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"The Crime of the Century"

CHAPTER XV.

PERDITA. Colonel Payton observed this scene in great surprise, while Mr. Mitchel only smiled, the denouement of his experiment being what he had expected. Lillian sat in the chair and cradled over her baby, apparently oblivious of those who stood near her.

"When you brought this girl here, did you think she was the baby's mother?" asked Colonel Payton. "I thought so," said Mr. Mitchel, "but I was not sure. She denied it. Therefore I brought the mother and child together, relying upon the instincts of nature to reveal the truth. There is yet much to be explained, however."

"Much to be explained!" cried the colonel. "I should say so. She will have to explain why she abandoned the child, and she must explain it before a jury too."

"Before a jury? What do you mean?" "I mean that I will have her detained here until the authorities are informed of what has taken place. Then she must go to prison. I have no doubt that with your assistance she will be indicted by the grand jury."

"Oh, indeed! But you will not have my assistance."

"You mean you will not testify against her. Well, well! You are a poor citizen. You hesitate to do your duty, deterred by a pretty face. If all men were like you, crime would go unpunished."

"You are quite correct, colonel. If all men shared my views, the punishment of crime would be abolished."

"Bah! It makes me sick to hear a man of your brains indulge in such unwholesome sentimentality. You allow your senses to be led astray by a woman's pretty face. This woman has committed a crime, and she must suffer the consequences. You are new at this sort of thing, but I am an old hand. I know my duty."

"And you think it is your duty to punish this child?" "Why, no—not the child, but the mother." The colonel did not quite comprehend Mr. Mitchel's meaning. The latter therefore added:

"Ah, but the mother is herself a child!" "Oh! I see what you mean. But youth is no excuse in a case of this kind."

"Then you are determined to have her punished?" "It is my duty to see that the law is carried out."

"But why?" "Because she has committed a crime."

"What evidence have you of that?" "Why, did she not admit that the child is hers?"

"Yes, but that does not prove that she abandoned it."

"Why, who else could have done it?" "Why not the father? Fathers have done such things, have they not? Did you never hear of such a case?"

The subject evidently was distasteful to the colonel, and, besides, it was ever his habit when he found himself worsted in an argument to bring the conversation to an abrupt close, as he endeavored to do now.

"That's most unlikely," said he. "Anyway I leave the proof to the district attorney. It is none of my business."

"You are mistaken. It is exactly your business to learn the truth before you blast this young girl's future by bringing such a charge against her. It will do no harm to question her. Will you listen to her replies while I talk with her?"

"Oh, I haven't a doubt that the lies will roll off her glib tongue faster than we could write them down! But you are determined to have your own way, I suppose, so fire away. You're a crank, Mitchel; that's what you are, a crank."

Mr. Mitchel approached Lillian, who was still busy playing with her baby and talking in a low tone with the matron, who sympathized with the pretty young mother. Touching her gently on the shoulder to attract her attention, he said:

"So it is your baby after all?" "Oh, yes! I am so surprised. How did she get here?"

"Did I not tell you? She was found crawling among the tombstones in an old graveyard down town."

"You mean that was a real story you told me? And it was my baby? I don't understand it all. What does it mean?"

She gazed at him appealingly, perplexed beyond measure, and Mr. Mitchel felt assured of her sincerity, but the colonel sneered and said:

"You stated that she is an actress, did you not? She plays her part very well. Quite an innocent, is she not?" Mr. Mitchel did not seem to notice the cruel speech, but again addressed Lillian.

"Yes, it was all true, as I told you the story. You remember, you asked me who could have placed the child there."

"Yes, and you said you suspected the father. But, if you were talking about my baby, then you are wrong. Matthew never would have done such a thing, never, never, never!"

"You mean Matthew Crane?" "Yes; but you said you know him. Why do you call him that?" "You mean I ought to call him Jim," said Mr. Mitchel, "Preacher Jim?"

He hastened to lead her on now, lest her own suspicions might be aroused and she should thereafter refuse to make further disclosures.

"I thought you told me so. Then Matthew Crane is not your husband's real name?"

"Why, no! If you know him, you ought to know that. His name is Matthew Morton."

"Matthew Morton," thought Mr. Mitchel, quickly grasping the truth.



"She plays her part well. Quite an innocent, is she not?"

"It was Matthew Mora, alias Matthew Morton, who was the father of this waif. How very strange that what had at first seemed a totally different affair should now prove to be connected in so important a manner with the case which Mr. Barnes was investigating!"

"Of course, of course," said he aloud. "It was to you, then, that he sent the note yesterday morning when you left the house in Essex street in a carriage?"

That he should have this knowledge seemed to reassure the girl, for she now spoke to him more freely.

"Why, yes," said she. "Matthew wrote me that I must leave the house and go to a boarding house in Tenth street, and he told me to call myself Mrs. Crane till I heard from him again. That's why I gave you that name."

This seemed very significant to Mr. Mitchel. Did Matthew Mora know that Preacher Jim's true name was Matthew Crane, and did he instruct Lillian to assume that name as a means of throwing detectives upon a false scent in case they should track the girl to her new abode? It began to look as though Mr. Barnes' estimate of the man was correct. But the main point at present was to learn what part he had played in the removal of the child from its mother and in its subsequent abandonment. Mr. Mitchel dismissed all idea of collusion on the part of the girl.

"You say your husband did not place your baby in the graveyard. How do you know this?"

"I suppose I might as well tell you the whole truth. Well, one night we were to a ball at Apollo hall when who should turn up but an old gent, who walked straight to where we were dancing. He grabs me by the arm and squeezed me so hard I screamed. Then he threw me one side, and, grabbing Matthew, he says, 'I want you to come out of this.' Matthew never said a word, but went with him. They went down to the saloon, and they had high words together, but after awhile Matthew came up again and tried to make out as if nothing was wrong. But I wouldn't have it, so finally he told me the old man was his father; that he was on to us and was in an ugly humor. I got scared at that and began to cry, but Matthew told me there was nothing to cry about. There was nothing the old man could do to me anyway, whatever he might do to him. Then all of a sudden Matthew turned white like, as though he had a sudden idea, and he says to me: 'You wait for me here. I'll be back.' Then he rushed off. He was gone a long time and only got back as the ball was breaking up, and he took me home. When we got there, baby was gone. I was frightened, but Matthew explained everything to me. 'I got an idea at the ball,' said he, 'that the gov'nur might have found out where we were living. If he had come here and seen the baby, it would have been all up with me. He would have disinherited me, sure. So I rushed round here, and there was the little cherub in his crib. But I know my gov'nur, and I ain't taking chances. So I've taken baby to a nurse I know up town, and she'll be all right till this blows over.' 'Till this blows over,' says I. 'You ain't never going to keep baby from me for a long time?' 'Oh, no,' says he, 'only till the old gent gets off his high horse. That won't be more'n a week. But it's best for you not to see baby for awhile. You might be watched. The old man is full of that sort of thing. If I find it out, I may have to move you out of this in a hurry. So be ready any time you get word to change boarding houses in a jiffy.' Then he kissed me and went off. I haven't seen him since, but that's why I wasn't surprised when I got the note yesterday morning."

"Where did this nurse live? Did your husband tell you?"

"No. He said if he didn't tell me it would be safer, as nobody could get it out of me. So, don't you see, he was so particular about baby's safety he never would have harmed her."

Mr. Mitchel looked down at her as she stooped over and buried her face in the infant's clothing and pitied her as he noted her childlike faith in her lover.

This talk about the nurse was so transparent, and yet it had served to satisfy the trusting woman because she loved the man who had thus basely deceived her.

"About what time did the old man come to the ball and quarrel with your

husband?" inquired Mr. Mitchel. "Somewhere about 11 o'clock. I should say. It was long before supper, and that was 12."

"And what time was it when your husband returned to take you home?" "It was about half past 3."

"What did I tell you?" interrupted Colonel Payton. "Do you hear? She is trying to show now that the man had possession of the child and took it away from her house about the time when it was placed in the graveyard. That is the way she hopes to shield herself. Oh, I tell you, women are tricky!"

"What do you mean? Who are you?" asked Lillian, rising and facing him. "When you say that I am trying to prove that my husband took our baby to that graveyard, you tell a lie. I say he did not do it. He would not, he could not, do such a thing."

"No; it was you who did it!" cried the colonel, losing his temper. "That is another lie!" exclaimed Lillian, but more calmly.

"Look here, my good woman," said the colonel. "Keep a civil tongue in your head, or it will be all the worse for you." Then, turning to Mr. Mitchel, he added: "I say, Mitchel, this farce has gone on long enough. I will send for an officer and have this woman taken to the station house."

"No, no! Stop, colonel!" cried Mr. Mitchel, grasping his arm. "I will take her to my own home, and I will be responsible for her appearance when you have found proof of your charges. Will that be satisfactory?"

"Oh, I suppose so?" growled the colonel. "Here, matron, take the baby from her."

"Take my baby from me!" exclaimed Lillian. "No, no! You shall not do that! I have found her again, and we shall not be separated!"

"You don't suppose I am going to let you take the child away, do you?" sneered the colonel.

"Then I'll stay here, too," said Lillian firmly, hugging the baby closer to her breast.

Mr. Mitchel took the colonel aside. "Now, Colonel Payton," said he, "you must be reasonable in this matter. I have good reasons for believing that this girl is the victim of a treacherous man who has deceived her. The best course, it seems to me, will be to detain her in the care of your society until our evidence is complete. If you will do this and for a couple of days will hold in abeyance your formal communication to the authorities, I will promise you decisive news at the end of that time. Will you do this?"

"Oh, I suppose I must humor you," said the colonel, unwillingly consenting. "But it's irregular, and if anything should go wrong you must bear the consequences."

"I assume all responsibility," said Mr. Mitchel.

"Then I'll give the necessary orders to the matron," said the colonel, walking off.

Mr. Mitchel went to Lillian and spoke to her gently, advising her to remain in the building with her baby, to make no effort to get away and to trust to him to do his utmost in her behalf. He promised to see her again soon, and he went away, satisfied that he had made the best arrangement possible under the peculiar circumstances.

Leaving the building, he crossed over to Fifth avenue and walked rapidly up that thoroughfare. He walked because he wished to reflect. He found the problem which engaged his mind assuming a more complicated form than ever. He could readily see how the knowledge which now was his would have more than convinced Mr. Barnes of the correctness of his suspicions against young Mora. The detective would have argued that the man who had quarreled with his father and had abandoned his own child would scarcely have hesitated to kill his father under the fear of being disinherited. But for the present Mr. Mitchel dismissed that side of the subject from his thoughts. The supposition that Mora was the murderer left much to be explained in connection with the mysterious killing of Slippery Sam and the finding of the will in the young crook's pocket. Besides, he could not reconcile Mora's guilt with certain theories of his own which he was not yet ready to abandon. Therefore, despite the evidence which seemed to accumulate against the dead man's son, Mr. Mitchel considered the case still unproved.

But there was another matter which interested him in no ordinary degree. The great resemblance between the photographs of Lillian Vale and his daughter's school friend, Perdita Van Cortlandt, seemed to invite study. But, having seen Lillian and having closely observed her face, he was more than ever struck by the likeness between herself and the other girl as he remembered her. Yet it was possible that memory was here playing him a trick. He had not seen Perdita for nearly a year and so could not now be sure that he was not deceived in fancying the likeness to be so great.

Then it occurred to him that there was nothing to prevent his calling at her house. He was sufficiently well acquainted with her family to do this

without exciting comment. With Lillian's features freshly imprinted upon his memory he could thus make a comparison which would be decisive.

Half an hour later, therefore, he stood at the door of the Van Cortlandt residence and sent in his name. The servant, not recognizing him as a familiar visitor, ushered him into a small reception room separated from the larger parlors beyond by heavy oriental draperies.

While awaiting the return of the man Mr. Mitchel was attracted by a fine Corot which hung on the wall near the portieres and went to that end of the room to examine it. Standing there, he was surprised to hear a voice, which he instantly recognized, speak

ing in most earnest tones, in the apartment beyond.

"But, Perdita, my darling, you have admitted that you love me! Then why do you hesitate? Can you not trust me, or do you, too, still doubt?"

It was Matthew Mora who was thus pleading. Thus another and most unlooked for chapter was added to this case. Mr. Mitchel firmly believed—in fact, could not doubt—that Mora was the father of Lillian's child. He fancied that there was an unusual resemblance between Lillian herself and Perdita, and here he overheard Mora making ardent professions of love to the latter.

And Mora also noticed the similarity between his little beauty of the slums and this society belle? Was it this which had attracted him to this girl, who was his social equal and whom society would adjudge to be a more fitting companion to him through life? As these thoughts occurred to him Perdita was replying.

"How can you think me so contemptible? I have confessed my love for you. Does not that suffice? Do you think that I could care for you and not trust you?"

"Then you do believe in my innocence?" pursued Mora.

"As I believe in my Maker," was the girl's reply, and the words jarred unpleasantly on Mr. Mitchel's ear.

It was not pleasant to be thus playing eavesdropper, but the events which were rushing one upon the other so swiftly and the very interests of this girl herself seemed to justify Mr. Mitchel in adopting this method of learning the truth. He was therefore glad that the servant did not return too quickly.

The conversation on the other side of the portieres continued.

"Ah, you say you believe in my innocence; that you trust me! But, Perdita, when I wish to put that faith to a test, then you shrink. You hesitate to comply with my wishes."

"Ah, but what you ask is so unnecessary! I do not understand why you should make such a request, nor do I think I ought to accede. I owe something to my mother, you know."

"When a woman truly loves a man, she is ready to give up home, parents and even self to follow his fortunes."

"I am willing to do all that, but I do not see why you should ask me to do so in 24 hours. That is very sudden."

"Oh, love affairs are always sudden surprises to women! That is what they all say."

"Now you are unjust and unkind." Her voice trembled a little, and Mr. Mitchel was strongly tempted to open the draperies and chastise this man, who was urging a girl to do that which her conscience rebelled against. Taking advantage of the young girl's emotion, which he thought indicated a tendency to yield, Mora pressed his suit with renewed ardor.

"My darling, forgive me if I have spoken roughly! But it is because I love you so that I cannot bear to lose you, and something tells me that if I do not win you now, that if I cannot persuade you to go with me, I shall never call you mine."

"But why? Now you show that you do not trust me. I will wait for your return and be true to you forever."

"Yes, yes! You think so, and you mean what you say. But listen! I must go away. I must leave this detested place, where all my friends regard me with suspicion. No one knows what I have suffered during the last few days. I have been accused of



Mr. Mitchel plays eavesdropper.

murdering my father, and the law has released me. But don't you see that until the real murderer is discovered there must be a doubt in the minds of the people? They are not fully convinced. Unfortunately my father left me a lot of money. Worse yet, there was a will leaving half of the fortune to charity, and that has disappeared. Nine millions thus come to me as sole heir which ought to go to charity. Yet what can I do? If I turn that amount over to charity, people will say, 'He is trying to buy back his reputation.' If I keep it, they will say, 'He profited by the loss of the will. Perhaps he is guilty, after all.' At any rate, until the mystery be cleared up and my innocence demonstrated to the whole world it is only natural that people should prefer to avoid my acquaintance. So at present I am an outcast, a social pariah. I am alone in this great city, friendless in spite of my millions. My God, I cannot stand it! I will not stand it! I must get away, away across the ocean, to some remote corner of the world, where I can wait till the truth is known or stay away forever. And I think it will be forever, for something tells me that the murderer will never be discovered. I am a ruined man—ruined, ruined! So you are right to hesitate. You are right, quite right! I do not blame you."

He spoke bitterly, and there was a true ring in his words, as though it all came from his heart. Yet Mr. Mitchel

could not avoid the thought that just such words as these, just such emotional tones, were best calculated to excite a young girl's sympathies to the point where she might overstep the dictates of discretion and take a false step.

Before he could hear her reply the servant approached, and Mr. Mitchel went to the other end of the room, that he might not appear to have been listening. The man announced that Mrs. Van Cortlandt would be down in a few minutes and then withdrew. Mr. Mitchel hastened back to the portieres, but too late to know just what the girl had said. Mora was speaking again and very rapidly.

"Yes, yes, my darling! I believe that you love me, and I know that I am asking a great sacrifice. Listen! I will compromise. I will let you think it all over alone. If you decide in my favor, take the train which leaves the Grand Central for Boston tomorrow at noon, and when you reach Boston go to the Hotel Brunswick. I will be there, with a clergyman at hand in readiness to marry us. On the following day we will sail for Europe, and then, with our troubles left behind, our happiness will begin in earnest. Think it all over, dearest, and if you decide against me send a dispatch to my house tonight. Just say 'Bon voyage!' and I will set out on my journey alone. In any event, I will take the midnight train tonight."

"I will do as you say. I will think it all out alone, but I cannot decide now. I must have a little time. What seems right to me I will do. But if my duty here should prevent—then you will—you will forgive me?"

"Yes, I will forgive you."

"And—and come back for me—some day?"

"Just as soon as these clouds blow away."

"You promise me that? For if—I if I do not go with you—I will wait for you—forever!"

Then, overcome by her emotion, she began to weep, and Mora spoke soothingly to her in low tones. It seemed probable to Mr. Mitchel, that brave girl though she was, if left to herself she must eventually yield to the importunities of her heart and forsake her home for this man, whose allegiance was rightfully due to another.

He walked slowly to the window which looked out into the street and stood there, endeavoring to determine what course he should pursue. Presently his attention was attracted by the figure of a man partly concealed in a doorway opposite. He watched the man for a few moments and then muttered:

"A spy! Can it be possible that Mr. Barnes is still maintaining an espionage over me?"

Just then he heard Mora leaving the house and saw him descend the stoop. He stood for a second on the pavement, looking sharply up and down. The man opposite, however, had withdrawn so that he was entirely out of view. Apparently satisfied, Mora walked rapidly up the street, turning the next corner. Then the spy came forth and glided swiftly after him.

"Ha!" thought Mr. Mitchel. "Mr. Barnes cannot divorce himself from routine methods. Well, if his man keeps Mora in sight, it may be an advantage this time."

(To be Continued.)

ILLINOIS CENTRAL PERSONALLY CONDUCTED Low Rate Excursion TO COLORADO Tuesday, Aug. 21, 1900.

The train will leave Denison at 1:50 p. m. Tuesday, Aug. 21 and will arrive at Denver 11:00 a. m., Wednesday, Aug. 22. The round trip rate from the above point to Denver or Colorado Springs will be only \$20.00. Tickets limited to October 31st for return. This train will also stop at smaller stations and agents at those points will sell tickets at proportionate rate if given a few days notice.

Modern tourist sleepers will be run on this train, and the rate per double berth from the above named point to Denver will be only \$2.00. Make applications to the undersigned not later than Aug. 16 for reservations in these tourist sleepers.

Mr. J. A. Wheeler, traveling passenger agent of this company, who is familiar with the western country and who has had large experience in conducting excursions, will accompany this party and see that nothing is lacking which will contribute to the pleasure and comfort of all.

The Farmers' National Congress will be in session at Colorado Springs Aug. 22, 23 and 24. For a copy of the program for those dates, or for any other information, about this excursion, address:

J. F. MERRY, Asst. Gen. Pass. Agt., I. C. R. R., 62-3 Dubuque, Iowa.

ILLINOIS CENTRAL Through Tourist Sleeper TO CALIFORNIA.

Beginning Friday, August 31 and every Friday thereafter, the Illinois Central will have a through tourist sleeping car to San Francisco and Los Angeles, California, which will leave Chicago, on train No. 3, at 11:15 p. m. and pass through Iowa every Saturday on the daylight train to Omaha. From Omaha the route will be the Rock Island to Pueblo, the Denver and Rio Grande to Grand Junction, the Rio Grande & Western to Ogden, and the Southern Pacific to destination, arriving at San Francisco at 4:15 p. m. Tuesday and Los Angeles, 1:30 p. m. Wednesday.

The cars which will be used in this service are modern upholstered Pullman Tourist sleepers, such as are now used by 75 per cent of the California travel. They are supplied with the same quality of linen and bedding as Standard Pullman Cars.

Second class tickets are accepted in these cars and the rate per double berth is less than half that in Standard Sleepers. The east-bound car will leave Los Angeles every Friday at 12:40 p. m. and arrive at Chicago 10:20 a. m. Wednesday. J. F. MERRY, Asst. Gen. Pass. Agt., Dubuque, Iowa.