

# A DEAD RECKONING.

## CHAPTER XI.

No one spoke for a moment or two after Margery had blurted out her news. Then for the second time Karovsky said: "There is still one way of escape open to you."

"And that is?" said Gerald again.

"For me to personate you."

"O monsieur!" cried Clara, a flash of hope leaping suddenly into her eyes.

"Karovsky, are you mad?"

"Pardon, I think not; but one can never be quite sure. Listen! These men who are coming to arrest you are strangers to you, or rather you are a stranger to them; they have never set eyes on you before. I will answer to your name; I will go with them, and before they have time to discover their mistake, you will be far away."

"And the consequences to yourself?"

"A few hours' detention—nothing more. Your English police know me not." Then he added with a shrug: "At St. Petersburg or Berlin, mai foi, it might be somewhat different."

"Karovsky, your offer is a noble one, and the risk to yourself might be greater than you seem to think. In any case, I cannot accept it."

"Gerald, for my sake!" implored his wife.

"As I said before, I am tired of this life of perpetual hide-and-seek. Let it end; I am ready to face the worst."

"No, no! Would you court a felon's doom, you whose innocence will one day be proved to the world?"

"Vous avez raison, madame," said the Russian. Then placing his hands on Gerald's shoulders, he said, "Go, Brooke my friend; hide yourself elsewhere for a little time, and leave me to face these bloodhounds."

Picot, who had been listening and watching in the background, now came boldly forward. It was enough for the kind-hearted mountebank to know that his friends were in trouble. "I have une petite chambre en haut," he said to Gerald. "Come with me, monsieur, and I will hide you."

"Yes, yes; go, dearest, with Monsieur Picot," urged his wife, her beautiful eyes charged with anguished entreaty.

"For your sake, let it be as you wish," answered Gerald sadly.

"At this juncture there came a loud knocking at some door below stairs.

"Venez, monsieur—vite, vite!" said Picot.

Gerald hastily kissed his wife, gripped the Russian's hand for a moment, and then followed the mountebank.

"It will not be wise to keep our friends waiting," said Karovsky. Then turning to Miss Primby: "Madame, will you oblige me by taking charge of these trifles for a little while?" With that he handed her a card-case, a pocket-book stuffed with papers, and a bunch of keys.

"They will be mighty clever if they get them out of here," muttered Miss Primby, as the articles disappeared in the capacious depths of some hidden pockets.

The knocking was repeated in louder and more imperative terms than before.

"Let the door be opened," said Karovsky to Margery; then he addressed a few words hurriedly in a low tone to Mrs. Brooke.

The door at the foot of the stairs, which Margery in her alarm had taken the precaution to fasten, had apparently been originally put there with the view of more effectually separating the upper part of the house from the lower, probably at a time when the domicile was divided between two families. This door Margery now unbolted without a word; and without a word after flashing a bull's-eye in her face, a sergeant of police and two men pushed past her and tramped heavily upstairs.

"Mr. Gerald Brooke, commonly known by the name of Stewart," said the sergeant interrogatively as he advanced into the room, while his two men took up positions close to the door.

The Russian turned—he had been in the act of lighting a cigarette at the fireplace. "Who are you, sir, and by what right do you intrude into this apartment?" he demanded haughtily.

The sergeant went a step or two nearer and laying a hand on his shoulder, said: "Gerald Brooke, you are charged on a warrant with the wilful murder of the Baron Otto von Rosenberg on the 28th of June last at Beau-lieu, near King's Harold, and you will find one piece of rope. Bring him here. Depechez-vous—quick."

Margery needed no second bidding. Then the mountebank said to Gerald: "You must not stop here any longer, monsieur; the police may come back at any moment."

"Yes—come, come," urged Clara. "Another minute and it may be too late."

"George, I did not deserve this at your hands," said Gerald with grave sadness to his cousin. The only answer was a scowl and an execration muttered between his teeth.

Gerald, his wife and Miss Primby retired into the farther room and closed the folding-doors. Margery was back by this time, carrying a small coil of rope.

"Good child.—Now hold this so," said Picot, as he placed the revolver in Margery's hand, and stationed her about a couple of yards from Crofton. "If you see that man stir from his chair, press your finger against this little thing, and—pouf—he will never stir again. Hold him steady—so. You have no fear—hein?"

"Why, o' course not," laughed Margery. "It would do me good to shoot the likes o' him."

With a dexterity that seemed as if it might have been derived from long practice, Picot now proceeded to bind Crofton securely in his chair.

"You scoundrel! you shall suffer for this," muttered the latter between his teeth.

while, *cara mia*," said Karovsky, as he drew Clara to him. For a moment her head rested against his shoulder, then his lips lightly touched her forehead.

She turned from him, and sinking on a couch, buried her face in her hands.

Karovsky drew himself up to his full height. "Now, sir, I am at your service," he said to the sergeant.

A moment later and the three women were left alone.

"They be clever ones, they be!" said Margery with a chuckle as the sound of the retreating footsteps died away.

"How noble, how magnanimous of Monsieur Karovsky!" exclaimed Miss Primby. "I shall never think ill of the Russians again."

"Now is the opportunity for Gerald to get away," said Clara. "The police may discover their mistake at any moment." Her hand was on the door, when suddenly there was a sound which caused all three to start and stare at each other with eyes full of terror. It was the sound of unfamiliar footsteps ascending the stairs. Mrs. Brooke shrank back as the door opened and George Crofton entered the room. "You!" she gasped.

"Even so," he answered as he glanced round the room. "It is long since we met last."

"Not since the day you crushed my husband's portrait under your heel."

"As I have now crushed your husband himself."

"What do you mean?"

"Clara Brooke, the hour of my revenge has struck. You slyighted me once, but now my turn has come. It was through my efforts that your husband was tracked to this place. It was I who gave information to the police. Never could there be a sweeter revenge than mine."

"Can such wickedness exist unsmitten by Heaven!"

After that first glance round, he had never taken his eyes from Clara's blanched face. He spoke with a venomous intensity which lent to every word an added sting.

"Don't I just wish I was a man, instead of a great hulking good-for-nothing girl!" muttered Margery, half to Miss Primby and half to herself, as she defiantly rolled up the sleeves of her cotton gown.

For a little space, the two stood gazing at each other in silence.

Clara's heart beat painfully, but her eyes blazed into his full of scorn and defiance. Then she said: "George Crofton, believe me or not, but my husband is as innocent of the crime laid to his charge as I am. It is not he who is a murderer, but you who are one after this night's work—in heart, if not in deed."

A sneering laugh broke from his lips. "I was quite prepared to hear that rimarole," he said. "It was only to be expected that you should swear to his innocence. It is possible you may believe in it—wives will believe anything."

But Clara's ears, of late, ever on the alert, had heard a certain sound. With a low cry she sprang to the door; but before she could reach it, it was opened from without, and Gerald, accompanied by Picot, appeared on the threshold.

Crofton fell back as if he had seen a face from the tomb. "By what friend's trick have I been fooled?" he cried.

"There stands the villain who betrayed you," exclaimed the young wife, pointing to Crofton with outstretched finger.

"He! My cousin! Impossible."

"It may not be too late yet," exclaimed Crofton as he sprang to one of the windows and tore aside the curtain. But next instant, with a bound like that of a tiger, Picot had flung himself on him and had gripped his neck as in a vice with both his sinewy hands.

The other was no match in point of strength for the mountebank; and before he knew what had happened he found himself on his back on the floor, half choked with Picot kneeling on his chest and regarding him with a sardonic grin.

Clara, with natural impulse, had clung to her husband's arm. Miss Primby and Margery were too startled to utter a word.

Picot's hand went to some inner pocket and drew from it a small revolver; then rising to his feet, he said to Crofton: "Oblige me by standing up, monsieur, and by taking a seat in that chair, or in one little minute you are a dead man."

Crofton, with a smile like that of some hide-crowed wild animal, did as he was bidden.

Gerald stepped quickly forward and laid a hand on Picot's arm. "What would you do?" he asked.

"Shoot him like the dog he is, if he move but one finger. If he move not, tie him up—gag him—and leave him here till you, monsieur, have time to get away."

Then addressing himself to Margery, but without taking his eyes for an instant off Crofton, he said: "My good Margot, in my room up-stairs you will find one piece of rope. Bring him here. Depechez-vous—quick."

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"A la bonne heure, monsieur," responded the mountebank airily. Then perceiving a corner of a handkerchief protruding from his pocket, he drew it forth, and tearing a narrow strip off it, he proceeded to firmly bind the other's wrists; then making a bandage of the remainder, he covered his mouth with it and tied it in a double knot at the back of his neck. "Ah, ha! that do the trick," he laughed. "How found you yourself? Very comfortable—hein?"

Margery, who had watched the operation with great glee, now gave back the revolver and retired to the inner room. Picot sat down a little way from his prisoner, but for the present took no further notice of him. He had heard a footstep on the stairs a minute or two previously, and rightly judged it was Gerald already gone.

From the first day of taking up their abode at No. 5 Pymm's Buildings, Clara and her husband had prepared themselves for an emergency like the present one. They were always ready for immediate flight, and had arranged the means for communication in case of an enforced separation.

At the end of a few minutes Margery returned carrying a folded paper, which she gave to Picot, at the same time whispering a few hurried words in his ear. The mountebank nodded and smiled, and kissed the tips of his fingers. Then the girl went back and the two men were left alone. But presently both of them heard the footsteps of more persons than one descending the stairs. Picot listened intently till the sound had died away, and then proceeded to light a cigarette. Of Crofton, sitting there bound and gagged, he took not the slightest apparent notice.

A quarter of an hour passed thus, and with the exception of a footfall now and then in the court below no sound broke the silence. At the end of that time, Picot's cigarette being finished, he rose, pushed back his chair, clapped his hat on his head, and after a last examination of his prisoner's watch, he marched out of the room without a word, and down the stairs and out of the house. First shutting behind him the door which divided the upper rooms from the ground floor.

Left alone, George Crofton began at once to struggle desperately to free himself, but all to no purpose. After a little time, however, he discovered that the chair in which he was bound moved on casters, and this discovery put an idea into his head such as would not have entered it under other circumstances. The room was lighted by a lamp on a low table, and to this table he managed by degrees to slide his chair, along the floor. Then setting his teeth hard, and stretching his arms to the fullest extent, he held his wrists together, and, leaning on the outermost coil of the legs, he wove to do them was burnt through. When once his hands were at liberty, very few minutes sufficed to make him a free man.

"My revenge is yet to come, Gerald Brooke," he said aloud as he paused at the door and took a last glance round. "It is but delayed for a little while, and every day's delay will serve but to make it sweeter at the last."

## CHAPTER XII.

We are back once more at Linden Villa. It is a March evening, and the clock has just struck nine. George Crofton is smoking a cigar, and gazing fixedly into the fire, seeing pictures in the glowing embers which are anything but pleasant ones, if one may judge by the lowering expression of his face. He looks haggard and careworn, and is no longer so fastidious with regard to his personal appearance as he used to be. Dissipation has set its unmistakable seal upon him; he has the air of a man who is going slowly but surely downhill.

His wife is amusing herself somewhat listlessly at the piano. There is a slightly worn look about her eyes, and the line of her lips looks thinner and more careworn than it was wont to do. Married life had not brought Stephanie the happiness, or even the content, she had looked forward to. The awakening had come soon, and had not been a pleasant one. Not long had it taken her to discover that she had mated herself with an inveterate gambler, if not with something worse. So long as plump young pigeons were to be had for the plucking, matters had gone on swimmingly at Linden Villa. There had been no lack of money, and Stephanie had never cared to inquire too curiously how it had been come by. But after a time Crofton's wonderful luck at cards began to be commented upon; people began to be shy of playing at the same table with him; pigeons were scarce to avoid him; and when, one unfortunate evening, he was detected cheating at the chair, and unmasked by a member cleverer in that particular line than himself, his career in that sphere of life came to an end forever. But his ambition had not been satisfied with the comparatively small gains of the card-table; he had bet heavily on the St. Leger and other races, and had been unfortunate in all. So far he had been able to meet his racing liabilities, but the doing so had exhausted the whole of his available resources, and matters at Linden Villa had now come to a pass that might almost be termed desperate.

Stephanie brought her roulades to an end with a grand crash; then turning half round she said in her clear metallic tones: "Have you anything to talk about, mon ange? Have you nothing to say to me?" Her husband's back was towards her, as he sat brooding sullenly in front of the fire. "It is not often that you stay at home at an evening, and when you do—chut! I might as well be alone."

He shrugged his shoulders. "What would you have me talk about? Our debts—our difficulties—our—"

"Why not?" she broke in quickly. "If you talked about them a little often, it might be all the better. You seem neither to know nor care anything about them. You are out from morning till night. It is I who have to promise to come, to lie, first to one person and then to another who come here demanding money when I have none to give them. Oh, it is a charming life—mine! N'importe. It will end itself in a little while."

"What do you mean? What new trick are you hatching now?" he demanded.

"It is nothing new—it has been in my head for a long time. Shall I tell you what it is? Why not?" The fingers of one hand were still resting on the piano. She struck a note or two carelessly, and then went on speaking as quietly as though she were mentioning some trifling detail of every day

life. "One evening, chéri, when you come home you will not find me; I shall be gone. This life suits me no longer. I will change it all. I will go back to the life I used to love so well. I have had a letter, Signor Ventelli is at Brussels; he prays to me to return to him. I shall go. You and I, my friend, can no longer live together. It will be better for both that we should part." Again her fingers struck a note or two carelessly.

Crofton was roused at last. He started to his feet with an imprecation and faced his wife. "What confounded stuff and nonsense you are talking, Steph," he exclaimed. "As if I believed a word of it!"

"Do I ever say that I will do a thing when I do not intend doing it?" she quietly asked. In his own mind he was obliged to confess that she did not. "We have made a mistake, you and I, and have found it out in time," she resumed. "We can be friends, always friends—why not? But you will go your way and I mine; that is all."

The cold indifference of her tone and manner stung him to the quick. Evidently she was minded to cast him off as carelessly as she would an old glove. The sudden fire in his heart blazed up in a moment. He loved this woman after a fashion of his own, and was in nowise inclined to let her go. "What you say is utter nonsense. I would have you remember that you are my wife, and that I can claim you as such anywhere and everywhere."

"And do you imagine that if I were twenty times a wife I should allow you or any other man to claim me as such against my will?" demanded Steph, with a contemptuous laugh. "Tza! tza! my friend, you talk like a child."

They were standing face to face, and for a few moments they stared at each other without speaking; but the clear resolute light that shone out of Steph's eyes, for a time at least, the fitful, dangerous gleam flickering redly in her husband's bloodshot orbs, as though there were a reflection from some Tophet below.

George Crofton turned away, and crossing to the sideboard, poured himself out a quantity of brandy. "You would be a fool, Steph, to leave me as you talk of doing, were it only for one thing," he said dryly. He seemed to have quite recovered his equanimity, and was choosing a cigar as he spoke.

"If it pleases me to be a fool, why not?"

"Has it ever occurred to you that any morning the newspapers may tell us that my cousin, Gerald Brooke, has been captured? Every day, that is the first news I look for."

"Ah, bah! you mock yourself. Your cousin will never be arrested now; he has got safe away to some foreign country long ago."

"You have no ground for saying that. Anyhow, may I bring the tidings of his capture and then—? But you know already what the result of his conviction would be to you and me. Beechley Towers and six thousand a year—nothing less."

"You deceive yourself," resumed Steph. "You are waiting for what will never happen. Nine months have passed since the murder, and the crime is half forgotten. You let Gerald Brooke slip through your fingers once; but you will never have the chance of doing so again.—Let us come back to realities, to the things we can touch. Dreams never had any charms for me."

He went back to the fireplace with his cigar, and took up a position on the hearth rug. "As you say—let us stick to realities; it may perhaps be the wisest," he went on. "What, then, would you think, what would you say, if I were to tell you as a fact that, in less than six weeks from to-day I shall be in possession of ten thousand pounds?"

"I should think and say that it was not a fact, but a dream, a—what do you call it?—a Will-o'-the-wisp."

"And yet it is not a dream, but a sober solid fact, as a very short time will prove."

She raised her brows; evidently, she was incredulous. "You made sure that you would win two thousand pounds at Doncaster, whereas you contrived to lose five hundred. You were just as certain that you would win!"

"What I am referring to now has nothing to do with horseracing," he broke in impatiently. "Listen," he added; and with that he planted himself astride a chair and confronted her, resting his arms on the back of it and puffing occasionally at his cigar as he talked. "I am about to tell you something which it was my intention not to have spoken about till later on; but it matters little whether you are told now or a month hence." He moved his chair nearer to her, and when he next spoke it was in a lower voice: "The young Earl of Leamington, who is enormously rich, is to be married on the 27th of next month. On the 14th of April one of the partners in a certain well-known firm of London jewelers, accompanied by an assistant, will start for the Earl's seat in the north carrying with him jewelry of the value of over twenty thousand pounds, for the purpose of enabling his lordship to select certain presents for his bride. That box of jewelry will never reach its destination."

Stephanie was staring at him with wide-open eyes. "You would not—?" she exclaimed, and then she paused.

"Yes, I would, and will," he answered with a sinister smile. "I and certain friends of mine have planned to make that box our own. The whole scheme is cut and dried; all the arrangements in connection with the journey are known to us; and so carefully have our plans been worked out, that it is next to impossible that we should fail."

"And you, George Crofton, my husband, have sunk to this—that you would become a common robber, a thief, a villain?"

His face darkened ominously, and the gash in his lip looked as large again as it usually did. "What would you have?" he asked with a snarl. "My cursed ill-luck has driven me to it. I cannot starve, neither will I."

"For a little while neither spoke."

"I didn't think you would take my news like this, Steph," he said presently. "Think of the prize! How is it possible for a man fixed as I am to resist trying to make it his own? One half comes to me because the plan is mine, but of course I can't work without confederates. My share will be worth ten thousand at the very least; and then, hey presto for the New World and a fresh start in life with a clean slate!—What say you, Steph?"

"At present, I say nothing more than I have said already," she answered coldly. "I must have time to think."

(To Be Continued.)

# PASTORS PRAY FOR THEM.

## INTERESTING SIGHTS AT OUR GREAT FISHING PORT.

Scenes From the Seaport of Lunenburg—Life in the Nova Scotia Town—Fishes and Their Business.

Lunenburg, the greatest fishing port in Nova Scotia, is stagnant out of season, writes a correspondent. From April to October, save for a little bustle about the docks, caused by the West India trade, there is little to relieve her somnolence; but just now she is intense, with fierce energy, and the din and bustle of commerce fills her streets. There are over a hundred rakish, clipper built fishing schooners lying in her harbour, that by the first of April will be off to the Grand Banks, Bay Chaleur and Labrador, and this means that there are over a hundred captains hurrying about drumming up crews of seventeen men each seeking a captain and a berth; over a hundred vessels to be fitted out with beef, flour, pork, sugar, salt, bait and other necessities. Just now the captains are in full pursuit of their men. To the ovens, the Blue rocks, the Black rocks, the Back harbour, Newtown and out among the fine farms in the back country they go, seeking recruits. Of course the captains most famed for big catches get the best men, which explains why some vessels make better voyages than others. All rendezvous in the harbour as the day of departure approaches, about April 1, forming a pretty spectacle.

### A JOINT-STOCK BUSINESS.

The Sunday before sailing special services are held in the churches and their pastors pray for a good catch and for health and safety. Then, on the first of April usually, they spread their white wings and put to sea, leaving their wives widows and their children orphans for the time being. Each vessel carries seventeen souls, master, thirteen trawl-men, two boys and a cook. The crew get half the proceeds of the catch and the vessel half. But the master, in addition, has a 4 per cent. commission. The boys and cook are paid wages. The men do not receive half the proceeds, however, as they must pay out of their share half the cost of ice and bait, about \$600 a voyage, the cook's wages, and half the boy's, with half the captain's commission and half the cost of curing the catch and freighting it to market. The vessel owners furnish ship and provisions, half the ice and bait, pay half the captain's commission, and half the cost of curing and freighting. The vessels are owned mostly by shareholders among the villagers and farmers, so that everybody is interested in the industry and benefited by it.

### FISH BY THE SHIP LOAD.

By September 15, if all goes well, the vessels begin returning, and by October 1 are mostly in port with the catch. If they have made a good voyage they hoist their flag, fire swivels and come in in grand style, the people greeting them as the Roman populace did returning victors; but if there has been death or casualty on board, as too often happens, they set the flag at half mast and there are sorrow and foreboding in the village. Once in the cod and haddock are taken from the pickle in the ship's hold and spread on flakes in the sun. These flakes are scaffolds on short posts covered with rails or spruce boughs. There are great numbers of them on both shores and on islands in the harbor inform the visitor at once that Lunenburg is a centre of the fisheries.

After the fish are cured they are exported, principally to the West Indies and Brazil. Twenty-seven vessels are engaged in this trade. They take out fish, lumber and potatoes, and bring back salt, sugar and molasses. I have talked with the merchants who engage in this business. They said it was on a very satisfactory basis at present. The Cuban war had wholly stopped traffic with that island and beet sugar was taking the place of cane sugar, so that there was less demand for the latter.

Porto Rico is their best market, the French islands Gaudaloupe and Martinique being monopolized by French fishermen who receive a subsidy from the Government of ten francs a quintal while the owners get ten centimes for every mile their vessels sail. Therefore the French fishermen can undersell the English.

### THEY CARRY GOODS HOME.

They are fine, clipper built vessels, these fish carriers, as they are called, and usually make the voyage to the West Indies, discharge cargo, re-load with sugar, salt and molasses, and are back in the home port in six or seven weeks. I was much interested in one of them, the May, which lay at the docks nearly all last summer, re-fitting, having had the sticks taken out of her by a white squall in West Indies seas the winter before.

The extreme point of the peninsula, which forms the northern shore of Lunenburg's harbour, ends in a mass of blue, rifled, jagged, upturned rocks, against which the sea in storms dashes with thunders that make earth tremble and a smother of foam that clothes the black masses in a creamy white. Right here, upon the crags, is set the fishing hamlet of Blue Rocks at head, 400 souls when the men are at about; but where in the season only women, children and old men are to be found. It has been a favourite haunt of mine, whether watching the turmoil of the waters on the rocks or the old men mending their nets on a sea worn cliff or the refitting and painting the whalers in the huge chasm in the rocks they term the inner harbour, or listening to tales of the sea in the little shop and post office combined, or arranging the children all down the main street that I may take their pictures—there are action and novelty and a phantasmagoria of shifting scene that must be experienced to be appreciated.