"Magic!" murmured Curtis, with a far away look.

"Liar!" Maurice muttered. "I told him why I knew. Why doesn't he say so?"

At one o'clock court adjourned for luncheon.

The first witness in the afternoon was Carfax. He related how Maurice had handed him the curious instrument, and how, armed with a search warrant, he had visited Crampiron's bed room and examined the ledge over the top of the door, and found minute traces of dried blood there, such as might have been lett by the instrument.

"What date was this, Carfax?" asked Lorimer.

"I have looked at my diary and at the almanac. It was on the second of August, and full moon was on the thirty-first of July."

"Ah! Suppose I suggest that this instrument had been placed on the ledge over the door by Curtis himself, what would you say?"

"I should say that if Curtis placed it there, it must have been several weeks before his suspicions were directed to Crampiron."

"Why?"

"Because the spot which had been occupied by the instrument was comparatively free from dust, whereas all the other part of the ledge was thick with dust. Moreover, there was much dust on the instrument."

"Does it not strike you as extremely odd that the accused should have selected such a peculiar locality for hiding the instrument?"

"It strikes me as extremely clever," said Carfax. "A better hiding place could not have been chosen. Who would ever think of looking there?"

"Curtis thought."

"He did."

"What are you driving at, Mr. Lorimer?" inquired the Judge.

"I am driving at Curtis," said Lorimer. "I mean to ask Your Lordship's permission to recall him."

"As you wish. But why?"

"Because I have had an analysis made, and am in a position to prove that the dried blood on the instrument is not human blood, but dog's blood."

CHAPTER XIV.

Verdict and Sentence

ON the morning of the trial of Abraham Crampiron at Bedford, there occurred in another place a scene which was to react in the most extraordinary way in the assize court a few hours later. The other place was Lord Doncastle's private room in the Houses of Parliament. Lord Doncastle was at his ordinary flute practice, while a secretary opened and sorted despatches. He seemed moody, and much less indifferent than usual. The fact is that the Prime Minister was disturbed about the Crampiron trial. Owing to the illness of the Sultan of Morocco, the financial transactions which were to save Morocco from ruin had been suspended. The Sultan was now better, and the affair, under the charge of Crampiron, who did not allow the accidents of private life to interfere with business, was resumed.

But supposing that Crampiron was convicted, where would the loan be, and where would be the English Government? The failure of the loan would mean peace instead of war, and none knew better than Doncastle that a European war alone could save the ministry. Moreover, the conviction of Crampiron would be in itself a severe blow at the prestige of the ministry, and of Lord Doncastle in particular. For had not Lord Doncastle offered him an earldom? Now a wise Prime Minister ought not to offer an earldom until he has assured himself that there is no fear of the recipient of the offer being executed for murder within the next three months.

Doncastle did not by any means think that Crampiron would actually be convicted and sentenced. The shocking death of his old friend Carl Courlander had been a great grief to him; but he believed positively that Crampiron was innocent. Doncastle's intellect was not simple; it was his soul that was simple. And Crampiron had somehow captured his soul, and had drawn to himself that sympathy which Lord Doncastle was as ready to give as he was to demand. The latter deemed himself bound to Crampiron by sentiments of honor.

Lord Doncastle put his flute into its case, and then he picked up a newspaper, "The Daily Record." Among other items which he perused was this, from the Paris correspondent:

I understand that Miss Norah Crampiron has died at Paramé, near Dinant. For some reason the death has been kept secret. Miss Crampiron died from brain fever brought on by shock. I shall have all particulars tomorrow.

Doncastle instantly sat down and composed a letter of condolence:

MY DEAR CRAMPIRON.—I cannot allow a moment to elapse without telling you how very sorry I am to hear of the death of your daughter at Paramé. I did not know even that she was ill. Please accept my sincerest sympathies and my best wishes. I cannot, in my position, write to you as one private individual to another; but nothing shall or can prevent me from assuring you of my great sympathy with you in your bereavement.

Believe me, yours most sincerely, DONCASTLE.

It was a bold letter for a Prime Minister to send to a man on trial for murder; but, whatever Doncastle's faults, he knew what courage was, and it was notorious that his conception of loyalty was well nigh romantic.

As he was blotting the address on the envelop, Bott, the Home Secretary, came into the room.

"My dear fellow," said Doncastle, "you can do me a service. Will you deliver this letter for me?"

Bott reached Bedford, and calmly took a seat on the Judge's bench. He gave the letter to the Judge's valet, with injunctions that it should be handed to Crampiron at once.

"Now, Carfax," Lorimer was drawling, "how was it that the police did not have the blood examined? Surely that was an elementary duty? It was, at any rate, a precaution which would have prevented you from raising a whole structure of so called proof on a foundation of dog's blood."

"The police did have the blood examined," said Carfax obstinately and quietly.

"By whom?"

"The experts of the Home Office."

"And what was the report?"

"That the blood was human blood."

"Well, Your Lordship," said Lorimer, turning his gaunt face to the Judge, "I can put Professor Chant, F.R.S., of Bedford Technical College, into the box at once to prove that the blood is dog's blood. Shall I do so?"

"By all means," said His Lordship, and then turned to Carfax. "Before leaving the box," the Judge questioned, "can you throw any light on this apparent discrepancy?"

"I was about to say," said Carfax, "that the instrument was mislaid by my immediate superior, and rediscovered only yesterday evening."

"Where was it mislaid?" asked the Judge.

"At Tudor Hundreds. When it was originally discovered, we took it to London for examination. It was then brought down again to be placed once more on the ledge of the door by my superior himself, to reconstitute the prisoner's actions after his alleged crime. Subsequently we had a consultation at Tudor Hundreds, and it was only after our arrival in London that we discovered that the instrument was missing out of a bag. It was found by Mr. Maurice Courlander yesterday evening in a drawer in the room where the consultation was held."

"Your theory is that it had been left there accidentally?"

"Yes, My Lord," said Carfax, and he stepped down.

"H'm!" said His Lordship. "Let Curtis be recalled."

Curtis was therefore called; but he could not be found.

In the meantime the professor had given his evidence.

It was at the precise moment when the professor was leaving the box that the most dramatic incident of the day happened. A note had been handed by an usher to Lorimer (the Judge's valet had not hurried over his task); Lorimer had handed it to one of the officials in charge of Crampiron; and that official had handed it to Crampiron. The prisoner tore it open. Then Crampiron sank to the ground in a swoon.

When a doctor, having failed to restore him to consciousness by ordinary devices, had ordered his removal, the Judge gruffly stated that the sitting would be suspended for half an hour at least, and departed.

Maurice went to a private room which he had engaged at the Unicorn. It was an ordinary sitting room, and communicated by means of an open door with a bed room. Suddenly Maurice heard sounds of movement in the bed room, where no one should have been, and hurried to inspect. Finally he beheld the astonishing spectacle of Curtis emerging from beneath the bed.

"What the—" he began angrily, and stopped. He was very content that Curtis was there, after all.

"I was coming to you, sir," said Curtis simply, straightening his robes.

"Where from?" Maurice demanded.

"From the bed," said Curtis.

"I mean, where have you been?"

"Hiding here," Curtis explained. "Better to hide. I was waiting for you, sir."

"See here!" said Maurice. "Just make yourself plain, or we shall be likely to have difficulties."

"Perleece!" said Curtis, with no advance toward intelligibility. "They seek me soon."

"Why?" Maurice asked. "What have you been doing?"

"Sit down, sir," Curtis appealed. "You sit down. I tell you evelything." And, persuasively advancing, he wafted an unwilling Maurice back into the sitting room.

"You will see clearly. When instlument lost by Mr. Sibthorpe, I say to myself that instlument stolen by Clampiron."

"How could it be stolen by Crampiron?"

"By somebody for Clampiron. By Beakbane, eh?"

A light seemed to break upon Maurice.

"When instlument lost I say: How sad! How sad! This is the ploof, and the ploof is lost. Then one day I fin a another instlument in cupboard of master's loom. Ah!"

"Then there are two of these things—these instruments?" Maurice cried.

The Chinaman nodded.

"Exactly alike?"

"Exactly alike," said the Chinaman gravely. "I had been wlong. I thought master had taken his instlument—charm!—when he went that night to meet fate in the gardens. I thought he was killed with his instlument. No! His instlument in room all the time. Two instluments. Exactly alike. I say to myself, 'What pity! How sad that ploof is lost!' I say to myself, 'I will make new ploof.' I take one of Lady Mary's spaniels into shlubbery at night. I stick master's instlument into it, and I hold its mouth. Then I bury it. Then I dly blood on master's instlument, and I put it in dlawer in study. And I ask you if you have looked in all dlawers if Mr. Sibthorpe not left his instlument there. You look. You find. You have new ploof, like old. I say nothing. I say to myself, Master wants Clampiron hanged. I will do it."

"Am I to understand, man," said Maurice, "that you found another instrument the same as the murderer's in my father's room?"

"Yes," said Curtis. "He had one. Clampiron had one—both same."

"And that you then, when the first one disappeared, deliberately killed one of my mother's dogs with the second one and let the blood dry on it, and then set a trap for me to find it, believing it to be the first?"

"Yes," Curtis amiably concurred. "But I did not know that Englishmen could know when dog's blood and when man's blood. Magic! English magic! When I heard that, I ran. Aflaid! I am here to wait till you came. Now you come. I have told you, sir."

"Well," said Maurice, "you have made an absolute mess of everything; that is what you have done. You have been clever; but you haven't been clever enough. If you had stuck the instrument into the calf of your own leg, there would have been some sense in that; but now you have ruined all."

Maurice laughed bitterly. There was a humorous side to Curtis's magnificent disregard of everything save an end to be gained, and he was obliged to laugh.

"My leg," Curtis murmured; "yes. But I did not know. Too late now!"

It was clear that, had it not been too late, Curtis would quite willingly have even cut his leg off in order to provide the missing proof necessary for Crampiron's conviction.

"Two instruments!" Maurice said in a low, reflective voice, forgetting for an instant, in his preoccupation with the central mystery, all the complications involved by Curtis's trick. "Curtis, you haven't by any chance found out what these cursed instruments are, or where they came from, or why my father had one and Crampiron the other?"

"No, sir," Curtis answered solemnly. "Magic! All that is magic!" And he hid his hands in his wide sleeves. "I shall be put in prison, sir?" he questioned.

"Why should you be?" said Maurice. "All you have to do is to keep quiet in the witness box. If you don't give yourself away, nobody can give you away. You say you have buried the dog?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come along to the court then, and persuade yourself that you know nothing. It should be perfectly simple to a man of your attainments."

And Maurice returned to the assize. He could not be incensed against Curtis. Curtis had probably ruined the trial; but then, in the absence of any blood stained instrument, the prosecution could not reasonably have dared to proceed with the trial at all. So that Curtis, if he had destroyed chances, had at any rate begun creating them. The solution of the enigma seemed to Maurice farther off than ever, and as he followed its retreat in his mind his interest in the trial itself seemed to wane slightly. He felt that new issues had been raised, owing to the fantastic trick of the bland Curtis.

He was late. The hearing had already been resumed when he entered the court. The aspect of the chamber seemed to be completely altered, and the change bewildered him. Dusk was falling in the streets, and within the gas had been lighted, and its yellow glare smote an uneven sea of excited faces that were turned, not in the direction of the witness box, but in the direction of the dock. There were three chandeliers, and one of them hung somewhat in front of the dock, illuminating the haggard and drawn features of the prisoner. Maurice at the first glance imagined that he must be mistaken in thinking that Crampiron was in tears. He was not mistaken. The man's face was tremendously stern and set; but reluctant drops ran one after the other down those heavy cheeks. Crampiron was not speaking. Nobody at the instant was speaking. The Judge held up one hand in a deprecatory gesture.

Then the drawling voice of Lorimer was heard: "This being so, I shall, with Your Lordship's permission, retire from the case."

"Yes," said Crampiron with a glance suddenly savage, "you may as well"; and, addressing the Judge and the jury, "I plead guilty. I have had enough. No need for you to bother about what Curtis said and what Curtis did. I've had enough." And he almost shouted. "I can't stand it any longer! It makes no difference to me now whether I live or die; and, by Heaven! I'd as soon die. Anything to avoid further effort! I've done with effort! I've just discovered that I've got nothing to live for, gentlemen of the jury. Yes, I killed him. Whether there's dog's blood or Courlander blood on that instrument, with that instrument I killed him that night, under his cursed statue. So now you all know! Everybody may know!" He became fiercely ironical in his tears. "It'll make a pretty mess with the powers that be in this country; but I plead guilty to the wilful murder of Carl Courlander."

There was a pause. Many could not bear even to look upon the agonized and tragic figure of Crampiron, with the glistening dew of an ineffable dissolu-

Continued on page 17