

FOR THE THIRD TIME.

CHAPTER I.

I raise an instant on the threshold of this story. You will call it perhaps incredible, impossible. Be it so—however it is true. Twenty years ago its principal incidents were wonderingly chronicled in every paper throughout the length and breadth of the land. Incredible it sounds—true it is. It is but one more proof of the veracity of that hackneyed axiom—“truth is stranger than fiction.”

A raw and gusty March day was closing in a rawer and gustier twilight. One lurid bar of blood-red streaked the black sky where the sun had set wrathfully; all else was murky, troubled darkness. A wailing wind moaned through the gaunt trees, and sent the March dust whirling in blinding clouds before it. In the ominous sky, in the groaning blast, the coming storm heralded its approach.

The 5 p.m. train from London came thundering into the dull little station of Farmingham. The lamps flared in the numberless draughts, and the little wayside station looked, so unutterably dismal and desolate in the eerie gloaming. Half a dozen stragglers lounged about, hands deep in their pockets, hats drawn far over their eyes, waiting to see the passengers alight.

There was but one. A tall young man, with a light overcoat thrown across his arm, sprang off, and walked into the station.

“All right!” shouted the guard. And, with a demoniac shriek, the train was lost in the blackening evening.

The half-dozen stragglers turned their twelve eyes upon the tall young man with an overcoat—a stranger to them, a stranger in Farmingham. A handsome and gentlemanly fellow, with dark, bright eyes, a black mustache, and a magnificent ring blazing on his ungloved left hand. It flashed like a great eye of fire as he stood under one of the gas jets and lit a cigar.

“Nasty night, sir,” suggested the station-master, rather impressed by the superb stranger. “We shall have it hot and heavy before morning.”

The stranger nodded carelessly, blew a fragrant cloud of smoke in the face of the nearest straggler, walked to the door, and looked long and earnestly down the road.

The dull little village—dull at its best and brightest—was unappealingly forlorn and forsaken this black and dismal March evening. Not even a stray dog wandered through its one long, straggling street. Everybody was shut up behind those lighted windows in square, white dwellings, with the inevitable Venetian blinds—houses as much alike as peas in a pod.

The stranger shrugged his shoulders significantly.

“A gay and festive place, this Farmingham of yours, my friend. Existence dragged out here must be a priceless boon. There’s a hotel, I suppose?”

“Five of ‘em,” replied the station-master, triumphantly. “The Crown, the Farmers, the Wheatsheaf, the—”

“That will do. Which is the best?”

“Well, the Crown is the dearest and the neatest—and a pretty fair hotel. There it stands, sir, with them benches in front of it.”

“Thanks; I’ll try it. Whereabouts does Miss Hardenbrook live?”

“Miss Hardenbrook? Well, you can’t see Miss Hardenbrook’s from here; it’s pretty high ‘oother end of the village. Be you a friend of Miss Hardenbrook’s?” with a curious stare

The young man laughed—a peculiar, short laugh—as he hung away his cigar, and invested himself in his overcoat.

“I don’t know about that. If I’m not, however, it’s Miss Hardenbrook’s fault. I’m not at all proud. Good evening to you.”

He strode away. The stragglers watched him out of sight.

“Not proud, ain’t you?” said the station-master. “Maybe not, but you’re pretty considerable cheery. What’s he to Miss Hardenbrook, I wonder?” She never has no visitors.”

“One of her handsome niece’s beaux, I expect,” suggested one.

“Miss Hardenbrook’s very poorly today,” another remarked. “She ain’t expected to live the week out. Miss Isabel will drop into a good thing, when the old girl goes off the hooks. She’ll be the richest and handsomest gal in Lancashire.”

“And this young chap, with the black mustache and diamond ring, comes down beforehand to make sure of his game. A fortune-hunter, or a gambler, most likely. They all look like that—black mustaches, diamond rings, tall hats, and lots of cheek.”

The young man, thus unflatteringly discussed, reached the hotel meantime, secured his room, ordered his supper, and ate it with an appetite. His watch pointed to six as he came from the table.

It was quite dark now—moonless and starless; a black, bitter night. “Pleasant this,” the young man muttered—an inky sky above, an inky earth below. My dear girl will hardly venture out in this March tornado; but, like a true knight, I must brave the elements and be at the place of tryat.”

He buttoned up his coat, drew his

hat far over his eyes, and sallied out into the gusty darkness.

There were no street lamps in primitive Farmingham and the lighted windows were so obscured by tossing trees, that they illuminated his path, but little. The path was strange to him, too; but he plunged carelessly forward with an easy, trust in luck and himself, that was characteristic of the man, humming the fag end of an old ballad.

“Oh, hang it!” as he stumbled over an obstruction. “Miss Hardenbrook would lock the door and keep the key, too, if she dreamed George Wildair was within a score of miles of this delectable, happy village. I hope Issie will keep tryst; one doesn’t mind breaking one’s shins for the girl of one’s heart; but if the girl doesn’t come—This ought to be the spot, I think.”

He was out on the verge of a bleak marsh, just discernible and, no more, Pollard willows waved and cracked, and a low clump of furze-bushes dotted it—black specters, this bad March night.

“This is the spot, and this is the hour,” Mr. George Wildair muttered to himself; “and a more desolate spot and a more dismal hour my adored Isabel couldn’t have chosen, if she had tried a lifetime. May the gods that specially watch over fools and lovers send her soon, or I shall be found here to-morrow morning, frozen as stiff as Lot’s wife.”

A step sounded on the road—baked hard as iron with black frost—a quick light woman’s step.

An instant later, and a slender female figure stood before him, dimly outlined against the gloomy night sky.

“Isabel!” He started forward, his arms outstretched.

“George!” A hysterical cry of delight, and the outstretched arms were empty no longer.

“Dear George—dearest George, how good it is to see you again,” she cries in the same hysterical way. “Oh! the last two months have seemed like an eternity, never to see you, never to hear from you! And Miss Hardenbrook has been so cross and so suspicious; and Ellen Rossiter has watched me as a cat watches a mouse. Oh! clinging to him with something between a laugh and a sob, ‘one may ever buy gold too dear, George.’”

“My dear little Issie! My precious little ill-used darling. So you are enduring daily martyrdom for my sake. Time doesn’t improve Miss Hardenbrook’s temper I suppose; but as it doesn’t improve her health either, there is reason to hope your martyrdom will soon end. How is she?”

“Very, very ill, and liable to die at any moment. Ellen Rossiter hardly leaves her night or day.”

“Ellen Rossiter is the toad-eating, tuft-hunting old maid cousin you told me of, who hopes to supplant you in Miss Hardenbrook’s will?”

“And who will supplant me, George,” the girl said, solemnly, “as surely as Aunt Hardenbrook finds out you are here, and that we have met.”

“But she must not find it out,” Mr. Wildair said, in a rather startled tone; “and she must not know we have met. It would be a terrible thing for us, Isabel, if you lost your aunt’s fortune.”

The girl looked up at him earnestly. But in the darkness the expression his face wore could not be seen.

“You would not love me less, George?”

“You foolish child. As if any loss in this lower world could make me do that.”

“Then why would it’s loss be terrible? I should like to be rich, George, to live luxuriously, to dress superbly, to have all that is beautiful and bright in life around me, but I could give all up, and go forth to beggary with you, my beloved, without one pang. Nothing in this wide earth could be terrible to me but the loss of your love, George.”

Mr. Wildair laughed and kissed her. But the laugh sounded cynical, and the kiss was not at all the rapturous proceeding it might have been.

“A very pretty speech my dear, and a very flattering one. But there is a homely old adage which is as true as truth itself to my mind. ‘When poverty comes in at the door, love flies out of the window.’ The going forth to beggary sounds nice and sentimental in theory; but when it came to practice, I should quietly steal a razor and cut my throat. The story of King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid, as told by Mr. Tennyson, is a very charming story, indeed; and if I were a King Cophetua and Miss Hardenbrook disinherited you, I should take my dark-eyed beggar maid, and make her my queen as promptly and romantically as he did. But you see, being only a briefless barrister, just able to earn the bread and salt of daily life, and nothing more, beggar maids are not practicable. So my pretty Issie, if we are to be best for life before our hair turns gray, you must become heiress of Miss Hardenbrook’s fortunes.”

“Then it is Miss Hardenbrook’s fortune you marry, not Isabel Vance?”

She spoke in a cold, constrained voice, drawing herself free from his encircling arms.

“Nonsense, Issie,” he said impatiently. “You know better than that. I’m not a very sentimental young man, and I tell you the plain truth. I love you dearly—I would marry you without a penny to-morrow—if I could, but I can’t; and if the Venus Celestis were to come alive on earth, and offer to become Mrs. Wildair out of hand, I should have to thank the radiant goddess, respectfully decline, unless she brought several thousand pounds from Olympus with her. Don’t be silly, Isabel, and don’t be sentimental; Miss Hardenbrook will die shortly, and if she wasn’t an unconscionable old spider she would have died long ago; and when your six months’ mourning has expired, we’ll be married, and live happy forever after.”

(To Be Continued.)

ROSEBERY'S CAREER.

Accident of High Birth the Cause of His Failure in Political Life.

The earliest forecast of the career of the Earl of Rosebery was made by a shrewd Scotchman, who heard him deliver a speech at a luncheon after a military review. He was a lad of fourteen, but he spoke so well that this keen observer declared that the volunteers had been listening to one of England's future prime ministers.

Twenty years passed and he was still referred to by his friends as a man with a great future in public life, although he had done little to justify expectation. His first speech in the House of Lords, when he was twenty-four, was a feeble one; and while he presided three years afterward over a Social Science Congress and subsequently was chosen the rector of two Scotch universities, he had made no marked progress in political life. Yet those who met him frequently were impressed with his force of character and exceptional ability, and were in the habit of speaking of him as a future prime minister.

He had not been idle, but had made good use of his wealth and leisure. He had traveled much and had thought deeply on many subjects. When he obtained his first official position in 1881 as Under-Secretary of the Home Office, he went ahead rapidly.

In five years he was Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and his intimate friend, Mr. Gladstone, had pointed to him as

THE FUTURE LEADER.

of the Liberal party and his own successor. He had already been a leader of the Imperial Federation League, and he subsequently took an active part in the organization of the first London County Council. When Mr. Gladstone retired from public life the Earl of Rosebery became prime minister.

As a man of the future he had excited much enthusiasm. As a man of the present he has failed to make a reputation as a statesman of the first rank. His tenure of office was short, and his party met with a crushing defeat in the general elections of 1895. As the leader of a divided and discouraged minority he soon lost heart and retired from public life.

His failure to justify the hopes of his friends was not due to any lack of brilliant gifts. As an orator he is without a rival in England. Mr. Chamberlain is a better debater, but is not more fluent as a speaker, and lacks his melodious voice, and resources of humor.

On the platform he is an almost ideal speaker, combining with dignity of bearing and earnestness of manner, a sparkling wit and felicity of expression which delight an audience.

His career proves that it is a misfortune, at least for an English Liberal, to be born a Peer. He has sat in the House of Lords since he was twenty-one. If he could have fought his way to the front in the Commons he would have had the political training in the management of party affairs, which would have fitted him for leadership.

As a man of the future he was a dreamer interesting himself in many things. As prime minister and leader he lacked definite purpose and commanding authority. His public career has been blighted by the accident of high birth.

GROWING OLD.

Most women have a horror of growing old. It certainly is not the pleasantest thing to contemplate, but it is inevitable. But that is no reason why old age should not be kept off as long as possible. Let that worn-out expression, “I am getting old,” be consigned to the past, and keep young. Just because a few gray hairs have made their appearance, do not give up all forms of active amusement, put on old-fashioned clothes, dress the hair unbecomingly or don ugly colors. Old age does not need to be forced on, rather keep it at bay.

But we are being continually reminded that we are no longer young, you say. Certainly our friends notice the gray hairs and wrinkles and wish to spare us, through kindness, much of the active work which would ward off the wrinkles and put color in the face. The young folks take the walks in the fresh, bracing air while their elders sit before the fire in big arm-chairs. They are glad to spare the dear old mother and father any unnecessary steps. The old folks must have extra warmth, easy chairs, and must not use their limbs and muscles as long as they could. Is there any way which invites the approach of the enemy better? It is all very well to allow the young all the amusement they can find, but it is folly to retire from it entirely and proceed to grow old. Few things keep one young so long as association with youth and life.

Then, too, it is not vanity to select becoming clothes, even if a woman is past forty. There are pretty things suitable for all ages, and that little line, “Fine feathers make fine birds,” is very true. Do not allow gray hairs to make a “back number” of you, but look anxiously, care and worry away from keep young, keep to the front and sight.

RUSSIA'S RAPID GROWTH.

Russia has the most rapidly increasing population of any country in the world. The growth during the last 100 years has been a fraction less than 1,000,000 annually.

THE REINDEER'S WARM COAT.

The skin of the reindeer is so impervious to the cold that any one clothed in such a dress, with the addition of a blanket of the same material, may bear the intensest rigors of an Arctic winter's night.

THE PIANO-ORGAN CASE.

A day or two after, as I was plodding along the road, I was passed by the same pair of musicians, and on my wishing the man good-morning the woman as before went on, not saying anything to me. Several other times I met him either going or returning, and I was struck with their powers of endurance in dragging such a heavy load all those miles and up the long hills on the way.

One morning, coming from the fields with some cowslips, I came upon them outside a large substantial old house. The man was grinding away, and the woman was going in at the garden gate. I was in the act of lighting my short-cut pipe, when the man asked me for a match, though he didn't light up then, as not looking business-like, I suppose. Setting down my basket, I tried to have a little talk with him; but his English was so bad that I could not make out much of what he said. While I was at this game the woman returned, and did not seem pleased to see us together. She looked sulkily at me under her black brows, and gave an impatient stamp with her foot upon the road, making one think what a handsome spitfire she was in her gay costume. Not wishing to be blown up by her, I shouldered my basket and moved away, leaving her rating her companion soundly. I could not imagine what made her take such a dislike to me, as I had always been civil.

For some time after this the district was not visited by burglars, and I was beginning to think of being recalled from my wearisome duty, when one morning before starting I was sent for to the office and instructed to go to Hendon in private clothes, as a house there had been broken into on the previous night.

On arriving, I found it to be the house in front of which I had given the organ-grinder the match and had aroused his wife's anger. A large garden, shut in with a high wall, separated it from the road, while in the rear the grounds sloped down to the river Brent. The thieves had got into one of the bedrooms by means of a ladder, from a neighbouring stackyard; and they had carried off a large booty, principally jewels. The robbery was not discovered till a late hour, when one of the maids going up to light the gas in the room, found the door locked on the inside. She at once gave the alarm; but the thieves had evidently taken their departure some time before, for no trace of them could be discovered, though a strict search was made all round.

I examined the place and found the job had been done in a thoroughly workman-like manner, and was on the point of leaving with my report, when my eye caught the gleam of something bright under the window-curtain. Stooping down, I picked up a large foreign-looking earring, which I immediately recognised as one of those worn by the Italian woman with the piano-organ. This put me at once on the scent, and explained why my two friends so haunted the district. But the thing was to pounce upon them before they had any suspicion of being wanted, otherwise, there was little chance of recovering the jewels, for I made up my mind that it could be no other than they who had stolen the diamonds from Hampstead. I did not mention my find to the gentleman of the house, as one cannot be too cautious in these matters.

Knowing the Italians would be by this time on their round I returned to town, and after a consultation with my superior, determined to drop upon my pair the next morning before they began business. I don't know, sir, if you are acquainted with the Italian quarter near Hatton Garden. It's a queer place, chockful of those black-haired icemen, pifferari, bagpipers, organ-grinders, and artists' models. The names on the shops are all foreign; the streets are crowded from morning till night, and the bright dresses of the women are in great contrast to the dingy houses.

When I made my way there early the following morning, accompanied by another officer, also in plain clothes, most of the inhabitants were already stirring, busy preparing for the day's campaign. Some were mixing their ice in tubs, stirring the mixture with great pieces of wood, and some were going off with their cargo complete. On reaching the house where my couple lodged, we were confronted in the doorway by a stout dirty-looking Italian who was the landlord—the padrone. I think they call him. We stated as our business that we wished to speak to Carlo Andreolotti. The fat man looked at us suspiciously, as though guessing something was wrong; but seeming not to wish to be unkind, he tapped at the door of the back parlor, and getting no answer, he tried the handle, but found the room locked, so told us Carlo must be out already on his round. Leaving another officer to watch the neighbourhood, we started on our search, hoping to overtake the musicians.

Finding by inquiry of constables on the road, that they were before us on their usual route towards Hampstead, we hailed a cab, and presently saw our quarry jogging along with their organ through Kentish Town. We stopped the cab, and getting out, stepped up to the Italian, whom I tapped on the shoulder, bringing him to a standstill. The woman at first appeared inclined to run; but on second thoughts, she remained quiet, putting on an air of injured innocence. We had no great difficulty in getting them to a police station, where I charged them with be-

ing concerned in the burglary at Hatton two nights before. The woman, who took it much more coolly than her husband, said we should all rue the insult upon her, speaking in very decent English. I noticed that she wore another pair of earrings, which were much plainer and smaller than those I had always before seen her with. After the two were disposed of for the time, the piano-organ was wheeled into the station yard and locked up in a shed.

Getting a search-warrant, my friend and I went to the lodgings near Hatton Garden. The landlord at first demurred about letting us go into the room; but on showing our authority, he made no further bother. As the parlour was locked, we had to force open the door. The room into which we broke was a large, old-fashioned apartment, very dirty, the ceiling black with age. There was little in it beside a deal table, decidedly in want of scrubbing, a couple of broken chairs, and in one corner of the floor a mattress and a blanket or two. We looked eagerly into a cupboard, but found only a few cups and basins, some macaroni in a dish, and a rusty old lamp. Though we examined the place thoroughly, we could find nothing else but dirt; so, terribly disappointed, we at last gave up the search.

On going out of the room, we were met in the passage by a crowd of Italians, who had evidently been looking through the keyhole during our hunt. They made way for us to pass, but kept up a chorus of what seemed to me uncomplimentary remarks.

When we got into the street I felt rather at a loss how to proceed, for I had only the earring and my suspicions to go upon, and was quite at sea as to the whereabouts of the jewels. Taking leave of my companion, as he had another engagement, I walked moodily and out of spirits to the police station where my Italians were locked up.

All at once it struck me that I might as well have a look at the piano-organ so, getting the key of the shed from the inspector in charge, I proceeded to examine it. It was an ordinary-looking instrument on a low truck, with a box near the handles. This contained nothing of consequence, so I took off the waterproof cover and carefully inspected the case, but could find nothing unusual about it. I was shaking my head over my want of success, when I happened to notice that the green baize which covered the back was rather loose, and that some of the tacks which fastened it to the frame were missing. Something impelled me to look behind it; so, taking hold of one corner of the baize, I gave it a smart pull, and it came away easily from the wood-work for a foot or more from the bottom, exposing a deal panel. I rapped this with my knuckles, on which it gave out a hollow sound; so, going on my knees, to get more readily at it, I pulled out a knife and commenced prising at the panel. At that moment the inspector came into the shed, and seeing me busy, asked if I had found anything. I succeeded at length in wrenching off the piece of wood on which I was working, and disclosed a place between it and the real back of the organ. Wheeling the instrument to the light in the door-way, the inspector and I looked inquisitively into the cavity, and discovered a small parcel wrapped in a handkerchief. With trembling hands, I unfolded this, and also a piece of cotton-wool inside, and disclosed a number of brooches, rings, and bracelets, evidently of great value, and a diamond necklace, which I knew from description to be the one stolen from Hampstead.

This lucky find did the business for the Italians, who were committed for trial at the next sessions. When the day came and the case began, it was astonishing to note the difference in the bearing of the two prisoners. The woman looked defiantly about her, while her husband appeared quite crushed. At the close of the speech for the prosecution he broke down altogether, and then and there made a full confession, throwing all the blame on his wife. He said they had committed the robberies with which they were charged, but that he acted completely under his wife's direction, as she planned the affairs, and was foremost in carrying them out. They had arranged, as soon as the last business had blown over, to dispose of the jewelry abroad, and afterwards to settle down quietly in Italy. Of course the confession made it no lighter for the man, and both the prisoners were sentenced to a long term of penal servitude.

I came in for a good deal of praise for my share in the matter, and what was much better for me, got promoted. Though, as a member of the force, I was not entitled to claim the reward offered for the recovery of the diamonds, yet Miss Somers was so delighted to get them back, that she made me a handsome present. Ever since then, I've had a liking for piano-organs.

(The End.)

SQUEAKED ONCE TOO OFTEN.

Maccabe, the ventriloquist, was a great practical joker. Several years ago he was on board a river steambat, and having made friends with the engineer, was allowed the freedom of the engine room.

Presently a certain part of the machinery began to creak. The engineer oiled it and went about his duties. In the course of a few minutes the creaking was heard again, and the engineer rushed over, oil can in hand, to lubricate the same crank.

Again he resumed his post, but it was only a few minutes before the same old crank was creaking louder than ever.

Great Jupiter! he yelled, the thing's bewitched.

More oil was administered, but the engineer began to smell a rat. Pretty soon the crank squeaked again, when slipping up behind Maccabe, he squirted half a pint of oil down the joker's back.

There said he, I guess that crank won't squeak any more.

REVERSE ACTION.

Hello, old fellow, I'm glad to hear that you wife is well. Didn't the doctors tell her she couldn't recover?

Yes, and if they'd told her that she must get well she would have fooled them just as badly. I saved her by telling them her disposition.