

He wondered, in a half awake way, that his memory was so good, for he was an old man. He shook himself, and with trembling hands untied the package. How well he knew the papers! Yes, his memory was wonderful, and with such a straining at his head.

The two spots of red in his cheeks grew and grew till they covered his face. As he continued the search, his hands shook so perceptibly that it caused him some alarm. He felt his hot forehead, then on the next paper read:

"Marshfield estate."

The lines of rigid tension in his face softened. How foolish and weak to doubt! He drew out the paper and opened it.

With stooping shoulders, a face as colorless as that of a corpse, he stared at the first word. There was a buzzing in his ears. His hot breath came through lips that were parched almost to blistering. He was so numb in his limbs that he could not have moved for his life. Save his restless, scheming brain, he was dead,—but the mind was so alive to the misfortune which had befallen him, that it seemed to be struggling for escape. With a mighty effort he forced his wild, staring eyes to read, and his treacherous brain to construe these words—

FATHER: When you see this you will know the handwriting and your curses will be hurled at your own flesh and blood. What I am, I was born. But if at any time there has been a glimmer of that honesty and purity of purpose that gives to one womanly grace, it has been crushed by your taunts and jeers. Remember that she who writes this has been schooled in hypocrisy, the volume of which will soon astonish that society in which you have so vainly tried to establish yourself. As for me, I am out of it forever. I hate it! My path is downward, marked out at my birth. As for you, if you survive the scandal and humiliation which must now befall you, that same lack of higher aspirations so evident in me will, once your jeering pride is broken, bring you to my level.

If every plan so long nurtured by you is frustrated, do not attribute it wholly to me. Had I never been born the result would have been, to you, the same. I have only hurried the end. The girl through whose death you expect to own the Marshfield property is alive. I have seen her, have held in my hand a stone she wears, which is the exact counterpart of the one you have so jealously guarded.

The same craftiness which induced you to conceal from me all knowledge of a subject of such interest to us both, induced me to cover the fact that I have long known the contents of the papers you expected to find here. You have played your game, and have lost. Had we worked together, you would never have been obliged to acknowledge the loss. The papers are of no further use to you. You are safer without them, for they are evidence of your crimes. I take them to protect your daughter. You may rest assured that the property will not go from your family. Under my management there will be little fear that the girl will ever prove her own. She will soon be lower than I can ever become, for she can suffer. I thank you that I can shut my eyes to her sufferings. What matter to me if her heart breaks? If, when she finds her position, she takes her own life, where she will die there are no mourners. After you are dead, I shall claim my property. You will be pleased that your daughter will profit by your patience.

If you were kneeling to me, judge by your own heart how much sympathy there is in mine. You once taunted me on my fall. Good-bye, forever.

He did not move. The torturing brain seemed baffled, that there was not more of it. There was a noise in the room, near the door. With an effort he lifted his head.

"Hullo, Mr. Goldthurst!" a voice said. It was Mr. Grillis. "You won't thank me for comin' down at this time o' night," regarding the staring face with rather a foolish expression on his own, "but I saw you

crossin' the bridge. There's a little matter I want fixed. I want some kind of a paper on that Marshfield property!"

Quite unconsciously Mr. Grillis had allowed his voice to take a peremptory tone. He showed he had come to stay, for he took a seat and looked at the white face.

"'Tain't often a man can find you, now-a-days," he went on. He mistook the stare for the cold contempt for which the face was noted, and it angered him. "Why don't you speak, man?" loudly. "Don't think you can set there 'n' look me out o' face! You've gut my money, 'n' I want somethin' to show you mean to do the right thing by me, 'n' I'm goin' to git it!"

In the silence which followed, he wished that he had not gone into it so abruptly; he began to think that something was wrong. The white head staring at him looked queer, almost awful! All at once a convulsive movement showed in every feature, and a discordant rattle issued from between the chalky lips.

"There is no property."

Mr. Grillis leaped from his chair in a rage. Everything he had seen he attributed to the hypocrisy of the man.

"Ye lyin' villain!" he shouted, "what did ye encourage me to wait for? D'ye think forty thousand dollars nothin', ye thief? Dam ye, if ye go out of this house ye'll go a disgraced man before the world!"

Mr. Grillis stopped, for the form was slowly rising, the stare had grown so ghastly that he became nervous, and started toward the door. A singular noise reached him, a noise quite unlike any that could be made by human being. He turned to see Mr. Goldthurst's arm reach out and grasp the lamp. For an instant there seemed a circular flame about the awful face, then there was a dull thud, and Mr. Grillis fell senseless.

There was not a sign or sound to tell the patrol as he went through Summit avenue, that a human life was hanging in the balance. On the floor of the Goldthurst library lay Mr. Grillis, his knees drawn up, his right hand pressed to his head, from which the blood ran down the face and stained the grizzly beard. The ghastly scene was lighted by a flickering fire,—a tiny fire,—which crept along the floor as though with cunning stealth, that it might not startle its prey. On it moved, making fantastic figures on the walls and ceiling. Now it lay low, then sprang into renewed life, dancing coquetishly hither and thither, as though to lull suspicion. Along the thick carpet it crawled, then, with a leap, encircled one of the heavy draperies in its grasp.

Darting toward the insensible form, it played about the open hand, then greedily licked the fingers. A spasmodic jerk threw the form on its other side. A groan escaped it, but there was no attempt to rise. Nearer the fire came, till it touched the forehead. Another jerk, and Mr. Grillis came to his knees and looked dazedly around. With a cry he struggled to his feet, then staggering blindly, rushed out into the night.

Savagely the flames, robbed of their prey, lashed themselves about the room. The breeze through the open door fanned them into greater fury. They crept up the stairway, not timidly, but with a lustful greed;