

Not Guilty ;

Or, A Great Mistake.

CHAPTER XI.

Gordon had not found it an easy task to frame some excuse which would permit him to call upon Mr. Usher, but he had arrived at last at something which seemed to him satisfactory; and he made his way to the Bath Hotel as early as possible the following morning.

To his disappointment, however, the gambler was out when he reached Piccadilly, and after he had spent an hour or so in promenading that thoroughfare, varied by an occasional excursion into Burlington Arcade, he returned to the hotel, to find the object of his search still absent.

"I understood from Mr. Usher that he was only going to be out for an hour or so," said the hall-porter, "but he is certain to be in for lunch, sir. Will you leave your name?"

"I will come back about lunch time," said Gordon, hurriedly. "It doesn't matter about the name."

"It is no use wandering about here," he thought. "I had better go home and see if Miss Gaunt is well enough to have a little talk. For some reason or other I would have liked to see Usher before she and I began our explanations, but it does not much matter, I suppose."

The truth was that Gordon was looking forward more than he would confess to his interview with the young girl, whose beauty and helplessness had attracted him more with every moment she remained in his house. He was impatient to know what she would say at this first conversation, if she would still insist to him on the incredible story of her guilt, and so leave him powerless, of if she would confess what he felt to be the truth, namely, that it was some terrible misunderstanding only, some miserable and overwhelming combination of circumstances, in the midst of which she stood pure and innocent, which had made her accuse herself and cling so determinedly to her accusation.

As Gordon opened the door of his house he became aware that someone was descending the stairs towards him, and looking up quickly he gave a start, and, in spite of his presence of mind, stood for a moment absolutely stupefied.

A man stood facing him in an easy attitude, his hat on his head and a cool smile upon his lips. There was no mistaking the white face, the hard green eyes, the tall well-built figure, yet Gordon almost felt that his eyes were deceiving him. Usher! and in his house!

And then something in the man's expression, his smile, the look in his eyes, struck him sharply, and he realized that the man had been descending the stairs as he opened the door.

"What are you doing here?" he said roughly, a hundred wild theories crossing his brain.

Usher smiled again with a smile that Gordon felt was hateful.

"I beg your pardon, Colonel Gordon," he asked, calmly.

"Take off your hat, sir!" said Gordon sternly. "This is my house."

"Certainly. Excuse me," returned the other, still smiling coolly, and he slowly uncovered himself.

"Thank you," said Gordon, who was recovering himself rapidly. "Now will you kindly tell me your business, and why—why you are coming down my stairs?"

Usher nodded easily. "My business, I am afraid I can't tell you," he said, calmly. "It is, to tell you the truth, private. I came down your stairs because it would have been inconvenient to go down by the window."

"You will certainly go out that way all the same," returned Gordon, "unless you explain yourself."

For the moment the two men stood looking at one another. They were both outwardly cool, but Gordon noticed with satisfaction that a red tinge had begun to show on the other's white face, while he felt himself at every moment becoming more collected, as indeed he always did at moments when his presence of mind was needed.

Usher was the first to break the silence.

"I have been to see Miss Gaunt," he said.

"In my house, without my permission?" continued Gordon, sternly.

Usher frowned. "Do you arrogate to yourself the right to choose Miss Gaunt's visitor for her?" he asked.

"That is rather peculiar for a host, especially when she has become a guest under such—such peculiar circumstances."

"I have a right to shut my door or open it to whom I will," said Gordon.

"And you would like to close it on me? It is a pity you were not earlier. But, surely, whatever she may be, a young lady has a right to see her fiancée!"

"Her fiancée! It is a lie!" But Gordon stopped suddenly. He remembered what the fat proprietor of the gambling house had told him. Was it true? Could it be true that she was to be married to this man? And if it were, then what had been the murdered man. "Dear Claude! dear, dear Claude!" the girl's piteous cry returned to his mind. If this man was engaged to her, who was Claude? The other watched his confusion with a cold sneer. "If you doubt me," he said at length, "you can ask Miss Gaunt herself. I daresay I ought to apologize for not awaiting your permission to see my future wife, but, you see, you were not

at home, and I was, you will naturally understand, impatient. Besides, you will excuse me for saying that Miss Gaunt's presence here at all is rather confusing and in want of an explanation. However," he continued, seeing that Gordon was about to speak, "I really have not time to argue the question. I can only repeat that Miss Gaunt herself will confirm my words. Will you go and ask her?"

Gordon shook his head, but the man's tone told him that his ground was sure, and he felt his heart sink heavily. After all, had not his words been confirmed by the fat proprietor, and what reason had he to suppose that Carlton was the man.

As he still stood irresolute, Usher waved his hand lightly, and passed out of the door. "Good-day, Colonel Gordon," he said, coolly. "I shall not trouble you again. Miss Gaunt will be leaving you to-morrow, she tells me, and will probably thank you for your hospitality herself."

Gordon stared after him, irresolutely still. "You blackguard," he said, "for I am sure you are one, you have got the best of me this time, but wait! And now to see Miss Gaunt."

He flew upstairs and tapped at the door of the young girl's room. The nurse opened to his summons, with rather a disturbed look on her face, he thought.

"Can I speak to Miss Gaunt?" he asked.

The nurse came out into the passage, closing the door behind her. "She has been very much upset, sir," she said. "That gentleman who has just gone should really have known better than to excite her so much."

"But how did he come here at all, nurse?" said Gordon. "How was it you allowed him to see Miss Gaunt?"

"I was out for a moment, sir. He said that he was engaged to be married to the young lady. As soon as she heard he was here she sent down word that she must see him at once."

"And now she is ill again? Worse?"

"Not ill again, sir, but much too excited. But it is not that, she talks of going away at once, and, you know, in her condition, rapid as her improvement has been, that would be too dangerous."

Gordon started. "Of course it would, perfect madness." He returned quickly. "Nurse, she must be persuaded."

"I have tried, sir, but she won't listen to me. She seems to have some trouble on her mind," the nurse looked anxiously at Gordon, "and it is useless for me to argue with her. Will you try, sir? I am sure if Dr. Seymour were here he would insist upon her staying."

"I will try, if I may see her," said Gordon.

"Oh, you may see her," said the nurse. "Another visitor will do her less harm than to leave her in that state."

She tapped at the door, opened it to admit Gordon, and discreetly withdrew to the passage again.

For a moment Gordon and Miss Gaunt stood looking at one another. It was the first time the young girl had seen Gordon since that terrible night when he had carried her off so unceremoniously, and she gazed at him curiously and a little shyly. As for him, he was thinking how lovely she was with consciousness in her dark eyes, and wondering how it was that every time he saw her her beauty came to him as a fresh revelation.

She had been standing by the window, and had half turned towards him as he entered. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks unusually flushed, but at the back of the determination expressed by her graceful figure and closed lips, he still could see the terror and despair which so startled him when her glance had first met his through the glass panels of the room in Regent Street.

"Miss Gaunt," he said, "you cannot be thinking of leaving yet? You must not go."

Her eyes met his for a moment. "I must go," she said, "I am quite well again. I thank you, oh, how I thank you for all your kindness. I was mad that night, I was overwhelmed, and you saved me from—from I don't know what horrors; but I must go to-day. You must not think me ungrateful, but—but what does it matter after all! What can you think of me?"

"I think you are the victim of some terrible misunderstanding," said Gordon. "It is because of what I think that I ask you to stay."

"A misunderstanding—some terrible misunderstanding. Ah, if it were the truth! the words were almost a cry, and Gordon bit his lip. How he felt that he could echo her wish himself; but Usher, what of his speech?"

"Miss Gaunt," he said at last, "you say I saved you the other night from a danger which threatened you, and you have thanked me for it. Let me ask you a favor in return. Be my guest here for a day or so longer. If you wish I will go away myself, and you shall see no one but the nurse and my housekeeper; but do not go until at least the doctor comes again, and I will abide by his decision."

Miss Gaunt shook her head. "I must go," she said. "Ah, I have not even a choice! I must go."

Gordon frowned. "That man who was here just now—I beg your pardon, Mr. Usher, he has—"

"He! that man!"

Her tone made Gordon's heart bound suddenly. Her face had turned white, and she had shrunk back against the wall, with her hand at her heart.

"Then I knew it," he said quickly. "He has lied to obtain admittance here. The man is a scoundrel. He said, forgive me, that he was—he was to marry you."

The young girl stood in the attitude she had taken, while her lips turned whiter still. Gordon's words seemed to have changed her to stone.

"If I had known he was lying," Gordon continued, "he should not have escaped so easily. Even now—"

Miss Gaunt's hand went out swiftly, as if to arrest his movement. Her lips opened, but for a moment no sound came from them. Then she spoke with an effort:

"He was not lying," she said.

"Good God!"

"He was not lying. I am going to marry him. God help me!"

The despair in her eyes, her heart-broken tone, made Gordon forget everything but her beauty and helplessness, and the fascination of her presence, which every word and movement made him feel more strangely.

He strode forward and caught her hand, though, meeting his eyes almost wildly, she strove to restrain it.

"Miss Gaunt," he said, "why won't you let me help you?"

"It is useless, it is impossible," she gasped, attempting in vain to release her hand, which trembled like a bird in Gordon's grasp. There is no help possible—no way out, but one.

"And that you shall not take," said Gordon. "You cannot like that man. I see you do not. Your tone when you speak of him, your look, everything tells me you do not. But in some infernal way he has got a power over you which you fancy you must yield to. Miss Gaunt, that man is a scoundrel, I am sure of it. I believe he is worse. Let me prove it; give me time to prove it to you?"

"It is impossible. It would be useless if you could."

The despairing resignation in her tone set Gordon's mind at work.

"I see what you mean," he said, thoughtfully. "It is because of the other night."

The young girl shuddered. "Ah, do not speak of that!" she said.

"Forgive me, but I must," he returned. "After all, I have the right to, for remember the circumstances. I found you were in that room, by accident. There was a dead man there—a man who had been murdered—"

"Ah, stop; please stop!"

"You accused yourself of the crime. You were waiting there to give yourself up. You might have been found there and arrested. I took you away against your will—"

"I have thanked you. I cannot thank you sufficiently, but I am grateful; don't think me ungrateful."

"You accused yourself," continued Gordon firmly. "I did not believe you; I did not think you had committed that crime; but you said you had. To-day you do not repeat your accusation. Then I was right; you did not do it. Who did?"

Miss Gaunt was silent, staring at him with wide-open, frightened eyes.

"Who did it?" repeated Gordon.

"Usher, was it Usher?"

"He! oh, no. He? And you think that if he had done it, I would—"

"Then who was it?" repeated Gordon. "But I will know, and I will save you, in spite of yourself."

Again their eyes met, and this time hers fell.

"Why should you?" she murmured, "why should you help me?"

Gordon's lips opened, and he moved towards her, but he restrained himself.

"I will tell you, but not now," he said, watching the flush rise to her cheek. "I will help you first."

"You cannot," she said. "Oh, do not make me repeat it. You can do nothing, there is nothing to be done."

"And you will marry that man?"

She let her head bow till it touched her breast.

CHAPTER XII.

In the morning Gordon was awakened by a hurried tapping at his door. He leaped at his watch before he sprang out of bed, and saw that it was hardly seven o'clock.

Wondering what could have occurred, he opened the door and found himself confronted by the nurse. She had evidently dressed in haste, and her face was pale and agitated.

"Oh, sir, Miss Gaunt, the young lady!" she gasped.

Gordon started. "What of her?" he asked. "What has happened? Is she worse?"

"She has gone, sir."

"Gone!"

"Gone, sir. Oh, I don't know what to do, or how you will ever forgive me. I am sure I can't forgive myself. To think that she could have taken me in like that! So simple and innocent as she looked!"

Gordon stopped her quickly. "Yes, yes," he said, impatiently, "but tell me the facts. When did she go, and how?"

"Well, sir, she must have gone at day-break. She was quiet after you had seen her, and seemed much more settled. I sat by her until she went to sleep. I am sure she did go to sleep first, sir. And I sat in the room by her bedside for a long time; I should think until about one or two. Then I went to my room, but although I was quite easy about her, for I had taken her temperature, and it was almost normal, I nevertheless looked in at her every hour or so. Well, sir, the last time was about four. She had been asleep, but she just turned over and half opened her eyes. 'It's all right, nurse,' she said. 'Go to sleep now, and don't bother about me. I shall sleep on till morning myself. I am as drowsy as I can be.' Well, sir, I believed her, and I saw no cause not to. But about a quarter of an hour ago I woke with a start, feeling something wrong. I went straight to her room and found her gone. I ran down stairs, but could see nothing of her, and then I went and woke up Mrs. Crump, but we have searched the house and found nothing. And—here is a note for you, which was on her table, sir, where I saw it afterwards."

Gordon took the letter in silence. She was gone, but how could he blame this woman, who had for the rest performed her duties perfectly.

"Thank you, nurse," he said. "I beg you won't blame yourself too much. I should have been deceived as you were, I daresay."

He was unwilling to read the note with the nurse's eyes upon him, and nodding to her he made his way to his study, where he shut the door upon himself.

"I cannot thank you sufficiently, and I am grateful; oh, do believe that I am not ungrateful; but I must go. I had meant to go ever since this morning, and though you would have persuaded me, you could not. And now let me beg you to forget me, that you ever met me, that you ever troubled yourself about me, or, if you do remember, remember only that you would have saved me, but that it was impossible."

"Vivienne Gaunt."

Gordon flung the little sheet of paper on the floor, and then picked it up again and kissed it.

"What a pretty name! Confound you, though, Miss Vivienne, you've done a nice thing now! Gone! And where am I to look for you? Gone! Without giving me even a chance at that brute Usher; gone to him? No, I hardly think that, though that may come unless I do something. But I will! I have sworn it, and I don't often break my word. Marry him: A gambler, a spendthrift, a blackguard, a—but I have to prove that. Ah, Vivienne!"

Gordon sighed, and for a moment his thoughts went wandering in what were for him as yet untraveled paths, but soon the man of action in him took the upper hand. If he were ever to do more than dream sadly of Vivienne Gaunt's loveliness he must act, and act quickly; and he roused himself, and shutting the young girl's letter carefully in his desk, he got his hat and stick, and made his way out. In the hall he met, and thought it better to avoid, Mother Crump, who was making her way downstairs to him with a tear-stained face and the expression of a dog who knows he has done wrong, but hardly fears to be beaten nevertheless.

Gordon, although he did not believe that Miss Gaunt had gone to Usher, yet could not doubt that he would be in possession of her address, and he made straight for the Bath Hotel.

Just as he neared the building, however, he caught sight of Usher coming out, and hastily ensconcing himself in the doorway of a shop, he watched him.

Usher descended the steps reading a note, which he had evidently just received, and Gordon felt he would have given anything to have been looking over his shoulder, for some instinct told him that the letter was from Vivienne.

The gambler, however, with a little smile, which Gordon could have struck him for, crushed the note into his pocket, and pursued his way down Piccadilly.

Gordon had intended to speak to him, but something in the man's walk and manner stopped him. He could not help fancying that he had some fixed purpose in view and that this purpose touched upon the subject on which his own mind was so intently engaged.

Gordon did not think that he was about to pay a visit to Miss Gaunt, for Usher had only, apparently, just received her note—if it was hers—while from his quick step and determined look this journey had evidently been determined on some time beforehand. In Gordon's present state of mind, and in the necessity for speedy action, which he foresaw, he could not afford to disregard the slightest signs or premonitions, and he determined to trust to his instinct on this occasion and to delay approaching Usher.

Keeping well out of sight, he therefore began to follow the gambler, for the third time within the past few days, hoping vigorously that on this occasion fate would be kinder to him than on the previous ones.

He felt, however, that Usher was a man on whom it was not easy to play tricks. When he had last followed him it was evident that the gambler had known it; this time Gordon was determined that he should not see him, but how to contrive it? It was easy enough while Usher kept to crowded thoroughfares like Piccadilly, but should he turn into more frequented ones, how could Gordon in broad daylight, escape his quick green eyes?

Still following him, he considered rapidly, and presently an idea came to him.

Crawling slowly along Piccadilly came an antiquated four-wheeler, such a four-wheeler, fortunately, as one seldom sees nowadays, monstrous as those conveyances still remain. It was tied, rather than harnessed, to a poor old horse like itself, in the last stage of emaciation, and it rattled as it went, but in the eyes of its weather-beaten driver, Gordon, with his swift observation, had caught a glimpse of superior intelligence, and formed his plan.

He strode quickly towards the vehicle and touched the driver on the shoulder.

"I want you to follow someone," he said, keeping Usher carefully in the tail of his eye. "And I'll give you half a sovereign if you don't miss him. Keep on moving."

(To be continued.)

PERSONAL PARAGRAPHS.

Interesting Gossip About Some of the World's Prominent People.

Mr. Percyvall Hart Dyke, eldest son of Sir William Hart Dyke, lost his sight when a small boy, but this did not prevent him from studying for the University, and eventually going to Cambridge. His studies were supervised by Mr. Marston, then rector of Ecomb, in the Cotswolds. He, like his pupil, was blind. But he was a Fellow of Hatfield Hall, Durham; a good "coach," and expert chess player; used frequently to ride on horseback; was his own organist in church; and played "blind tennis" on his lawn with his blind pupils, one of whom was the son of the late Bishop Sandford. Another instance of remarkable ability among the blind is to be found in Dr. Bangor, the solicitor to the Salvation Army.

The most remarkable thing concerning Mr. Arthur Burrows, England's oldest barrister, who has just entered upon his ninety-sixth year, is that his longevity seems due, in no small measure, to hard work. For years he denied himself the pleasure of a day's holiday excepting on Sundays, and even now may be seen three or four times a week at his chambers in Lincoln's Inn. Followers of the simple life point with pride to Mr. Burrows, who is a foe to most forms of luxury. Of late years he has dispensed with tobacco and stimulants, and retains good health on the plainest of food. And yet this wonderful old man, who has lived in five reigns and under seventeen Prime Ministers, can give lessons in walking to many younger ones, and spends hours watching cricket matches.

Perhaps the next best linguist to King Edward among those sitting upon European thrones is the Kaiser, whose French is extraordinarily pure and idiomatic, and who also speaks excellent English, although he has never been able to rid himself of a strong German accent. But the Emperor only employs a foreign tongue on State occasions when it is a case of noblesse oblige, and even while fully aware of the Czar's dislike to most things German, including the language, he specifies to Nicholas II's polite French toasts in sonorous, guttural German. The Kings of Spain and Italy are also good linguists, and among the Queens and Princesses of Europe the talent for languages is quite extraordinary and adds greatly to the grace and charm of modern Court life.

A very notable and romantic figure in modern religious life is that of Gipsy Smith, who has recently concluded his sixth evangelistic campaign in the United States. Gipsy Smith, whose baptismal name is Rodney, was born forty-seven years ago in a gipsy tent, the son of gipsy parents, near Epping Forest, England. He grew up a wild, heedless boy, until his mother's death. His parents were both illiterate, his father being a tinkler who mended tinware, re-raned chairs, and made willow baskets and clothes-pogs, which the mother and children sold in the country villages. When he was seventeen General Booth got hold of him and sent him round the country. His first great success was at Hull, where for six months the Mission was so crowded, even at seven o'clock in the morning, that the street was blocked, and the police had to manage the crowd. In 1882 he was sent to Hanley. At the first open-air meeting he had an audience of three—his two lieutenants and his wife. At his first Sunday evening service there were eighty persons in a circus that seated 2,500. At the end of three months the young preacher was addressing crowds of 8,000 people every Sunday, holding sometimes no fewer than nine services.

One of the most amazing careers on record has just been closed by the death of Lord Dunmore. He has been described as an explorer and a faddist, and was famous as an advocate of Christian Science. No one can gainsay his daring and pluck. As a traveller, Lord Dunmore explored "the roof of the world" in the Pamirs and Western Tibet, sleeping amid ice and snow at an altitude 2,000 feet higher than Mont Blanc, being ultimately arrested as a Russian spy. At one time he wanted to ride from New York to Paris by land, crossing the Bering Straits on the frozen ice, but this he never achieved. He was one of the first to really explore Newfoundland, and went farther into "the great lone land" than any other white man before it became opened up to civilization. Dunmore Junction, on the Canadian Pacific Railway, is named after him. At Moosejaw he mended the wheel of his Red River cart with the jawbone of a moose he had shot, and the red Indian scouts called it the place where "the one-eyed white chief"—a shooting accident having deprived him of the use of one of his eyes—"mended his cart with the jawbone of a moose." Viscount Fincastle, who succeeds to the title, is no less daring than his father. He won the V.C. in the Afghan Frontier War of 1897, and commanded Fincastle's Horse in the South African campaign, winning a medal and four clasps.

BY EXPERIENCE.

"He used to brag on being a good judge of women."

"He doesn't now."

"What cured him?"

"He got married!"

HIS TASK.

Genial Clergyman (visiting the school).—

"Well, my little man, what do you do in school all day?"

"I wait till it's time to go to play, sir!"

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