

"There are some wrongs for which nothing will atone but death. Paul Ernscliffe is guilty of such a wrong—and he is dead!"

She was breathing hard like one in pain, her eyes, large and dark, were gleaming with the fire of fever and delirium. I felt a great pity stir my heart for this mad girl—mad in throwing away her own life when she could have saved it.

Yet a feeling of admiration for her heroism thrilled me and made me bow before her.

"I will not consent to help you in this cruel sacrifice," I said. "Miss Wardour, you must not give yourself up. You shall not suffer for a sin which in the eyes of justice is almost pardonable; at least, there was some amelioration for the offense."

"I cannot. I must free my poor old father from prison, from a felon's fate. He is innocent. Good God! Doctor Dorrance, cannot you understand and believe me? Stephen Wardour is as innocent as a babe; and to be forced to suffer for a crime one has not committed is horrible! I tell you, it must not—shall not be! Take me to prison. I insist upon it. I beseech you!"

She fell upon her knees before me, clasping her hands imploringly, her eyes, full of tears, uplifted to my face.

"I cannot," I repeated. "It is not my place, and besides, Miss Wardour, I do not believe that you are guilty. Go back to your own room; give up this mad scheme. Your father, if innocent, must be saved in some other way."

The words died upon my lips into silence. A door on the opposite side of the corridor opened softly, and Esme Lyell stood in the dim light of the lamp which burned all night in the corridor. She looked like an angel, in a flowing robe of white cashmere, her golden hair falling loosely over her shoulders. I thought of the shining coil which I had taken from the dead man, and an awful shudder ran over my frame. Thank heaven! the coil was safe, locked away in my desk among my private papers. No one should ever know, no one must even suspect.

"Ruby!" she cried in a voice full of dignified alarm, "my dear, what is the matter?"

She glided swiftly to Ruby's side, and wound her white arms in their flowing lace-trimmed sleeves about the girl's neck.

"What brings you here at this hour?" she went on, piteously. "I missed you from your room and so came to look for you."

"Miss Lyell," (my voice shook as it spoke her name) "you know this girl? Will you please tell me all you know about her?"

"I will, Doctor Dorrance, certainly!" Esme's head was held erect, and a steely fire kindled in the depths of her eyes. How I loved her! How I worshiped, idolized her. And surely, surely she had loved me!

And, looking upon her as she stood there so brave and fearless, I realized that she was the sort of woman who would stand by one she loved through everything—everything!

As I gazed upon her there was a strange constriction in my throat. She seemed all that was pure and true and transparent. Yet, how—oh, pitying heaven!—how came that golden curl in Paul Ernscliffe's dead hand, as though it had been clutched frantically from the graceful head?

I tried to steady my voice, as I repeated in brief the story of Ruby Wardour's self-accusation, and ended with a request for Esme to tell me all she knew concerning the girl. The dark eyes met mine frankly.

"I will. Ruby Wardour came to me at this hotel last Tuesday. She told me that Paul Ernscliffe had deceived her and had broken her heart; and she wished to leave home and go away to earn her own living. My heart went out in sympathy toward her. I needed a maid. I asked my mother to let me retain Ruby. She consented. She sent a message to her father, telling him of her whereabouts, but it seems he never received the message. Tonight I inadvertently betrayed the truth to her, that her father had been arrested for Mr. Ernscliffe's murder, and as soon as she thought me asleep she came to you, believing you to be interested, as the avenger of your friend's death, to give herself up, a voluntary sacrifice. She is innocent, Doctor Dorrance; surely, you believe it?"

What a strange, mesmeric power there was in Esme's dark eyes! I had never observed it before. They held me spell-bound. I aroused myself with an effort and shook off the spell.

"I trust she is innocent," I made answer; and a strange cloud passed over Esme's beautiful face.

"I know she is!" she cried, eagerly. "Now, Ruby, come back to your room and give up this madness. And, anyway, nothing can be done tonight. Come, dear. Good-night, Doctor Dorrance. I hope you will sleep well."

And Esme Lyell drew the white-faced, shivering girl back to her own room, and I heard its door close and the key turn in the lock. Dazed and bewildered, I went back to my own chamber and locked myself in.

She had hoped I would sleep well. Ah! me! Ah-me! Would I ever sleep again?

My nerves were all unstrung with the exciting and terrible events and I was never more wide awake in my life. I mixed myself a dose of chloral, and, having taken it, threw myself, all dressed, upon the bed, and was soon in oblivion. When I awoke it was ten in the morning. Bathing and dressing myself, I rang for coffee.

The waiter, ever garrulous, was bursting with importance; a gossip-loving negro, he could hardly wait to fire the news at me. It came upon me like a blow. Ruby Wardour had given herself up to the authorities early that morning, self-accused of the murder of Paul Ernscliffe, and had been taken to the jail, from whence she would soon be removed to more secure quarters. The story told by the gossiping waiter, who never dreamed that I was aware of Ruby's intentions, was told; and then he handed me a letter.

"Dis jes' come for you, sah; a boy brought it, sah;" he announced, showing all his ivories in a broad grin.

Mechanically I opened the envelope, noting as I did so that the handwriting was unfamiliar. This is what the letter said:

"Doctor Dorrance: One man has been accused of the murder of Paul Ernscliffe, and one woman has accused herself, to

save that man from punishment. If you know anything that may help clear up the awful mystery, I beg you, for the love of God, in the name of justice, to make it known to the public, no matter who may suffer from the telling. It is your duty to reveal anything you may know in regard to this awful crime, even circumstantial evidence. Will you do it?"

No name signed; and the handwriting strange to me.

"Circumstantial evidence!" I thought of Stephen Wardour and the quarrel which had certainly taken place between him and Ernscliffe not half an hour before Ernscliffe had met his death. Surely Wardour had had just cause and provocation to do the deed!

Then I thought of Ruby Wardour and the good cause which she had had to hate Paul Ernscliffe; and I recalled more than one instance where a woman just as bitterly wronged had sought to wipe out the score in heart's blood.

And then—then, I thought of that curl of golden hair found in the grasp of the stiff, cold fingers, evidently torn from its locks in a paroxysm of rage. Ruby Wardour's hair was jet black, her father's iron gray; the only golden hair upon the whole island were the shimmering tresses which grew upon the head of beautiful Esme Lyell!

I glanced furtively toward my desk, where it was hidden away.

"I will destroy it!" I muttered. "Circumstantial evidence!" Ah!

Another rap at my door. Was I never to be alone, and in private?

A tall, handsome man of some thirty years, attired in a perfectly fitting gray suit, stood before me. Clear, dark, beautiful eyes, a frank face, and the most perfectly chiseled mouth I have ever seen, half hidden by a silky, dark mustache. He bowed profoundly.

"I am speaking to Doctor Dorrance?" he began, interrogatively.

I acknowledged my own identity. "Let me introduce myself," my visitor continued. "My name is Duane—Jack

Duane—and I am a private detective. I am interested in this Ernscliffe murder, and intend to devote my time to solving the mystery. One point in my hasty examination of the body seems to have been overlooked. It is this: Mr. Ernscliffe had a considerable sum of money upon his person. It is gone. And there was nothing of any value found upon the body, as you will recollect, save his watch (broken in his fall) and a diamond shirt stud. The money, at least \$1,500, is missing. Also a valuable diamond ring. Doctor Dorrance, I believe that Paul Ernscliffe was murdered for his money and valuables. I have arrested a disreputable-looking character, a tramp, who was found in the vicinity (I arrived here this morning early), and upon the tramp I found a diamond ring which has already been identified by a dozen different persons as the property of the murdered man. I have handed the tramp (he gives the name of Davis) over to the police, and have come to you to make your acquaintance. I understand that you and the dead man were once great friends, and that you intend to leave no stone unturned to discover the murderer. Am I right, Doctor Dorrance?"

I wondered who had told him all this about Paul Ernscliffe and myself; but I could not contradict it. I seemed fated to be assigned the role of Paul Ernscliffe's avenger. I arose and extended my hand.

"I shall leave no stone unturned, Mr. Duane," I replied; and then he bowed himself out, with a promise to "see me later."

Alone once more, I opened my note book and made a careful entry. Surely there was evidence enough.

Stephen Wardour. Ruby Wardour. Davis, the tramp.

But my hand shook so that I could not add a memorandum of that golden curl!

The pencil fell from my nerveless fingers. Amid all this "conflict of evidence" who was guilty?

An hour later I was summoned in mad haste to Esme Lyell's side.

What had happened?

#### CHAPTER IV. A Recognition.

I rapped at the door of Mrs. Lyell's private parlor, with a conviction that something awful had happened. The door was opened by Mrs. Lyell herself. A handsome, delicate-looking woman, still young, and with a haughty expression upon her pale, clear-cut features.

She was a votary of fashion, utterly given over to the world and its ways, to the full extent of the colonel's not unlimited purse. For the world of fashion alone she "lived and moved and had her being." The cut of a sleeve, the value and texture of a gown, the shape of a bonnet, were more to this nineteenth century mother than the happiness and peace of mind of her only child. Esme was beautiful; Esme must make a grand marriage; that was the one aim and object of this devoted mother's existence. But a mesalliance would be worse than death. It meant social extinction, and that to Mrs. Lyell was the greatest disgrace that could befall her child.

She had set her heart upon Esme marrying Paul Ernscliffe. The sudden and mysterious death of the young millionaire was a blow from which Mrs. Lyell felt herself unable to rally.



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