

soul together. You could give me a regular screw if you chose. It's time you did it."

"That may be your opinion," was the answer, "but it's not mine. I've put plenty of odds and ends in your way since I came here, and I've put you up to a first-rate thing in this matter of Ffolliott. If you can't take advantage of it that's your affair. Anyway, you needn't hang about the place any more if you don't think you're properly paid for what you do."

It was the vindictive turning of the cur who has a bone upon the cur who has not. And cur number two recognised of necessity that cur number one had the best of the position. Cecil Cochrane rose. His very lips were white with fury.

"You'll be sorry for this, dear boy," he said. "It may be my turn yet. Anyhow, you can do your dirty work for yourself in the future. Ta-ta!"

He walked out of the room and left the theatre with an easy air, somewhat belied by a vicious kick which he aimed at an offending cat. He refreshed himself with a glass of whisky at a bar hard by, insinuating dark things meanwhile to a couple of men he met as to the probable speedy termination of the season at the theatre from which he had just come. And two or three hours later, when he had exhausted the possibilities of loafing with empty pockets, nobody having offered him dinner, he went to Charing Cross Station and took a train westward.

It was about half-past four when he set out for the few minutes' walk that lay between the station at which he left the train and his lodgings, and the September sun was getting low. Cochrane threaded his way through a few yards of crowded thoroughfare pre-occupied and savage in expression. He turned into a quiet road, and then again into the crescent in which the house stood.

Mareshill Crescent was not a populous spot. It led nowhere in particular, although it was not far from a rather desirable neighbourhood. And it was one of those always dreary-looking places from which the greater number of the inhabitants, male and female, issue forth to work in the morning to return late in the evening, while those who remain are too heavily occupied indoors for much coming and going.

There was not a creature to be seen as Cochrane turned into the Crescent, but before he had gone many yards his eyes were caught by a somewhat unusual sight, a girl advancing towards him on a bicycle. The bicycle was a good one. The girl was well dressed and she rode well, though she was looking about her in a rather frightened and uncertain manner.

Cochrane had noticed these points, and was wondering if anything were to be gained by asking her if he could direct her when, about twenty yards from him, he saw the machine carelessly guided on a newly watered road slip. The girl was thrown violently and lay still, with her bicycle on the top of her. Cochrane broke almost involuntarily into a rapid run. He reached the girl's side in a moment, lifted the machine, and knelt down beside her.

"I'm afraid you're hurt?" he said, suavely.

She did not speak or move, and he leaned over her so that he could see her face. The next moment he had drawn back with a low ejaculation. Then he glanced furtively about him. There was nobody to be seen. Even the accident had not attracted the notice of a single soul. The girl was lying at his very door. He ran up the steps with extraordinarily alert movements, opened the door with his latch-key, at the same time ringing the bell violently. Then he ran down again to the prostrate figure in the road as his landlady appeared in the distance and followed him out.

"Make haste, Mrs. Simmons," he called. "There's been an accident. This young lady—she was coming to see my sister—has had a fall and is stunned. No, I don't think she's much hurt. But I want to get her upstairs quickly that I may see. I'm a bit of a doctor, you know. Help me, will you?"

He took the girl in his arms with a skill, born of his medical training, that needed little or no assistance from the woman.

"Bring in the bicycle," he said. As he reached the top of the stairs the sitting-room door opened, and Rachel appeared on the threshold.

Cecil Cochrane was panting heavily with his exertions.

"What is it? What in the world has happened?"

"He quiet!" he said, in a low gasp. With a half glance over his shoulder at the advancing figure of the landlady, he said loudly: "It's Miss Maynard, Rachel; thrown from her bicycle at the very door—stunned."

He moved on into the room, his sister standing aside to let him pass, and he added:

"Will you fetch some water, please, Mrs. Simmons?"

He laid his burden on the sofa as he spoke, and as Mrs. Simmons departed with an agitated, "Lor, deary me!" Rachel came up to him. She looked down at the unconscious face with an unrecognising stare of blank bewilderment.

"What do you mean, Cecil?" she said. "Who is it?"

Cecil Cochrane was still panting slightly. He was kneeling by the sofa with his hand on the girl's pulse. He lifted his head for an instant, and looked full at his sister.

"It is our cousin Violet, my dear!" he said.

CHAPTER IV.

"I DON'T KNOW."

"Then you'll send the telegram off at once, Mrs. Simmons, please. My sister doesn't feel easy about leaving her friend, you see."

It was nearly two hours later, and Cecil Cochrane and his landlady stood in the sitting-room with the door open. The room looked even more disorderly than usual. A basin of water and a sponge stood on the floor by the sofa, a bottle of smelling salts and a bottle of brandy stood on the table, and under the table lay a hat, which had evidently rolled there unobserved.

Cecil Cochrane was standing with his back to the light. He held a telegram form in his hand, and it contained the words, "Cannot come to-night. Rachel Cochrane," and was addressed to the manager of the theatre. Mrs. Simmons took it with an alacrity which she was not wont to show in obeying the Cochranes' behests. They were by no means impeccable lodgers. She was one of those women to whom a little excitement, particularly of a disastrous nature, is a godsend.

"Sarah, she shall take it at once, Mr. Cochrane. Pore young lady, it would never do for Miss Cochrane to leave her; not after the shock she's had. There's no telling what might happen, as I always say, I'm sure I'm thankful to hear she has come round as well as she has."

"She's doing splendidly, thanks," answered Cochrane. "You can let us have dinner as soon as possible, please, Mrs. Simmons."

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Simmons again. "And the young lady, will she take dinner with you, sir?"

Cecil Cochrane stroke his chin reflectively, with his eyes fixed upon his landlady.

"I think not, on the whole," he said. "A little Bovril by and by would be the best thing for her. She's feeling a little faint and uncomfortable still. She'll stay with us to-night, by the bye."

"Which it's only natural she should feel herself shook, sir," responded Mrs. Simmons. She hesitated a moment, and then glancing down at the paper in her hand, she said:

"The young lady's friends, sir—if I might take the liberty of reminding you. If Sarah could take the telegram to ease their minds at the same time as she takes this, it would save her a journey like."

Cecil Cochrane smiled blandly. "It would, Mrs. Simmons," he said; "you're quite right. But Miss Maynard's friends will not be anxious; and a telegram would only alarm them unnecessarily."

Mrs. Simmons sniffed. She would have liked the sending off of a startling telegram.

"As you think best, sir, of course," she said huffily. "Well, I'd better be sending Sarah off with this 'ere, then."

Cecil Cochrane waited till Mrs. Simmons's heavy footfall could be heard descending into the lower regions, then he slipped softly across the narrow passage, opened the door facing the sitting-room door, and shut it quickly behind him.

The room was Rachel Cochrane's bedroom. It was darkened as much as might be, a shawl having been

pinned up to supplement the curtain and keep the least ray of light from falling on the bed. The bed stood with its head against a wall at right angles with the window, and Cecil Cochrane went towards it. Rachel was standing on the other side. She looked up as her brother came in, but she did not say anything, nor did he speak to her.

On the bed, between the brother and sister, lay the girl who had been thrown from her bicycle—the girl who had sat with the clergyman in the garden—Violet Drummond. Her eyes were closed and there were dark, purplish marks under them. Her face was quite white and absolutely unconscious. There was no sign of life about her except her heavy breathing. Cecil Cochrane bent over her, felt her pulse, and touched her forehead. Then in a deft, professional way he raised her eyelids and examined her eyes, his sister watching him closely all the time. He drew himself up, and stood looking thoughtfully down at the unconscious girl; and Rachel said abruptly and in a low voice:

"There's no change at all."

"No," he answered. "Not yet."

"What are you going to do?"

"Nothing."

Rachel's brow contracted.

"You'd better be careful," she said.

"I've not a notion what's in your head. But I think you'll be a fool if you don't send for a doctor. Suppose she dies?"

"She won't die," returned Cecil, coolly. "At least, not yet."

Rachel's lips parted sharply. But the retort she was about to utter was checked. A low and mysterious knock, which was Mrs. Simmons' tribute to illness, fell upon the door.

Cecil turned hastily and went towards it. He opened it slightly.

"Your dinner's up, sir," she said, in a loud whisper. "The young lady feeling any better, sir?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Simmons, much better," he answered. "There's a little cut on her forehead that I am just plastering up. But we shall come to dinner directly."

He shut the door again, and at the same moment a sharp exclamation came from Rachel.

"Cecil," she said, "come here!"

He was at the bedside in a moment, asking no question, but giving all his attention to his patient. The girl had moved for the first time. The heavy insensibility of her face was relaxed, and one hand was feebly moving over the counterpane.

Rachel did not speak after that one ejaculation. She, too, stood looking down, watching with an almost fascinated expression as the life came slowly back to the face on the pillow. There were a few seconds during which they remained thus, and consciousness seemed to creep slowly from feature to feature. Then the girl opened her eyes. She opened them full on Cochrane and lay looking blankly up at him. He did not move or speak for a moment; then he said, in carefully modulated tones:

"You feel better, now?"

She turned her head away from him with a feeble movement of instinctive dislike, and so turning, her eyes fell upon Rachel. She stretched out her hand.

"My head aches," she said, indistinctly. "I want to go to sleep."

She turned over on her side, rested her cheek on her hand, and in another moment she was sleeping like a tired child, breathing softly and regularly. Rachel drew a long breath and looked across at her brother. He studied the sleeping face for a moment longer, and then he, too, lifted his head. He made a sign to his sister to follow him quietly, and moved noiselessly out of the room opening and shutting the door with the utmost caution.

"She must sleep now," he said. "I am going to tell Mrs. Simmons to keep the place quiet."

When he returned to the sitting-room, Rachel had thrown herself into an easy chair, totally ignoring the waiting dinner. She looked paler than usual, and her eyes were hard. Cecil drew a chair to the table and took the cover off the dish.

"Why don't you come to dinner?" he said. "We are only about a couple of hours late!"

She rose mechanically and seated herself opposite him.

"Will she be all right?" she said.

"You've run a frightful risk."

"She'll be all right till she wakes up," he responded. "What she'll be like then remains to be seen. A little shaky, I should say."

"How did it happen?"

"Side-slip," responded Cochrane, jaconically. "She must have struck her head against the pavement."

Rachel leaned back in her chair.

"But how in the world do you suppose she came to be riding in London? And alone, too. A pet lamb like that!" she said.

"Who knows?" he answered, shrugging his shoulders. "It's the unexpected that happens. Anyhow, it was uncommonly accommodating of her to throw herself off just at our door."

Rachel pushed away her plate, and rested her elbows on the table, propping her chin moodily on her hands.

"I see you think so," she said. "I suppose you think there's something to be got out of it? But why you should have taken so much unnecessary trouble, telling a pack of lies to Mrs. Simmons, and running the risk of doing without a doctor, I haven't the slightest idea."

Cochrane helped himself deliberately from the dish before him.

"No definite reason!" he said. "I do not want Mrs. Simmons on in this scene, therefore it was obviously necessary to take definite possession of my mind at once; and it's as well to keep your cards to yourself till you know what they are worth. I don't care about having another fellow to share the credit of restoring the young lady to her father. I couldn't have kept a doctor out without a few more lies to Mrs. Simmons."

Rachel rose and turned away to the window.

"It seems to me it's time you took steps to restore her to her father!" she said, with a brusque sneer, "if it's to be done to-night. It's eight o'clock. I suppose I'd better see if I can find a London address of any kind in her pocket."

"Don't trouble," returned her brother. "It's not to be done to-night. I wasn't allowed to see my cousin the other day. We don't know who the young lady is until she wakes up and tells us."

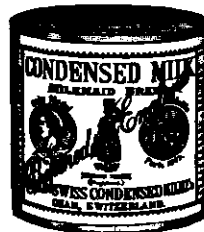
"How do you know her if you did not see her?" said Rachel, turning suddenly.

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