

and the injustice; the same mad fear of the end; the same passionate longing to do something—anything—which might help.

Never for an instant did the girl believe that Stainforth had killed Vera Wenwick. She could understand that he had been tempted, but she was certain that he would never have yielded. Yet the police made no new discoveries, the private detective when she engaged at her own expense found out nothing which could throw light upon the mystery.

There were those who said it was no mystery; that the whole affair was simple enough, and that there was no doubt Stainforth had been goaded by the woman's taunts or threats into stabbing her at last. He would be condemned and hanged, and there would be an end of the tragic story. And Consuelo knew there were people who were saying this, and the knowledge gnawed at her heart like some corroding acid.

At first she hoped that the real murderer would be found, or traces of him; but no stranger had been seen at Lurwin Cove or West Lurwin on the night of the murder, except the woman and the half-drowned sailors of the yacht, and by and bye there was nothing to hope for except that when the trial came Stainforth's character might shine so clear out of darkness that the verdict would be favourable.

The blow to Consuelo, falling on her wedding day, was also a blow to her father, and he had not the youthful power of physical recuperation. For a time before the date fixed for the marriage he had seemed stronger and brighter, but, gently as the truth was broken to him, he did not recover from the shock. For a few days he was completely prostrated, rallied a little later, and then, just as Consuelo began to feel somewhat more hopeful for him, suffered a paralytic stroke.

It seemed that the girl was to be spared nothing; but at least she had no time to brood on her sorrow, or to think of herself at all; her father was conscious, though bound hand and foot by the awful malady; and his eyes showed his pleasure in her presence, his reluctance to let her go. Consequently she scarcely left his side, except for the little sleep which she could not live without; and so weeks wore on, moving slowly, drearily, like a grey procession of ghosts.

Many times Anthony Wyndham called to inquire for his old friend, but he never saw Consuelo; he could guess something of what her feelings might be towards him, and understood that the sight of him might be almost repugnant to her. She knew that he had loved her for years, and that he must hate the man who had taken her from him. She knew that by a strange whim of fate it would fall to his lot to try Stainforth for the crime of murder, and Wyndham had delicacy enough never to attempt to force himself upon the girl. He was not sure even that he wished to see her. Perhaps, he thought, she might trade on her sex to try and work upon his feelings in some way, and a useless scene of that sort would be unpleasant for both to remember afterwards in years to come—the years in which, he felt vaguely, lay his only hope with her, if hope there could be anywhere.

Six months past, and they did not meet, but a few weeks after Christmas, Pelham Vail died, and Anthony Wyndham, who was at his house in Lorne-mouth, came to the funeral. He felt afterwards that he could not go away leaving the girl so utterly alone as she would be now, without making some definite show of sympathy, perhaps some offer of help; he sent a line to her, therefore, carefully worded, begging that she would speak with him, if only for a moment, and half to his surprise she consented.

There was in his heart an aching home-sickness for the old times—the sweet, old times when he had believed that he would win her—as he was taken into the girl's own sitting-room to wait. At first glance it seemed to him that everything was unchanged; but a second, longer look showed him that the brightness of the room was gone, just as it was gone from Consuelo's life. Once there had been fresh flowers everywhere, even in winter; now there was not a blossom, and there was a certain stiffness in the arrangement of the furniture and little ornaments which told him that the care of everything was left to the servants. On Consuelo's writing desk stood a silver photograph frame, which had not been there when Wyndham had known the room, and he left the hearthrug where he had been standing to go and glance at it. With a faint pang of the old jealousy, he saw that it was an amateur snapshot of Stainforth, evidently treasured by Consuelo, perhaps taken by her. He stood staring gloomily at the handsome face, which (he told himself in bitterness) would never have come into Consuelo's life, after the first meeting in London, if it had not been for his blind foolishness; and so it was that Consuelo found him, as she came quietly into the room.

As Wyndham turned and saw her, pale and slender, and childish looking in her deep mourning, all his preconceived ideas, all remembrances of the distance she had put between them, were swept away in a bewildering instant. "My poor little girl!" he exclaimed. "My poor little girl!"

No tears fell from Consuelo's weary eyes. She had passed that stage long ago, but her lips quivered slightly. It seemed to Wyndham that she had never been so sweet, so altogether desirable. Pity intensified his love. Himself cried to himself that he must have her for his own; he must be able to comfort and cherish her; he could not wait patiently for the years to roll on, and then perhaps have her snatched from him in the end. He had meant to talk to her reasonably, to sympathise, to offer help, but he lost his head as if he had been twenty instead of past forty, and something inside him, over which he had no control, suddenly seemed to gain the mastery.

"My darling!" he faltered. "I worship you. You are all alone in the world, and unhappy. Come to me; let me make you forget everything except my love." "Don't!" she exclaimed, putting him away from her, with both little cold hands. "This is no time to talk of love."

"I know," he said humbly, "it would not be the right time in ordinary circumstances. But I spoke, before I thought, because I couldn't help it; I was carried away, and as it's too late to go back, I must go on. Besides, our circumstances are not ordinary. Once, your father wished me to be your husband. If he could have spoken during these long months of his illness—"

"He would have bidden me be faithful," Consuelo broke in.

"How, faithful?" Wyndham echoed. "Where is your faith due? You can never marry Stainforth—or Chutehill—if you wish me to call him so."

Consuelo threw up her head. "Why not?" she asked.

"Because," Wyndham answered on a brutal impulse, "because convicted murderers cannot marry."

The girl's eyes pierced him. "He is not convicted yet. How dare you— you, of all others on earth—speak as if the case were already decided against him?"

Wyndham realised his mistake, but it only made him sullen.

"I used the wrong word," he apologised. "I should have said suspected, not convicted. But whatever happens, you and he are parted."

"Only death can part us, and not that really," Consuelo answered. Then, her face changing: "And you, who come here and speak to me of love before my father has been a day in his grave, can send him to his death, if you choose."

It was on Wyndham's tongue to protest, in honest indignation, but he stopped, and forced back the words, while he thought quickly. "You believe me capable of charging against Stainforth, I suppose," he said at last, "and forcing a conviction from the jury, whether they would otherwise have given a verdict against him or not. Well, all I can say is, that you think more meanly of me than I thought of myself, until a moment ago."

"Until a moment ago?" Consuelo

echoed questioningly, startled by his tone.

"Yes. I would have said—until then—that my rival (Stainforth is that, even in his cell) need expect nothing but fair dealing from me, as if I were a stranger. But now, if I say differently, it is your fault, Consuelo. I ask myself, since you believe me base, and I have everything to gain and nothing to lose by being base, why shouldn't I step down to the level on which you've placed me? By heaven, I will do it. I will do my best to send Stainforth to the scaffold, where I am convinced he ought to go, unless you will marry me before the trial comes on."

"Anthony Wyndham!" gasped the girl. "Do you know what you are saying? If my father were alive to hear you, he would not believe what his ears told him. You must be mad to make such a threat against Lance. Why, I've only to tell of it, to—"

"Who would believe you?" asked Wyndham. "No word has ever been breathed against my integrity. Who would listen to the hysterical fancies of a young girl, who would naturally stop at no accusation, if it were to save her lover? You would only do his interests a hundred times more harm than good, I assure you, by telling. But why not marry me and save him?"

"You could not save him," said Consuelo.

"It is true, I could not promise it; but a judge can do much with a jury. I tell you, I can come nearer to saving him than anyone else can, under Providence. You know—you must know—that even if he were acquitted, he couldn't marry you; he wouldn't be the man of honour that he used to be if he were willing to let you sacrifice yourself. If he escapes death, it will be because most of the evidence against him is circumstantial; there's the thing to dwell on with the jury; and at best, in the minds of his best friends, the doubt will always linger. Did he kill her, after all? You see he could not marry a girl like you with such a black cloud always over him. Therefore if you gave yourself to me, you would be throwing away no chance of happiness."

that could come to you otherwise. And with you as my wife, I would put my heart and soul into the work of saving Stainforth from the consequences of his own crime."

"He has committed no crime!" Consuelo exclaimed.

"The crime of which he stands accused. Oh, I may have made up my mind quickly in offering you this alternative, but I shall not change it. And you must choose. Is it to be death for Stainforth, or life?"

"Life—I choose life for him," she cried with shining eyes.

"Good. You are wise," said Wyndham. "He will owe you a debt of gratitude all the rest of his life. When we are married—"

"We will never be married."

"Did you not just say you would choose to save him?"

"I will save him, but not by marrying you."

"I swear to you, by the light of my experience, that there is no other way."

"And I swear to you, by the light of my inexperience, which means my faith that there is another way."

"What do you mean?"

"I refuse to tell you," she answered.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CASTLE OF CREVECOEUR.

The words that Consuelo Vail had spoken on the day when she first knew of Stainforth's love, were constantly in her ears now, like the sound of a distant bell: "Whatever happens, nothing can ever really part us now."

It was true; whether he were doomed to a long martyrdom in prison; whether they killed him, still they would not be parted in spirit, but after her talk with Anthony Wyndham, the girl realized far more sharply than before the awful blackness of the gulf on the brink of which Stainforth stood. Her anxiety for her father and her duty to him had for a time numbed her sense of Stainforth's great danger. It had seemed too bad to be true that justice should in the end miscarry; and she had clung to the hope that after a time of great suffering, he

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