

Hume Fergus

# A Coin of Edward VII: A Detective Story



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### CHAPTER I

### THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Two old ladies sat in the corner of the drawing-room. The younger – a colonial cousin of the elder – was listening eagerly to gossip which dealt with English society in general, and Rickwell society in particular. They presumably assisted in the entertainment of the children already gathered tumultuously round the Christmas tree, provided by Mr. Morley; but Mrs. Parry's budget of scandal was too interesting to permit the relaxing of Mrs. McKail's attention.

"Ah yes," said Mrs. Parry, a hatchet-faced dame with a venomous tongue and a retentive memory, "Morley's fond of children, although he has none of his own."

"But those three pretty little girls?" said Mrs. McKail, who was fat, fair, and considerably over forty.

"Triplets," replied the other, sinking her voice. "The only case of triplets I have met with, but not his children. No, Mrs. Morley was a widow with triplets and money. Morley married her for the last, and had to take the first as part of the bargain. I don't deny but what he does his duty by the three."

Mrs. McKail's keen grey eyes wander to the fat, rosy little man who laughingly struggled amidst a bevy of children, the triplets included. "He seems fond of them," said she, nodding.

"Seems!" emphasised Mrs. Parry shrewdly. "Ha! I don't trust the man. If he were all he seems, would his wife's face wear that expression? No, don't tell me."

Mrs. Morley was a tall, lean, serious woman, dressed in sober grey. She certainly looked careworn, and appeared to participate in the festivities more as a duty than for the sake of amusement. "He is said to be a good husband," observed Mrs. McKail doubtfully. "Are you sure?"

"I'm sure of nothing where men are concerned. I wouldn't trust one of them. Morley is attentive enough to his wife, and he adores the triplets – so he says; but I go by his eye. Orgy is written in that eye. It can pick out a pretty woman, my dear. Oh, his wife doesn't look sick with anxiety for nothing!"

"At any rate, he doesn't seem attentive to that pretty girl over there – the one in black with the young man."

"Girl! She's twenty-five if she's an hour. I believe she paints and puts belladonna in her eyes. I wouldn't have her for my governess. No, she's too artful, though I can't agree with you about her prettiness."

"Is she the governess?"

Mrs. Parry nodded, and the ribbons on her cap curled like Medusa's snakes. "For six months Mrs. Morley has put up with her. She teaches the Tricolor goodness knows what."

"The Tricolor?"

"So we call the triplets. Don't you see one is dressed in red, another in white, and the third in blue? Morley's idea, I believe. As though a man had any right to interest himself in such things. We call them collectively the Tricolor, and Anne Denham is the governess. Pretty? No. Artful? Yes. See how she is trying to fascinate Ware!"

"That handsome young man with the fair moustache and –"

"The same," interrupted Mrs. Parry, too eager to blacken character to give her friend a chance of concluding her sentence. "Giles Ware, of Kingshart – the head of one of our oldest Essex families. He came into the estates two years ago, and has settled down into a country squire after a wild life."

But the old Adam is in him, my dear. Look at his smile – and she doesn't seem to mind. Brazen creature!" And Mrs. Parry shuddered virtuously.

The other lady thought that Ware had a most fascinating smile, and was a remarkably handsome young man of the fair Saxon type. He certainly appeared to be much interested in the conversation of Miss Denham. But what young man could resist so beautiful a woman? For in spite of Mrs. Parry's disparagement Anne was a splendidly handsome brunette – "with a temper," added Mrs. McKail mentally, as she eyed the well-suited couple.

Mrs. Parry's tongue still raged like a prairie fire. "And she knows he's engaged," she snorted. "Look at poor Daisy Kent out in the cold, while that woman monopolizes Ware! Ugh!"

"Is Miss Kent engaged to Mr. Ware?"

"For three years they have been engaged – a family arrangement, I understand. The late Kent and the late Ware," explained Mrs. Parry, who always spoke thus politely of men, "were the greatest of friends, which I can well understand, as each was an idiot. However, Ware died first and left his estate to Giles. A few months later Kent died and made Morley the guardian of his daughter Daisy, already contracted to be married to Giles."

"Does he love her?"

"Oh, he's fond of her in a way, and he is anxious to obey the last wish of his father. But it seems to me that he is more in love with that black cat."

"Hush! You will be heard."

Mrs. Parry snorted. "I hope so, and by the cat herself," she said grimly. "I can't bear the woman. If I were Mrs. Morley I'd have her out of the house in ten minutes. Turn her out in the snow to cool her hot blood. What right has she to attract Ware and make him neglect that dear angel over there? See, yonder is Daisy. There's a face, there's charm, there's hair!" finished Mrs. Parry, quite unconscious that she was using the latest London slang. "I call her a lovely creature."

Mrs. McKail did not agree with her venomous cousin. Daisy was a washed-out blonde with large blue eyes and a slack mouth. Under a hot July sky and with a flush of color she would have indeed been pretty; but the cold of winter and the neglect of Giles Ware shrivelled her up. In spite of the warmth of the room, the gaiety of the scene, she looked pinched and older than her years. But there was some sort of character in her face, for Mrs. McKail caught her directing a glance full of hatred at the governess. In spite of her ethereal prettiness, Daisy Kent was a good hater. Mrs. McKail felt sure of that. "And she is much more of the cat type than the other one is," thought the observant lady, too wise to speak openly.

However, Mrs. Parry still continued to destroy a character every time she opened her mouth. She called the rector a Papist; hinted that the doctor's wife was no better than she should be; announced that Morley owed money to his tradesmen, that he had squandered his wife's fortune; and finally wound up by saying that he would spend Daisy Kent's money when he got it. "If it ever does come to her," finished this amiable person.

"Did her father leave her money?" asked Mrs. McKail.

"He!" snapped the other; "my dear, he was as poor as a church mouse, and left Daisy only a hundred a year to live on. That is the one decent thing about Morley. He did take Daisy in, and he does treat her well, though to be sure she is a pretty girl, and, as I say, he has an eye."

"Then where does the fortune come from?"

"Kent was a half-brother who went out to America, and it is rumored that he made a fortune, which he intends to leave to his niece – that's Daisy. But I don't know all the details of this," added Mrs. Parry, rubbing her beaky nose angrily; "I must find out somehow. But here, my dear, those children are stripping the tree. Let us assist. We must give pleasure to the little ones. I have had six of my own, all married," ended the good lady irrelevantly.

She might have added that her four sons and two daughters kept at a safe distance from their respected parent. On occasions she did pay a visit to one or the other, and usually created a

disturbance. Yet this spiteful, mischief-making woman read her Bible, thought herself a Christian, and judged others as harshly as she judged herself leniently. Mrs. McKail was stopping with her, therefore could not tell her what she thought of her behavior; but she privately determined to cut short her visit and get away from this disagreeable old creature. In the meantime Mrs. Parry, smiling like the wicked fairy godmother with many teeth, advanced to meddle with the Christmas tree and set the children by the ears. She was a perfect Atê.

Giles said as much to Miss Denham, and she nervously agreed with him as though fearful lest her assent should reach the ears of Mrs. Parry. "She has no love for me," whispered Anne. "I think you had better talk to Daisy, Mr. Ware."

"I prefer to talk to you," said Giles coolly. "Daisy is like her name – a sweet little English meadow flower – and I love her very dearly. But she has never been out of England, and sometimes we are at a loss what to talk about. Now you?"

"I am a gipsy," interrupted Anne, lest he should say something too complimentary; "a she-Ulysses, who has travelled far and wide. In spite of your preference for my conversation, I wish I were Daisy."

"Do you?" asked Ware eagerly. "Why?"

Anne flushed and threw back her head proudly. She could not altogether misunderstand his meaning or the expression of his eyes, but she strove to turn the conversation with a laugh. "You ask too many questions, Mr. Ware," she said coldly. "I think Daisy is one of the sweetest of girls, and I envy her. To have a happy home, a kind guardian as Mr. Morley is, and a – " She was about to mention Giles, but prudently suppressed the remark.

"Go on," he said quietly, folding his arms.

She shook her head and bit her lip. "You keep me from my work. I must attend to my duties. A poor governess, you know." With a laugh she joined the band of children, who were besieging Morley.

Giles remained where he was, his eyes fixed moodily on the ground. For more than five months he had fought against an ever-growing passion for the governess. He knew that he was in honor bound to marry Daisy, and that she loved him dearly, yet his heart was with Anne Denham. Her beauty, her brilliant conversation, her charm of manner, all appealed to him strongly. And he had a shrewd suspicion that she was not altogether indifferent to him, although she loyally strove to hide her true feelings. Whenever he became tender, she ruthlessly laughed at him: she talked constantly of Daisy and of her many charms, and on every occasion strove to throw her into the company of Giles. She managed to do so on this occasion, for Giles heard a rather pettish voice at his elbow, and looked down to behold a flushed face. Daisy was angry, and looked the prettier for her anger.

"You have scarcely spoken to me all night," she said, taking his arm; "I do think you are unkind."

"My dear, you have been so busy with the children. And, indeed," he added, with a grave smile, "you are scarcely more than a child yourself, Daisy."

"I am woman enough to feel neglect."

"I apologize – on my knees, dearest."

"Oh, it's easy saying so," pouted Daisy, "but you know Anne – "

"What about Miss Denham?" asked Giles, outwardly calm.

"You like her."

"She is a very charming woman, but you are to be my wife. Jealous little girl, can I not be ordinarily civil to Miss Denham without you getting angry?"

"You need not be so *very* civil."

"I won't speak to her at all if you like," replied Ware, with a fine assumption of carelessness.

"Oh, if you only wouldn't," Daisy stopped – then continued passionately, "I wish she would go away. I don't like her."

"She is fond of you, Daisy."

"Yes. And a cat is fond of a mouse. Mrs. Parry says – "

"Don't quote that odious woman, child," interrupted Ware sharply. "She has a bad word for everyone."

"Well, she doesn't like Anne."

"Does she like anyone?" asked Giles coolly. "Come, Daisy, don't wrinkle your face, and I'll take you out for a drive in my motor-car in a few days."

"To-morrow! to-morrow!" cried Daisy, her face wreathed in smiles.

"No. I daren't do that on Christmas Day. What would the rector say? As the lord of the manor I must set an example. On Boxing Day if you like."

"We will go alone?"

"Certainly. Who do you expect me to ask other than you?"

"Anne," said Daisy spitefully, and before he could reply she also moved away to join the children. Giles winced. He felt that he was in the wrong and had given his little sweetheart some occasion for jealousy. He resolved to mend his ways and shun the too fascinating society of the enchantress. Shaking off his moody feeling, he came forward to assist Morley. The host was a little man, and could not reach the gifts that hung on the topmost boughs of the tree. Giles being tall and having a long reach of arm, came to his aid.

"That's right, that's right," gasped Morley, his round face red and shining with his exertions, "the best gifts are up here."

"As the best gifts of man are from heaven," put in Mrs. Parry, with her usual tact.

Morley laughed. "Quite so, quite so," he said, careful as was everyone else not to offend the lady, "but on this occasion we can obtain the best gifts. I and Ware and Mrs. Morley have contributed to the tree. The children have their presents, now for the presents of the grown-ups."

By this time the children were gorged with food and distracted by many presents. They were seated everywhere, many on the floor, and the room was a chaos of dolls, trumpets, toy-horses, and drums. The chatter of the children and the noise of the instruments was fearful. But Morley seemed to enjoy the riot, and even his wife's grave face relaxed when she saw her three precious jewels rosy with pleasure. She drew Anne's attention to them, and the governess smiled sympathetically. Miss Denham was popular with everyone save Daisy in that happy home.

Meantime Giles handed down the presents. Mrs. Morley received a chain purse from her affectionate husband; Mrs. Parry a silver cream-jug, which she immediately priced as cheap; Mrs. McKail laughed delightedly over a cigarette-case, which she admitted revealed her favorite vice; and the rector was made happy with a motor-bicycle.

"It has been taken to your house this evening," explained Morley. "We couldn't put that on the tree. Ha! ha!"

"A muff-chain for Daisy," said Giles, presenting her with the packet, "and I hope you will like it, dear."

"Did you buy it?" she asked, sparkling and palpitating.

"Of course. I bought presents both for you and Miss Denham. Here is yours," he added, turning to the governess, who grew rosy, "a very simple bangle. I wish it were more worthy of your acceptance," and he handed it with a bow.

Daisy, her heart filled with jealousy, glided away. Giles saw her face, guessed her feeling, and followed. In a corner he caught her, and placed something on her finger. "Our engagement ring," he whispered, and Daisy once more smiled. Her lover smiled also. But his heart was heavy.



## CHAPTER II

### AN ANONYMOUS LETTER

After the riot of the evening came the silence of the night. The children departed amidst the stormy laughter of Morley, and it was Anne's task to see that the triplets were put comfortably to bed. She sat in the nursery, and watched the washing and undressing and hair-curling, and listened to their joyous chatter about the wonderful presents and the wonderful pleasures of that day. Afterwards, when they were safely tucked away, she went down to supper and received the compliments of Morley on her capability in entertaining children. Mrs. Morley also, and in a more genuine way, added her quota of praise.

"You are my right hand, Miss Denham," she said, with a smile in her weary blue eyes. "I don't know what I shall do without you."

"Oh, Miss Denham is not going," said the master of the house.

"Who knows?" smiled Anne. "I have always been a wanderer, and it may be that I shall be called away suddenly."

It was on the tip of Morley's tongue to ask by whom, but the hardening of Anne's face and the flash of her dark eyes made him change his mind. All the same he concluded that there was someone by whom she might be summoned and guessed also that the obeying of the call would come as an unwilling duty. Mrs. Morley saw nothing of this. She had not much brain power, and what she had was devoted to considerations dealing with the passing hour. At the present moment she could only think that it was time for supper, and that all present were hungry and tired.

Hungry Anne certainly was not, but she confessed to feeling weary. Making some excuse she retired to her room, but not to sleep. When the door was locked she put on her dressing-gown, shook down her long black hair, and sat by the fire.

Her thoughts were not pleasant. Filled with shame at the knowledge of his treachery towards the woman he was engaged to marry, Giles had kept close to Daisy's side during supper and afterwards. He strove to interest himself in her somewhat childish chatter, and made her so happy by his mere presence that her face was shining with smiles. Transfigured by love and by gratified vanity, Daisy looked really pretty, and in her heart was scornful of poor Anne thus left out in the cold. She concluded that Giles loved her best after all, and did not see how he every now and then stealthily glanced at the governess wearily striving to interest herself in the breezy conversation of Morley or the domestic chatter of his wife. In her heart Anne had felt a pang at this desertion, although she knew that it was perfectly justifiable, and unable to bear the sight of Daisy's brilliant face, she retired thus early.

She loved Giles. It was no use blinking the fact. She loved him with every fibre of her nature, and with a passion far stronger than could be felt for him by the golden-haired doll with the shallow eyes. For Giles she would have lost the world, but she would not have him lose his for her. And, after all, she had no right to creep like a serpent into the Eden of silly, prattling Daisy. In her own puny way the child – for she was little else – adored Giles, and as he was her affianced lover it would be base to come between her and her god. But Anne knew in her heart that Giles loved her best. If she did but lift her hand he would leave all and follow her to the world's end. But lift her hand she would not. It would be too cruel to break the butterfly Daisy on such a painful wheel. Anne loved sufficiently to be large and generous in her nature, and therefore broke her own heart to spare the breaking of another woman's. Certainly Giles was as unhappy as she was; that was patent in his looks and bearing. But he had forged his own chains, and could not break them without dishonor. And come what may, Giles would always love her best.

Anne's meditations were disturbed by a knock at the door. Glancing at the clock, she saw it was close on midnight, and wondering who wished to see her at so late an hour, she opened the door.

Daisy, in a blue dressing-gown, with her golden hair loose and her face flushed, entered the room. She skipped towards Anne with a happy laugh, and threw her arms round her neck.

"I could not sleep without telling you how happy I am," she said, and with a look of triumph displayed the ring.

Anne's heart beat violently at this visible sign of the barrier between her and Giles. However, she was too clever a woman to betray her emotion, and examined the ring with a forced smile.

"Diamonds for your eyes, rubies for your lips," she said softly. "A very pretty fancy."

Daisy was annoyed. She would rather that Anne had betrayed herself by some rude speech, or at least by a discomposed manner. To make her heart ache Daisy had come, and from all she could see she had not accomplished her aim. However, she still tried to wring some sign of emotion from the expression or lips of the calm governess.

"Giles promised me a ring over and over again," she said, her eyes fixed on Anne. "We have been engaged for over six months. He asked me just before you came, although it was always an understood thing. His father and mine arranged the engagement, you know. I didn't like the idea at first, as I wanted to make my own choice. Every girl should, I think. Don't you?"

"Certainly," Anne forced herself to say, "but you love Mr. Ware."

Daisy nodded. "Very, very much," she assented emphatically. "I must have loved him without knowing it, but I was only certain when he asked me to marry him. How lucky it is he has to make me his wife!" she sighed. "If he were not bound – " Here she stopped suddenly, and looked into the other woman's eyes.

"What nonsense!" said Anne good-humoredly, and more composed than ever. "Mr. Ware loves you dearly. You are the one woman he would choose for his wife. There is no compulsion about his choice, my dear."

"Do you really think so?" demanded the girl feverishly. "I thought – it was the ring, you know."

"What do you mean, Daisy?"

"He never would give me the ring, although I said it was ridiculous for a girl to be engaged without one. He always made some excuse, and only to-night – But I have him safe now," she added, with a fierce abruptness, "and I'll keep him."

"Nobody wants to take him from you, dear."

"Do you really think so?" said Miss Kent again. "Then why did he delay giving me the ring?"

Anne knew well enough. After her first three meetings with Giles she had seen the love light in his eyes, and his reluctance to bind himself irrevocably with the ring was due to a hope that something might happen to permit his choosing for himself. But nothing had happened, the age of miracles being past, and the vow to his dead father bound him. Therefore on this very night he had locked his shackles and had thrown away the key. Anne had made it plain to him that she could not, nor would she, help him to play a dishonorable part. He had accepted his destiny, and now Daisy asked why he had not accepted it before. Anne made a feeble excuse, the best she could think of.

"Perhaps he did not see a ring pretty enough," she said.

"It might be that," replied Daisy reflectively. "Giles has such good taste. You did not show me what he gave you to-night."

Miss Denham would rather not have shown it, but she had no excuse to refuse a sight of the gift. Without a word she slipped the bangle from her wrist – Daisy's jealous eyes noted that she had kept it on till now – and handed it to the girl.

"Oh, how sweet and pretty!" she cried, with artificial cordiality. "Just a ring of gold with a coin attached. May I look?" And without waiting for permission she ran to the lamp.

The coin was a half-sovereign of Edward VII., with three stones – a diamond, an amethyst, and a pearl – set in a triangle. A thin ring of gold attached it to the bangle. Daisy was not ill pleased that the gift was so simple. Her engagement ring was much more costly.

"It's a cheap thing," she said contemptuously. "The coin is quite common."

"It will be rare some day," said Anne, slipping the bangle on her wrist. "The name of the King is spelt on this one 'Edwardus,' whereas in the Latin it should be 'Edvardus.' I believe the issue is to be called in. Consequently coins of this sort will be rare some day. It was kind of Mr. Ware to give it to me."

Daisy paid no attention to this explanation. "An amethyst, a diamond, and a pearl," she said. "Why did he have those three stones set in the half-sovereign?"

Anne turned away her face, for it was burning red. She knew very well what the stones signified, but she was not going to tell this jealous creature. Daisy's wits, however, were made keen by her secret anger, and after a few moments of thought she jumped up, clapping her hands.

"I see it – the initials of your name. Amethyst stands for Anne and Diamond for Denham."

"It might be so," replied Miss Denham coldly.

"It is so," said Daisy, her small face growing white and pinched. "But what does the pearl mean? Ah, that you are a pearl!"

"Nonsense, Daisy. Go you to bed, and don't imagine things."

"It is not imagination," cried the girl shrilly, "and you know that well, Anne. What right have you to come and steal Giles from me?"

"He is yours," said Anne sharply. "The ring –"

"Oh, yes, the ring. I have his promise to marry me, but you have his heart. Don't I know. Give me that bangle." And she stretched out her hand with a clutching gesture.

"No," said Anne sternly, "I shall keep my present. Go to bed. You are overtired. To-morrow you will be wiser."

"I am wise now – too wise. You have made Giles love you."

"I have not; I swear I have not," said Anne, beginning to lose her composure.

"You have, and you love him; I see it in your face. Who are you to come into my life and spoil it?"

"I am a governess. That is all you need to know."

"You look like a governess," said Daisy, insultingly. "I believe you are a bad woman, and came here to steal Giles from me."

"Daisy!" – Anne rose to her feet and walked towards the door – "I have had quite enough of your hysterical nonsense. If you came here to insult me in this way, it is time you went. Mr. Ware and I were complete strangers to one another when I came here."

"Strangers! And what are you now?"

"Friends – nothing more, nothing less."

"So you say; and I daresay Giles would say the same thing did I ask him."

Anne's face grew white and set. She seized the foolish, hysterical little creature by the wrist and shook her. "I'll tell you one thing," she said softly, and her threat was the more terrible for the softness, "I have black blood in my veins, for I was born at Martinique, and if you talk to Giles about me, I'll – I'll – kill you. Go and pray to God that you may be rid of this foolishness."

Daisy, wide-eyed, pallid, and thoroughly frightened, fled whimpering, and sought refuge in her own room. Anne closed the door, and locked it so as to prevent a repetition of this unpleasant visit. Then she went to open the window, for the air of the room seemed tainted by the presence of Daisy. Flinging wide the casement, Anne leaned out into the bitter air and looked at the wonderful white snow-world glittering in the thin, chill moonlight. She drew several long breaths, and became more composed. Sufficient, indeed, to wonder why she had behaved in so melodramatic a fashion. It was not her custom to so far break through the conventions of civilization. But the insults of Daisy had stirred in her that wild negro blood to which she had referred. That this girl who had all should grudge her the simple Christmas present made Anne furious. Yet in spite of her righteous anger she could not help feeling sorry for Daisy. And, after all, the girl's jealousy had some foundation in truth. Anne

had given her no cause, but she could not deny that she loved Giles and that he loved her. To end an impossible situation there was nothing for it but flight.

Next day Anne quite determined to give Mrs. Morley notice, but when she found that Daisy said nothing about her visit, she decided to remain silent. Unless the girl made herself impossible, Anne did not see why she should turn out of a good situation where she was earning excellent wages. Daisy avoided her, and was coldly polite on such occasions as they had to speak. Seeing this, Anne forbore to force her company upon the unhappy girl and attended to her duties.

These were sufficiently pleasant, for the three children adored her. They were not clever, but extremely pretty and gentle in their manners. Mrs. Morley often came to sit and sew in the schoolroom while Anne taught. She was fond of the quiet, calm governess, and prattled to her just as though she were a child herself of the perfections of Mr. Morley and her unhappy early life. For the sake of the children she forbore to mention the name of their father, who from her account had been a sad rascal.

Giles came sometimes to dine, but attended chiefly to Daisy. Anne was content that this should be so, and her rival made the most of the small triumph. Indeed, so attentive was Giles that Daisy came to believe she had been wrong in suspecting he loved the governess. She made no further reference to Anne, but when Miss Denham was present narrowly watched her attitude and that of Ware. Needless to say she saw nothing to awaken her suspicions, for both Giles and Anne were most careful to hide their real feelings. So far the situation was endurable, but it could not continue indefinitely. Anne made up her mind to leave.

On the day before New Year she was wondering what excuse she could make to get away when an incident happened which set her duty plainly before her and did away with all necessity for an excuse. It occurred at breakfast.

The little man was fond of his meals, and enjoyed his breakfast more than any other. He had the most wonderful arrangement for keeping the dishes hot – a rather needless proceeding, as he was invariably punctual. So were Mrs. Morley and Anne, for breakfast being at nine o'clock they had no excuse for being late. Nevertheless, Daisy rarely contrived to be in time, and Morley was much vexed by her persistent unpunctuality. On this occasion she arrived late as usual, but more cheerful. She ever greeted Anne with a certain amount of politeness.

"There's a letter for you," said Morley, "but if you will take my advice you will leave it until breakfast is over. I never read mine until after a meal. Bad news is so apt to spoil one's appetite."

"How do you know the news will be bad?" asked Daisy.

"Most news is," replied Morley, with a shade on his usually merry face. "Debts, duns, and difficulties!" and he looked ruefully at the pile of letters by his plate. "I haven't examined my correspondence yet."

Anne said nothing, as she was thinking of what arrangement she could make to get away. Suddenly she and the others were startled by a cry from Daisy. The girl had opened the letter and was staring at it with a pale face. Anne half rose from her seat, but Mrs. Morley anticipated her, and ran round to put her hand on the girl's shoulder. "Daisy, what is the matter?"

"The – the – letter!" gasped Daisy, with chattering teeth. Then she cast a look full of terror at the astonished Anne. "She will kill me," cried the girl, and fell off the chair in a faint.

Morley hastily snatched up the letter. It was unsigned, and apparently written in an uneducated hand on common paper. He read it out hurriedly, while Anne and Mrs. Morley stood amazed to hear its contents.

"Honored Miss," read Morley slowly, "this is from a well-wisher to say that you must not trust the governess, who will kill you, because of G. W. and the Scarlet Cross."

Anne uttered a cry and sank back into her chair white as the snow out of doors. "The Scarlet Cross," she murmured, "again the Scarlet Cross."

## CHAPTER III

### A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR

Later in the day Mr. Morley called the three women into his library to have a discussion regarding the strange letter and its stranger accusation. Daisy had recovered from her faint, but was still pale and obviously afraid of Anne. The governess appeared perfectly composed, but her white face was as hard as granite. Both Morley and his wife were much disturbed, as was natural, especially as at the moment Anne had refused any explanation. Now Morley was bent on forcing her to speak out and set Daisy's mind at rest. The state of the girl was pitiable.

The library was a large square apartment, with three French windows opening on to a terrace, whence steps led down to a garden laid out in the stiff Dutch style. The room was sombre with oak and heavy red velvet hangings, but rendered more cheerful by books, photographs, and pictures. Morley was fond of reading, and during his ten years' residence at The Elms had accumulated a large number of volumes. Between the bookcases were trophies of arms, mediæval weapons and armor, and barbaric spears from Africa and the South Seas, intermixed with bows and clubs. The floor was of polished oak, with here and there a brilliantly colored Persian praying-mat. The furniture was also of oak, and cushioned in red Morocco leather. Altogether the library gave evidence of a refined taste, and was a cross between a monkish cell and a sybarite's bower.

"Well, Miss Denham," said Morley, his merry face more than a trifle serious, "what have you to say?"

"There is nothing I can say," replied Anne, with composure, "the letter has nothing to do with me."

"My dear," put in Mrs. Morley, much distressed, "you cannot take up this attitude. You know I am your friend, that I have always done my best for you, and for my sake, if not for Daisy's, you must explain."

"She won't – she won't," said Daisy, with an hysterical laugh.

"I would if I could," replied Anne, talking firmly, "but the accusation is ridiculous. Why should I threaten Daisy?"

"Because you love Giles," burst out the girl furiously.

"I do not love Mr. Ware. I said so the other night."

"And you said more than that. You said that you would kill me."

"Miss Denham," cried Morley, greatly shocked, "what is this?"

"A foolish word spoken in a foolish moment," said Anne, realizing that her position was becoming dangerous.

"I think so too," said Mrs. Morley, defending her. "It so happened, Miss Denham, that I overheard you make the speech to Daisy, and I told my husband about it the next morning. We decided to say nothing, thinking – as you say now – that it was simply a foolish speech. But this letter" – she hesitated, then continued quickly, "you must explain this letter."

Anne thought for a moment. "I can't explain it. Some enemy has written it. You know all about me, Mrs. Morley. You read my credentials – you inquired as to my former situations at the Governess Institute where you engaged me. I have nothing to conceal in my life, and certainly I have no idea of harming Daisy. She came to my room and talked nonsense, which made me lose my temper. I said a foolish thing, I admit, but surely knowing me as you do you will acquit me of meaning anything by a few wild words uttered in a hurry and without thought."

"Why did you make use of such an expression?" asked Morley.

"Because I was carried out of myself. I have a strain of negro blood in me, and at times say more than I mean."

"And your negro blood will make you kill me," cried Daisy, with an expression of terror. "I am doomed – doomed!"

"Don't be a fool, child," said Morley roughly.

"She is a trifle hysterical," explained Mrs. Morley, comforting the girl, who was sobbing violently.

"Mr. Morley," said Anne, rising, "I don't know who wrote that letter, or why it should have been written. Mr. Ware and I are friends, nothing more. I am not in love with him, nor is he in love with me. He has paid me no more attention than you have yourself."

"No, that is true enough," replied Morley, "and as Giles is engaged to Daisy I don't think he is the man to pay marked attention to another woman."

"Ah! Giles is all right," cried Daisy angrily, "but she has tempted him."

"I deny that."

"You can deny what you like. It is true, you know it is true."

"Daisy! Daisy!" said Morley persuasively, whereupon she turned on him like a little fury.

"Don't you defend her. You hate me as much as she does. You are a – "

"Stop!" said Mrs. Morley, very pale. "Hold your tongue, Daisy. My husband has treated you in the kindest manner. When your father died you were left penniless. He took you in, and both he and I have treated you like our own child. Ungrateful girl, how can you speak so of those who have befriended you?"

"I do. I shall. You all hate me!" cried Daisy passionately. "I never wanted your help. Giles would have married me long ago but for Mr. Morley. I had no need to live on your charity. I have a hundred a year of my own. You brought that horrid woman down to steal Giles from me, and – "

"Take her away, Elizabeth," said Morley sharply.

"I'll go of my own accord," cried Daisy, retreating from Mrs. Morley; "and I'll ask Giles to marry me at once, and take me from this horrid house. You are a cruel and a wicked man, Mr. Morley, and I hate you – I hate you! As for you" – she turned in a vixenish manner on Anne – "I hope you will be put in gaol some day. If I die you will be hanged – hanged!" And with a stamp of her foot she dashed out of the room, banging the door.

"Hysteria," said Morley, wiping his face, "we must have a doctor to see her."

"Miss Denham," said the wife, who was weeping at the cruel words of the girl, "I ask you if Daisy has ever been treated harshly in my house?"

"No, dear Mrs. Morley, she has always received the greatest kindness both from you and your husband. She is not herself to-day – that cruel letter has upset her. In a short time she will repent of her behavior."

"If she speaks like this to Mrs. Parry, what will happen?" moaned the poor woman, wringing her hands.

"I'll have Mrs. Parry in court for libel if she says anything against us," said Morley fiercely. "The girl is an hysterical idiot. To accuse her best friends of – pshaw! it's not worth taking notice of. But this letter, Miss Denham?"

"I know nothing about it, Mr. Morley."

"Humph! I wonder if Daisy wrote it herself."

"Oliver!" cried Mrs. Morley in amazement.

"Why not? Hysterical girls do queer things at times. I don't suppose Mrs. Parry wrote it, old scandal-monger as she is. It is a strange letter. That Scarlet Cross, for instance." He fixed an inquiring eye on Anne.

"That is the one thing that makes me think Daisy did not write the letter. I fancied myself she might have done it in a moment of hysteria and out of hatred of me, but she could not know anything of the Scarlet Cross. No one in Rickwell could know of that."

"The letter was posted in London – in the General Post Office."

"But why should any one write such a letter about me," said Anne, raising her hands to her forehead, "and the Scarlet Cross? It is very strange."

"What is the Scarlet Cross?" asked Mrs. Morley seriously.

"I know no more than you do," replied Anne earnestly, "save that my father sometimes received letters marked with a red cross and on his watch-chain wore a gold cross enamelled with scarlet."

"Did your father know what the cross meant?" asked Mrs. Morley.

"He must have known, but he never explained the matter to me."

"Perhaps if you asked him now to –"

"My father is dead," she said in a low voice; "he died a year ago in Italy."

"Then this mystery must remain a mystery," said Morley, with a shrug. "Upon my word, I don't like all this. What is to be done?"

"Put the letter into the hands of the police," suggested his wife.

"No," said Morley decisively; "if the police heard the ravings of Daisy, Heaven knows what they would think."

"But, my dear, it is ridiculous," said Mrs. Morley indignantly. "We have always treated Daisy like one of ourselves. We have nothing to conceal. I am very angry at her."

"You should rather pity her," said Anne gently, "for she is a prey to nerves. However, the best thing to be done is for me to leave this place. I shall go after the New Year."

"I'm sure I don't know what the children will do without you," sighed the lady; "they are so fond of you, and I never had any governess I got on better with. What will you do?"

"Get a situation somewhere else," said Anne cheerfully, "abroad if possible; but I have become a bugbear to Daisy, and it is best that I should go."

"I think so too, Miss Denham, although both my wife and I are extremely sorry to lose you."

"You have been good friends to me," said Miss Denham simply, "and my life here has been very pleasant; but it is best I should go," she repeated, "and that letter, will you give me a copy, Mr. Morley?"

"Certainly, but for what reason?"

"I should like to find out who wrote it, and why it was written. It will be a difficult matter, but I am curious to know who this enemy of mine may be."

"Do you think it is an enemy?" asked Mrs. Morley.

Anne nodded. "And an enemy that knows something about my father's life," she said emphatically, "else why was mention made about the Scarlet Cross? But I'll learn the truth somehow, even if I have to employ a detective."

"You had much better leave the matter alone and get another situation, Miss Denham," said Morley sagely. "We will probably hear no more of this, and when you go the matter will fade from Daisy's mind. I'll send her away to the seaside for a week, and have the doctor to see her."

"Dr. Tait shall see her at once," said Mrs. Morley, with more vigor than was usual with her. "But about your going, Miss Denham, I am truly sorry. You have been a good friend to me, and the dear children do you credit. I hope we shall see you again."

"When Daisy is married, not before," replied Anne firmly; "but I will keep you advised of my address."

After some further conversation on this point the two women left the library. Daisy had shut herself in her room, and thither went Mrs. Morley. She managed to sooth the girl, and gave her a sedative which calmed her nerves. When Daisy woke from sleep somewhere about five she expressed herself sorry for her foolish chatter, but still entertained a dread and a hatred of Anne. The governess wisely kept out of the way and made her preparations for departure. As yet the children were not told that they were to lose her. Knowing what their lamentations would be like, Mrs. Morley wisely determined to postpone that information till the eleventh hour.

There was to be a midnight service at the parish church in honor of the New Year, and Anne determined to go. She wanted all the spiritual help possible in her present state of perplexity. The unhappy love that existed between her and Giles, the enmity of Daisy, the anxiety of the anonymous letter – these things worried her not a little. She received permission from Mrs. Morley to go to the midnight service.

"But be careful Daisy does not see you," said she anxiously.

"Is Daisy going also?"

"Yes. Giles is coming to take her in his motor-car."

"I hope she will say nothing to him about the letter."

"I'll see to that. She is much quieter and recognizes how foolish she has been. It will be all right."

Morley was much upset by the state of affairs. But a few days before and life had been all plain sailing, now there was little else but trouble and confusion. His ruddy face was pale, and he had a careworn expression. For the most part of the day he remained in his library and saw no one. Towards the evening he asked his wife not to bring the triplets to the library as usual, as he had to see some one on business. Who it was he refused to say, and Mrs. Morley, having no curiosity, did not press the question.

After dinner the visitor arrived – a tall man muffled in a great-coat against the cold, and wearing a thick white scarf round his throat. He was shown into the library and remained with Mr. Morley till after nine. About that time Anne found occasion to go into the library in search of a book. She had not heard the prohibition of Morley, and did not hesitate to enter without knocking, supposing that no one was within.

Meantime Daisy dressed herself very carefully in expectation of Ware's arrival. He was to take her for a ride in his motor before Church, and then they were to go to the service together. There was plenty of snow on the ground, but the nights were always bright with moonlight. Daisy had a fancy for a moonlight ride, and Giles was willing to humor her. She expected him about ten, and descended shortly after nine to watch for him from the drawing-room window.

Outside it was almost as light as day, and the white sheet of snow threw back a reflection of the moonlight. Daisy gazed eagerly down the avenue, where the leafless trees rocked in the cutting wind. Unexpectedly she saw a tall man come round the corner of the house and walk swiftly down the avenue. She knew from Mrs. Morley that there was a visitor in the library, and wondered why he had elected to leave by the window, as he must have done to come round the house in this way. Being curious, she thought she would tell Mr. Morley of what she had seen, and went in search of him.

At the door of the library she had just laid her hand on the handle when it suddenly opened, and Anne came out. Her face was white and drawn, her eyes were filled with fear, and she passed the astonished girl in a blind and stumbling fashion as though she did not see her. Daisy saw her feebly ascend the stairs, clutching the banisters. Wondering at this, Miss Kent entered the room. Morley was standing by the window – the middle window – looking out. It was open. He started and turned when Daisy entered, and she saw that he was perturbed also.

"What is the matter?" she asked, coming forward.

"Nothing. What should be the matter?"

Morley spoke shortly and not in a pleasant tone. "I thought that Anne, that Miss Denham, looked ill," said Daisy.

"Don't you think you had better leave Miss Denham alone, Daisy, seeing the mischief you have caused? She has been weeping herself blind here."

"Well, that letter –"

"Oh, that letter is rubbish!" interrupted Morley scornfully. "Miss Denham is a simple, kind woman, and you should take no notice of anonymous correspondence. However, she is going away to-morrow. I have just paid her her wages."



"I am glad she is going," said Miss Kent doggedly; "I am afraid of her. You think she is an angel; I don't."

"I don't think anything about her; but I do think you are a very hysterical girl, and have caused a great deal of unnecessary trouble. Miss Denham is not in love with Ware, and it is only your absurd jealousy that would accuse her of such a thing. Besides, this morning you behaved very badly to my wife and myself. You must go away for a time till we can get over your ungrateful words and conduct."

"I am very sorry," said Daisy humbly, "but it was Anne who disturbed me, and that letter. I was afraid."

"Then you admit that we have behaved well?"

"You are my best friends."

"Thank you. And now may I ask what you want?"

"I came to tell you that I am going to church. I thought you were engaged."

"So I was; but my visitor is gone."

"I know; he went out by that window. I saw him going down the avenue. Who is he?"

"A friend of mine. That is all you need to know. Did you think it was some one who had to do with the anonymous letter?"

"No, no!" Daisy seemed to be thoroughly ashamed of herself. "But you must admit that the letter was strange."

"So strange that you had better say nothing about it. Don't mention it to Giles."

"Why not?"

"Because I will find occasion to tell him myself. I at least will be able to explain without showing jealousy of poor Miss Denham."

"I won't say anything," replied Daisy, with a toss of her head, "but you are all mad about Anne Denham. I don't believe she is a good woman. What is the matter with her now? She seems ill."

"For Heaven's sake don't ask me any further questions," said Morley irritably. "What with your conduct of this morning and other things with which you have no concern I am worried out of my life."

Daisy took the hint and walked away. When she got outside the library she came to the conclusion that Morley's visitor was a bailiff, and that was why he had been shown out by the window. Decidedly her guardian was in a bad way financially speaking.

"I shall marry Giles and get away from them all," said the grateful Daisy. "They may be sold up, and my hundred a year will not keep me. What a mercy that Giles is so rich and loves me! No, he does not love me," she said vehemently to herself. "It is that woman. But he is engaged to me, and I'll marry him if only to spite her."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CHURCHYARD

To Daisy that drive in the motor-car was like an exquisite dream. Her frivolous, shallow soul was awed by the vast white waste gleaming mysteriously in the moonlight as the car sped like a bird along the silent roads. There was not a cloud in a sky that shone like tempered steel; and amidst the frosty glitter of innumerable stars the hard moon looked down on an enchanted world. With Giles' hand on the steering gear and Daisy beside him wrapped in a buffalo rug, the machine flew over the pearly whiteness with the skimming swiftness of the magic horse. For the first time in her life Daisy felt what flying was like, and was content to be silent.

Giles was well pleased that the Great Mother should still her restless tongue for the moment. He was doing his duty and the will of his dead father, but his heart ached when he thought of the woman who should be by his side. Oh that they two could undertake this magical journey together, silent and alone in a silent and lonely world. He made no inquiries for Anne, and Daisy said nothing. Only when the car was humming along the homeward road to land them at the church did she open her mouth. The awe had worn off, and she babbled as of old in the very face of this white splendor.

"Anne's going away," she said abruptly.

For the life of him Giles could not help starting, but he managed to control his voice and speak carelessly. "Ah, and how is that?" he asked, busy with the wheel.

"She is going to-morrow. I suppose she is tired of the dull life here."

"I expect she is," replied Ware curtly.

"Are you sorry?"

Giles felt that she was pushing home the point and that it behooved him to be extra careful. "Yes, I am sorry," he said frankly. "Miss Denham is a most interesting woman."

"Does that mean –"

"It means nothing personal, Daisy," he broke in hastily; then to change the subject, "I hope you have enjoyed the ride."

"It is heavenly, Giles. How good of you to take me!"

"My dear, I would do much more for you. When we are married we must tour through England in this way."

"You and I together. How delightful! That is if you will not get tired of me."

"I am not likely to get tired of such a charming little woman."

Then he proceeded to pay her compliments, while his soul sickened at the avidity with which she swallowed them. He asked himself if it would not be better to put an end to this impossible state of things by telling her he was in love with Anne. But when he glanced at the little fragile figure beside him, and noted the delicacy and ethereal look in her face, he felt that it would be brutal to destroy her dream of happiness at the eleventh hour. Of himself he tried to think not at all. So far as he could see there was no happiness for him. He would have to go through life doing his duty. And Anne – he put the thought of her from him with a shudder.

"What is the matter, Giles? Are you cold?" asked Daisy.

"No; I expect a white hare is loping over my grave."

"Ugh! Don't talk of graves," said Daisy, with a nervous expression.

"Not a cheerful subject, I confess," said Giles, smiling, "and here we are in the very thick of them," he added, as the motor slowed down before the lych-gate.

Daisy looked at the innumerable tombstones which thrust themselves up through the snow and shivered. "It's horrible, I think. Fancy being buried there!"

"A beautiful spot in summer. Do you remember what Keats said about one being half in love with death to be buried in so sweet a place?"

"Giles," she cried half hysterically, "don't talk like that. I may be dead and buried before you know that a tragedy has occurred. The cards say that I am to die young."

"Why, Daisy, what is the matter?"

She made no reply. A memory of the anonymous letter and its threat came home vividly to her as she stepped inside the churchyard. Who knew but what within a few days she might be borne through that self-same gate in her coffin? However, she had promised to say nothing about the letter, and fearful lest she should let slip some remark to arouse the suspicions of Giles, she flew up the path.

Already the village folk were thronging to the midnight service. The bells were ringing with a musical chime, and the painted windows of the church glittered with rainbow hues. The organist was playing some Christmas carol, and the waves of sound rolled out solemnly on the still air. With salutation and curtesy the villagers passed by the young squire. He waited to hand over his car to his servant, who came up at the moment, breathless with haste. "Shall I wait for you, sir?"

"No, take the car to the inn, and make yourself comfortable. In an hour you can return."

Nothing loth to get indoors and out of the bitter cold, the man drove the machine, humming like a top, down the road. The sky was now clouding over, and a wind was getting up. As Giles walked into the church he thought there was every promise of a storm, and wondered that it should labor up so rapidly considering the previous calm of the night. However, he did not think further on the matter, but when within looked around for Daisy. She was at the lower end of the church staring not at the altar now glittering with candles, but at the figure of a woman some distance away who was kneeling with her face hidden in her hands. With a thrill Giles recognized Anne, and fearful lest Daisy should be jealous did he remain in her vicinity, he made his way up to his own pew, which was in the lady chapel near the altar. Here he took his seat and strove to forget both the woman he loved and the woman he did not love. But it was difficult for him to render his mind a blank on this subject.

The organ had been silent for some time, but it now recommenced its low-breathed music. Then the choir came slowly up the aisle singing lustily a Christmas hymn. The vicar, severe and ascetic, followed, his eyes bent on the ground. When the service commenced Giles tried to pay attention, but found it almost impossible to prevent his thoughts wandering towards the two women. He tried to see them, but pillars intervened, and he could not catch a glimpse of either. But his gaze fell on the tall figure of a man who was standing at the lower end of the church near the door. He was evidently a stranger, for his eyes wandered inquisitively round the church. In a heavy great-coat and with a white scarf round his throat, he was well protected against the cold. Giles noted his thin face, his short red beard, and his large black eyes. His age was probably something over fifty, and he looked ill, worried, and worn. Wondering who he was and what brought him to such an out-of-the-way place as Rickwell at such a time, Giles settled himself comfortably in his seat to hear the sermon.

The vicar was not a particularly original preacher. He discoursed platitudes about the coming year and the duties it entailed on his congregation. Owing to the length of the sermon and the lateness of the hour, the people yawned and turned uneasily in their seats. But no one ventured to leave the church, although the sermon lasted close on an hour. It seemed as though the preacher would never leave off insisting on the same things over and over again. He repeated himself twice and thrice, and interspersed his common-place English with the lordly roll of biblical texts. But for his position, Giles would have gone away. It was long over the hour, and he knew that his servant would be waiting in the cold. When he stood up for the concluding hymn he craned his head round a pillar to see Daisy. She had vanished, and he thought that like himself she had grown weary of the sermon, but more fortunate than he, she had been able to slip away. Anne's place he could not see and did not know whether she was absent or present.

Giles wondered for one delicious moment if he could see her before she left the church. Daisy, evidently wearied by the sermon, had gone home, there was no one to spy upon him, and he might

be able to have Anne all to himself for a time. He could then ask her why she was going, and perhaps force her to confess that she loved him. But even as he thought his conscience rebuked him for his treachery to Daisy. He fortified himself with good resolutions, and resolved not to leave his seat until the congregation had dispersed. Thus he would not be tempted by the sight of Anne.

The benediction was given, the choir retired with a last musical "Amen," and the worshippers departed. But Giles remained in his seat, kneeling and with his face hidden. He was praying for a strength he sorely needed to enable him to forget Anne and to remain faithful to the woman whom his father had selected to be his wife. Not until the music of the organ ceased and the verger came to extinguish the altar candles did Giles venture to go. But by this time he thought Anne would surely be well on her homeward way. He would return to his own place as fast as his motor could take him, and thus would avoid temptation. At the present moment he could not trust to his emotions.

Outside the expected storm had come on, and snow was falling thickly from a black sky. The light at the lych-gate twinkled feebly, and Giles groped his way down the almost obliterated pathway quite alone, for every one else had departed. He reached the gate quite expecting to find his motor, but to his surprise it was not there. Not a soul was in sight, and the snow was falling like meal.

Giles fancied that his servant had dropped asleep in the inn or had forgotten the appointed hour. In his heart he could not blame the man, for the weather was arctic in its severity. However, he determined to wend his way to the inn and reprove him for his negligence. Stepping out of the gate he began to walk against the driving snow with bent head, when he ran into the arms of a man who was running hard. In the light of the lamp over the gate he recognized him as Trim, his servant.

"Beg pardon, sir, I could not get here any sooner. The car – " The man stopped and stared round in amazement. "Why, sir, where's the machine?" he asked, with astonishment.

"In your charge, I suppose," replied Ware angrily. "Why were you not here at the time I appointed?"

"I was, begging your pardon, sir," said Trim hotly; "but the lady told me you had gone to see Miss Kent back to The Elms and that you wanted to see me. I left the car here in charge of the lady and ran all the way to The Elms; but they tell me there that Miss Daisy hasn't arrived and that nothing has been seen of you, sir."

Ware listened to this explanation with surprise. "I sent no such message," he said; "and this lady, who was she?"

"Why, Miss Denham, sir. She said she would look after the car till I came back, and knowing as she was a friend of yours, sir, I thought it was all right." Trim stared all round him. "She's taken the car away, I see, sir."

The matter puzzled Giles. He could not understand why Anne should have behaved in such a manner, and still less could he understand why the car should have disappeared. He knew well that she could drive a motor, for he had taught her himself; but that she should thus take possession of his property and get rid of his man in so sly a way perplexed and annoyed him. He and Trim stood amidst the falling snow, staring at one another, almost too surprised to speak.

Suddenly they heard a loud cry of fear, and a moment afterward an urchin – one of the choir lads – came tearing down the path as though pursued by a legion of fiends. Giles caught him by the collar as he ran panting and white-faced past him.

"What's the matter?" he asked harshly. "Why did you cry out like that? Where are you going?"

"To mother. Oh, let me go!" wailed the lad. "I see her lying on the grave. I'm frightened. Mother! mother!"

"Saw who lying on the grave?"

"I don't know. A lady. Her face is down in the snow, and she is bleeding. I dropped the lantern mother gave me and scudded, sir. Do let me go! I never did it!"

"Did what?" Giles in his nervous agitation shook the boy.

"Killed her! I didn't! She's lying on Mr. Kent's grave, and I don't know who she is."

He gave another cry for his mother and tried to get away, but Giles, followed by Trim, led him up the path. "Take me to the grave," he said in a low voice.

"I won't!" yelled the lad, and tearing his jacket in his eagerness to escape, he scampered past Trim and out of the gate like a frightened hare. Giles stopped for a moment to wipe his perspiring forehead and pass his tongue over his dry lips, then he made a sign to Trim to follow, and walked rapidly in the direction of Mr. Kent's grave. He dreaded what he should find there, and his heart beat like a sledge-hammer.

The grave was at the back of the church, and the choir boy had evidently passed it when trying to take a short cut to his mother's cottage over the hedge. The snow was falling so thickly and the night was so dark that Giles wondered how the lad could have seen any one on the grave. Then he remembered that the lad had spoken of a lantern. During a lull in the wind he lighted a match, and by the blue glare he saw the lantern almost at his feet, where the boy had dropped it in his precipitate flight. Hastily picking this up, he lighted the candle with shaking fingers and closed the glass. A moment later, and he was striding towards the grave with the lantern casting a large circle of light before him.

In the ring of that pale illumination he saw the tall tombstone, and beneath it the figure of a woman lying face downward on the snow. Trim gave an exclamation of astonishment, but Giles set his mouth and suppressed all signs of emotion. He wondered if the figure was that of Anne or of Daisy, and whether the woman, whomsoever she was, was dead or alive. Suddenly he started back with horror. From a wound under the left shoulder-blade a crimson stream had welled forth, and the snow was stained with a brilliant red. The staring eyes of the groom looked over his shoulder as he turned the body face upwards. Then Giles uttered a cry. Here was Daisy Kent lying dead – murdered – on her father's grave!

## CHAPTER V

### AFTERWARDS

Never before had any event created such a sensation in the village of Rickwell. From the choir boy and his mother the news quickly spread. Also Giles had to call in the aid of the rector to have the body of the unfortunate girl carried to The Elms. In a short time the churchyard was filled with wondering people, and quite a cortege escorted the corpse. It was like the rehearsal of a funeral procession.

Mrs. Morley had gone to bed, thinking the two girls might be reconciled in church and come home together. Her husband, not so sanguine, had remained in the library till after midnight, ready to play the part of peace-maker should any fracas occur. He appeared in the hall when poor dead Daisy was carried through the door, and stared in surprise at the spectacle.

"Great heavens!" he cried, coming forward, his ruddy face pale with sudden emotion. "What is all this?"

Giles took upon himself the office of spokesman, which the rector, remembering that he had been engaged to the deceased, tacitly delegated to him.

"It's poor Daisy," he said hoarsely. "She has been – "

"Murdered! No. Don't say murdered!"

"Yes, we found her lying on her father's grave, dead; a knife-thrust under the left shoulder-blade. She must have died almost instantaneously."

"Dead!" muttered Morley, ghastly white. And he approached to take the handkerchief from the dead face. "Dead!" he repeated, replacing it. Then he looked at the haggard face of Ware, at the silent group of men and the startled women standing in the doorway, where the rector was keeping them back.

"Where is her murderess?" he asked sharply.

"Murderess!" repeated Giles angrily. "What do you mean?"

"Mean? Why, that Miss Denham has done this, and – "

"You are mad to say such a thing."

"I'll tax her with it to her face. Where is she? Not at home, for I have been waiting to see her."

"She's run way on Mr. Ware's motor-car," volunteered Trim, only to be clutched violently by his master.

"Don't say that, you fool. You can't be sure of that, Mr. Morley," he added, turning to the scared man. "Make no remark about this until we can have a quiet talk about it."

"But I say – "

"You can say it to the police officer in the morning."

"She'll have escaped by that time," whispered Trim to his master.

Giles saw the danger of Anne – supposing her to be guilty, as the groom thought her – and made up his mind at once.

"Go home, Trim, and saddle a couple of horses. We'll follow the track of the car, and when we find it – "

"You'll never find it," put in Morley, who had been listening with all his ears. "The falling snow must have obliterated any wheel-marks by this time. When did this occur?"

"I don't know," replied Giles coldly. "And instead of chattering there, you had better have the – the – " he stammered, "the body taken into some room and attended to. Poor Daisy," he sighed, "what an end to your bright young life!"

Here Mr. Drake, the rector, thought it necessary to assert himself, and waved aside the throng.

"All you men and women, go to your homes," he said. "Nothing can be done to-night, and – "

"The car might be followed," said a voice.

"And the car will be followed," said Giles, pushing his way to the door. "Come, Trim, we'll ride at once. Did no one see the car pass out of the village?"

No one had seen it, as most of the villagers had been inside the church and the rest in their homes.

There was some talk and suggestions, but Ware, with a nod to Morley, took a hasty departure and disappeared into the stormy night.

"He might track the car," said the rector.

"He won't," replied Morley bitterly; "he'll lead Trim on a wrong scent. He liked Miss Denham too well to let her drop into the hands of the police."

"Then you really think she did it?" asked Drake, horrified.

"I am perfectly certain," was the reply. "Come into the library, and I'll show you what evidence I have."

Meantime the hall was cleared of the eager listeners, and all present went to their homes less to sleep than to argue as to the guilt or innocence of Anne. The body of the girl was taken to her bedroom, and poor scared Mrs. Morley, roused from her bed to face this tragedy, did all that was needful, assisted by two old women, who remained behind to offer their services. This was all that could be done till dawn, and Mrs. Morley, thinking of the dead Daisy and the missing Anne, wept till the first streaks of daylight. As yet her limited understanding could not grasp the horror of the thing.

Morley conducted Mr. Drake to the library. He related how his wife had heard Anne threaten to kill Daisy, produced the anonymous letter, detailed Daisy's accusation that the governess was in love with Ware, and finally pointed out the damning fact of the flight. The rector was quite convinced by this reasoning that Anne was guilty.

"And now I come to think of it," he said, stroking his shaven chin, "Miss Kent was in church."

"Yes, so was Miss Denham; but I don't think they sat together, as they were on the worst possible terms. Did you see Daisy?"

Drake nodded. "She went out when I was half-way through my sermon. I remember that I felt a little annoyed that she should leave when I was doing my best to inculcate good habits for the year in my congregation. She must have gone to pray at her father's grave, and there – " Drake stopped with sudden terror in his eyes.

"And there Miss Denham stabbed her. Ware said the wound was beneath the left shoulder-blade. That looks as though Daisy was struck from behind. I can see it all," cried Morley, with a shudder. "The poor child praying by her father's grave, and the stealthy approach of that woman armed with a – "

"Ah!" interposed Drake, "there you are. We have not yet found the weapon; and after all, Morley, the evidence is purely circumstantial. We do not know for certain that Miss Denham is the guilty person."

"Why did she fly, then?" demanded Morley fiercely. "If she were innocent – if she had not left the church until the others did – she would have returned, and now been in bed. But from what Trim says she fled on Ware's motor-car."

"Humph! She can't get far on that. Such a night, too."

And the rector walked to the window to watch the still falling snow.

Morley shook his head. "Miss Denham knows the country for miles and miles, and Ware taught her how to drive the motor. I shouldn't be surprised if she got away after all, in spite of the weather."

Drake looked uneasy, and placed himself before the fire with a shiver. He rather admired Miss Denham, and could not yet bring himself to believe that she was guilty. Even if she were, he cherished a secret hope that she might escape the police. It was terrible to think that one woman should be dead, but it was more awful to look forward to the trial, condemnation, and hanging of the other.

"I blame Ware a good deal for this," continued Morley gloomily. "He openly admired Miss Denham, and encouraged her to flirt with him. A rash thing to do to one who has negro blood in her veins. I expect passion carried her beyond herself."

"How do you know she has negro blood?"

"She said so herself."

"Did you know that when you engaged her?"

"I never engaged her at all, Drake. My wife did. I must say that Miss Denham's credentials were good. She had been governess in an Italian family, and ha! – " He stopped suddenly, and started up. "In Italy she might have procured a stiletto. From the nature of the wound – which is small and deep – I should think it was inflicted with such a weapon."

"How do you know that the wound is small and deep?"

"My wife told me when she came to the door that time. You did not hear her. She says the wound is quite small. In that case it must be deep, or the death would not have occurred so suddenly."

Drake shook his head. "We don't know that it did occur suddenly."

Morley contradicted this angrily. "If Daisy had not died at once she would have had time to shriek, and the cry would have been heard in the church."

"I doubt it. The people were deeply interested in my sermon."

The other man shrugged his shoulders. It was scarcely worth while arguing this point with the rector. He relapsed into a brown study, until roused to reply to a question asked by his guest.

"Have you ever seen a stiletto?" asked Drake.

"I have one here," replied Morley, running his eye along the wall; "one that I got in Italy myself. It was said to have belonged to Lucrezia Borgia. I wonder where it is."

"Rather difficult to discover it amidst all these weapons, Mr. Morley. Good heavens! what is the matter?"

He might well ask. His host was clutching his arm in a vice-like hold, and was pointing to a certain part of the wall whereon hung a pair of ancient pistols, a crusader's shield, and an old helmet.

"The stiletto was there. It is gone!" gasped Morley.

"Impossible. Who can have taken it?"

"Miss Denham! Miss Denham! Oh, and you believe her to be innocent!" cried the other. "She came into this very room at nine o'clock, or a little after. I was outside on the terrace seeing a visitor off. She was alone in the room for a time. She must have taken the weapon."

"No, no; why should she have?"

"Because she intended to murder my poor Daisy. It was all arranged in her black heart. Drake," he added solemnly, "I have done my best to believe that woman innocent. I defended her against Daisy, and my wife defended her also. We tried to believe that she had no ill intention, and see – see what comes of it. She steals the stiletto, and kills the child in the most brutal manner. I swear to hunt her down. I swear – !"

The rector caught down the uplifted hand which Morley was raising to the heavens. "Be yourself," he said sternly; "there is no need for a man to call upon God to witness a blood-thirsty oath. If the woman is guilty, let her be punished. But give her the benefit of the doubt. Appearances are against her, I admit. All the same, she may be able to prove her innocence."

"You might as well talk to the wind as to me. She is a murderess; I'll do my best to have her hanged."

Morley spoke with such vehemence that Drake looked closely at him. He wondered if the man had any grudge against Anne Denham that he spoke of her with such bitterness. Certainly her crime was a terrible one, and she deserved to be condemned. But it would only be fair that she should be first tried. Morley, on the contrary, had already judged her, without waiting to hear what she had to say in her own favor.



"Well, Mr. Morley, there is nothing more to be said," he remarked coldly, for he disliked this melodrama; "we must wait till the police come in the morning. Meanwhile I shall go to my home and get some sleep."

"I can't sleep with that in the house," replied Morley, abruptly rising; "I'll go with you."

"Where?"

"To the churchyard – to the grave. I intend to look for the weapon. It may have been left there – tossed aside by the assassin after the crime."

"But the night is dark – the snow is falling. You will not be able to do anything. Be advised, and –"

"No. I'll come with you now. If I find nothing, it is all the better for her. If I do –" He shook his hand again fiercely.

Drake argued no longer, seeing that the man's brain was in such a state that it was best to humor him. They went out together, but at the church-gate Drake excused himself and retired to his home. He had no wish to see Morley groping amongst the graves like a ghost. Pausing until the little man disappeared into the gloom, the rector went to his house, wondering at the sudden change in Morley's character. He had been a light-hearted and rather frivolous creature; fond of gaiety and overflowing with the milk of human kindness. Now he was fierce and savage enough for a Caliban. "He must have loved that poor girl very dearly," sighed Drake, "but I can't believe that such a charming woman as Miss Denham committed so cruel a crime. There is some mystery about this," and in this last speech he was right. There was a mystery about the death, and a much deeper one than a shallow man like the rector could fathom.

All through the long night Mrs. Morley watched by the dead. She had placed candles on either side of the bed, and laid a cross on the poor child's breast. Drake was quite shocked when he saw this Papistical arrangement. But it afterwards came out that Mrs. Morley had been educated in a convent, and had imbibed certain notions of the Romish ritual for the dead that, her memory reviving, made her act thus, in spite of her openly confessed belief in the communion of the English Church. While she was thus sitting and weeping, Morley looked in. He was wild and haggard, but in his eyes glared a triumphant expression which terrified his wife. She did not dare to move. He crossed the room, and looked at the body. "You shall be avenged, my dear," he said solemnly, and before Mrs. Morley could recover from her surprise and denounce this ill-chosen moment for a visit, he wheeled round and disappeared.

He did not retire either, no more did the servants, who were collected in the kitchen steadying their nerves with tea. So it happened that when Giles, weary, wet, and worn, rode up to the door in the morning on a jaded beast, he was met by Morley.

"Have you caught her?" asked the man.

Giles dismounted and threw the reins to a groom. "No. Trim went one way and I another. Where he is I don't know, but my horse gave in, and I returned." He entered the house. "Where is the body?" he asked.

"Up in the room it occupied during life," said Morley; "but come into the library, I have something to show you."

Ware followed and sank wearily into a chair. He could scarcely keep his eyes open. Nevertheless he started up wide awake when his host spoke. "Miss Denham killed Daisy," said Morley. "She took a stiletto from the wall yonder, and here it is." He produced it with a dramatic wave.

"Where did you find it?"

"Beside the grave – on the spot of the murder."

## CHAPTER VI

### THE CASE AGAINST ANNE

The contradictory qualities of Mrs. Parry's nature came out strongly in connection with the Rickwell tragedy. When Miss Denham was prosperous the old woman had nothing but bad to say of her, now that she was a fugitive and generally credited with a crime, Mrs. Parry stood up for her stoutly. She made herself acquainted with all details, and delivered her verdict to Mrs. Morley, on whom she called for the express purpose of giving her opinion.

"I never liked the woman," she said impressively, "she was artful and frivolous; and to gain admiration behaved in a brazen way of which I thoroughly disapproved. All the same, I do not believe she killed the girl."

"But the evidence is strongly against her," expostulated Mrs. Morley.

"And how many people have been hanged on evidence which has afterwards been proved incorrect?" retorted Mrs. Parry. "I don't care how certain they are of her guilt. In my opinion she is an innocent woman. I am glad she has escaped."

"I am not sorry myself," sighed the other. "I was fond of Anne, for she had many good points. But Mr. Steel says –"

"Who is Mr. Steel?"

"The detective who has charge of the case."

"I thought the police from Chelmsford had it in hand."

"Of course, Mr. Morley sent for the police the morning after poor Daisy's death. That is three days ago. To-morrow the inquest is to be held. I suppose they will bring a verdict against poor Miss Denham."

"Ha!" said Mrs. Parry, rubbing her nose, "and my greengrocer is on the jury. Much he knows about the matter. But this Steel creature. Where does he come from?"

"Mr. Morley sent to London for him. He has a private inquiry office, I believe."

"No such thing," contradicted Mrs. Parry, "he is from Scotland Yard. A genuine detective – none of your makeshifts."

"I thought you knew nothing about him?"

"Nor did I till this minute. But I now remember seeing his name in connection with the theft of Lady Summersdale's diamonds. He caught the thief in a very clever way. Steel – Martin Steel, I remember now. So he has the case in hand. Humph! He won't accuse Anne Denham, you may be sure of that. He's too clever."

"But he is convinced of her guilt," said the other triumphantly.

"Then the man's a fool. I'll see him myself."

Mrs. Parry did so the very next day after the inquest had been held and the verdict given. She possessed a small, neat cottage on the outskirts of Rickwell, standing some distance back from the high road. Seated at her drawing-room window, she could see all those who came or went, and thus kept a watch over the morals of the village. This window was called "Mrs. Parry's eye," and everyone sneaked past it in constant dread of the terrible old lady who looked through it. Beyond Mrs. Parry's cottage were the houses of the gentry and the church; therefore she knew that Steel would pass her house on the way to The Elms, where he would doubtless go to report himself to Morley. To be sure Morley was to be at the inquest, but Mrs. Parry took no account of that. He and the detective would certainly return to The Elms to compare notes.

Also there was another chance. Steel might go on to see Ware at his place, which was a mile beyond the village. Giles had caught a cold after his midnight ride and search for the missing motor, and since then had been confined to his bed. His deposition had been taken down in writing, for the

benefit of the jury, as he could not be present himself. Since he was deeply interested in the matter, Steel would probably go and tell him about the inquest. Mrs. Parry therefore posted herself at the window about twelve and waited for the detective.

At half-past twelve she saw him come along, having on the previous day made herself acquainted with his personality. He was a dapper pert little man, neat in his dress, and suave in his manners. Not at all like the detective of fiction as known to Mrs. Parry. There was no solemnity or hint of mystery about Mr. Steel. He would pass unnoticed in a crowd, and no one would take him for a bloodhound of the law. He did not even possess the indispensable eagle eye, nor did he utter opinions with the air of an oracle. In fact, when Mrs. Parry captured him and lured him into her parlor, she was exceedingly disappointed with his appearance. "No one would even take you for a detective," said she brusquely, whereat Steel laughed cheerily.

"All the better for me, ma'am. Folk speak more freely when they don't know my business. But you will excuse me," he added, glancing at his watch, "I am in a hurry. You say you know something about this matter?"

It was on this pretence that Mrs. Parry had got him into her house, else he would not have wasted his time on her. She had therefore to make good her words, but had not the slightest chance of doing so.

"I know that Anne Denham is innocent," was all that she could say, but said it with the air of one who settles a difficult matter once and for all.

"On what grounds, ma'am?"

"On no grounds, save those of my own common sense."

"You have no evidence to – ?"

"I have the evidence of my own eyes. You haven't seen the woman. I have. She is not the kind of person who would act so."

"The jury take a different view," said Steel dryly. "They have brought in a verdict of wilful murder against her."

"Fools! But what can you expect from a parcel of tradesmen? I wish to hear on what grounds they made such idiots of themselves."

Steel was somewhat taken aback by this coolness. "You must really excuse me," said he, rising, "but I have to see Mr. Ware."

"All in good time, Steel," said the old lady coolly. "You might do worse than spend an hour with me. There is precious little going on in this parish I don't know of. I might be able to help you in your search."

"After this woman?" Steel shook his head. "I don't think so. I expect she has escaped to foreign parts."

"Oh, I know all about that. I made Trim tell me. You know Trim, of course. He was a groom once."

"Isn't he a groom now?"

"Well" – Mrs. Parry rubbed her nose – "you might call him an engineer. When Ware started a motor-car Trim refused to let anyone else attend to his young master but himself. He was the servant of old Ware, and thinks it is his duty to look after the son – not but what it's needed," added Mrs. Parry spitefully; "but Trim learned how to work the car, and so he is what you might call an engineer."

"All very interesting ma'am, but I have an appointment."

"It will keep," replied Mrs. Parry suavely. "You had better wait, Steel. I have something to show you."

"In connection with the case?"

"In connection with Miss Denham."

"What is it? Show it to me."

"All in good time, Steel. I must first know what you think of the matter."

"I think that this woman is guilty."

"Oh, you do, do you. Humph! And I thought you clever. How easily one can be deceived! However, you can sit down and tell me your grounds for this preposterous belief."

Steel hesitated. In all his career – and it had been a varied one – he had never met before with anyone like this determined old dame. She took possession of him in the calmest way, and was evidently bent upon pumping him dry before he left the house. As a rule Steel was not a man to be pumped, but after some reflection he concluded that it was just as well to use a sprat to catch a mackerel. In plain English, he determined, with reservations, to gratify Mrs. Parry's curiosity, so that he might get a sight of what she had to show him. If he were reticent, she would show him nothing; whereas if he told her all about the evidence at the inquest – and that was public property – she would certainly open her mind to him. Moreover, Steel knew the value of having a gossip like Mrs. Parry to aid him in gaining knowledge of the neighborhood. Finally, he saw that she was a shrewd, matter-of-fact old person, and for the sake of making his work easy it would be as well to conciliate her. He therefore sat down with a cheerful air, and prepared himself for an interesting conversation.

"I shall be perfectly candid with you," said he, taking out his notes. "These are the memoranda I made at the inquest."

"Humph! You have a bad memory I see. I," said Mrs. Parry, with emphasis, "I carry all I know in my head. Go on."

Steel detailed the facts of the case. He related the threat of Anne against Daisy overheard by Mrs. Morley; read out a copy of the anonymous letter; emphasized the presence of Anne in the library for the few minutes Morley was absent, when she would have had time to secure the stiletto; and explained how Morley had found the very weapon near the scene of the crime. Then he continued to relate what took place in church during the midnight service.

"Martha James," said he, "was sitting not far from Miss Kent. The corner was rather dark –"

"The whole church is badly lighted," interrupted Mrs. Parry. "I never could bear smelly kerosene lamps."

"The corner was dark," resumed Steel patiently, "and Martha, as she says, having a headache, was rather inattentive to the sermon. She saw a man near the door – a tall man, with a great-coat and a white scarf. She couldn't see his face plainly. He slipped along the wall during the sermon, when the attention of everyone was fixed on the preacher, and – as Martha saw – slipped a scrap of paper into the hand of Miss Kent. She started, and bending towards a near lamp, read the paper."

"Did anyone else see her read it?"

"No. She placed the paper in her prayer-book, and so contrived to read it without exciting suspicion. Martha saw the action, because she was well placed for observation."

"And couldn't mind her own business. I know Martha James. Go on."

"After a few minutes Miss Kent seemed to grow faint, and slipped out of the church. Another witness – Samuel Gibbs – says that as she brushed past him she murmured that she felt unwell. However, she went out."

"And the tall man also?"

"No. He remained for another ten minutes. Martha James watched him, because she could not think why he did not follow Miss Kent after giving her the paper."

"Of course, Martha thought of something bad," sniffed Mrs. Parry; "no doubt she believed that the two had arranged to meet. So the tall man went out ten minutes afterwards. What about Anne?"

"She was a few pews behind, and apparently inattentive, but a small girl called Cissy Jinks –"

"A most precocious child," interpolated the lady.

"She is smart," admitted Steel. "Well, she declares that Miss Denham was watching the tall man all the time. Whether she saw him give the paper to Miss Kent no one seems to know; I think myself she must have done so, if she was as watchful as Cissy Jinks declares. Moreover, she followed the tall man when he went out."

"Immediately?"

"Five minutes afterwards."

"Ha! Then it was a quarter of an hour before she followed Daisy. Humph! Didn't Trim see them come out of the church?"

"The groom? No, he was at the lych-gate with the car, and the snow was falling fast; besides, the night was so dark that he could see nothing. The first intimation he had of Miss Denham was when she came through the lych-gate to tell him that his master was with Miss Kent on the way to The Elms and wished to see him. Trim followed, and left her in charge of the car. When he was gone she went off, leaving the body of the girl behind her. The case is dead against her."

"As you make it out, it certainly is," said Mrs. Parry scathingly. "But what about the tall man – what became of him?"

"He has vanished, and no one seems to know anything about him."

"Ha!" said the old lady, with satisfaction; "well, I can enlighten you on that point. He was the man who called to see Mr. Morley, and who left just before Anne entered the library."

"Are you sure Morley said nothing about that?"

"Morley can hold his tongue when necessary," said the old lady dryly. "Yes, that was the man. The footman at The Elms told me that Mr. Morley's visitor wore a great-coat and a white scarf."

"The same dress," murmured Steel, "and the man was afterwards in church. He passed a note and went out apparently to see Miss Kent. I must question Mr. Morley about him. I wonder if he went away in the motor also."

"Of course he did," replied Mrs. Parry calmly. "Anne was watching him, according to Cissy Jinks, and she followed him five minutes later. It would seem that she knew him, and after he killed Daisy helped him to escape."

"What do you say," asked Steel, wrinkling his brows, "that this man killed Miss Kent?"

"The evidence is nearly as strong against him as against Anne. He was in the library also and might have obtained the stiletto. It was he who lured Daisy out of the church. He was five minutes absent before Anne followed – quite long enough for him to kill the poor girl."

"It sounds feasible, I admit," said the detective thoughtfully; "but even if this is true, it incriminates Miss Anne. She helped him to escape, according to your theory. She must, therefore, have known about the murder, and that makes her an accessory after the fact. In any case she should be arrested."

"But not hanged," insisted Mrs. Parry. "I am sure she did not kill the girl. As for the man, she had a strong reason to get him out of the way, but that does not say she knew of the crime."

"I don't see what other reason she could have had," said Steel. "I daresay you are right, and that this stranger did go with Miss Denham on the car. What a pity no one saw them!"

"Did no one see the car?"

"No, it was found overturned in a hedge, near Tilbury."

"I know," said Mrs. Parry, not liking to have her omniscience questioned; "Trim told me. He came on the car by chance. It was quite cold – the furnace was extinguished. It must have been abandoned for some time when he came across it. I wonder where the pair went then."

"You seem certain that the stranger was with Miss Denham."

"Yes, I am quite satisfied on that point. Tilbury – ha! they were making for Tilbury. Did you inquire there?"

Steel nodded. "I could find no trace of them. No one saw them, or rather her, for I asked only after Miss Denham. It is my opinion that they must have got on board some ship, and have escaped to foreign parts. I could not learn of any ship having left that night, though. Well, that is all the evidence, Mrs. Parry, and you can see for yourself that the case against Miss Denham is almost conclusive."

"All the same, I believe she is innocent," insisted the old lady; "it was the man who committed the crime. Ask Morley about him."

"Do you think he knows anything?"

"Not of the murder; but he must know the man's name. And now as you have been so frank with me I'll show you what I promised. Do you remember the anonymous letter and the reference to the Scarlet Cross?"

"Yes. Miss Denham said that her father – who is now dead – wore a red-enamelled cross on his watch-chain."

"I know. Mrs. Morley told me so. Now see here." Mrs. Parry opened her left hand, which for some time she had kept clenched. In her palm lay a small gold cross enamelled red.

"Where did you get that?" asked Steel, astounded.

"Mrs. Bates, the pew-opener, found it in the church and brought it to me. It was found near the spot where the stranger stood."

"What?" Steel started to his feet.

"Ah, you are beginning to see now!" said the old lady. "Yes, Steel, you may well look. Anne is innocent. On the evidence of this cross I believe that her father is not dead. He was the stranger; he killed Daisy, and because he was her father Anne aided him to escape."

## CHAPTER VII

### OLIVER MORLEY

In due time the body of Daisy Kent was buried. Her remains were laid by those of her father in the very churchyard about which she had complained to Giles a short time before the tragedy of her death. Ware being still ill, did not attend the funeral, but a large concourse of people from all parts of the county followed the coffin to the grave.

Morley was the chief mourner, and looked haggard, as was natural. Poor Mrs. Morley remained at home and wept. She did little else but weep in those days, poor soul!

When Mr. Drake had finished the service, and the grave was filled up, the crowd dispersed. There was a great deal of talk about the untimely death of the girl and the chances of her murderess being caught. Everyone believed that Anne was guilty; but as Steel had kept his own counsel and Mrs. Parry held her tongue, no mention was made of the tall man.

The chatter of Cissy Jinks and Martha Gibbs certainly seemed to inculcate him in the matter, but only the villagers talked of this especial point. It never reached the ears of the reporters, and did not get into the papers. But the journals gave a good deal of space to the affair, and hinted that it was what the French call "un crime passionnal." Still, no paper was daring enough to hint at Giles and his presumed connection with the tragedy. It was merely stated that he had been engaged to the deceased girl, and felt her death so deeply, as was natural, that he had taken to his bed. Of course, this was an embellishment of facts, as Ware was simply laid up with an attack of pneumonia. But for the benefit of the public the journalists ascribed it to romantic and undying love. Giles, who was a matter-of-fact young Englishman, did not see these descriptions, or he would have been much disgusted at the sickly sentimentality.

Meantime no news was heard of Anne. It was not known that the tall stranger had been with her, for several people had seen the car passing on its way to Tilbury. It was a lucky thought that had made Trim take that particular direction, and merely by chance that he had stumbled on the motor overturned in a hedge. Evidently an accident had occurred, but no one was near at the time, as it took place some little distance from Tilbury and in a lonely part. But it was conjectured that the two occupants had proceeded on foot to Tilbury. A boatman was found who related that he had taken a lady and gentleman across to Gravesend, and that the gentleman walked a trifle lame. They landed on the Gravesend shore, and here the boatman lost sight of them. It was the lady who paid his fare, and he said that she appeared to be quite calm. He did not see the face of the man, but described that of Anne and her dress also. There was no doubt but what she was the fugitive.

However, here the trail ended. Once in Gravesend, and all trace of the pair was lost. Steel made inquiries everywhere, but without success. The two might have got away in a ship, but this he could not learn. The night was foggy and dark, and no ship had gone out of the river, according to the boatmen. Steel could discover nothing, and resolved to throw up the case. But at the eleventh hour he stumbled on a clue, and followed it up. The result of his inquiries made him return at once to Rickwell, where he sought out Mr. Morley.

The little man had sent his wife and family away from The Elms, as the atmosphere of the house was melancholy in the extreme. Mrs. Morley, not averse to more cheerful surroundings, elected to go to Brighton with the triplets, and took two servants with her. Morley remained behind with a reduced staff, and promised to join her later. He desired to wait until he could see the detective. His wish was speedily gratified, for three days after the departure of his wife Steel made his appearance. Morley received him in the library.

"How do you do, sir?" said the detective, as they shook hands. "I am glad to see that you are looking better."

"I am getting over the shock," replied the other, "now that the poor child is buried; there is no use mourning further. I have sent my wife and family to Brighton and propose to follow myself in a day or so."

"I am lucky to have caught you, then?"

"What? Have you found any clue?"

"I think so. It is connected with the Scarlet Cross."

Morley, who was warming his hands over the fire, looked round eagerly, and his eyes flashed.

"I thought there was something in that reference. You remember the letter, Steel?"

"Yes. And I showed it to Mrs. Parry."

"To that meddlesome old woman. Why?"

"It's too long a matter to go into. But it was just as well I did. She gave me this little ornament."

Morley turned over the enamelled cross and examined it carefully. "Humph! It is the kind of thing Miss Denham said was worn by her dead father."

"Exactly. Well, Mr. Morley, either the father is dead as she told you and that cross was worn by a stranger, or the man who called to see you here was the father."

"How do you make that out? What do you mean?" said Morley, and his face exhibited genuine amazement.

For answer Steel related what Mrs. Parry had told him about the discovery of the cross, and how she had put two and two together.

"And now, sir, you must see that in some way this stranger is connected with the crime. He called to see you. May I ask what you know of him?"

"Absolutely nothing," replied the other emphatically. "Wait! I must show you something." He rose and went to his desk. "Of course, I am telling you my private business," he added, opening a drawer, "so don't please speak about it."

"If it has nothing to do with the murder I won't; but if –"

"Pshaw! that is all right, I know as much about these things as you do. However, we can talk of that later. Meantime cast your eye over that," and he placed a document on the table.

"A judgment summons for five hundred pounds," said Steel, with a whistle. "Did he serve this?"

"Yes," replied Morley, returning to his seat with a gloomy face. "You will see that it is dated three days before he came to me. I have outrun the constable, and have the greatest difficulty in keeping my head above water. This man – I don't know his name – said that he came from those solicitors –"

"Asher, Son, and Asher," read out the detective.

Morley nodded. "Of twenty-two, St. Audrey's Inn. A firm of sharpers I call them. The money has certainly been owing a long time, but I offered to pay off the sum by degrees. They refused, and insist upon immediate payment. If they would only wait until the war is over, my South African shares would go up and there would be a chance of settling the matter. But they will not wait. I expect a bankruptcy notice next."

"I am very sorry for you, Mr. Morley, and of course, I shall not betray the confidence you have placed in me; but the point is, what is the name of the man who served this?"

"I don't know; I never asked him his name. He entered by the front door and served this here. I sent him out by the window, so that the servants should not see him again. He had the look of a sheriff's officer, and one can't be too careful here. I believe Mrs. Parry pays my servants to tell her what goes on in my house. I didn't want her to learn about this summons."

"I can easily understand that," replied the detective; "and I see now why you let the man out by the window. You left the room with him?"

"Yes. I didn't say anything much at the inquest beyond that he was a visitor, and I was relieved when I found that no questions were asked. But I walked with him to the end of the terrace and saw him go down the avenue. Then I returned to this room, and found Miss Denham waiting by the desk."



I asked her what she wanted. She asked for her wages, as she was leaving the next day. I had no ready money, and promised to see to it before she departed. Then she went out, and shortly afterwards Miss Kent came in to say she had seen the man go down the avenue. She asked me who he was, and I was rather short with her, poor creature!" and Morley sighed.

"I wonder why the man went to church."

"I can't say that; but I can guess that when he knew who Daisy was he wanted to speak to her."

"What about?" asked Steel eagerly.

"About me and the summons. You see, Steel, there is a half-uncle of Daisy Kent's who went to Australia. He said that if he made his fortune he would leave the money to her. Whether he is dead or alive I don't know, but certainly she did not get any money left to her. Powell's solicitors are Asher, Son, and Asher – "

"Powell? I thought the uncle would be called Kent, unless, of course, he was uncle by the mother's side."

"I said half-uncle," said Morley dryly. "Powell is his name – William Powell – and his solicitors are those who issued that judgment summons. I expect the clerk wanted to tell Daisy about my position and warn her against lending me money. As though I should have asked the girl for sixpence!"

"I don't see why this clerk should warn Miss Kent."

"Well, you see, Daisy had a hundred a year, and they pay it to her. As she might one day be an heiress, I suppose they think it as well to keep an eye on her. This man could not have known that Daisy was in church, and may have just gone there to kill time. But when he saw her and knew who she was, I daresay he wrote that note asking her to come outside and be told all about me."

"It might be so. Was the note found?"

"Not to my knowledge. But you should know, being a detective."

"I'm not omniscient," replied Steel good-humoredly; "it is only in novels that you get the perfect person who never makes a mistake. Well, to resume. I don't see why the clerk should have killed Miss Kent."

"He did not kill her," insisted Morley. "I was in the room with him from the time he entered by the door to the time he left by that middle window. He had no chance of stealing the stiletto. Now Miss Denham had, for she was in the room alone for a few moments."

"But why should she have taken the clerk with her on the car? If she killed the girl her object must have been to escape herself?"

"I can't explain. Perhaps this clerk saw the crime and hoped to make money out of it. Had he given the alarm he wouldn't have gained any reward. So I suppose he mounted the car with her, so that she should not escape him."

"A wild theory."

"It's the only one I can think of," responded Morley; "but if you want to know more of this man go up to Asher, Son, and Asher. I daresay they will be able to give you his history."

"And the Scarlet Cross?"

"I know nothing about that. I did not even notice if the man had such a cross on his chain. In fact," added Morley frankly, "he was too shabby and poverty-stricken to have a chain. I think Anne Denham killed Daisy; you think this man did, and – "

"Pardon," protested Steel. "I have not yet made up my mind. But the two fled together, and there must be some reason for that."

"If so, it will be found in the past history of both, or either. You know where to look for the man. I can get from my wife the address of the Governesses' Institute where she engaged Miss Denham. That is all I can do, unless I take up the case myself."

Steel looked up with a laugh. He was copying the address of the solicitors from the summons, but could not help pausing to reply to this egotistical remark. "Why, Mr. Morley, what do you know of such work?" he asked, bantering.

"Much more than you would give me credit for. Did you ever hear of – by the way, this is another of my secrets I am telling you, so please don't repeat it."

"Are you going to say that you were in the profession?"

"I am. You may have heard of Joe Bart."

"I should think so," said Steel quickly. "He had a splendid reputation, and was much thought of. But he retired before I came to London. I was in the country police for a long time. But" – he started up – "you don't mean to say that –"

"That I am Joe Bart?" interrupted Morley, not ill-pleased. "Yes, I do. I retired over ten years ago, more fool I. You see, Steel, I grew wearied of thief-catching, and as I had a chance of marrying a widow with money, I took the offer and retired. But" – he looked at the summons – "the game wasn't worth the candle. I have had nothing but trouble. Still, I am devoted to my wife and her children."

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