

gentleness. "Whatever ye've done, I'll not be the man to give ye away. I had a lad of my own once, and I reckon ye're some mother's son."

"Nay, nay, lad—it's nowt. Ye must go to sleep now, and think ye're in your own bed at 'oam."

But even as the farmer spoke there was a sound of tramping feet, and a voice thick with drink was heard protesting:

"Noa, noa, Ward; I didn't tell ye owt. Tak' yerself off before t' maister comes."

"Don't be a fool, James. I must go up stairs and look at him," said an authoritative voice.

The farmer started toward the door, but before he reached it the big form of a policeman was in the room. He gave a quick glance at the man on the bed, and then said, with bustling importance:

"George Fenton, I arrest you for the murder of Harriet Staples!"

CHAPTER IV.

MABEL BREAKS OUR ENGAGEMENT.
On the afternoon of the day following the murder I made my way to De Vere Gardens. The previous evening I had gone there full of blissful excitement. I was going there to ask Mabel Fenton to be my wife, and as I scarcely doubted what her answer would be, I was in the seventh heaven of prospective happiness. Now, the day afterward, I entered the house absolutely dejected and broken down, for I knew her brother to be a murderer. The police were on his track and at any moment he might be arrested. A world of trouble was in store for my darling.

The man who opened the door eyed me with marked curiosity. My devotion to Mabel was too obvious to have escaped notice below stairs. The visit of the police that morning to make inquiries had naturally aroused great excitement in those regions, and now not only was I regarded as the favored suitor of his young mistress, but I had all the additional interest of being a suspected murderer.

He ushered me into the drawing room. It remained just as I remembered it the previous evening. There was the bowl of roses from which my love had taken the choicest bloom to fasten in my coat, a treasure which I had inwardly vowed to hoard forever, but which had been lost in the brutal fray—lost, crushed and trodden in the mire. There was the book Mabel had been reading when I entered, and by its side the paper knife with which she had toyed before I made her hand my captive. And there was still that subtle odor of violets, which would linger in my memory, inseparably connected with that scene.

But now the frown frown of dainty skirts 'old me of my darling's approach. The handle turned, and Mabel stood before me.

"Mabel!"
"Duncan!"
For one sweet moment all else but our love was forgotten in one long, rapturous embrace. Not 24 hours had elapsed since I last held my dearest in my arms, but what a world of agony had happened in that time!

I looked into her eyes, so full of untold happiness for me; I kissed the lips that spoke but of sweetest love, and for the moment all the pending misery was forgotten in one long, fond rapture of bliss.

Never had Mabel looked so unspokeably lovely. Her red gold hair rippled and shimmered in the clear sunlight and waved and clustered round her white forehead. Her deep blue eyes looked into mine in trustful faith. Her parting lips invited kisses, disclosing pearls of rarest beauty, while the color on her cheeks came and went in concert with the heaving of her breast.

"Oh, Duncan, my poor boy, how shamefully they have treated you! How could they suspect you? How dare they arrest you?"

"Their suspicion was nothing. You did not doubt me for a moment?"
"Duncan, how could I?"
She started from my embrace and held herself erect.

"Though all the world were against you, you know I could not for one moment doubt you."

I drew my dear one to a seat, still holding her hand in mine.

"Tell me, Duncan," she said, with gentle sympathy, "tell me all about it." So I poured into her ears all I dared tell her of my experiences after leaving her the previous evening. I touched as lightly as possible on my finding the body of the murdered woman, scarcely mentioning the man who stood over her. As I told of the fury of the mob her little hand tightened in mine and the color left her cheeks. When I spoke of her of the long, dreary night at the police station, her eyes betrayed her sweet compassion, and when I breathed tenderly all my thoughts of her in the darkness and gloom that had shrouded me she nestled almost imperceptibly nearer to me, and again for a moment I forgot the coming agony. When I described the weary waiting in the morning, the arrival of my friends and my ultimate release, she broke in eagerly:

"Ah, Duncan, it was so unfortunate George was away when the police came! I know how sorry he will be that he could not be the first to go to you! How indignant he will be at their suspecting you!"

was guilty of this ghastly crime! As in a fearful panorama, I saw the murderer captured; I witnessed the trial; I heard the hum of the crowded court; I saw the judge, the black cap, and I saw the gallows looming behind it all. I seemed to be still talking and listening, yet my mind worked out these horrors regardless of my will, and gradually a nightmare's spell seemed to creep over me. She was talking about George now.

"He has been awfully worried lately, Duncan. You yourself know something of the reason, but not all, I think. You know he is infatuated with some woman beneath him in position, but I will tell you all now that you are one of us."

She added these last words with delicious shyness, and I could but kiss her blushes. She continued:

"I know, if not all, at least more than any one else, for George has made me his confidant, and I have stood up for him against my father and mother, who are naturally very angry with him; for, after all, the girl is a servant, and we have always had such high ideals of the wife George would bring home to us. This is how it all came about. Last year George went fishing with a friend to a picturesque village on the Wye. It was little better than a cluster of houses, half a dozen miles away from the nearest railway station, and the only accommodation was to be had at the village inn, which stood on the banks of the river. The only other visitor there was a lady, who kept closely to her room and who they heard was an artist. They only met her casually in the inn, and she excited very little interest in George so long as his friend was with him.

"When he was left alone, however, George, out of sheer curiosity, and having nothing better to do when not fishing, tried to find out more about her, and it was not very difficult for him to become acquainted with her. She was not very well off, it appears, and was painting Christmas cards and doilies and doing fancy work to eke out her income. George could not very well ask at first why she was there, but he gathered she had an unhappy home life and was trying to earn her own living. As the days passed on they became better acquainted, and George ended by being hopelessly in love with her. He told me that much as she seemed to enjoy the society she never encouraged anything more than ordinary friendship, and when he attempted to say more than this would warrant she stopped him at once. Poor boy, he must have been very far gone, and one evening he would not be gainsaid. He confessed to her that much he loved her, and begged her to marry him. She was awfully kind to him, but he told me she would not say anything.

"Tomorrow I will give you my answer," she said. George went away from her in a state of blissful suspense. As she had not said "No," his hopes were raised; but when morning came she had gone. She had packed up her things in the nighttime and had gone by the early morning train, leaving no address or clew as to her whereabouts. There was a note for George. He opened it eagerly, but it simply contained the words: "Goodby. 'Tis better so."

"George was almost heartbroken. He tried to follow her, and indeed, traced her to the neighboring junction, but there all clew was lost. He was an utter wreck when he came home, and one evening, in a burst of hopelessness, he told me all about her. Of course I was terribly sorry for him, and I must confess my sympathies were drawn toward the woman. The months passed and George could not get over it, but he had long ago given up all hope of seeing her again. One night he burst into my room in a flush of excitement.

"Mabel, I have seen her again—I have seen her!"
"Poor boy! He looked so happy I could not but be glad for his sake."

"Tell me all about it."
"I saw her on the top of a bus, of all places. We were sitting next to one another. It was dark. I didn't notice her, but she knew me. I felt my neighbor edging away from me and noticed her head turned in the opposite direction. This aroused my curiosity. I obliged her to turn, and there she was—my darling! And George, quite overcome with emotion, buried his face in his hands and wept like a child."

"She got down at Hyde park corner," he went on, "begged me to leave her, but I wouldn't. I was not going to lose her again when I had only just found her. I made her tell me where she was living before I would go. She is— And George hesitated."

"Well? I said interrogatively."
"She is a lady's maid at Spiegels-son's."

"Oh! I said, and I'm afraid I shuddered. It was not only that she was a servant that made my heart sink in dismay, but because I felt she had been sailing under false colors when George first met her. He had told me she was a lady, and her conduct at the inn had confirmed it, but now I felt she was a sham and that George's passionate love had been given to a probable adventuress."

"I tried to convince him of this, but he was so infatuated with her that he would not see it. He even begged me to see the woman and intercede for him, but I could not do it. I couldn't pretend to believe in her, even for his sake, and so things went on. He never faltered in his devotion to her."

"At last George and myself were sadly estranged. He did not tell me much then, but I knew he was unceasing in his attentions and that he was still hoping to get her to change her opinions. He was ready to risk anything for her sake. He was utterly infatuated, and you can guess, Duncan, how all this has made us very unhappy at home. News of such things cannot be kept back for long, and mother heard of it from some malicious friend."

"There is little more to add. George is ceaseless in his attentions to her. He waits for her coming out, and she cannot escape him—he is sure of that—but she will not listen to his words of love



For one sweet moment all else but our love was forgotten.

and begs him to leave her alone. All this has made me very anxious about George. I never know what this madness of his may impel him to do. Even his not being at home last night has alarmed me, though once I should not have thought anything about it. I wonder where he is?"

At this moment there was a sound of hurried footsteps outside the door, which was abruptly opened, and Mr. Fenton appeared, holding a morning's newspaper in his hand. He was in a state of great excitement and did not seem to notice my presence at all.

"Mabel," he said, "the murdered woman!"
"Well, father?"
"She is Harriet Staples!"
"No, no, father; that cannot be!"
"Here it is. Read for yourself."

Mabel took the paper from him in silent horror, and then he turned to me.

"Brett," he said, "it is most extraordinary that you were mixed up in this affair. There is no need to keep the matter from you now. The woman who has been murdered was a flame of George's. The lad was infatuated with her. Now thank God that is at an end. But how did the poor wretch come by her death? What were you doing there? Why were you arrested?"

The old man gasped out his words in a whirl of excitement. These questions were most natural under the circumstances, but as they were hurled at me I again felt my equivocal position. Were I to tell him all I knew, just as it happened, I should expose the criminality of his own son—Mabel's brother—and yet did I hesitate I imperiled my own reputation.

All the answers I had carefully prepared for these and kindred questions vanished from my mind and left it a perfect blank. I felt that the old man was waiting for my reply, yet I could not speak, and all the while my attention was rooted elsewhere on one of those trivialities that stand out inconspicuously on the most momentous occasions. As I looked at Mr. Fenton and beyond him my eye was caught by the perpendicular lines on the wall paper. Between two of the lines a fly was crawling along the center with absolute precision. All the while, when I ought to have been collecting my thoughts for some sort of an excuse to my prospective father-in-law, I was wondering to which side the fly would eventually incline.



"Duncan," came the voice again, "it was George you saw there!"

but on it went with unerring precision equidistant between and it fascinated me. The silence grew in the room, and at last Mr. Fenton did not choose to wait longer for his answer. He began to tap the carpet with his foot, and then he said impatiently:

"Well?"
"I think it is going a little to the left," I said mechanically.
"What?"
He was getting indignant now, and mechanically I pulled myself together and told him what I had already said at the police station, hiding just as much, confessing just as little.

"Stabbed, you say?"
"Stabbed to the heart."
"Then the ruffian who did the deed was one of her many friends, I'll be bound. Depend upon it, she was carrying on with two or three. I told George as much; but, fool that he was, he wouldn't believe me. Perhaps he'll think more of his father's judgment in future. You seem to have had a rough time of it, Brett. It's most unfortunate you should have been mixed up in the affair, and it is a remarkable coincidence it should be so, after all the other trouble she has caused us. But what about the murderer? You say he was still standing over the woman when you came up. Couldn't you have secured him?"

"I came across them quite suddenly, and, as you may well imagine, my thoughts were elsewhere. It all happened in a moment, and before I could fully grasp the situation he had gone."

"What was the man like? The papers say he was decently dressed."
"Yes, I think that he was so; but he had gone in a moment."
The old man gazed doubtfully at me. I am not an adept at lying, and he felt there was something I was endeavoring to conceal. He looked at me with keen, critical eyes and left the room.

For some moments after the noise of the closing of the door there was dead silence in the room. There were the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece and the sounds of the busy world outside, but above all the shrill voices of the newsboys could be heard calling out, "The tragedy in Mayfair!" There were violets in an Indian bowl on one of the tables and the scent of them seemed stifling. I longed to rush to an open window for relief, but there stood Mabel, with the newspaper held mechanically before her. She had not stirred a hair-breadth, and the fly on the wall paper still kept between the lines—right in the center. I held my breath. I dared not break the silence.

Suddenly the paper dropped. Could that be Mabel's voice, so hard and cold, that seemed to speak in some far distance?

"Duncan, was it George?"
The fly had gone to the left after all. I knew it would. I did not dare to reply nor even look at her.

"Duncan," came the voice again, "it was George you saw there!"
"It was."

"And you believe him to be the murderer?" She drew herself up to her full regal height, her eyes flashing and her hands clinching and unclenching in suppressed indignation, while her whole frame seemed to quiver with excitement. "You believe him to be the murderer?" she repeated.

"What else could I think? I found him there bending over her with the broken dagger in his hands—his own Venetian dagger which used to hang over the mantelpiece in his room. Look for yourself. The dagger is not there now."

"You found him there! Were you not found there, too, with her watch in your hands? Did I take you to be a thief? You found him there indeed!"
"I think you must admit"—I began.
"Admit, Duncan! I admit nothing. I leave that to you."

Suddenly a thought seemed to flash across her.

"So, Duncan, it is owing to your admissions that George is now being hunted. To free yourself you have cast suspicion upon him—upon my brother! This is the way you show your love for me? Love! Do you call this love?"

The fly still crawled on the wall, but it had hopelessly lost its track.

I was quite calm now. The worst had come, and more than the worst; but, at any rate, I could speak quite openly.

"Mabel," I said, "will you listen to me for one moment? I am absolutely innocent of casting any suspicion upon George. His name has never passed my lips in connection with the case. I said nothing about the murderer at the police station, save that I should know him again if I saw him. You must see from that paper that George has brought all the suspicion upon himself by running away and by trying to get rid of the dagger. Even now none but you and I have the faintest suspicion who the man described is. He may still escape."

(To Be Continued.)

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