



CHAPTER XIX (CONTINUED).

By accidentally overhearing conversations Chloe had learned the whole story of the murder. She had heard Pintard and Vitellius discussing it in French when they did not suspect that a human being was within earshot. She had heard remarks passed between Pintard and Madame Renaud which, although made in a blind and misleading manner, were perfectly intelligible to her. She had become familiar with the police records through hearing them discussed by the habitués of the place. She knew that Edgcomb was languishing in prison, charged with the murder of Mancel Tewkes; but she loved Coulter then, and she would have sacrificed herself to protect him. It was with the knowledge of all this that she sought Imogen in the guise of a necromancer. Her intense jealousy instigated her to such a course in order to prevent an intrigue with her lover. When the trial came on, and she was asked by Coulter to disguise herself, and appear as a witness, she knew what it meant and she readily consented. It was not for Madame Renaud's sake, but for Coulter's, for she knew his connection with that affair. After the trial Coulter's neglect began. He avoided her more and more, until a year after the fire it culminated in the scene above described.

After the fire Chloe went with Madame Renaud to her new quarters; but in the general upheaval of things following that dire calamity, Coulter lost sight of her for many weeks. He earnestly hoped that she had disappeared, like hundreds of her class who, having been driven out by the fire, had sought other towns and cities where the conditions of such a life were more promising. But just as he thought himself well rid of her the siren suddenly rapped at his door one evening, and his hopes were speedily dissolved. While walking upon the street, closely veiled, she had encountered him. It was an easy matter to follow him and ascertain his lodging-place, then present herself at an opportune moment. Coulter received her coldly. The life she had led had not entirely dulled her sensitive nature, and she felt hurt at his aversion. She did not betray her feelings, however, but endeavoured for some time to win him back by her smiles and caresses, but she could not move him from his indifference. Then, in a fit of distraction, she threw herself upon the floor, and endeavoured to move him with her tears from his contumacy. But coolly taking a cigar from his pocket he lighted it and puffed away unconcernedly while she pouted. He did not treat her harshly then, nor tell her to leave. It was simply an attempt to freeze her out by indifference. He thought she would soon go of her own accord and never trouble him more. But Chloe was stubborn and he was obliged to yield. Then he saw her at intervals during the next few months, but at every meeting his offensiveness increased. Then he avoided her entirely. This was not to be endured, and Chloe was resolved to bring him to terms with the accusa-

tion of murder. The result has been seen.

Coulter's manner toward Chloe was at once perceptibly changed. The secret which she possessed inspired him with a wholesome dread of her for awhile. She did not press her advantage by making inordinate demands upon him; neither did she attempt to display a spirit of ascendancy. She was contented; she had disenthralled herself from her wretched mode of life at Madame Renaud's. She really wished to lead a better one, and this might be a beginning, though a poor one.

A room was furnished and the mistress installed. Coulter was assiduous in his attentions, and came frequently to see her. One evening, during one of his visits, he remarked, 'Chloe, you are a great enigma to me; do you know it?'

'No; am I, indeed?' she asked smilingly.

'Yes; you are a great mystery to me. I have known you three years, and yet I am convinced that I do not know you at all.'

Chloe burst into a merry peal of laughter. 'What would you like to know, my dear?' she asked.

'I should like to know who you are and where you came from. I don't understand why you have always kept it from me.'

'Why, I am Chloe, of course, and—' 'And as great a mystery as the 'Man in the Iron Mask,' Coulter added, interrupting her.

'Or the "room-mate of James Kye," suggested Chloe, with a sly wink.

'Ha, ha! Very well put,' said Coulter, returning the significant glance; 'but are you never going to tell me anything of yourself?'

'Jack, I have only one name now, and that is Chloe. It was adopted in a baptism of shame when I left my father's roof and met you. I am determined never to utter my father's name with these unclean lips. No; you may call it a freak or a foolish whim, but I have that reverence for him and the love which he gave me never to pronounce his name again.'

'Never is a long time, you know.'

'Never, while this state of concubinage exists, at any rate. When I have become transformed into a lawful wife, or have become a reformed and honest woman, then I shall seek my father, ask his forgiveness, and with clean lips I shall not be ashamed to pronounce his name.'

'Ridiculous! Nonsense! You reform! I've seen old whiskyblots try to reform; but let them stick their noses to the bung-hole of a cask and all their good resolutions vanish like a fog in the sunshines. You would be equally as fickle. The first good-looking chap that came along with a glossy tite, a checkered suit, and a diamond stud, you would succumb. It's born in the flesh, Chloe.'

'A woman would not obtain much encouragement to reform from you. I know,' Chloe answered, with a tinge of sarcasm.

'Why, you ungrateful minx, didn't I lift you out of the mire of prostitution at "French Anne's," and give you a place here?'

'I don't see that it is of much use; I am never the wiser for it.'

'And you never shall be, rest assured of it, Jack.'

'But I shall always think there is some deep mystery connected with your life.'

'Think anything, my boy, only do not question me about it. Talk about anything that will interest you more—Jarmyn, for instance.'

Coulter seemed to start at the mention of the detective's name, but instantly recovering himself asked, nonchalantly: 'What the devil do I care about Jarmyn?'

'I don't think myself that you care for a very close acquaintance with him.'

'You had something to say about him the night of our unpleasantness; but I thought it was merely a contrivance to keep me away from the Madame's.'

'The Madame says he has been watching the house.'

'Well, he may be looking for Pintard.'

'For Pintard, Vitellius and—' 'And who?'

'And Coulter.'

'Humph! You seem to know all about it. Take care that he don't get hold of you. Would you hold your tongue if he did?'

'Have no fear of me, Jack, as long as you treat me decently. But, do you know, I think he was shadowing me, too; and, to tell you the truth, that was one of my reasons for leaving the house. I am afraid of him. Could they do anything with me for testifying in that case?'

'Why, certainly; they would hang you, if they should discover it.'

Chloe shuddered and looked frightened. 'Hang me? I don't see what I have done.'

'You were a conspirator, as much as Madame Renaud, Pintard and Vitellius.'

'You always forget to mention yourself, don't you?'

'But you never forget to remind me of it, do you?'

'How was I a conspirator? Pray tell.'

'Didn't you perjure yourself to help convict Edgcomb? Why, they could easily make it appear to a jury that you were in the plot to murder Tewkes, or that you were privy to the matter. The very fact alone that you committed perjury would convict you of being an accessory; so I think you have quite as much to dread from me as I have from you.'

'You are only trying to frighten me, Jack. I sacrificed my long hair and went there to please you, and now you would be ungrateful enough to see me gibbeted.'

'No, I don't want you to meet such a fate, but I am telling you these things to show you the necessity of keeping a close mouth. You are as deep in the mire as any one. Keep out of Jarmyn's way, and never let him ply you with questions, and especially with none concerning me.'

Coulter arose and took his hat.

'What am I to be left alone again to-night?' Chloe inquired, upon observing his intentions.

'Yes; I can't remain longer with you to-night. I have a game on hand, and I want to make a good winning, if I have to sit up all night to do it. I will see you again soon. Look out for Jarmyn. An revoir.'

Coulter was out and away before Chloe could return even a commonplace 'good-night.' After a few minutes of musing she took up a book and tried to read, but she could not concentrate her thoughts, for the conversation in regard to the murder kept running in her head. She really felt alarmed at Coulter's assertion—so much so that she closed the book and fell into a train of reflections.

'What a fool I was to do that for him; he does not love me for it. He only provides for me, and comes here

from necessity. I never once thought of the consequences of my false evidence, if discovered. Jack asked me to give it and I did, simply because I loved him—for no other reason. But that is the way with a man. He will make a fool of a confiding woman, and, when he can use her no longer, throw her overboard. And still the silly fools will confide in them. What a dupe I have been, and how he chuckles in his sleeve to think of it! Good gracious, I wonder if they could hang me if they discovered my perjury! They would surely say that I knew all about the murder, because I swore falsely, and impersonated a mythical character. And what if they should find Kye, and bring him before me, and ask him if he recognised his ancient room-mate? Oh, dear, I wonder what has become of him! But, let me think; I remember Jack told me when I went to court not to be afraid, that Kye would never trouble me. I wonder if they killed him, too. I shall not sleep a wink to-night, I'm so nervous.'

Chloe was interrupted in her musings by a sudden rap at the door. 'There, Jack has returned for some reason or other.'

With book in hand she stepped forward and opened the door slightly, when a face was thrust in, and a voice said, in a low tone: 'Hi, hi, Chloe, ye thar?'

'Why, Pintard, is that you?'

'Yes, it's me, 'Chloe; lemme come in,' and he pushed the door open as he spoke and entered. 'I've been layin' low till Coulter got away. He won't come back and find me with his gal, will he?'

'No; he won't be back for a little while—probably an hour. But how in the world did you know I was here?'

'I seed ye on the street the other day and I follered ye.'

'Did you know I had left "French Anne's?'

'Qui Mam'selle,' 'Qui Mam'selle,' 'Who told you?'

'La Madame.'

'Why, you don't dare to go to the house, do you?'

'No; but she knows where to seek me.'

Chloe then spoke to him in French, and Pintard sat down in a chair.

'What brings you here, Pintard?'

'Business, Mam'selle, business.'

'Business with me? What can it be? You are the last person on earth I expected to see. Is it something from the Madame?'

'No; it's a scheme of mine. Can I pend on ye, Mam'selle?'

'Well, I can't say until I have heard what it is.'

'Will ye keep it to yourself if I don't fit yer notion?'

'Of course, Pintard, you can rely on me for that; you ought to know that well enough without asking.'

'Hev ye got any wine here, Mam'selle? I think I could talk better if I had a bit to wet me tongue.'

It flashed upon Chloe's mind that it might be well to limber up his tongue, and that, perhaps, a little wine would assist in the matter, so she replied: 'Yes; I have a bottle of St. Julien in the closet which Jack brought up the other night. I will get it, and bringing it forth she placed it on the table with a couple of glasses.'

'Chloe, yer a poor drinker for one of Madame Renaud's gals,' said Pintard, holding the well-filled bottle up to the light to size its contents. 'Come, take a sip.'

Chloe permitted Pintard to serve her. After indulging himself in a portion of the wine the cheer became quite perceptible, and with a confidential air he commenced: 'Chloe, ye hev no love for that man who just went out, hev ye?'

'Do you mean Coulter?'

'Yes; that infernal dog, Coulter.'

'Why, Pintard, what do you mean by calling him such a name?'

'Pintard took another sip of wine before answering. 'Wal, I've got good reasons for it. I know more about him than ye does.'

'I don't know why you should; I have known him longer than you have.'

'Well, do ye know any good of him? Why, Chloe, he'd cut yer throat in a minute if he wanted to get rid of ye and couldn't do it any other way.'

Chloe was silent; she thought there might be considerable truth in the assertion. Pintard watched her closely over the edge of his glass, as he held it to his lips.