CHAPTER XVII

Miss Bruce seemed greatly perturbed by Mr King's sinister suggestion.

"You terrify me," said she. "You make my blood run cold. Surely I have had trouble enough. Is there more to come?"

"I fear so," he replied, solemnly. "I greatly fear so. I know nothing definite, but I have a horrible presentiment of I scarcely know what. But recent circumstances compel me to carry my investigations a step further. I will be perfectly frank and open with you, and tell you all I know. Then you may judge for yourself."
But, before I come to that, let me hark back again to that memorable Sunday. Assuming, for argument's sake, that Mrs Bruce did run away, she must have taken some articles of clothing, jewellery, what not, with her. Was this the case?"

"No," was the reply, "and that always seemed the most puzzling feature of the affair. Not a thing was missing from her room; not so much as a hat."

"H'm," said he, "can you tell me in what room the interview between the two took place?"

"In the library, I believe."

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "The library!"

"Yes. Why do you seem surprised at that?"

"Oh; only it reminded me of something Eleanor mentioned to me. I will tell you later. And now, coming back to recent
events, can you tell me the exact cause of Mr Bruce's death?"

She was very pale now, and ill at ease. She hesitated a moment before answering. Then said she, "The doctor certified it to be apoplexy."

"Family doctor?"

"Yes; for a great many years."

"Just so. I begin to understand. Did he die in his own room?"

"No; and to save further questioning I will tell you all I know about it. His reason had suddenly given way. The day of his death he had become so violent that a strict watch—by the doctor's orders—was kept upon him. During the night, however, he escaped from his room, and a few hours later was found lying dead in the library."

"Ah! The library again! Who was the first to discover the body?"
“Simpson—the butler.”
“He had been in Mr Bruce’s employ, I believe, for many years?”
“For many years. Yes.”
“And was in the house at the time of the disappearance of Mrs Bruce?”
“I presume so. Yes.”
“Excuse my asking you so many questions, Miss Bruce, but my object in doing so will become obvious to you presently. Did you see the body of your brother that morning?”
“Yes. I was summoned to his room at once.”
“And did you notice anything peculiar about his appearance; any strange marks upon his throat, for instance?”
Miss Bruce gave a little inarticulate cry as of pain, and, for a moment, did not reply.
“You know—you seem to know, every-
thing," she said at last, "so why ask me the question?"

"Because," said he, "we are now coming to the motive which impelled Eleanor to fly from this accursed house. She had, and still has—for I have seen them—exactly similar marks upon her own neck."

Miss Bruce stared at him with open jaws, and eyes bulging with horror, her breath coming thick and fast. But no word escaped her lips.

"Eleanor owed her life, in a double sense, to her father," he continued quietly. "He lost his in saving hers. Perhaps," he added, after a solemn pause, "it was an act of God's retributive justice."

Miss Bruce swayed for an instant in her chair; then, with an imploring gesture, she said—

"Don't drive me mad, Mr King. Have a little pity on a broken-down woman. I
understand nothing of this, and you terrify me. You—you—"

He pushed back his chair and made a movement as if to rise.

"Pardon me," he said. "Perhaps I am inconsiderate at such a time. Suppose we postpone it, until—"

"Not for a moment," said she, controlling her agitation with a mighty effort. "You have gone too far. I must know the whole truth now. Further suspense would kill me outright."

"Very well, then," and he related the whole story as he had received it from the lips of Eleanor. When he had ceased speaking, there was a long silence between them. At last, in a broken voice, she said:

"I need not tell you—you can see for yourself that I knew nothing of this. My blood runs cold with the horror of the thing. I have never been inside this museum. He
never asked me to visit it. I never had the slightest curiosity to do so. I considered it a harmless hobby, which had diverted his mind from—the other matter. I never viewed it in any other light. Until now I never heard of this revolving bookcase. It must have been constructed for some special purpose, as there are two other means of access to the museum—one from his bedroom, and another for visitors from a door under the staircase in the hall. As for this awful creature—this monster you have described—the idea seems incredible, fantastic, even grotesque. I cannot bring myself to believe it. Remember, I have lived in this house for many years. It has been a very quiet and monotonous existence. No incident that could have disturbed a child has ever occurred. Why should it suddenly become a house of unspeakable horrors? No, no! Mr
King. This monster is but a creation of Eleanor's excited brain.”

“Well,” said he, unwilling to harrow her feelings further, “let it rest, at present, at that, Miss Bruce. Of course, I am bound to get at the truth of the matter in the end, and there is one man under this roof who knows.” And, glancing toward the door and lowering his voice, he added, “I mean the butler. He has been here many years, has he not?”

“Twenty or more,” she answered.

“I thought so. I will have an interview with him on Saturday; but he must have no inkling of that intention.”

“I must leave the matter entirely to your discretion,” said she, quite submissively. “Yours now seems to be the master-hand.”

“I am but an earnest seeker after the truth, Miss Bruce,” said he, rising, “and that reminds me that I have in my pocket
here, what I consider to be an absolute indication of Mrs Bruce's innocence," and to the amazement of Miss Bruce, he placed in her hands the letter written by Eleanor's mother to Felix Featherstone bidding him to that last fatal tryst in Curzon Street; "a weak, greatly tempted, and doubtless imprudent woman—yes; but a guilty one—never."

Miss Bruce read the letter as one in a dream, once, twice, and again. Then, with swimming eyes, she returned it to Mr King.

"Poor creature!" she said. "I know not by what miracle you became possessed of this letter, but there is innocence, though tempted sore, in every line of it; and thank God for it. But it only deepens the mystery. What could have been the fate of the poor creature?"

"That I shall shortly ascertain," said
he solemnly. “It is my duty to do so. It may possibly come to pass that a dread secret will long exist between us two alone. There may be reasons why Eleanor should never know a hideous truth. Good-bye, Miss Bruce, until Saturday.” And before she could recover from her astonishment at these cryptic words, he had gone.

Mr King walked all the way to the Middle Temple in a brown study.

“I am in a dashed awkward position,” he repeated to himself again and again, with variations. “Without Blake I could have done nothing. The secret would always have remained a secret. But now that I am hot on the scent, knowing what I already know, and suspecting what I shall shortly know, how can I, for Eleanor’s sake, for my sake, for everybody’s sake, reveal the whole ghastly business to him?”
Frankly, it is impossible; still, I am under obligations to the man. My honour is involved. It is the question of the loss or gain of £100,000 to him. Is there no dashed way out of the impasse?"

At last a forlorn-hope sort of an idea came into his brain, and he betook himself at once to the noble library of his Inn. For two hours he plodded through volume after volume of "The State Laws" of the American Union. At last he rose jubilant, folded up his notes, placed them in his pocket, and strode out into the sunshine, a greatly relieved man.

"Two things are safe enough now—our secret and Blake's money. What the deuce were his lawyers thinking about that they never discovered this thing? Whew! It is a relief. I wonder if I can find him at the Cecil."

He drove thither in a cab at once, and
caught his man as he was descending the steps into the courtyard.

"Come inside," said he. "I have news for you."

They repaired to the American bar, and over a cocktail Mr King delivered himself of the following:—

"Mr Blake," said he, "I told you last evening that I had a clue. No good," and he snapped his fingers. "It looked promising. I was over-confident—and there you are. What became of your cousin—of the blessed pair of them—the Lord only knows. I give it up. And, after all, it doesn't concern you one little bit. I have been busy with your State laws the better part of the afternoon. Mr Felix Featherstone, I understood you to say, was a citizen of the State of New York?"

"Quite right," said Mr Blake; "he was born in Lyons, Wayne County, New York."
“Precisely. Well, in that State the presumption of death, in case the party is not heard from in the interim, extends to ten years. After that time his claim to any moneys or properties devised to him by a will, wherever executed, is barred, and such moneys or properties are forfeited to the next of kin.”

“Is that really so?” asked Mr Blake, with his eye-brows lifted half-way up his forehead with astonishment. “Really so?”

“Of course it is so. No reason whatever why you should have been put to the trouble and expense of coming over here. What sort of lawyers have you got in your country, anyhow?”

“Say! look here! Mr King, suppose we have another cocktail over this,” said the delighted American, touching the bell.

“Don’t mind,” said Mr King, who was
equally delighted to scramble out of an awkward predicament.

"I'll cable over to-morrow and get a confirmation of this," pursued Mr Blake.

"Just what I was going to suggest; and, by the way, here is that cheque for £500 you gave me the other day," and Mr King produced it from his waistcoat pocket.

"Well, what of it?" asked the astonished Mr Blake.

"Unearned; take it back," said Mr King.

"Excuse me," said Mr Blake, drawing himself up, "but I'll see you hanged, sir, before I do. What? Unearned? Why, what are you talking about? If what you tell me is true—and I don't doubt it for an instant—you ought to have a cheque for ten times the amount. I shall be able to sleep in comfort—no dead body of a cousin on my chest all night long. Can
go back home, enjoy the trip, and draw my £100,000 without any further bother. Oh, sir, you have done me a tremendous service, and you have not heard the last of my gratitude. Put that cheque back in your pocket."

"All right," said Mr King. "But why not cable at once, and ascertain if I am correct or not? Within a few hours you ought to get a reply. When it comes, send a copy down to me. I must be off now. Got an appointment with a young lady."

"Oh! all right. Never keep a young lady waiting. I'll cable at once, and send you the reply straight away when it comes."

In his subsequent interview with Eleanor, he dwelt but lightly upon the result of his visit to Curzon Street, and began to sum it up in this wise:—
"Your aunt, Miss Bruce—otherwise Miss Gibson!"

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed Eleanor. "Then she admits it. The artful dear! And to think how well she managed it, too. I had my suspicions. Why, I said to her only the other day, 'I believe you really are Miss Gibson—but why the disguise? Why all this mystery?'

"I suspect," said he, "indeed, I know, that there was a stupid misconception about it all. I regret to say it; but, beyond any question, your father was not quite right in his upper storey."

"And got strange ideas in his head?"

"Exactly."

"Now, tell me," said she eagerly, "for I cannot get out of my mind what I overheard at the Carlton—did my mother ever run away with another man?"

"No, dear."
“She was a good woman?”
“A good, most lovable, but sorely tried woman.”
“I am so glad, so glad to know that,” said she. “Then she did not perish in a fire in Paris?”
“No. She died in Curzon Street, where you were born,” said he, with the hardihood born of a rooted conviction.
“But he—my father—imagined that

“Yes. That was his special form of madness.”
“I begin to understand. I may believe this implicitly, as coming from you?”
“Implicitly, as coming from me. Yes.”
“And do you suggest that I should dismiss the whole affair from my mind?”
“I do most earnestly.”
“Then it is done,” said she, with a sigh of relief.
Mr King had his own sense of relief as he quitted Montagu Mansion shortly afterward. Arrived at his chambers in the Middle Temple, he found a note from Mr Blake awaiting him. With the note was a cablegram from Boston, and it read as follows:—

"Information quite correct. Curious oversight. Regret trouble caused you. Have communicated with San Francisco solicitors."

A grim smile spread over his features. "Percy King," said he, "shake hands with yourself. You have never done a better day's work in your life than this, old boy!"
CHAPTER XVIII

Mr Bruce was duly buried at Highgate Cemetery on the following Saturday. The funeral was a very quiet one. His friends of late had been few. For years he had lived the life of a recluse, with the usual result. By most his continued existence, until then, had been quite forgotten.

On Saturday, as agreed upon, Mr King put in an appearance at 99, Curzon Street. During the interval since their last interview he had neither seen nor heard from Miss Bruce.

"Well," said she, "Eleanor—is she better?"
"Much better, and more cheerful," said Mr King.

"Did you give her my love?"

"I did. And I explained to her just what I thought to be necessary. Nothing more."

"I am glad of that. My motive, at Barnet, in seeking to dissuade you from making investigations in her behalf, was a natural one. I had another plan of my own, and I thought your inquiries might be premature, and of a nature to give her a shock. I wished to avoid that, if possible. However, everything, perhaps, has happened for the best. Whatever surprise there may yet be in store for me, I can bear it, knowing that Eleanor will never know."

"I have taken ample precautions against that," said Mr King. "Eleanor will never know."
"Very well, then. Where will you see Simpson?"

"In the library."

"Still the library?"

"Still the library. I have my reasons for seeing him there."

"As you will," and she at once led the way to that apartment and rang the bell.

"Tell Simpson," she said to the footman, "that a gentleman wishes to see him here. I shall see you again, Mr King, before you go, of course?" she added.

"Certainly, by all means, Miss Bruce," said he, and the next minute he found himself alone.

Very shortly the butler, halting a moment on the threshold, and palpably ill at ease, entered the room and closed the door behind him. I think I have already described him as a tall, thin, hawk-eyed, hawk-nosed, and clean-shaven man.
He advanced a few steps, then looked inquiringly in the direction of Mr King.

"Sit down, Mr Simpson," said the latter.
"I wish to have a little talk with you."

Mr Simpson, by this time very ill at ease indeed, sat down.

"You are the butler here, I believe?" said Mr King.

"Yes, sir."

"Been here a long time, I understand?"

"About twenty-two years, sir."

"That would be about the time of Mr Bruce's marriage?"

"Just a short while after his marriage. Yes, sir."

"So that you were here when the child—a daughter—was born?"

"I was, sir."

"Did he seem pleased?"

"Well, fairly so, sir, I believe. It wasn't
my place to ask, or take notice of a thing like that."

"Just so—that was before he had taken you into his confidence—I quite understand."

Mr Simpson, it would have been plain to the most casual observer, quite failed to perceive the drift of Mr King's remark, though he cast an uneasy glance in that gentleman's direction.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I will make it clearer to your understanding presently, Mr Simpson," said he. "I thought you would have grasped it at once. Meanwhile, I will just drop a gentle intimation that I know a lot, Mr Simpson—almost as much as you do; so don't attempt to prevaricate or bluff me one little bit, else it may be bad for you. You take a straight tip and answer my questions truthfully. No harm will
come to you then. But I am not a man
to be played with, Mr Simpson. I have
come here for the truth, and the truth I
mean to get out of you, if you are a sensible
man. Perhaps you would prefer to be
questioned by the police. If so, you are
a dashed fool, and must abide by the con-
sequences. Which is it to be?"

It was plain that Simpson was in a terrible
funk. It had been sprung upon him so
suddenly, and this Mr King was such a
masterful man, and seemed, as he had said,
"to know such a lot." All his nerves sud-
denly seemed to go to fiddle-strings. He
put his hand to his forehead, and felt it
clammy with cold sweat.

"Well," repeated Mr King, sternly,
"which is it to be?"

"Well," said Simpson, "I don't quite
know yet what you mean, sir; but I'll
answer your questions truthfully."
“In that case you will prove yourself to be a wise man. Mr Bruce, your late master, is dead; you have nothing to fear from him. I now represent Miss Bruce, and another; and you will have nothing to fear from me if you tell the truth. I candidly admit that I would much prefer to keep the police out of this business. It had better be kept a family secret. You, as one deeply implicated in this affair, ought to be glad enough to consent to this.”

Whatever fears Simpson may have hitherto entertained, disappeared at once.

“Willingly, sir. Willingly, sir. I have been an unhappy man for years—a slave, so to speak—bound hand and foot, and that miserable, sir, with the weight of it all on my conscience, as you would never believe.”
"I can quite understand that, Mr Simpson, and sympathise with you too. But you ran an awful risk, you know."

"Don't I know it, just! But he paid me well, and frightened me nearly out of my life with threats as to what would happen if I gave the show away——"

"Oh yes. I quite understand all that. But now to business. It was on a Sunday night, in May 1887, wasn't it, that Mr Featherstone called here last?"

Simpson stared aghast at the speaker.

"My word, sir, you seem to know quite as much as I do about it."

"Not quite. You must supply the missing links. You remember the gentleman, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. Perfectly."

Mr King produced a photograph from his pocket, and held it up for inspection.

"Recognise it?"
“Good Lord! yes, sir. That is the very gentleman.”

“And this?” producing another portrait. Simpson looked at it, gave a great gulp, and utterly broke down.

“The sweetest lady as ever lived, she was,” said he.

“Mrs Bruce?”

“Yes. She was so good and kind.”

“And yet you, Simpson,” said Mr King fiercely, “you lent a helping hand to this infamy.”

“I—sir; oh no, sir. God forbid! I can only suspect the truth, even now. I know nothing—nothing for certain. I’d rather not know.”

Mr King looked him straight in the eyes, but Simpson never faltered.

“I can meet your look, sir,” said he. “I have done wrong in keeping my suspicions to myself, I dare say, but they are my
suspicions after all. I've got 'em, and have had 'em for years, until they got into my dreams, awful—night after night—but I don't know, and, as I said before, I don't want ever to know, what really happened."

"The night Mr Featherstone called?"
"Yes, sir."
"You showed him into this room?"
"Yes, sir."

"Mrs Bruce was already here, awaiting his arrival. She made no secret of it to you?"

"Oh dear, no, sir. He had called frequently. Mr Bruce seemed to know him well. Indeed, he dined here once or twice. I think I heard that they had all met in Egypt, or somewhere abroad."

"Well; you showed him into this room, and left them together?"
"Yes, sir."
"Did you see him leave the house?"
"No, sir."
“Did you ever see Mrs Bruce again?”
“Never.”
“Was there no explanation given?”
“Yes; that they had eloped together that night.”
“Did you believe it?”
Simpson hesitated, and Mr King repeated the question.
“I didn’t know what to believe, sir,” said he at last. “They didn’t go out by the door; that I was certain of. And for the life of me—”
“That will do,” said Mr King, suddenly springing to his feet. “You have only told me half the truth so far. Now for the other half. This way,” and he walked to the farther end of the long room, and paused: “You keep a wild beast down here somewhere, and I want to have a look at him. How does this bookcase open, Simpson?”
CHAPTER XIX

SIMPSON seemed bewildered, and slowly shook his head.

"I don’t understand you, sir; honestly, I don’t."

"Do you mean to tell me," pursued Mr King, "that you don’t know how to get through these book-shelves into the museum?"

"Indeed I don’t, sir. It may be just as you say. Anything’s possible in this house; but I’ve never heard of such a thing, and I don’t see how it is possible either. I can take you into the museum, if you like. There are only two ways of getting in there
I know of. One door leads into it from the hall; but that is always locked. Then there is a secret way, through a cupboard in Mr Bruce's bedroom, with winding steps. I've been down them thousands of times, so I ought to know a bit about it, sir.”

Mr King was greatly puzzled. He was convinced that the man was speaking the truth, but that truth did not dovetail exactly with preconceived ideas.

“Oh, quite so,” said he. “Who ought to know better than yourself? I know that I am right all the same, but let that pass. Now, it was you, I believe, who first discovered Mr Bruce's body?”

“Yes, sir. In this very room, lying on his back just over there by that chair,” said he, pointing in the direction indicated. “You see, sir, it was just like this. He'd been raving mad all the day, and Miss Bruce had got a keeper in to look after him;
but, bless you, in the night he fell asleep, and when he woke up he found Mr Bruce had took his hook. So in he comes to my room, which was adjoining, and pulls me about until I woke up too. Then he tells me about it. So I just slipped into my trousers, and told him not to move until I came back with the master; for, bless you, I thought I would find him at once down in the museum. So, through the cupboard and down the steps I went to the museum, and switchèd on the electric light. Well, sir, I hunted in every hole and corner, but not a soul was in the place."

"H’m; you are quite sure of that, Simpson?" said Mr King.

"Oh! quite, sir." I twig what you mean; but I’d swear on a million Bibles that there wasn’t a living creature there then. Well, naturally, I couldn’t make it out at all, so I came upstairs again, told the man
to sit still a bit longer, and then looked through all the rooms, until, at last, I found him in here, lying just where I told you.”

“Did it strike you, Simpson, that he had died a natural death?”

“Well, to speak the truth, sir, it didn’t strike me that way at all.”

“What was your impression, then?”

“Well, since you ask me straight, sir, it is just this. It is not for me to dispute what the doctor said; but I’d ’a bet twenty to one that he had been strangled. That’s being honest, isn’t it, sir?”

“I am perfectly convinced of it, Simpson; and, since you have gone so far, who do you think did it?”

“I can guess, sir.”

“Good. We are getting on, Simpson; but I can go you one better, I know, so show me the way into this den of horrors. I should like especially to have a look at
this wild beast, who can strangle people with impunity here in the very heart of London.

"Very well. Follow me, sir," and Simp-son led the way through the hall and up the stairs. He opened a door at the end of a long corridor, and stood aside as Mr King entered a bedroom very simply furnished.

"This is where the master slept," said he, "and this is the cupboard I mentioned. Just an ordinary sort of cupboard, you see, sir, as nobody would ever take any particular notice of. I'll go in first; you follow me. The steps wind round and round, but they are safe enough. Lord! the victuals and drink I've brought down these blessed stairs, until I got jolly sick of it; and ain't I just glad it's all done and finished."

Mr King, closely following in the spiral descent, suddenly found himself in a lofty,
well-lighted room, though of rather small dimensions, so far as floor-space went. But such a room! a veritable lumber-room of the dead. Shelves ran round the walls, crowded with mummified cats, with ears erect and glass eyes glaring; mummies of goats, of horned bulls, and every other animal worshipped by the Egyptians. Broken coffins stood against the walls—half-dissected human remains on trestles, a huddle of bones and skulls—and linen cerecloths in the corners—a veritable charnel-house, pervaded by an indescribable odour of dust and decay, that was not quite offensive, yet repellent to the senses.

"This," said Simpson, "was what he called his workroom, sir. A pretty sort of workroom I call it."

"I should say so," was the reply. "But where is this wild beast—this foul creature who strangled him?"
“Oh! Hassan! The Lord knows where he is! I hain’t seen him since that night. There is a broken glass in the skylight overhead, as you can see for yourself, sir, and I fancy he escaped that way. He could climb like a monkey, and I dare say——”

“But who was he? What was he? A man?”

“Well, a sort of a man, sir. An Egyptian, I believe he was. The master brought him over to London years and years ago. He was an awful-looking chap; nearly black, with ears like a horse, and such long arms and fingers as I never see on any man. I never could guess how old he was—he might have been forty, or he might have been four hundred, for all I could tell. He couldn’t speak a word of English, and I think it was Arabic what they talked together. He seemed a perfect slave to the
master, used to follow him about like a dog; and for the life of me I can’t make out how he came to kill him.

“What he particularly seemed to know was all about dead things, and embalming people and things, and I really believe as some of them very cats up on the shelves there was our cats as we were always missing.

“Well, sir, here they worked together; and in here Hassan—that was the name of him—slept.” And Simpson opened a door disclosing a small room with a heap of rugs and cushions in a corner, and but little else. “And for all these years,” he continued, “I have had to bring down food and drink for the black beggar, and hold my tongue about it, for not a soul in the house but me ever knew he was here.”

“Rather unusual work for a butler,” remarked Mr King. “Why did you do it?”
"Well, sir, it was the money. That's what made me put up with it. The master thought I had a sort of hold on him, like; I pretended to know more about the disappearance of Mrs Bruce and the young man than what I really did—and that has meant a small fortune to me. You asked me to speak the truth, you know."

"Quite so. Quite so; and, since you are in the vein, tell me if you really know what became of that unfortunate couple."

"As God is my judge, sir," said Simpson earnestly, "I do not. He and me had some words one day, shortly after they'd gone, and in my temper I says, 'I know where I can put my hand on a hanging job, and not far away either,' I says. He turned as white as white at that, and says, 'What do you mean, Simpson?' 'I mean,' I says, 'that Mrs Bruce and that young gentleman I showed into the library that night,
never left this house, either of them, and I know it.’ ‘What nonsense!’ said he, after he had pulled himself together a bit, like. ‘What rubbish! Still, if you talk like that outside it might do a lot of mischief, and I want to hush up the scandal—keep it quiet, like—so stay here, hold your tongue, and draw five hundred pounds a year as long as I live. Will that suit your book, Simpson?’ he says. Well, there you are, sir. I’ve had to put up with a lot. Waiting on a nigger! My word! but it means now that I’ve got a tidy bit put away, and can buy a nice sea-side hotel; perhaps get married, as like as not.”

“Good idea, Simpson.”

“Yes; so there you are, sir. Still,” he went on. “I often wondered what became of them two. He was as mad as a hatter—the master was; no telling what devilry he wouldn’t be up to if he was crossed in
any way—and Hassan, as I say, was his slave, and would do any mortal thing he was told to do. And, at last, that set me a-thinking. I see him always a-working here; tinkering up dead bodies, wrapping ’em up in linen, and a-gilding and a-painting of ’em, and a-setting ’em up in fine coffins in the museum, and that did set me a-thinking. Well, upon my soul, sir, I don’t know what to say about it. You are a cleverer man than I am; you grasp my idea, I dare say—and there you are! I’ve told you every blessed thing I know, at all events.”

“Let us have a look at the museum,” said Mr King.

Simpson opened a door.

“This is it, sir;” said he, and stood aside for Mr. King to enter.

By daylight it was nothing more or less than a spacious, well-lighted apartment,
containing a remarkably good and valuable collection of Egyptian antiquities; some very beautifully-painted and decorated wooden coffins stood, among others, in glass cases, which lined the walls, while the ground space was fairly covered with cases, containing objects, in many instances of great interest. In short, there was nothing here to which the most fastidious visitor could take exception.

Mr King seemed perplexed at first.

"Nothing so very horrible, after all, about this," said he.

"No, sir; not in here—at least by daylight, sir," said Simpson.

Mr King, with a keenly suspicious eye, walked twice round the room. Nothing escaped his eager scrutiny.

"Everything seems to be all right," he began—when he suddenly stopped at sight of what appeared to be some movable
steps, standing just beneath a painted panel representing a high priest making sacrificial offerings to a hideous hawk-faced god in petticoats.

"Hello!" said Mr King, "this is an interesting find." And he straightway mounted the steps, and made a careful examination of the panel. He shortly discovered that one of the bosses on the high priest's girdle was not a painted, but a "practicable" one of brass. He pressed it, when lo! the panel swung around, and there was visible the whole interior of the library.
CHAPTER XX

For a moment Simpson stood stock-still with wonderment.

"You are right, sir! Upon my word I would never have believed it; and how you came to know—with all due respect, sir—is a bit beyond me. Ever been in the house before?"

"Never."

"Wonderful! And I've been here a matter of over twenty years, and never even dreamed of such a thing. It makes things a bit clearer, this does."

"To me, it makes everything clear, Simpson. Your master came down here
the other night unexpectedly, and caught this—this mal-formation up to some devilment. Words passed—the pair of them were more or less mad, I dare say—and the rest I can leave to your imagination. Hassan, as you call him, had been at this kind of work before. Nobody knew better than he how to strangle a man—or a woman.”

“It’s enough to make your flesh creep, sir, it truly is,” said Simpson, now as white as a sheet; “and to think of my being in it, in a manner of speaking, all these years. Lord, sir, a good breath of sea-air once more will be like heaven to me. Of course, it was done right here, somewhere.”

“Undoubtedly—and quietly.”

“Strangled him. I dare say dragged him up the stairs and laid him on the floor in the library; then, knowing what he’d done, and having sense enough to think that I’d want to know a thing or two, even
if I couldn't understand his bally lingo, he gets up to the skylight somehow, breaks a glass, gets through, and makes a bunk. It's all as clear as daylight now, sir."

By this time the painted panel had swung back to its place again with a slight click, and the room was as before.

"Yes; that is all plain enough, as you say," remarked Mr King, "but the greater mystery still remains unsolved."

"It does indeed," said Simpson. "Better have another good look around, sir."

"I will," said he; and again he made a slow and deliberate examination of every possible object of suspicion in the room. The result, as before, was nil. At last, said he—

"The key to the mystery is not here. This room was open at times to public inspection, and would defy Scotland Yard itself. Let us go back to the 'workroom,'
as you call it—and hellish work has been done there too, if I'm not greatly mistaken," and Mr King returned at once to the gruesome place and began a search, which he afterwards described in a single word—"sickening."

It is needless to dwell upon the ghastly details of that long search. He was about to give it up in despair at last, when, upon lifting a voluminous roll of papyri on an upper shelf, a modern japanned tin box was suddenly revealed. It was thickly covered with a form of dust, the nature of which he was not over eager to inquire into. Indeed, it did not matter, for the discovery of such a commonplace object, amidst such surroundings, at once stimulated curiosity. He prised it open with trembling hands, and within a very few minutes he had solved the mystery of which he had been in search.
MISS WHITE OF MAYFAIR

What he had found was merely this—a few letters, written by Felix Featherstone to Mrs Bruce; a formal report drawn up and signed by one "Thomas Mason, private detective," in which it was duly set forth that Eleanor Bruce and Felix Featherstone were among the victims of the Opéra Comique disaster; and, finally, a very extraordinary document, bearing no signature, but written, as Mr King instantly divined, by Mr Bruce himself.

The letters were of a highly inflammatory nature, and duly calculated to make the least jealous of husbands "sit up" as the locution goes. In them Mr Bruce was alluded to in terms which, if not quite insulting, were, at least, opprobrious. They were the unconsidered letters of a hot-blooded young man careless of the consequences, and wholly blind to the fact that their discovery by the husband would
swiftly lead to the undoing of the woman, however innocent she might be.

The report of "Mr Thomas Mason, private detective," brought a grim smile out upon Mr King's hitherto solemn face—the whole thing being so manifestly "cooked" to order—that for a second he fell to wondering what the amount of this man's honorarium could have been for incurring such a deadly risk of detection.

But the strange document of which I have spoken filled him with unspeakable horror, all else being forgotten as he read the deadly and sinister thing to the end.

It was headed "A Parable," and read thus:

"An upright man once married a maid. She was comely, and of her honesty he had no doubt. She bore him one child, and all seemed well—in a wicked world—until a man from over the seas suddenly crossed
her path, and straightway she forgot her allegiance to the upright man, her husband. Proofs of her perfidy came to him, and they were conclusive. His duty then was clear.

"The Jews stoned to death their scarlet women. Moderns divorce or shoot them. But certain wise men preserve their bodies, by ancient methods, as reminders of the frailty of their over-rated sex. Their companions in guilt serve a no less useful purpose in this respect.

"Hence, the upright man of this parable, seeing his duty clear, hid his faithful servant Hassan—a man versed in an ancient and honoured handicraft—to lie in wait for these two destroyers of his domestic peace, these betrayers of his honour. And Hassan was swift and silent of foot, and his grip was deadly, and the tongue of the seducer and the seduced were for ever stilled.

"Then was the skill of this faithful
servant employed to goodly effect; and now, cunningly embalmed with gum and spices of the East, enwrapped in many layers of woven flax, and glorified in red and gold coverings, suitably inscribed with hieroglyphics recounting their misdeeds—this godless twain now stand among the household belongings of the upright man.

"And the name of the woman, as inscribed beneath, is:

"'Buk-kuk, High Priestess of the Temple of Osiris, Thebes. Temp. Rameses II.'

"And the name of the man:

"'Heru A., gatekeeper of that same temple.'

"And thus hath justice been fulfilled."

"Well, sir. Found anything?"

The voice was Simpson's.

Quickly repressing a shudder of horror, Mr King thrust the papers into his breast
pocket, and assumed an air of disappointment.

"Nothing to speak of, Simpson. It may lead to something. That remains to be seen. I am tired now. I shall not require you any longer, Simpson. Go and tell Miss Bruce that I wish to speak to her in the library at once."

"Yes, sir," and greatly wondering, the butler disappeared up the winding staircase.

Mr King then re-entered the museum, and carefully scrutinised the inscriptions beneath the upright mummy cases ranged against the walls. Suddenly he gave a gasp, and his eyes dilated with horror. Glorified in red and gold indeed, were the coffins of Buk-kuk, the High Priestess, and Heru A., the gatekeeper of the Temple—otherwise, the hapless victims of a madman’s mistaken vengeance.

He crossed with a heavy heart to the
steps, pressed the brazen boss of the panel, and, as the latter swung open, he suddenly found himself face to face with Miss Bruce. She was deathly white, and trembling in every limb.

"Have you found anything? Do you know?" And as he did not at once answer, she added, "I see. Then tell me. I am prepared for the very worst."

He gave her his hand, and assisted her down the steps. Then he led her to the two coffins, and pointed to them in silence.

A great gulp came into her throat, and for a moment she could not speak. At last—

"Are you sure?" she said.

By way of answer he took the "Parable" from his pocket, and placed it in her hands. She recognised the writing in an instant.

"It is his," she said; and read to the end. Then she looked up.

"He was mad, mad, mad!" she ex-
claimed. "Oh, the horror of it! The tragedy of it! The sad, sad ending! The folly of it all! What is to be done, Mr King? Does Simpson know?"

"He knows nothing definite. He must never know. Nobody must ever know but our two selves."

"But what is to be done? They cannot remain here. It would be a sacrilege. What is to be done?"

"God knows," said he. "I must think it over. Come; let us get out of this. My nerves have gone to pieces; I can't stand it any longer."

They passed up the steps together, and into the library. The 'n'ysterious bookcase clicked behind them. A few moments later Mr King was out in the open again, struggling with a very thorny problem.

A week or so later, as Mr Blake was on
his way across the Atlantic to claim the inheritance of his dead kinsman, the problem was quietly solved. Among the landed possessions of Mr Bruce was an unoccupied old manor house, begirt by a pine forest, in the heart of North Devon—a secluded and desolate spot. Thither the bodies of the hapless pair were secretly taken, and as secretly interred beneath the pines. How this was managed by Mr King it is not our purpose, nor would it serve any useful end, to disclose.

By the time these words appear in print, "Miss White" will have become Mrs Percy King, and No. 29, Curzon Street, with all its contents, will have passed into the hands of uninquiring strangers.

THE END