

UNDER A CLOUD.

A THRILLING TALE OF HUMAN LIFE.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

GUEST'S SUGGESTION.

Stratton did not move, but stood as if lost in thought while involuntarily Guest's eyes were directed towards the door on his left.

A key had always been visible, in old times, by the handle—a key about which Guest had bantered his friend and cut jokes in which the spirit-stand and Mrs. Brade's name were brought into contact. But there was no key there now, and he recalled how Stratton had endeavored to keep him away from that door. A trifle then, but looking singularly suggestive now.

A dozen little facts began to grow and spread into horrors, all pointing to the cause of Stratton's sudden change, and strengthening Guest's ideas that there must have been a quarrel on the morning appointed for the wedding, possibly connected with money matters, and then in a fit of rage and excitement—disappointment, perhaps, at not willingly receiving the help he had anticipated—a blow had been struck, one that unintentionally had proved fatal.

All Guest's ideas set in this direction, and once started everything fitted in exactly, so that at last he felt perfectly convinced that his friend had killed Brettison and in some way disposed of the body.

Stratton stood there by the fireplace, pale, haggard, and wrapped in thought, apparently utterly unconscious of his friend's presence, till Guest took a step or two forward and rested his hand upon the table.

"Well, Stratton, what have you to say?" There was no answer. Stratton gazed at him with a far-off, fixed stare, full of helpless misery, which drew his friend far nearer in heart, and he spoke more freely now.

"Come," he said; "speak out. In spite of everything, I am your old friend. I want to help you. Will you trust me?" "Trust you? Yes," said Stratton slowly.

"Tell me, then, everything, beginning from the morning when you were to be married." Stratton slowly shook his head.

"Come, man; this is no time for reticence. Tell me all," cried Guest excitedly; and he spoke in a hoarse whisper, and glanced to door and window, as if afraid of being overheard.

There was the same desponding movement. "I will not be dragged into any confession," said Stratton fiercely. "It is my secret, and I will tell it to none. I have a right to keep my own counsel. You have a right to denounce me if you like. If you speak, you can force me to no greater punishment than I suffer now."

"Then it is all true?" groaned Guest. "You killed him, and hid him there?" Stratton uttered a mocking laugh.

"That door!" said Guest huskily. Twice over you have stopped me from going there. Your manner has been that of a guilty man, and I am forced to share the knowledge of your crime.

"No," said Stratton, speaking now with a look of calm contempt; "you share no knowledge—you shall share no knowledge. You say I killed him and hid him there; where are your proofs? You have brought in the police, and they have searched. What have you found? Again, I say, where are your proofs?"

Guest looked at him wildly, and his lips parted, but he uttered no sound. "Let me rest, my good fellow, let me rest. You are warring against your own happiness in trying to pry in matters that are naught to you. I will not blight your future, Percy Guest, by letting you share any secrets of mine. There, good-night. I want to be alone."

Guest tried to recommence the argument, and to master the man who looked so pitifully weak, but somehow the other's will was too powerful, and he had to yield, leaving the chambers at last with a shudder of horror, and feeling that he could never take Stratton by the hand again.

For the man seemed changed. There was a mocking, almost triumphant, look in his eyes as he took the lamp from the table, and followed Guest out to the landing to stand there, holding the light over the massive balustrade for his friend to descend.

As Guest reached the bottom, he looked up, and there, by the light which fell full upon Stratton's face, was the strange, mocking air intensified, and with a shiver he hurried across the inn, feeling that the mystery had deepened instead of being cleared.

His intention was to hurry back to his own chambers, feeling that it was impossible for him to go near Bourne Square, knowing what he did, but the yearning for one to share his knowledge proved too strong.

"And I promised that she should share every secret," he said to himself. "Whom am I to trust if I don't trust her?" The result was that, with his brain in a whirl of excitement, and hardly knowing what he did, he leaped into the first cab, and urged the man to drive fast, while he sank back into the corner, and tried to make plans.

"I won't tell her," he decided at last. "I'll see the admiral, and he will advise me what to do."

telling the admiral under a pledge of secrecy was in the ascendant when the cab drew up to the door.

It was opened by Andrews. "The admiral in?" he asked. "Yes, sir, but he's asleep in the library. Miss Myra is in her chamber, sir—not very well to-night, but Miss Edith is in the drawing room."

Guest went upstairs, and, upon entering, Edith rushed at him, when all his plans went for naught.

"Oh, how long you have been," she panted, as she caught his hands. "Have you seen him?"

"Yes." "Have you found out anything?" "Yes." "Is it dreadful?"

"Too dreadful to tell you, dearest," he replied sadly. "Then I won't know," she said with a sob. "Oh, my poor, darling Myra! She will die of a broken heart, I know, I know."

Guest tried to comfort her and she grew more calm. "I cannot—I dare not tell you." "Not tell me—and you said you loved me!"

"As I do with all my heart." "Then you cannot keep anything from me."

"I'll tell your uncle, and ask his opinion first." "No, no, Percy. I must know now—I must, indeed. No matter how terrible, you cannot keep it from me."

"But it is like betraying the man whom I'd give anything to save." "Save? Save from what?" "Don't press me, dearest," he said tenderly. "Trust me that it is best for you not to know."

"Percy, dear," she said gently, as she laid her hand upon his arm; "you can trust me. I always knew there must be something very terrible to make Mr. Stratton behave toward poor Myra as he did, and you and I have been plotting and planning to find it out, in the hope that it would prove to be a trouble we could bridge over, and bring them together again. You have discovered it all then at last?"

"Yes." "Then tell me." "I cannot—I dare not."

Edith was silent for a few moments, as she sat gazing straight before her into the dimly lit back drawing room, her eyes swathed with tears, as she at last said in a whisper:

"You asked me the other day if I would be your wife." "And you promised me an answer when I knew all," said Guest, cutting the ground from beneath his feet.

"And now you know, and I'll tell you," she said, hardly above her breath. "Yes, Percy, some day when we have made poor Myra happy."

"Then it will never be," he said despairingly. "Let me judge," she whispered. And he told her all.

"But—but I don't quite understand," she faltered; "you think, then—oh, it is too horrible—you think, then, he had killed poor Mr. Brettison, his friend?" "Yes," said Guest slowly and thoughtfully. "It must have been that. I cannot see a doubt."

"Ah!" They started to their feet at the piteous sigh which came from the back drawing room, and it was followed by a heavy fall. Myra had entered in time enough to hear the terrible charge, and for her life seemed to be at an end.

Meanwhile Stratton had stood motionless, gazing down into the dark pit formed by the staircase, with the light of the lamp he held shining full on his haggard face, made more painful by the smile which contracted the lower parts of his countenance, till the last echo of his friend's steps died out, when he turned slowly and walked into his room, closing and fastening both doors.

Then his whole manner changed. He rushed to the table, set down the lamp so that the glass shade rattled and nearly flew out of the holder; then, crossing quickly to a cabinet, he took out a decanter and glass, poured out a heavy draught of brandy, and gulped it down.

The glass almost dropped from his hand to the table, and he clasped his brow, to stand staring before him fighting to recall his thoughts.

Twice over he threw his head back, and shook it as if something compressed his brain and confused him. Then the stimulant he had taken began to act, and he went to a drawer and took out a new screw-driver, with which, after seeing that the blinds were down and the curtains drawn over the window, he crossed to the door on the left of the fireplace; but only to turn away again, and take up the lamp and place it on a stand, so that it should light him in the work he had in hand.

He was alert and eager now, as, with deft touches, he forced the screw-driver under a piece of moulding at the top and front edge of the door, wrenched them off, and bared some half dozen screw-heads. These he rapidly turned and withdrew, laying them down one by one till all were out, when, from an inner pocket, he took out a key, unlocked the door, threw it open, and went into the bathroom, lamp in hand.

Placing it on the polished lid, he rapidly toiled on till the screws were taken out in turn, when, lifting the lid with his left hand, he threw up the lid with his right, and stood staring down into the bath with a snigger, which rapidly passed away.

The lid fell with a heavy, dull sound, and, with a curious, wondering look, he turned and went slowly back to his table, set down the lamp, caught it up again, and walked into the bathroom, where he again set down the lamp, tore a fly-leaf from a letter in his pocket, folded it into a spill, and lit it at the lamp chimney.

"Will it burn slowly or explode at once?" he said, with a reckless laugh. "Let's see!" and once more he threw up the lid.

CHAPTER XL.

FOR HIS SAKE.

Edith rushed to her cousin where she lay

prone on the carpet, her face turned toward the shaded lamp, which threw its soft light upon her face, and, even then, in her horror, the girl thought had never looked so beautiful before, while, as Guest, full of remorse, joined her, he felt ready to bite out his tongue in impotent rage, against himself for a boyish babbling in making known to two gentle women his fearful discovery at the chambers.

"Shall I ring?" he said excitedly; and he was halfway to the bell before Edith checked him.

"Ring? No; you absurd man!" she cried impatiently. "Lock the doors. Nobody must know of this but us. Here, quick, water!"

Guest was hurrying to obey the business-like little body's orders about the door when she checked him again.

"No, no; it would make matters worse. Nobody is likely to come till uncle leaves the library. Water. Throw those flowers out of that great glass bowl."

Guest obeyed, and bore the great iridescent vessel, from which he had tossed some orobid, to her side.

"That's right. Hold it closer. Poor darling! My dearest Myra, what have you done to suffer all this terrible pain!"

There were drops other than the cold ones to besprinkle the white face Edith had lifted into her lap, as she sat on the floor, bending down from time to time to kiss the marble forehead and contracted eyelids as she spoke.

"Percy dear," she said, as he knelt by her, helpful, but in spite of the trouble, full of mute worship for the clever little body before him.

His eyes met hers, and flashed their delight, as the second word seemed to clinch others which she had spoken that night.

"This is all a secret. Even uncle must not know yet till we have had a long talk with aunt. She can be quite like a lawyer in giving advice."

Myra turned her head slightly on one side, and muttered a few incoherent words in a low, weary tone; and at last opened her eyes to let them rest on Guest's face as he knelt by her.

There was no recognition for a few moments, as she lay back, gazing dreamily at him. Then thought resumed its power in her brain, and her face was convulsed by a spasm.

Starting up, she caught his arm. "Is it all true?" she cried, in a low, husky whisper.

Guest gave her a pitying, appealing look, but he did not speak.

"Yes, it must be true," she said, as she rose to her feet, and stood supporting herself by Guest's arm, while Edith held her hand. "You have not told anyone?" she said eagerly.

"No; I came here as soon as I knew." "Where is Mr. Stratton?" "At his chambers."

"And you, his friend have left him at such a time?" "It was at his wish," said Guest gently, "his secret is safe with me."

"Yes, he trusts you. I trust you. Percy Guest, Edith, even if he is guilty, he must be saved. No, no it could not be guilt. I must not be weak now. He may be innocent, and the law can be cruel. Who knows what may be the case?"

She pressed her hands to her temples for a few moments, and then the power to think grew clearer.

"Go to him—from me. Tell him I bid him leave England at once. Leave with him, if you can be of help. Stop. He is not rich. Edith, all the money you have. Mr. Guest, take this, too, and I will get more. Now go, and remember that you are his friend. Write to me and Edith, and we will send; but, though all is over, let me know that his life is safe."

Guest caught the hand she extended with her purse and Edith's, kissed it reverently, and closed the fingers tightly round the purses, and gently thrust them from him.

"What!" Myra cried passionately; "you refuse?" "I want to help you both," he replied gravely.

"O Percy!" cried Edith, with the tears starting to her eyes, and her tone of reproach thrilled him.

"Don't speak to me like that," he said. "You mean well, but to do what you say is to condemn him at once in everybody's sight. It is all so foreign to my poor friend's nature that, even knowing what I do, I cling to the belief in his innocence."

"Yes; he must be innocent," cried Myra. "He could not be what you say."

"Then should I be right in taking money and your message, saying to him, though not in words—'Fly for your life, like a hunted criminal?' I could not do it. Myra, Edith—think, pray, what you are urging. It would be better advice to him to say—'Give yourself up, and let a jury of your fellow-countrymen decide.'"

"No, no," cried Myra; "it is too horrible. You do not know; you cannot see what he is suffering—what his position is. I must act myself. It cannot, it cannot be true!"

"Myra!" whispered Edith, clinging to her.

"What? And you side against me, too?" "No, no, dear! How can you speak such cruel words? You know I would do anything for your sake."

Half mad with mental agony, Myra repulsed her with a bitter laugh.

"Anything but this," she cried. "There it is, plain enough. He speaks, and you cry 'Harken! is he not wise.' He says, 'Let him be given up to justice for the mob to howl at him and say he must die.' Die? Oh, no, no, no, it is too horrible! He must—he shall be saved!"

In her agony she made a rush for the door, but before she was half way there, she tottered, and would have fallen but for Guest's ready arm. He caught her just in time, and bore her to a couch, where she lay back sobbing hysterically for a few moments, but only to master her emotion, draw her cousin to her breast, and kiss her again and again before holding out her hand to Guest.

"Forgive me!" she whispered. "These long months of suffering have made me weak—half-mad. My lips spoke, not my heart. You both are wiser than I am. Help me, and tell me what to do."

"I will help you, and help him, in every way I can," said Guest gently, as he held the thin white hand in his. "Now let me talk coolly to you—let us look the matter plainly in the face, and see how matters stand. I am speaking now as the lawyer not as the friend—yes, as the friend, too, but our feelings must not carry us away."

Guest was silent for a few moments and stood as if collecting his thoughts and reviewing his position.

"There is no need for taking any immediate steps," he said. "The scene that took place to-night was forced on by my precipitancy, and the danger to Stratton has passed away. To-morrow I will see him again, and perhaps he will be more ready to take me into his confidence, for there is a great deal more to learn, I am sure."

"It is not as bad as you imagined." "After what took place to-night I can't say that," Guest replied sadly; "but there are points I have not yet grasped. An accident—a fit of passion—a great deal more than I have yet learned."

"Then go to him to-night," said Myra eagerly. "I will go with you. He shall not think that all who love forsake him in the hour of his need."

"Myra!" "I cannot help it," she cried, springing up. "Did I not go to him when that suspicion clung to him—that he was treacherous and base? Even then in my heart I felt it could not be true. Yes, I know what you say; he has tacitly confessed to this dreadful crime, but we do not know all. I saw that Malcolm Stratton could not be base. If he has taken another's life, I know, I feel all the horror; but he has not been false or treacherous to the woman he loved, and it was on account of this horror that he shrank back that day. To insult—to treat me with contempt? No; to spare me, Edith, and my place is at his side."

"No, not now," said Guest firmly. "I will go back to-night. Trust me, please, and have faith in my trying to do what is for the best."

There was a few moments' silence, and then Myra spoke again faintly, but with more composure.

"Yes, we trust you, Mr. Guest. Don't think any more about what I said. Come to me again soon with news. I shall be dying for your tidings. Yes," she said, with a weary sigh, as she clung to his hand, "dying for your news. Only promise me this; that you will not deceive me in any way. If it is good or bad, you will come."

"You must know," said Guest quietly, "sooner or later. I will come and tell you everything."

"Then go now—go to him." "Your father? He will think it strange that I have been and gone without seeing him."

"No; you have been to see us. I will tell him everything when we are alone. Good-night."

Guest hurried back to the inn, but all was dark there; and, on going on to Sarum Street, he knocked at the door in vain.

"I can do no more," he said; and he went slowly back to his own rooms.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

"ENGLISH JACK" IS DYING.

The Strange Life of New Hampshire's Live Frog and Snake Eater, Who is Known to All White Mountain Tourists.

"English Jack," the quaintest character in New Hampshire, is dying at his hermit home in the wilderness on the side of Mount Millard, near the Crawford House, in the White Mountains. He is well known to the summer visitors, for whom for a small sum he has eaten alive many frogs and snakes. He has been exhibited in museums in this specialty many times. Part of his diet for years has been frogs, snakes and many other things that most men avoid. He is a well-educated man, a good scholar, a great reader and a fluent and interesting talker.

The romantic story of this man's strange life has more than ordinary interest. His name is John A. Vials. It is related that years ago a homeless boy in the city of London, he found a little girl wandering in the streets. She had lost her way, and it was with great difficulty that he was able to find her home and take her to it. Her father was grateful for the boy's kind deed and took a great liking for him. Being a sea captain, he took the boy to sea and, step by step, the street waif rose in his chosen profession. An affection grew up between him and the girl whom he had found, and finally the wedding day was fixed. He returned home, only to find that his intended bride was dead.

Then followed for him many years of wanderings in every clime, of fighting in China and India, where he saw service in the army of Sir Colin Campbell. At last he found his way to the White Mountains, where for more than twenty years he has made his home in a cabin. Here he has seemed to be perfectly contented. He loved children and nature. He never did harm to any one, and very often he has been able to help people. Many times has the old man searched for and found parties lost in the wilds of the mountains.

It is said that "Jack" has a generous sum of money laid away. Summer visitors to his lonely hut have often made him cash presents for the sake of inspecting his queer little mountain cabin and to hear him talk of his strange life, and these gifts have been hoarded with a miser's love and secrecy. He lived principally on the game he shot and trapped.

A Masked Marauder.

A despatch from Toronto says—Last Sunday evening the family of Mr. James Brown, 439 Bathurst street, was thrown into a state of consternation by the appearance of three masked men, who rang the bell, and when the summons was answered by one of the ladies of the house, forced their way in and demanded money, at the same time presenting revolvers at the frightened inmates. Upon Mr. Brown's appearance, however, they decamped without securing any booty. Since then the police have been hunting for the miscreants, and on Sunday evening Detective Davis arrested Henry Adams, a mild, inoffensive-looking man, but an old penitentiary bird, nevertheless, on suspicion of being one of the trio. Adams refused to give any address, but in spite of this the authorities are hopeful of securing his companions, against whom they believe they have a strong case.

MURDER AND ROBBERY.

TO SECURE \$25,000 THREE MEN ARE SHOT DOWN.

The Paymaster of the Valleyfield Cotton Mills and His Two Clerks Were Making Up the Pay rolls When a Discharged Employee Entered and With the Office Revolver Shot Down Two of Them—The Watchman Coming to the Rescue Was the Third Victim.

A despatch from Valleyfield, Q., says The bustling little manufacturing town of Valleyfield was on Friday night the scene of a terrible murder, by which the lives of John Loy, a clerk in the employ of the Montreal Cotton Company, and Maxime Lebout, the night watchman, were sacrificed at the hand of a discharged employee named V. C. K. Shortis, while Hugh Wilson, another clerk, was wounded and may not recover. The murderer is now in Beauharnois jail.

Shortis, who was lately secretary to Mr. Simpson, the manager of the mill, had been discharged for his drinking and irregular habits, and either robbery or revenge prompted his terrible deed. The details of the crime are most sensational.

PICKED UP THE PAYMASTER'S REVOLVER.

Mr. Lowe, paymaster of the mill, and two clerks had just about finished making up the pay rolls about 11 o'clock. Although Shortis had made threats of violence against Mr. Simpson and others, no steps had been taken to exclude him from the mill premises, and Shortis entered and loitered around the office, while Mr. Lowe was at work. He nonchalantly reached over the counter, picked up Mr. Lowe's loaded revolver, which was lying on his desk, and shot the clerk Wilson, the bullet taking effect in the side.

SHOT THROUGH THE HEART.

Mr. Loy, a clerk, thinking it was an accident, made for the telephone to call a doctor, but Shortis took deliberate aim and shot Loy through the heart, death being instantaneous. Mr. Lowe had been attending to Wilson, and a shot aimed at him struck Wilson in the forehead.

TOOK THE \$25,000 INTO THE VAULT.

Lowe, seeing how matters were, grabbed the pay boxes, which contained \$25,000, and ran into the vault with them, pulling the massive door after him. Shortis then went to the door and said to Lowe to come out, as he did not wish to injure him. Lowe replied that he was locked in and could not get out, though that was not the case, the door being simply shut.

Shortis said, "Give me the combination, Jack, I will let you out."

Mr. Lowe replied, "Just give the knob a sharp turn and it will open." The murderer did so, and, of course, locked the safe, which was what Mr. Lowe wished.

THE WATCHMAN HIS NEXT VICTIM.

Lebout, the night watchman, entered at this juncture and was shot dead. Wilson, by a superhuman effort, managed to crawl about 200 yards and touched the electric fire alarm button. Shortis made renewed efforts to enter the vault in which Mr. Lowe was, but in the meantime the firemen entered and overcame the murderer, after a terrible struggle.

THE INQUEST.

The inquest on the bodies of the victims, Loy and Lebout, was held on Saturday and resulted in a verdict in each case that the deceased came to his death at the hands of the prisoner Shortis. The funeral of the victims took place Monday and was attended by all the directors of the Cotton Company. At the inquest, at the prompting of reporters, Shortis demanded counsel, but consented to wait for the preliminary trial, which opens Monday.

THE PRISONER INTERVIEWED.

Shortis was a cigar and dime novel fiend and had several firearms in his room. A correspondent had an interview with him at the inquest. He was asked if he had any friends in Canada?

"No; I have not," he said. "How long have you been in Canada?" "I came over here about two years ago; came over to make my fortune. Nice, kind fortune, is it not? I was born in Waterford, Ireland, and educated in a college there. Am going on 20. In the Cotton Company's employ I was learning the business, and was first with the Globe Cotton Company, and then came here. I got no money for what I did."

"Do you care to speak of last night's occurrences?"

"No, I do not. I do not know what to think. I seem to be just recovering from a nightmare. I have to be graphed for a lawyer, and until he comes I cannot do anything."

The accused seems to take the affair very coolly, and as far as external appearance is concerned does not feel at all the horrible crime of which he stands accused.

Mr. Lowe, who rushed to the vault with Arthur Lebout, tells a most graphic story of the shooting. At the vault door Shortis burned paper to try and frighten them out, and remained for some time standing at the door, ready to shoot them if they emerged. The scene was visited by Mr. D. McMaster, Q. C., who represents the Crown, and Mr. Lowe went over the whole scene. By actual test, it was ascertained that he could, as he says, hear in the vault all that transpired.

Wilton may recover.

The Effects of a Sermon.

Once, when Cardinal Manning was preaching in Rome, he recognized John Bright among his listeners. On the instant he determined to preach to him, and dwelt with as much force and effect as he could on the claims of the Blessed Virgin to the veneration of the audience. Two or three years later he met him and reminded him of this incident. "I remember it perfectly," said John. "and I shall never forget it. I was delighted with everything that morning—a gratified smile came on the Cardinal's face—'excepting our sermon.'"