

mother foully, cruelly done to death. I realised then what her dying words meant. I understood that she had died believing that it was Paul who had killed her—her own son!

"Oh, Chris, Chris, can you wonder that I wanted to shoot the man who had planned it all? When I threatened to give information he laughed. A woman could not bear witness against her husband, he said, and if he was tried it would be Paul who would be hanged!

"Oh, I think that night drove me mad! I broke my heart—oh, I wonder now how it was I lived! Watson laughed at me; Paul defied me. Mother's death was an accident, he said, and could not be helped. It would be dangerous and useless to take up things now. And oh, Chris, he tried—he, mother's son—tried to persuade me that Watson put the poison in by accident—that he had not meant it. He lied to me and swore that he believed it to be all an accident! Oh, Chris, even I—fool that I was—did not believe that; but it seemed to me that I could do nothing—that if I tried to bring him to justice it would only hurt Paul, and I remembered that mother, who had known, had hidden me shield him.

"I saw him alone next day and tried to persuade him to take me away, but he only laughed. Oh, I know he was wicked and hardened, but if I could have got him from Watson he would have become his old self again. I can never believe that he was wicked except through Watson.

"Two days later I made up my mind that at any cost I must get away from them. I remembered my music. If only I could get back to England I should be sure of a living. I thought. So I waited day after day until my opportunity came, with a small bag ready packed.

"Before I could do anything, however, we were obliged to leave Monaco suddenly. Watson had been found out, and he hurried away. He changed his name to Ross; Paul changed his to Denvers, and we went back to Marseilles.

"There we met a man whom I had never met before, but who seemed well-known to Watson. His name was Hall—Rayner Hall—and it was through him that I managed to make my escape at last!

"He commenced to make love to me. At first I resented it; then suddenly it occurred to me that if I encouraged him it might lead to my getting more liberty; for to my horror and misery I saw that Watson was only too pleased. I believe he hoped that Hall would run away with me.

"And, indeed, that was what he tried to do, and in order to get away myself I even arranged to go with him. Oh, Chris, forgive me if you can. It was my only means of getting away!

"I arranged to meet him at a certain place—I believe Watson guessed it, and allowed me to get away. I took some money—it was not much—only two or three pounds, and then slipped out of the house. Then, instead of going to the station, I got down to the docks, and by hook or by crook got on to the first vessel that left. It was going to Nice, but perhaps that was lucky for they never thought to look for me there.

"After that I can scarcely tell how I managed to get to England again, but I did manage it little by little, step by step, always frightened lest some day they should overtake me. I played, sang, and worked my way on. Wherever I saw the word 'café' I applied. It was the only thing I could do—either to play for their dances or wash their dishes. I did both. Sometimes one, sometimes the other. Until, thank God, I reached Calais at last with enough money to take me to London.

"There I had to struggle again. I found that the only man who could have helped me—Professor Steinh—was dead, and I suppose I looked so shabby and strange that the old people who had engaged me before refused to do it now. All that I could get and all that I did get until I met you—was a little teaching, with occasional concerts, generally in Socialist clubs or small dancing rooms.

"So I went on—starving, struggling, living I scarcely know how. Oh, Chris, you can never guess how terrible my life was, and I am afraid you will never be able to understand or forgive my next act.

"I have always felt—it has always seemed to me impossible that I could escape for ever from Watson. I always knew that some day they would find me again; once, indeed, they did somehow find my address, and Watson wrote me an angry letter threatening that he could force me back if he chose. That drove me on again—afraid—haunted by the dread of meeting them. I knew that I should meet them again some day, but I never dreamt it would be like this.

"Oh, Chris! it is so hard to me to tell you all this. It is like stabbing myself over and over again with a knife, and all the time I know that when I have finished I shall be far away from you, never to see you again. Never to hear you speak! Oh, Chris! and I have loved you so! I never dreamt that I could love as I have loved you! I thought that all feeling of that kind had been killed long ago. But, oh, if you knew! I would give my life gladly to save you the unhappiness that this letter will cause you. I would give more than my life if I could know that you forgave me. But I never shall. I hope that I shall be far beyond Walden when you read this.

"I knew that I could never marry you—I always knew it, but I never dreamt you would ask me. I felt that there was danger for you through me, and I tried to avoid you, and when Effie wanted me to come to you here I tried to refuse—I tried until—until at last I suddenly gave way.

"I must try to tell you what made me alter my mind.

"The night before Watson Ross was murdered was, as you know, the very night before I came here. Well, late in the afternoon I walked through the wood towards Raynham. Why, I don't know, except that it was closer to you, and that it was Fate that led me there. It was fate—Fate all through, for from my very first meeting with Effie I have been almost unable to help myself.

"I was coming back through the wood—it was almost dark then—when I came face to face with Paul—Paul, but, oh, changed and altered so that I scarcely recognised him. At first the sight of him seemed like a reproach. It seemed as if I had not kept my promise to mother, but when he spoke to me I forgot that. I remembered only the awful horror of the scene at Monaco, and I ran away from him.

"As I ran I stumbled and fell, and then I found that I was clasping a manuscript of some kind. I opened it, and saw the words 'Raynham Court,' but before I had time to read any more I heard footsteps, and a minute later Mr Fytton passed me. If you ask him he will tell you that he recognised me when he saw me with you and Effie in the King's Gallery. I know he did.

"I went on. I was thinking of Paul and Watson—thinking that they had found me again and wondering what I should do, when suddenly as I reach-

ed the gate of the wood something I saw frightened me to death.

"It was Watson himself, lying in the ditch with his dead face staring at mine.

"I scarcely realised that he was dead at first. Then he did not speak or move, and I went towards him. Oh, Chris, it was wicked, but I was thankful to see him there dead. It seemed as if God had set me free!

"I touched him and put my hand over his heart. He was quite dead!

"How I got home I don't know. I meant to go and give information to the police, but as I went I realised who had stabbed him. Paul!

"Oh, Chris, I didn't know what to do. I went home and tried to think, but the more I thought the more I shrank from betraying him. I couldn't do it. I think even now I couldn't do it if I didn't believe he was away out of reach. Oh, Chris, how could I?

"I sat down and stared into my fire. Only one thing occurred to me—now that Watson was out of the way, Paul would be straight and honest once more. He had never deliberately murdered him. He couldn't have done that. It was a quarrel and an accident—that I firmly believe, and that was one reason why I have not spoken, the other was the thought of mother, and I told Paul so—I told him what I had seen and that it was for her sake that I had not spoken.

"I sat for a long time thinking, thinking until I seemed to be going mad. Then I remembered the papers I had found and turned to look at them.

"They were the papers when I am enclosing in this. I believe Paul or Watson must have dropped them, though how they came into their possession I do not know.

"I read them through, and then an idea occurred to me. Oh, Chris, you will wonder how I could do it, but after a time I decided that I would go and take the jewels—that I would go and steal them—for Paul's sake! Oh, forgive me, Chris! I thought of you, of Effie and Lady Chaloner—I thought of everything, but after that week at Raynham Court what would become of us? I never dreamed that you would ask me to be your wife, but even if I had I should have known that it could never be; I knew that I was becoming a thief, but the temptation seemed too great. Ten thousand pounds! And Paul! And if I could have only reached him I believed I could save him and put him straight again. Oh, it was committing a sin that good might come, it was turning myself into a thief to save Paul, but when I got there I could not do it. I could not!

"Now, the only thing is for me to go away. You will soon forget me. I do not know where Paul is. I shall never find him now. I shall drift on—where to, only God knows, but at least I am free and safe.

"Almost a thief! Oh, Chris, how these words ring in my ears. I was almost a thief! Almost! Try to forgive me, Chris. Try to forget your unhappy Rene."

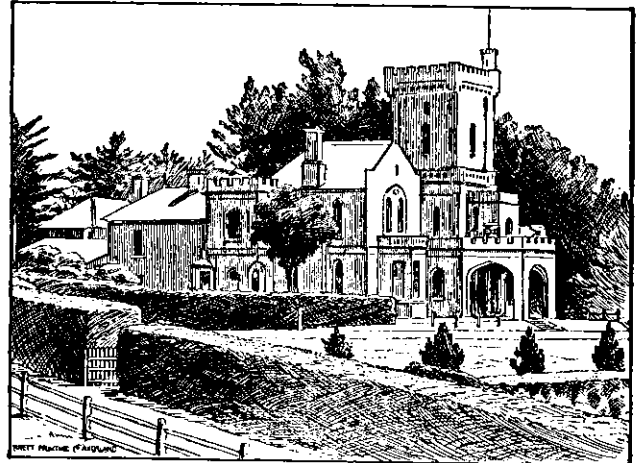
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