A House of Mystery

OR, THE GIRL IN BLUE

CHAPTER IV.—(Continued).

My guide drew forward a chair, and I seated myself, saying—

"I believe you are the inspector on duty here?"

"Yes, I am. Will you kindly tell me your name and address?"

I did so, and the scratching of a quill told me that he was about to take down my statement.

"Well?" he inquired at length. "Please go on, for my time is limited. What's the nature of the affair?"

"I've been present to-night in a house where a double murder has been committed," I said.

"Where?"

"Ah! That's unfortunately just the mystery which I cannot solve. Being blind, I could obtain no idea of the exterior of the place, and in my excitement I left it without properly marking the house."

"Strange—very strange," observed the officer. "Tell me the whole of the facts. Who are the victims?"

"A woman and a man."

"Young or old?"

"Both young, as far as I can judge. At any rate, I examined the body of the man and found him to be about twenty-eight."

"The gentleman has no idea of the street where the tragedy occurred," chimed in the constable. "He met me outside the Museum, and the blood on his clothes was still wet."

"He's got an injury to the head," remarked the inspector.

"I was knocked down and rendered insensible by a cab," I explained. "When I again became conscious I found myself in the strange house."

"They didn't rob you?"

I felt in my pockets, but could not discover that I had lost anything. I remembered that I had only a couple of half-sovereigns and some loose silver upon me, and this remained still in my pocket. My fingers touched the stud and pencil-case, and I hesitated whether to give these up to the police. But next second the thought flashed through my mind that if I did, suspicion might be aroused against me, and further that while I kept them in my possession I should possess a secret clue to the victims to the terrible tragedy.

After I had fully explained the whole circumstances, and the inspector had written down with infinite care each word of my remarkable statement, he said—

"It seems as though both the man and woman fell victims to some plot or other. You say that there were no high words, and that all you heard was a woman's shriek, and a man's voice say, 'Why, you've killed her!' Now, have you any idea of the indentity of that man?"

"None whatsoever," I answered. "My mind is a perfect blank on everything, save the personal appearance of the man who was afterwards struck to the heart."

"Exactly. But don't you think that the man who expressed horror at the first crime fell the victim of the second?"

"Ah! I never thought of that!" I said. "Of course, it seems most likely."

"Certainly. The second crime was committed undoubtedly in order to conceal the first."

"Then how extraordinary it is that I was spared."

"There was a motive, I believe, for that. We shall no doubt find that later."

"You will communicate with Scotland Yard, I suppose," I remarked.

"Perhaps we shall; perhaps not," answered the Inspector, vaguely. "The affair must, of course, be fully investigated. Have you anything to add? You say that some woman treated you kindly. Have you any idea of her personal appearance?"

"None," I answered. "The only fact I know was that she was in evening dress, and that upon her wrist was a curious smooth-worn bangle of a kind of fine plaited wire, very pliable, like those worn by African native women."

"Eh! What—impossible!" gasped the inspector, in a voice which surprised me. But next moment he recovered his self-possession and made a calm remark that this fact did not lead to anything definite. Yet the sudden exclamation of startled surprise which escaped him aroused within me a belief that my words had given him some mysterious clue. Nevertheless, I reflected upon the many thousands of women who wear bangles, and thus reassured myself that my words could have conveyed no hidden meaning to my interrogator.

"You have no further statement to make?"

"None," I responded.

There was a few moments silence, during which time the quill continued its rapid scratching.

"You will kindly sign your information," the officer said, whereupon the constable brought me the sheet of foolscap and a pen wherewith I scrawled my name.

"Good," observed the inspector, with a grunt of satisfaction. "And now I must ask you to excuse me further, Mr.—Mr. Heaton, and wish you good morning."

I made my adieu, after obtaining from him a promise to communicate with me if anything transpired, and, accompanied by the constable, made my way out into the long passage again.

I had not walked a dozen paces ere I knew instinctively that some persons were near me, and next instant felt myself seized roughly by both arms and legs.

"What are you doing?" I shouted in alarm; "let me go!"

But only for an instant I struggled. The force used was utterly irresistible, and not a single word was uttered. My arms were in a moment pinioned, rendering me helpless as a child. With my terrible affliction upon me, I could neither defend myself nor could I see my assailants. Whoever the latter were, it was evident that they were determined, and, further, that I had been cleverly entrapped.

My first thought was that I had been arrested, but ere the lapse of a few moments the hideous truth became impressed forcibly upon me.

I tried to fight for life, but my wrists had been seized in grips of steel, and after a few desperate wrenches I stood, bound, and utterly unconscious of where I was.

My real position was, to a certain degree, plain. The man whom I had believed to be a constable was no police-officer at all, but some thief or London ruffian; I, far too confiding, had neglected to take the precaution of feeling his uniform.

A shrewd suspicion overcame me that this trap had been purposely laid for me. The man who had posed as a police inspector had obtained from me a signed declaration of the remarkable occurrence, for what reason I knew not. Dnd they now intend to silence me for ever? The thought struck a deep and terrible dread within my heart.

A blind man is the sport of Fate, and, being utterly defenceless, is at the mercy of every person evilly disposed. Street urchins play practical jokes upon him, women deceive him, and men take advantage of his physical infirmity for their own ends. Truly I had fallen into bad company.

To my demands to know where I was, no response was given.

Indistinct whisperings sounded about me, and by the liquid "s s" of one person I felt convinced that a woman was present.

Little time, however was given in which to distinguish my surroundings, for two persons gripped my bound arms and drew me roughly through a narrow door, across an uneven floor, and thence down a long, crooked flight of stone steps.

From below came up a dank, mouldy smell, as if some chamber long unopened, and suddenly there broke upon my quick ears the wash of water.

In that moment of mental agony the truth was rendered plain. I was not in a police-station, as I believed, but in some house beside the Thames, and, moreover, I was descending to the water—going to my death.

Once again, as a last effort, I struggled and fought with the fierce desperation begotten of terror, but in a moment the strong hands that held me pushed me violently forward, and I then felt myself falling helplessly from some dizzy height. My head reeled, and weakened as I already was, all knowledge of things became blotted out.

The touch of a cool, sympathetic hand upon my brow was the first thing I subsequently remembered. My arms had apparently been freed, and with a quick movement I grasped the hand. It was a woman's.

Was I dreaming?

I stretched forth my left hand to obtain some idea of my surroundings, and found myself lying upon an uneven stone flooring that seemed covered with the evil-smelling of the river.

With my right hand I touched a woman's firm, well-moulded arm, and to my amazement my eager fingers came into contact with a bangle. I felt it.

The hand, the arm, the bangle, the subtle perfume of peau d' Espagne, all were the same as those of the woman who had pitied me in my helplessness, and had so tenderly cared for me in that mysterious, unknown house, wherein the tragedy had afterwards occurred.

At first I lay speechless in wonderment, but when I found tongue I spoke, imploring her to make explanation. I heard her sigh deeply, but to all my inquiries she remained dumb.

The adventure was extraordinary; the mystery utterly inexplicable.

CHAPTER V.

"Tell me," I demanded in my helplessness of the mysterious woman at my side, "what has happened?"

"Rise, and try whether you can walk," said the voice at last, sweet and low-pitched, the same well-remembered voice that had spoken to me in that unknown house and shadows.

I struggled and rose stiffly, assisted tenderly by her. To my joy I found that I could walk quite well.

"Thank God!" she gasped, as though a great weight had been lifted from her mind. "Thank God that I have found you. The tide is rising, and in half an hour you would have been beyond human aid."

"The tide!" I repeated. "What do you mean?"

"At high tide the river floods this place to the roof, therefore nothing could have saved you."

"What place is this?"

The voice was silent, as though hesitating to reveal to me the truth.

"A place wherein, alas! more than one person has found his grave," she explained at last.

"But I don't understand," I said eagerly. "All is so puzzling. I believed that I was inside a police-station, whereas I had actually walked into this mysterious and cleverly-prepared trap. Who are these people who are my enemies? —tell me."

"Unfortunately, I cannot."

"But you, yourself, are not one of them," I declared.

"I may be," answered the voice in a strange, vague tone.

"Why?"

"Ah! no, that is not a fair question to ask."

"But surely, you who were so kind to me after my accident in the street will not desert me now?" I argued. Her failure to give me any assurance that she was my friend struck me as peculiar. There was something extremely uncanny about the whole affair. I did not like it.

"I have not said that I intend to leave you. Indeed, from motives of my own I have sought and found you; but before we go further I must obtain from you a distinct and faithful promise."

"A promise—of what?"

There was a brief silence, and I heard that she drew a deep breath as those do who are driven to desperation.

"The situation is briefly this," the voice said, in a tone a trifle harsher than before. "I searched for you, and by a stroke of good fortune discovered where your unknown enemies had placed you, intending that at high tide you should be drowned, and your body carried out to sea, as others have been. From this place there is only one means of egress, and that being concealed, only death can come to you unless I assist you. You understand?"

"Perfectly. This place is a trap where a man may be drowned like a rat in a hole."

The place was foetid with the black mud of the Thames.

"Exactly," she answered. Then she added, "Now tell me, are you prepared to make a compact with me?"

"A compact? Of what nature?" I inquired, much surprised.

"It will, I fear, strike you as rather strange, nevertheless it is, I assure you, imperative. If I rescue you and give you back your life, it must be conditional that you accept my terms absolutely."

"And what are those terms?" I inquired, amazed at this extraordinary speech of hers.

"There are two conditions," she answered, after a slight pause. "The first is that you must undertake to make no statement whatever to the police regarding the events of last night."

She intended to secure my silence regarding the tragedy. Was it because she herself was the actual assassin? I remembered that while I had reclined upon the silken couch in that house of mystery this startling suspicion had crossed my mind. Was that same cool, sympathetic palm that had twice soothed my brow the hand of a murderess?

(To be Continued.)

FEAT FOR FEAT.

Madame Adelina Patti queen of songsters, has, in the course of her long professional career, met with many adventures—some amusing, some otherwise.

On one occasion, many years ago, she attended a supper-party after a concert, one of her fellow-guests being an eminent lawyer. After supper, the latter pressed the diva to sing, but for a while she refused.

"Sing, and I'll do anything you like!" he finally pleaded.

So Madame Patti sang "Home, Sweet Home."

"Now, Mr. M.," she remarked, at the close of her song, "please stand on your head."

"Good gracious, child, you're joking!" was the astonished reply.

"Not at all!" retorted the singer. "A bargain is a bargain."

"So it is," agreed the lawyer resignedly. "Here goes!"

And up in the air went his feet, waving wildly to preserve his balance, amid general applause.

AT FIRST HAND.

Meeks—"The man who tries to change a woman's views is a fool."

Weeks—"How do you know?"

Meeks—"My wife told me so."

THE GREAT TROUBLE.

Of course, the world may owe
A living to us, though
When fate's unkind,
We're apt to find
Collections mighty slow.

ON THE FARM

FARM HELP SUPPLY.

The demand for farm help this spring is likely to be as keen as ever. It has set in already. The immigration agencies are being besieged with applications from farmers. A few years ago the demand for help did not set in until about seeding time. The scarcity of suitable help has changed this, and now hiring begins a month or two earlier.

The Dominion Department of Immigration has charge of the distribution of farm help in Ontario, outide of what may be done by the Salvation Army and other agencies. There are 175 sub-agents distributed through all the leading towns and cities of Ontario. The Toronto agency, which is in charge of Mr. Stewart, is largely a forwarding office, from which men are sent to the various districts. This agency places a number of men in the vicinity of Toronto. Since Jan. 15, over 300 have been placed on farms, chiefly from the Toronto unemployed. Mr. Stewart has 200 applications for men on hand, and for 50 servants.

It is the aim of the Department to bring the local agent in touch with the booking agents in Great Britain. Immigrants are booked direct to the local agent, and within easy reach of the farms where help is wanted. The Dominion Department does not pay the railway fare of the immigrants, as was done by the Ontario Department. A ticket at two cents a mile is secured, but the immigrant has to pay this, or the farmer, who keeps it out of his wages.

There are some advantages in this. The immigrant, when leaving England, will try and get booked direct to the nearest point where work is obtainable. The local agent usually has places for the men on arrival, so that there is no delay or extra expense in getting to work. A plan, which is being largely followed, and which is working well is to have men placed before leaving the old country. The booking agent sends in advance a paper, describing the man, and when he will arrive. The immigrant has a duplicate of this, which he presents to the agent on arrival. Formerly, the bulk of the immigrants were booked direct to Toronto. Here many of them remained, and refused to go on farms, eventually becoming subjects for charity during the winter.

Compelling each one to pay his own fare to his destination, has the effect of procuring a better class of help. The fellow who has enough, or who can earn enough to pay his way, is more likely to stay at work, and to give better service, than the one who gets everything for nothing. The aim is to procure the best class of men obtainable.

The wages paid are about $10 a month and board for inexperienced, and $12 to $15 a month and board for partially experienced men. Men having farm experience in Great Britain get about $20 a month and board and those with experience on Canadian farms from $23 to $25 a month with board. The bulk of the help that has come to this country from the old land is inexperienced. It is difficult to get experienced men. The tide of immigration this way has not set in this season, but it will begin very shortly.

A great many married men with families come to Canada. These are hard to place, as comparatively few farmers have a second house for them to live in. If there were more extra houses, reliable men could be secured who would remain longer than the single men, and would not break into the family circle, as the latter do. Many farmers are adopting the extra house plan, and are finding it successful.

WHAT IS GOOD SEED?

To secure good seed, one must know what constitutes good seed. Good seed should be clean and free from weed seeds. It should be fresh and dry and with no trace of mould. Some seeds will retain their germinating power much longer than others, depending to a large extent upon the condition of the outer tegument, and the susceptability of the seed to the effects of gasses and moisture. Some recent tests in France show that seeds of a species of water lily germinated after having lain fifty-six year in a museum. With ordinary farm grains the life of the germinating power of the seed is limited to from two to five years, depending upon the condition in which the seed has been preserved. Dryness is essential in the preservation of seed. Other things being equal, the farmer should secure the seed for next spring's operations from the crop of 1907. To make sure that the seed is all right, test it. Particulars for testing have been given in previous issues.

An English authority gives the qualities of good seed as follows:

Wheat.—Bright, thin skin; freedom from swell; plump grain; groove well filled in; color, red or white, according to variety; dryness.

Oats.—Thin skin; plump grain; color, black or white—not known, which indicates heating at some period.

Barley.—Thin, wrinkled skin, grain not shrunk, but plump, with small, fine ends; pale, white to light golden color; freedom from smell; dryness.

Peas.—Dryness, and full size of the variety; colors, white, blue, brown and mottled. Black peas have been subjected to wet in the field, or elsewhere, and are useless for seed.

This definition of what constitutes good seed in the four cereals named, should enable any farmer to recognize good seed, when he sees it. Of course no amount of quality in the individual seed will make up for weed seeds and other impurities in the sample. It would be better to use an inferior quality of seed, that was clean, than a superior seed containing noxious weeds.

PERSONAL POINTERS.

Interesting Gossip About Some Prominent People.

President Fallieres enjoys outdoor and indoor pursuits equally well. Fond of shooting in the morning, in the evening he is generally to be found either reading, painting, or writing. In his time he has composed some very readable verse. He is also an assiduous collector of rare books, and on occasions may be seen rummaging amongst the second-hand volumes that are displayed for sale on the riverside quays in Paris.

Miss Haldane, the only unmarried sister of the British Secretary of State for War, who is her brother's right hand during the Parliamentary Session, is one of the most cultured and accomplished women of the day. Besides being an authoress of distinction, Miss Haldane is an exquisite needlewoman, and has reproduced some beautiful pieces of embroidery. She is also an adept at the ancient art of spinning, and has spun several varieties of the Scotch tweeds on her own wheel, and has done much to revive the spinning industry amongst the cottagers on the family estate in Perthshire.

When he started ranching in his early days President Roosevelt was looked down upon with some contempt by his hired cowboys, owing to the fact that he was a college graduate and also wore glasses. One bullying fellow, named "Long Ike," used to be fond of entering drinking bars and taking up the glass of any man he thought he could frighten. He played this trick on Roosevelt, and was so certain that he was a typical "tenderfoot" that he did not even make his customary bluff first with the revolver. Before "Long Ike" quite knew what had happened he found himself on the floor; then he was picked up, rushed out of the saloon, and flung down again on the ground outside. He was unable to get up for five minutes; and then he quietly sneaked out of the camp.

Many stories are told concerning the dry wit and humor of the Hon. Joseph Cannon, Speaker of the Washington Congress. Mr. Cannon's salary as a Congressman amounts to $417 per month, and on his election to the Speakership he decided to go to a better hotel than he had formerly lived in. He accordingly was conducted by the clerk of one of the more fashionable establishments to such a small suite of rooms as his actual needs required. "How much is it?" asked the Speaker. "We would let you have it for four hundred dollars a month." As the Speaker hesitated, fingering his cigar in a nervous way, the solicitous clerk inquired, "That is not too much, is it, Mr. Speaker?" "Oh, no, not at all," responded Mr. Cannon, gravely. "I was merely puzzling my brain to think what I could do with my other seventeen dollars."

The world loves a lover, and for that reason is deeply interested at the moment in the doings of Prince George of Greece, who is to marry Princess Marie Bonaparte. The world also loves a brave man, and has not forgotten how Prince George saved an Emperor's life some years ago. In a place of honor in the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg hangs a walking-stick which, if it could speak, would tell the story of how Prince George saved the Czar from a murderer's blow. The Royal cousins were walking through the streets of a Japanese town during the celebration of a religious festival, when a fanatical policeman aimed at the Czar with a heavy bludgeon. The blow must have killed Nicholas—then the Czarewitch—had not Prince George averted it, and knocked his assailant down with his stick.

The popularity enjoyed by the Emperor Joseph of Austria compares very favorably with that accorded our own King. When Francis Joseph ascended the throne he was only eighteen years of age—he is now seventy-seven—and the people of both Hungary and Austria vie with each other in loyalty to their monarch. How many people, by the way, are aware that the Austrian Emperor is the only living European monarch who has led an army in actual battle with the enemy? This was in 1848, at the Battle of Santa Lucia, when the Archduke, as he then was headed the cavalry charge against the Sardinian squares and captured the guns which had been playing havoc all day with the Austrian troops. Francis Joseph was one of the few who escaped without hurt. A few months afterwards he was called to the throne.

ON BUSINESS BENT.

Mother—"Tommy, what are you doing in the pantry?"

Tommy—"Oh, just putting a few things away!"

LOVE AND GROCERIES.

Love cometh into life,
Abiding with us still;
But though he has a winsome way,
'Tis Love that never loves to pay,
The jingling grocery bill.