the great case is over! Sibley, satisfied with having made its mark in the world, will now rest in peace. I quit the place with some reluctance myself. 'Tis a mighty pretty spot to do business in."

"You are going?" she asked.

"Immediately," was the reply. "We detectives don't have much time to rest." Then, as he saw how deep a shadow lay upon her brow, added, confidentially: "Miss Dare, we all have occasions for great regret. Look at me now. Honest as I hold myself to be, I cannot blind myself to the fact that I am the possible instigator of this crime. If I had not shown Mr. Orcutt how a man like himself might perpetrate a murder without rousing suspicion, he might never have summoned up courage to attempt it. For a detective with a conscience, that is a hard thought to bear."

"But you were ignorant of what you were doing," she protested. "You had no idea there was any one present who was meditating crime."

"True; but a detective should n't be ignorant. He ought to know men; he has opportunity enough to learn them. But I won't be caught again. Never in any company, not if it is composed of the highest dignitaries in the land, will I ever tell again how a crime of any kind can be perpetrated without risk. One always runs the chance of encountering an Orcutt."

Imogene turned pale. "Do not speak of him," she cried. "I want to forget that such a man ever lived."

Mr. Gryce smiled again.

"It is the best thing you can do," said he. "Begin a new life, my child: begin a new life."

And with this fatherly advice, he said good-bye, and she saw his wise, kind face no more.

The hour that followed was a dreary one for Imogene. Her joy at knowing Craik Mansell was released could not blind her to the realization of her own ruined life. Indeed she seemed to feel it now as never before; and as the slow minutes passed, and she saw in fancy the strong figure of Mansell surrounded by congratulating admirers and friends, the full lonliness of her position swept over her, and she knew not whether to be thankful or not to the fever for having spared her blighted and dishonored life.

Mrs. Richmond, seeing her so absorbed, made no attempt at consolation. She only listened, and when a step was heard, arose and went out, leaving the door open behind her.

And Imogene mused on, sinking deeper and deeper into melancholy, till the tears, which for so long a time had been dried at their source, welled up to her eyes and fell slowly down her cheeks. Their touch seemed to rouse her. Starting erect, she looked quickly around as if to see if anybody was observing her. But the room seems quite empty, and she is about to sink back again with a sigh when her eyes fall on the doorway and she becomes transfixed. A sturdy form is standing there! A manly, eager form in whose beaming eyes and tender smile shine a love and a purpose which open out before her quite a different future from that which her fancy had been so ruthlessly picturing.

THE END.

ASHBROOK'S MOTIVE.

It was quite late as Henry Ashbrook closed the huge ledger which held the credits of Amherst Brothers, wool merchants. So late that there was scarcely a sound to disturb the heavy silence of the street, except now and then the quick, sharp step of some midnight toiler.

Ashbrook sighed wearily as he closed the last account, a sigh unheard, for he was alone in the great warehouse. The day had been a long one for him, but now it was done, and he stretched back in his chair and thought about himself. He thought of his youth, of his position, of his ambition. How long before the elder Amherst, who had not been slow to recognize his merit in the past, would find a place for him above the drudgery of books. The time could not come too soon when he should place himself among business men, and be known, and—and, yes, respected. Ashbrook did wish to be respected, but particularly wished to be known. It was his dearest wish to walk and talk with the first. His family was good, but Ashbrook was not one to boast of blood—his desire was to be self-made. His five years of service with the Amherst Brothers, since leaving college at 21, had been a period of successive advancement, till now the chief clerkship was his berth.

He felt that he was doing well, but he longed to do better; he could not wait—his intense ambition was crowding him on; it must be satisfied.

But how? He had used means in the past—means of his own—to elevate himself. Could he not use them now?

Ashbrook was all self—his ambition was self, yet he was wholly respectable. A shrewd man, but yet respectable. How many such.

Ashbrook was now scheming with himself, he was thinking of the "means." How far his thoughts might have lead him it is uncertain, had not his wandering eye caught sight of an unopened letter on the desk before him, addressed to himself. He had not noticed it before. It must have been under the big ledger. The handwriting was familiar. He opened it with some agitation, as he anticipated its contents. The sheet bore the heading of the——National Bank. Ashbrook's color faded as he read it. It said:

DEAR ASHBROOK—I have tried to be a friend to you, and to help you in your shortages. You have repeatedly promised me that you would straighten matters out with Mr. Amherst. Your account at the bank is now very largely overdrawn, for which you alone are accountable. It is my duty, to the bank and to your employers, to make this state of affairs known. I pitied you in your first weakness, for I had been through it myself. I thought a little encouragement and sympathy might tide you over. But silence now ceases to be friendship. Unless you can personally straighten matters to-morrow, I shall furnish Amherst Brothers with an accounting.

Yours, DAVID LAWRENCE, Cashier.

Ashbrook's dark head dropped upon the desk before him as he concluded reading this. Tomorrow—impossible. No, not tomorrow, nor the next day, the next week, not for a year, at least, according to his expectations, could he replace the money he had withdrawn from Amherst Brothers. He had not meant to embezzle, no, no; but he needed it to satisfy his ambition, it was one of his "means." And now, the end must come; it must be known. He knew David Lawrence too well not to realize that the cashier meant what he said. Mr. Lawrence had been very kind to him, too kind, perhaps. He felt that the cashier was right, and tomorrow, oh, God! David Lawrence alone of all the world knew.

The thought maddened him. He rushed out from the sight of the blazing gas into the long, dark warerooms. With quick, nervous strides he walked between the piles of bales, huge piles that seemed ready to topple down and crush him. It mattered not to him if it was dark. It mattered not if he bruised his legs against the trucks lying in the path. He wanted darkness; he wanted oblivion.

David Lawrence alone of all the world knew. Tomorrow the world would know, and then where would he be. What of his ambition, what of his hopes, what of his family? He thought of prison, he thought of death, he thought of everything, nothing distinctly, but with a feeling that the end would be awful. Oh, how the conflicting thoughts surged in his brain.

The atmosphere of the warehouse was becoming stifling. He went back to the counting-room, put on his hat and coat, turned out the gas, and locking the great door of the building, more by instinct, hurried up the street.

"David Lawrence alone of all the world know," kept beating in his ears. "David Lawrence alone, David Lawrence alone."

Through Franklin, Washington, Winter streets, across the Common he rushed, oblivious to everything about him. On, on, and so rapid was his pace that less than half an hour found him in the suburbs—in Brookline.

"David Lawrence alone of all the work know," the trees, the winds, the night echoed back to him.

To the right of the street he was passing along, darkly shaded by trees, setting well back, was a modest little house, the home of David Lawrence. Even at this late hour a light shone from a room on the lower floor. One of the curtains was well raised, and as Ashbrook steadied himself by the rail fence and gazed in, he saw the white head of the cashier bent over a book. It flashed through his frantic mind that the cashier was a great student—a typical burner of the midnight oil.

"David Lawrence alone of all the world knew," was still seething through Ashbrook's brain. Oh, how it burned; oh, how it weakened him.

His hand was in his coat pocket, nervously grasping a packet which chanced to be there. Mechanically he drew the packet forth. As he did so the loosely wrapped paper fell off, disclosing in his hand an ordinary kitchen knife which his mother had asked him to buy that day.

He grasped the handle convulsively, pressed it to his breast. What did he mean: Ashbrook's thoughts were dark now his blood was racing through his veins like a flood. Impelled by a devilish instinct, he groped for the gate. He found it, and in an instant was at the door of the house. He tried the door. It was locked. "Oh, God! David Lawrence of all the world knew. To-morrow, to-morrow must never come," fell from his hot, dry lips. Ah! his keys. Yes, yes, there's just a chance that one may fit, a slender chance. He calmed himself as he drew them forth, and controlled the trembling of his hand.

Ah! Ashbrook is not himself now. A demon outside of himself is ruling his heart.

He tries the keys—one, two, three, four, No, not yet, and only two more. He wipes the cold sweat from his face with the sleeve of his coat. Five—it takes the lock—yes, it turns, the door opens, and with a quick movement Ashbrook steps within the unlighted hall. It is but the thought of a moment to determine the door leading to the library.

His nerves have become like steel as he turned the knob and noiselessly swings it open. The light does not blind him: he only has eyes for the white head seen above the chair back, which is turned from the door. The head which stands between him and tomorrow—The head which "alone of all the world knows."

Ashbrook is moving forward, a fiendish pallor is on his handsome face, the fingers of his right hand enclose the knife—fate placed it there—and his whole attitude has but one meaning. The cashier does not stir, his soul is in the book before him. Ashbrook is now directly behind, lips parted, teeth gleaming, eyes fixed, hand raised—raised high up with the gleaming blade—and then—there is no one to stay it—the strong hand descends and the knife has done its work. No one of all the world, but Ashbrook knew it now.

FAIR BICYCLISTS.

Many St Louis Ladies Have Become Enthusiastic Wheelwomen.

The number of feminine bicyclists in St. Louis is gaining surely and rapidly. The exercise, as vouched for by Miss Mabel Jenness, is both scientific and healthful, as well as a graceful and delightful mode of locomotion. The wheelmen of the past had the delights of the bicycle solely to themselves. Then came the advent of the tricycle for women, its gradual overthrow, the lull of the ladies' cycling, and then vive le bicycle for ladies just as well as for men. Now the three-wheeled affairs, known as the tricycles, are things of the past, and the ladies' bicycle are high in the favor of the wheelwomen of St. Louis as well as elsewhere. The fair riders mount the wheel with the agility of the wheelman himself, set their machine going and spin away with the fleetness of a bird. At present there are at least fifteen women bicycle riders in town, whilst candidates for the honor in the shape of amateurs in the process of study are constantly on the increase.

Among the lady bicyclist of this city may be counted the following: The greatest expert in the fine, the most finished and graceful of all, is Miss Delia Hardcastle. This young lady is a granddaughter of the late Col. Calvin Case, who was so well known in Missouri, and who was one of the prominent citizens who were killed in the famous Gascoade accident. She is also a niece of Dr. Case, of Ferguson. Miss Hardcastle is counted far-and-away the best wheelwoman of the city. She is one of the ladies mentioned as riding to Baldwin and back last week on their wheels. She rides for pleasure every day a distance of from fifteen to twenty miles without experiencing the least fatigue. Miss Hardcastle is pretty as well as graceful. She is tall and slight in her physique, which has all the beauty in curve and outline that constant outdoor exercise develops. She has delicate, fair skin, regular features and lovely blue eyes, which are all animation and expression. Her hair is golden brown and soft, and is worn simply on her classic head. She dresses in taste and dainty fashion, though while on the wheel, she always wears the Jenness Miller style of dress.—St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

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