

you a little. I have already told you that the poor fellow's dead; I can show you his grave, if you like."

"That grave wherein rests a certain unknown tramp, who died in this house, and was buried in Dick's bed," retorted Mrs. Pride coolly. "You see I know all the story—and I also know the reason why Dick keeps out of the way."  
"You're charmingly frank," said Stephen, "and you think you know a great deal. Doesn't it occur to you that you will find it rather hard to make people believe that the evidence of my poor brother's death—the verdict given by a corner's jury—the very grave itself in which he lies, are all to be controverted by the first idle story put together by a gossiping woman? Excuse my brutality, but that's what it amounts to. You have seen my brother Dick, you tell me; why has he allowed himself to be declared to be dead—why does he keep in hiding?"

"He has a reason," said Mrs. Pride. "You know what that reason is; you know that he is accused of stealing a large sum of money, and that his supposed death has covered that up."

"Four thousand pounds is certainly rather a large sum," said Stephen meditatively.

"Two thousand is the amount he states," exclaimed Mrs. Pride.

"Naturally, he would put it at the lowest figure," said Stephen. "I am, of course, assuming for one absurd moment that what you say is true; that my brother has, in some fashion or other, committed death, and got another to take his place. Such things have been done, I admit; but I rather think you have been imposed upon, my dear Aunt."

"I'll show you whether I have or not," cried Mrs. Pride. "I'll bring Dick back here, and confront you and all Market Rimstone, and let them know the fraud that has been practised."

Stephen Carvell, with his hands clasped behind him, leaned forward until his white face almost touched that of the old woman; then he whispered:

"And do you think he'll be fool enough to come?" he asked. "Think of the charges that could be brought against him, in the impossible event of his appearing alive before those who knew him. Robbery for one; we have the proof of that. For the other, a certain man lying in the grave under his name—a man found in his bed, dead—a man to be accounted for. Mr. Richard Carvell, night-bird, and in the habit of creeping in and out of the house at all hours, is known to have been at the bank that night, when all Market Rimstone was sleeping; known to have got the keys out of the house, from which he had been expelled. Who is the man—blackened and unrecognised—found in his bed?" Stephen looked at her with a triumphant smile.

"James Farley!" she fired back at him on the instant.

The shot went straight to its mark. Stephen drew away from her, hurriedly glancing all round about him, as though to be sure that the name had not been overheard; for a moment, Julia Pride thought he meant to attack her. It took him a moment or two to recover anything like his self-possession; then he tried to carry the thing off with something of bluster.

"I never heard the name in my life," he said. "I think I can understand what the situation is, my dear Aunt; you have been poking and prying about in business which does not concern you; you have performed that marvellous feat of putting two and two together, and have made something more than four of the result."

"Whatever I have done has been with your assistance, my dear nephew," retorted the old lady. "You introduced me to the wife of James Farley in this very house; she has been my companion since then. I have been making inquiries; am in the confidence of Dick, who is, as you know, alive."

"Produce him," said Stephen with a grin. "Bring the dog here, and let him tell his own story."

"You know I can't do that," said Mrs. Pride. "But I'll find a means yet to expose you; I'll find a means yet to prove who the man was who died in Dick's place."

"My dear Aunt, you are playing a game which can have but one result; disaster for yourself, and for those whose cause you espouse. Believe me, I am much too strong, and too securely set in my place here to be shaken by any threats from you or from anyone else. Do your worst, Mrs. Pride, and joy go with you!"

Failure in that quarter only made Julia Pride the more determined to carry out her purpose. She set out at once for the home of the Wilmores; and was fortunate in finding Olive alone. It took her a matter of two minutes to explain who she was, and what was her connection with the dead man; it took her another two minutes to break, with what gentleness was in her, the astounding news to the girl. To Olive's credit be it put that she did not faint nor scream; she simply listened, with hands clasped and eyes fixed on the face of Mrs. Pride, to every word that lady had to say.

"So you see what it means is this, my dear," said Mrs. Pride in conclusion. "Dick has been foully wronged, of that I am sure; the world believes him dead; it is for you to bring him to life again. I can't persuade him, but you can."

"It seems all so wild and strange," said Olive. "And yet I can understand

why he so willingly allowed it to be believed that he was dead. But about the lost money?"

"My dear, that can be found and stopped, if it ever got into circulation at all," urged Mrs. Pride. "Don't you see that what has kept everyone from moving in the matter was the belief that, in all probability, this money was burnt, when the supposed Richard Carvell perished; whereas, if Dick took it (which I don't believe for a moment) it got into other hands that night, and can be traced and restored. It all rests in your hands; get Dick to come back here, and we'll fight his battles for him, and clear him, in one way or another."

Olive agreed to come at once; fired by the extraordinary enthusiasm of Mrs. Pride—swept off her feet as it were, by the glorious possibility of meeting again the man she had believed to be dead—she was ready to throw everything to the winds, and to go in search of him. Realising, however, that she would meet with the strongest possible opposition if she stayed to consult her mother, she resolved to set out before that lady's return. Urged by Mrs. Pride to lose no time, she wrote a note, explaining to her mother that she had been called away on business that admitted of no delay; that she was in safe hands; and that she would write giving full details of her extraordinary reasons for thus running away, so soon as she reached her destination.

It was dark when they reached the station at Market Rimstone, in time for the last train that could carry them to where Dick was. Mrs. Pride took the tickets, feeling very light-hearted about the success of the whole business. She might not have felt quite so light-hearted had she observed a man who was sauntering restlessly about the station, and drew quickly out of sight an seeing her and her companion. That man was Stephen Carvell.

As a matter of fact he had come to the station, had haunted it for hours indeed, for the express purpose of seeing his aunt. He felt sure that she would be returning to Dick, and he had made up his mind that he would, if pos-

sible, shadow her, in order to see whom she went, and what persons she met. His astonishment may be imagined when he saw Olive Wilmore; and recognised in a moment the fact that she had been drawn into the game the determined old woman was playing. The thing was more serious than he had thought; he made up his mind to see it through. So that when the train steamed out of the station carrying two expectant eager women in search of the missing man, it carried also Stephen Carvell, determined not to lose sight of them.

(To be Continued.)

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