

Stories from the Diary of a Doctor.

By the Authors of "THE MEDICINE LADY."

X.—WITHOUT WITNESSES.



IN the October of 1890 I went to pay a short visit to my friends, the Brabazons, of Penporran, in Cornwall. I could only spare a week out of town, and looked forward to my visit with the pleasure which a busy man must feel when he can relax his labours for a short time.

Brabazon was an old college friend, and on the first evening of my stay we had many memories to revive and many friends to

"Barbara Farnham is, without exception, the most dangerous girl of my acquaintance," replied Brabazon, with a slight laugh. "Before her advent on the scene, Randall and Carleton were the best possible friends. Now they are at daggers drawn."

"I confess I did not particularly observe them," I answered.

"Oh, they are just ordinary good young fellows," replied Brabazon. "I am sorry for Carleton, of course, for I don't think he has

the ghost of a chance with Miss Farnham. He is not particularly good looking, and he has the misfortune to be poor. Randall is a handsome lad, and has considerable expectations. His father is Lord Hartmore—but the fact is, I don't think the girl means to marry either of them—she is simply playing one against the other for her own ends. She is a handsome witch, and a dangerous one. She plays as carelessly with edged tools—as carelessly and unconcernedly as a baby would with its rattle."

I said nothing further. Brabazon conducted me to my room, and wished me good-night. I sat down by the fire, and thought in an idle manner



"WE HAD MANY MEMORIES TO REVIVE."

talk over. We sat until the small hours in his smoking-room, and it was early morning before we retired to bed. Just as I was leaving the room, he said to me:—

"By the way, you will find some disturbing elements at work here. I know you are fond of attributing everything to some psychological cause. I wonder what you will say to the love affairs of Randall, Carleton, and Miss Farnham."

I naturally asked what my host meant.

"Randall and Carleton are both desperately in love with the same girl," he replied. "Did you not notice the state of affairs this evening at dinner?"

"I naturally noticed Miss Farnham," I answered at once. "It would be difficult not to be attracted by so striking a personality."

over the events of the evening. There was a large house party at Penporran. Shooting was going on vigorously, and cub-hunting had begun. Some of the guests were acquaintances of mine. In short, I looked forward to a pleasant week in this genial house. As I laid my head on my pillow I thought again, but without any specially keen interest, of Brabazon's story about the disturbing elements which were now agitating the air of this otherwise peaceful mansion.

Two young men were in love with the same girl. Surely the situation was a very ordinary one. Such a complication happened daily.

I wondered why Brabazon should have troubled himself to mention such an ordinary event, but as I was dropping off to sleep, I

saw rising up before me, in my mind's eye, the proud, beautiful face of Barbara Farnham, and a kind of intuition told me that these commonplace incidents might assume the form of tragedy in her cruel and careless hands.

I dreamt of Miss Farnham that night, and came down to breakfast the next morning with my curiosity considerably aroused about her.

She was in the room when I entered, and was idly helping herself to a cup of coffee, which she carried to a distant window where a small table was also laid for breakfast. She sat down, and, sipping it leisurely, looked around her with a careless glance. Her eyes fell on me—she smiled and motioned to me to approach.

"Pray bring your breakfast to this table," she said, in a light tone. "I was immensely interested in you when I heard you were coming. I adore doctors, particularly if they are clever. Are you going to ride this morning?"

I answered in the affirmative, and asked her if she was fond of horses.

"Fond?" she replied, a flash of added warmth lighting up her peculiar red-brown eyes. "I am going to whisper a secret to you—I never could compare horses and human beings. I consider the horse the infinitely nobler creature of the two."

I laughed, and we entered into an animated conversation.

While we were talking, Carleton came into the room. He was a squarely built young man, with deeply set dark eyes, and a determined chin and mouth. His figure was slightly above the middle height; he was extremely spare, but had good shoulders and was well set up. As soon as ever he appeared in sight, Miss Farnham, by an almost imperceptible movement, slightly turned her back to him and her talk with me became even more animated and full of wit than before. Her gay, light laugh must have reached Carleton, who came straight across the room to her side.

"You are in your favourite seat," he said.

"Yes," she replied, "and Dr. Halifax is having breakfast with me."

Then she turned to continue her conversation with me, while Carleton stood perfectly erect and silent by her side.

"Why don't you eat something?" she said to him, presently.

"There is time enough," he answered.

Finding he would not go away she tried to draw him into conversation, but he was

evidently not in the humour to make himself agreeable. His answers were confined to monosyllables, and to some of Miss Farnham's remarks he did not reply at all.

I confess that I began to think him an unmitigated bore.

A change was, however, quickly to take place in the situation—Randall, the other lover, appeared on the scene, and his coming acted like a flash of sunshine. He was a gay, handsome, debonair-looking young fellow. He had good teeth, good eyes, a genial smile, a hearty manner. His voice was musical, and he knew well how to use it. He nodded carelessly to one or two acquaintances when he entered the room, and then came straight to Miss Farnham's table.

She shook hands with him, and he nodded a cheerful good morning to Carleton and me.

"That is right," he said, smiling brightly at the handsome girl; "you promised to reserve a seat for me at this table, and I see you have kept your word. Have you done breakfast, Carleton?"

"I had something an hour ago," replied Carleton.

Randall went to a sideboard to help himself to a generous portion of a dish which was being kept hot with a spirit lamp. On his return our conversation became gayer and more lively than ever.

I must confess that I saw nothing to object to in Miss Farnham's manners. I could not imagine why Brabazon spoke of her as a dangerous witch. She tried to be polite to both men—or rather, she was polite without effort, but there was not a trace of the flippant in her manner or bearing. Her beauty was undoubtedly of a remarkable order. Her eyes were her most striking characteristic. There was a great deal of red in their brown, which was further accentuated by the red-brown of her long eyelashes. The eyes were capable of every shade of expression, and could be at times as eloquent and as full of meaning as those of that bewitching creature, the collie. Her eyebrows were dark and delicately pencilled. Her hair was tawny in shade—she had quantities of it, and she wore it picturesquely round her stately, statuesque head. In some lights that brilliantly coloured hair looked as if a sunbeam had been imprisoned in it. Her complexion was of a warm, creamy whiteness. Her figure was slight and graceful. But for her eyes she might have been simply remarked as a handsome girl; but those eyes made her beautiful, and lifted her completely out of the commonplace.

We had nearly finished breakfast, when I was startled by seeing Randall suddenly press his hand to his eyes, and turn so white that I thought he was going to lose consciousness. He recovered himself almost immediately, however, and so completely, that no one else remarked the circumstance. Miss Farnham rose from the breakfast-table.

"I am going to ride with you, Dr. Halifax," she said, nodding brightly to me. "I shall come downstairs in my habit in half an hour."

She was crossing the room to speak to some of the other guests when Carleton came up to her.

"I want to say something to you," he said—"can we go to some room where we shall be quite undisturbed?"

His words were distinctly audible, not only to me, but to several other people in the room.

Randall in particular heard them, and I could see that he was waiting anxiously for the reply.

"I want to ride this morning—I have no time for private confidences," replied Miss Farnham, in a distinctly vexed tone.

"I won't keep you long," replied Carleton—"what I have to say is of great importance, at least to me."

"I will give you ten minutes after lunch; will that suffice?"

"Five minutes now will do better. I am very much in earnest when I make this request."

"Very well," said Miss Farnham, in a light tone; "importunate people generally have their way. Come into the conservatory—there is a rose there on which I have set my heart; it is too high for me to reach."

She left the room as she spoke, and Carleton quickly followed her. As they disappeared, I noticed more than one guest looking significantly after them. Carleton's pluck was distinctly approved of—I could see that by the expression on some of the ladies' faces—and one, as she passed close to Randall's side, was heard to murmur, audibly:—

"Faint heart never won fair lady."

Randall came up to me and asked me to join him in a smoke on the balcony. As we walked up and down, he talked cheerfully, and, whatever anxiety he may inwardly have felt, was careful not to betray a trace of it.

In less than half an hour Miss Farnham joined us. She was in a dark brown riding-habit, which toned perfectly with her rich and peculiar colouring. Her spirits were

gay, not to say wild, and the warm, creamy whiteness of her face seemed to glow now as if with hidden fire.

"Are you not ready for your ride?" she said, looking at me with a certain reproach. "The horses will be round in less than ten minutes. It is a splendid morning for a gallop. You are coming, too?" she added, turning suddenly to Randall.

"I only waited for you to invite me," he said. "Of course I shall come, with pleasure. But I thought," he added, in a low tone, coming close to her side as he spoke, "that you arranged to ride with Ronald Carleton this morning?"

"That is off," she replied, in a light tone. "Mr. Carleton has, I believe, another engagement."

The balcony on which we were walking led round to one of the entrances to the house; at this moment a groom was seen leading a smart mare up to the door, and at the same instant Carleton ran down the steps, and sprang lightly into the saddle.

"Where are you off to?" exclaimed Randall, bending out of the balcony to speak to him. "Miss Farnham, Dr. Halifax, and I are all going out immediately. Won't you join us?"

"Not this morning, I think," said Carleton, constraint in his tone. He gathered up the reins, and the mare began to prance about.

"You are holding her too much on the curb," exclaimed Randall.

"Thanks, I think I know what I'm about," replied Carleton, with evident temper. "Quiet, you brute, quiet," he continued, vainly endeavouring to restrain the movements of the impatient animal.

"I tell you, that mare won't stand the curb," shouted Randall. "Give her her head, and she'll do anything you ask her. I know, for I've often ridden her."

"When I require a riding lesson from you, I'll inform you of the fact," answered Carleton, in a sulky voice, which was rendered almost ridiculous by the frantic movements of the mare, now thoroughly upset.

Miss Farnham, who had been standing in the background, came up at this juncture, and took her place conspicuously by Randall's side.

"Mr. Randall is right and you are wrong," she exclaimed. "It is absolutely cruel to ride that mare on the curb."

Carleton looked up with a scowl, which anything but improved him. He would not even glance at Miss Farnham, but his eyes



"CARLETON LOOKED UP WITH A SCOWL."

flashed an angry fire at his more fortunate rival.

"Of course, Randall is right," he exclaimed. "All the odds are in his favour."

"Nonsense," retorted Randall, with heat.

"Come, come, gentlemen, pray don't quarrel on this lovely morning," said Miss Farnham. "Mr. Carleton, I wish you a pleasant ride."

She left the balcony as she spoke, and Randall and I immediately followed her example.

We had a splendid ride over an extensive moorland country, and returned to lunch in excellent spirits and in high good humour with each other. Carleton had not yet come back, but his absence did not seem to depress anyone, certainly not Miss Farnham, whose bright eyes and gay, animated manner made her the life of the party. Randall was radiant in the sunshine of her presence. She was confidential and almost affectionate in her manner to him; and he undoubtedly looked, and was, at his best.

I could not help cordially liking him and thinking that the pair were well matched. Notwithstanding Brabazon's words of the night before, I had no doubt that Miss

Farnham was sincerely attached to Randall, and would tell him so presently.

I spent the greater part of the afternoon alone with my host, and did not see the rest of the guests until we met at dinner. Carleton had then returned. He sat between a red-haired girl and a very fat old lady, and looked as *distract* and bored as man well could. Randall, on the other hand, was in his best form. His clothes sat well on him. He was, undoubtedly, a handsome, striking-looking man.

I cannot describe Miss Farnham's dress. It was ethereal in texture and suited her well. She was not seated in the neighbourhood of either Randall or Carleton, but once or twice I noticed that her eyes wandered down to their part of the table. For some reason, she was not in such high spirits as she had been in the early part of the day. My neighbour, a quiet, middle-aged spinster, began suddenly to talk to me about her.

"I see you are interested in Barbara Farnham," she began. "I am not the least surprised—you but follow the example of all the other men who know her."

"Miss Farnham is a very beautiful girl," I replied.

Miss Derrick gave a short sigh.

"Yes," she replied, "Barbara has a beautiful face. She is a fine creature too, although of course terribly spoiled."

"Have you known her long?" I asked.

"Yes; since she was a child. Of course you must notice, Dr. Halifax, the state of matters. Barbara's conduct is more or less the talk of the whole house. I presume from his manner that poor Mr. Carleton's chances of success are quite over, and for my part I am sorry. He is not rich, but he is a good fellow—he is devotedly attached to Barbara, and his abilities are quite above the average. Yes, I am sorry for Mr. Carleton. Barbara might have done worse than return his affection."

I did not feel inclined to pursue the subject any further with this somewhat garrulous lady. After a pause, I remarked:—

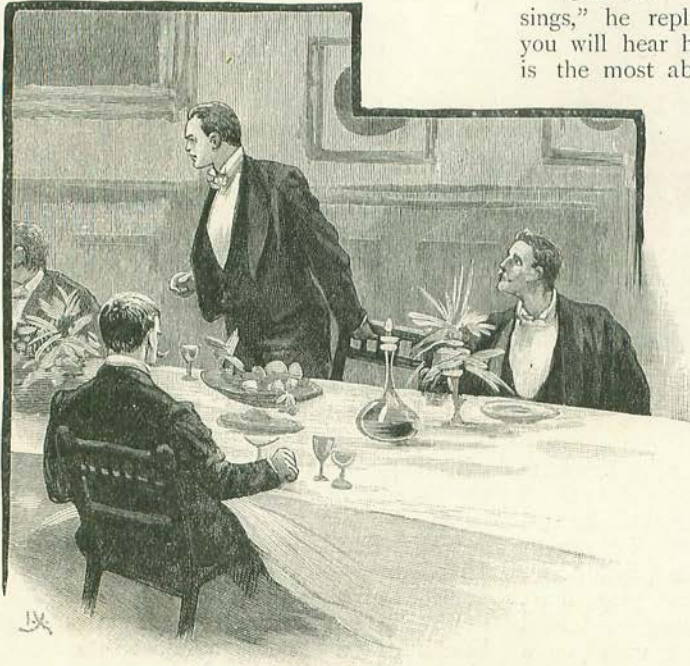
"Miss Farnham looks tired, and does not seem in her usual spirits."

Miss Derrick shrugged her thin shoulders.

"What else can you expect?" she

answered. "Barbara is a creature of moods. She was quite *exaltée* all the morning; now she will be correspondingly dull, until a fresh wave of excitement raises her spirits."

At this moment the signal for the ladies to withdraw was given. After their departure, Carleton and Randall found themselves sitting close together. I noticed that neither man spoke to the other, and also observed that after a time Carleton deliberately changed his seat for one at a distant part of the table.



"CARLETON DELIBERATELY CHANGED HIS SEAT."

We did not sit long over wine, and when we came into the drawing-room a lady was playing some classical music with precision and sufficient brilliancy to attract several musical men to the vicinity of the piano. Her place was quickly taken by the droll man of the party, who entertained the company with comic songs. The evening dragged on in the usual manner. For some unaccountable reason no one seemed quite in good spirits. As for me, I found myself constantly looking in the direction of the door. I heartily wished that either Carleton or Randall would come in—I acknowledged to myself that the presence of one at least of these gentlemen in the room would give me relief.

An hour and more passed away, however,

and neither of them appeared. I glanced towards Miss Farnham. She was standing near the piano, idly playing with a large feather fan. I thought I read both solicitude and expectation in her eyes.

The funny man was trolling out a sea-song to which a lively chorus was attached. Brabazon came up and touched my arm.

"When that is over," he said, in a low voice, "I will ask Barbara Farnham to sing."

"Can she sing?" I asked.

"Can she!" he reiterated. "Yes, she sings," he replied, emphatically. "Wait—you will hear her in a moment. Her voice is the most absolutely sympathetic I have ever listened to."

Soon afterwards Miss Farnham went to the piano. She played her own accompaniment. One grand sweep her hands seemed to take of the instrument, as if they meant to embrace it, and then a voice, high, full, sweet, magnificent in its volume of melody, rose on the air and seemed to fill the room.

Brabazon was right. Barbara Farnham could sing. As the words fell from her lips, there was no other sound in the listening room.

I jotted those words down afterwards from memory—they seemed to me to be a fit prelude to the scene which was immediately to follow:—

Thou hast filled me a golden cup
 With a drink divine that glows,
 With the bloom that is flowing up
 From the heart of the folded rose.
 The grapes in their amber glow,
 And the strength of the blood-red wine,
 All mingle and change and flow
 In this golden cup of thine
 With the scent of the curling wine,
 With the balm of the rose's breath—
 For the voice of love is thine,
 And thine is the Song of Death!

The voice of the singer sank low as she approached the end of her song. The final words were in a minor key. I looked full at Miss Farnham, and her dark eyes met mine. They were full of apprehension. A kind of premonition of coming sorrow might well have filled her breast from the look in their depths.

There was a noise and sense of confusion in the outer drawing-room. People stood back to make way for someone, and hurrying steps came quickly towards the piano.

Miss Farnham sprang to her feet, the last notes of the song arrested on her lips.

Carleton, an overcoat covering his evening dress, his hair dishevelled, his eyes wild, had come hastily to her side.

"You will think that I have killed him, Barbara; but, before God, it is not true!" he said in a hoarse whisper—then he grasped my arm.

"Come, I want you," he said, and he dragged me, as if he were a young fury, out of the room.

"What, in the name of Heaven, is the matter?" I asked of him when we found ourselves in the hall.

"Randall has fallen over the cliff down by Porran's field," he gasped. "I have found the—the body. Oh! no, no, what am I saying? Not the body yet—not a body when I left it—it breathed—it just breathed when I left. I tried to drag it up here, but it was too heavy. Come at once, for the love of Heaven."

Other people had followed us out of the drawing-room. I encountered a glance of fire from Miss Farnham's dark eyes—her face was like death itself. Brabazon, in a tone full of authority, as befitted the host, began to speak.

"Come!" he said. "Accident or no, there is not a moment to be lost in trying to help the poor fellow. You will lead us to the spot at once, Carleton. Come, Halifax; what a blessing that you happen to be on the spot!"

"Get some brandy and something which we can improvise into a litter or shutter," I exclaimed. "I am going to my room to fetch my surgical case."

I ran upstairs. A moment or two later we were on our way to the scene of the accident. Every man of the party accompanied us, and

several of the ladies. The foremost of the group was Miss Farnham herself. She had hastily flung a shawl over her head, and the train of her rich dinner dress was slung across her arm. She looked at Carleton, and with a peremptory gesture seemed to invite him to come to her side. He did so, and they rushed on—too quickly for many of the rest of the party to keep up with them.

It was a bright, moonlight night, and we had scarcely any need of the lantern which Brabazon was thoughtful enough to bring with him. We had to go some distance to reach the spot where poor Randall was lying, but by-and-by we found him stretched partly on his back, partly rolled over on his left side, on a little strip of sand which gleamed cold in the moonlight.

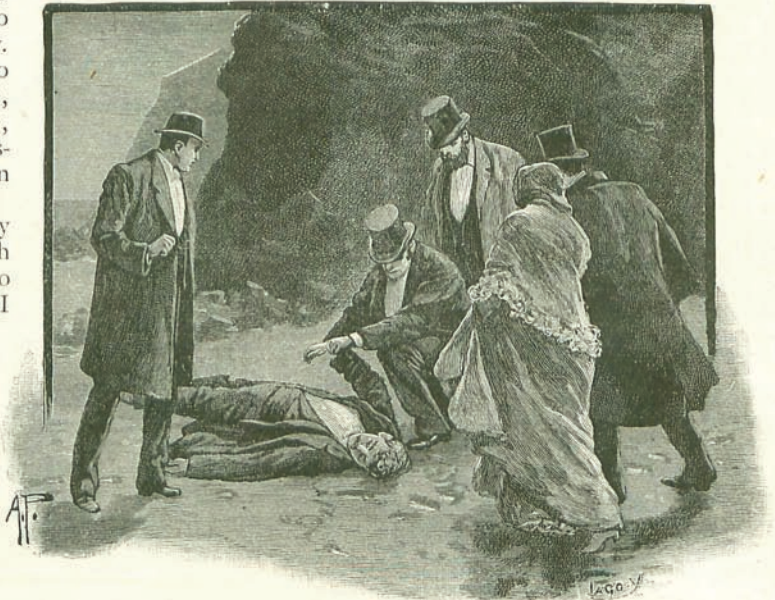
"Yes, it was here I left him," exclaimed Carleton. He fell on his knees as he spoke and looked intently into the poor lad's face.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, looking up at me, "he can't be dead. I dragged him as far as this, and then left him lying on his back. See, he has moved—he is partly on his side now!"

I motioned to Carleton to make way for me to approach. Carleton felt for the pulse in the limp and powerless wrist. I laid my hand on the heart—then I gently raised the head, and felt along the region of the skull.

"You will give him a little brandy," exclaimed Brabazon; "here is the flask."

Miss Farnham took it out of Brabazon's



"I FELT FOR THE PULSE IN THE LIMP AND POWERLESS WRIST."

hands, unscrewed it, and began to pour some into the cup. As she did so, she knelt also on the sand. I looked at her and felt that she would probably need the stimulant which could avail nothing now to the dead.

"It is all over," I said; "he is dead, poor fellow!"

As I spoke, I stretched out my hand and took the brandy flask from Miss Farnham. She looked wildly round, glanced at Carleton, gave a piercing cry, and fell forward over Randall's body. She had completely lost consciousness. I laid her flat on the sand, and, applying some restoratives, she quickly came to her senses.

The body of the dead man was lifted up and laid on some boards which we had brought with us, and we returned slowly to the house. Brabazon gave his arm to Miss Farnham, who truly needed it, for she staggered as she walked. I looked round for Carleton. There was a wild expression in his eyes, which made me anxious about him. I saw, too, that he wished to linger behind the others.

"Come," I said, going up to him, "this has given you a terrible shock; why, you are just as much overcome as Miss Farnham."

I dragged his hand through my arm, and we followed in the rear of the sad procession. All the way up to the house he did not speak, nor did I trouble him with questions. I saw that his misery had made him dumb for the time being—in short, he was in a stunned condition. I dreaded, however, the return tide of strong emotion which must inevitably follow this apparent calm. I guessed that Carleton was a man of strong sensibilities. I could read character well—most men in my profession have much practice in this art. The human eye tells a doctor a good deal. The lips may falter out certain utterances, which the eyes will belie. I read truth and sincerity in the honest eyes of this young man. He was intensely reserved—he was jealous to a morbid degree—he in all probability possessed anything but a good temper; nevertheless, his eyes were honest, and I felt certain that he had nothing whatever to do with poor Randall's death. Nevertheless, I knew well that appearances were strongly against him.

When we got to the house I turned to him and said, abruptly:—

"I should like to see you in Brabazon's smoking-room in about half an hour."

He raised sullen eyes to my face.

"Come," I said, laying my hand on his shoulder, "I tell you at once I do not believe

that you killed that poor fellow, but we must talk the matter over. I am anxious to be your friend. It is absolutely necessary that you should confide in someone. I am as unbiased in my views of the whole situation as man can be. Come and talk to me in half an hour in the smoking-room."

He did not say a word, but I knew by the way in which he suddenly grasped my hand that he would come.

The dead man was carried into the library, where he was laid reverently on a table. Brabazon then had a consultation with me as to the best means of breaking the news to Lord and Lady Hartmore. Poor Randall was their only son; it was a terrible business altogether, and Brabazon was naturally greatly distressed.

I asked after Miss Farnham. He told me that she had gone straight to her room. His tone was scarcely sympathetic, and I looked at him in wonder.

"I have no patience with her," he exclaimed. "She has behaved very badly—this awful thing would not have occurred but for her. She has driven poor Carleton——"

I put up my hand to arrest the words.

"Hush!" I exclaimed. "You surely don't——?"

He laughed aloud in his agitation.

"I surely do," he began. "There, Halifax, we won't give the thing a name to-night. Of course, there must be a coroner's inquest."

"Yes," I replied.

"It is a terrible thing altogether," continued Brabazon; "and to think of its happening here. And to Randall, of all people—a man with his expectations. Well, it is a lesson which Miss Farnham may well lay to heart."

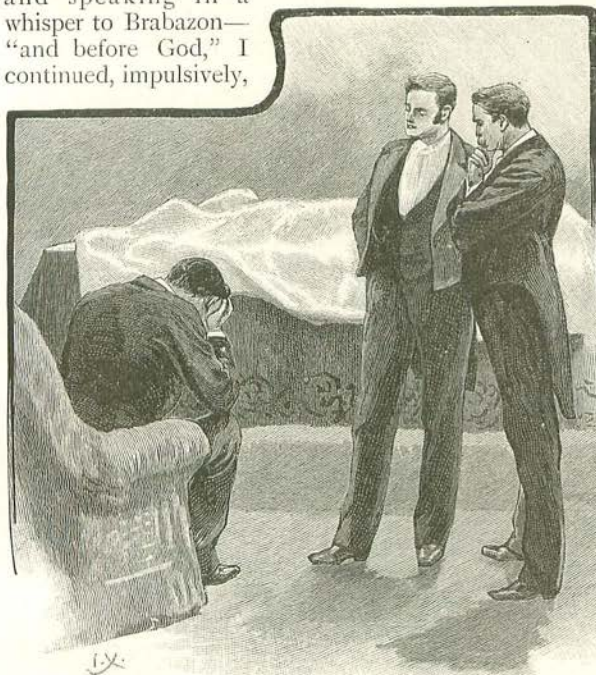
We were standing together in the library—the hour was now nearly midnight. The body of the dead man lay on the centre table covered with a white sheet. There came a knock at the door, and to my dismay and astonishment I saw Carleton enter the room.

"I heard voices, and guessed you would be here," he exclaimed. "I have recovered my nerves to a certain extent, and wish to tell you, sir," looking at his host, "and you also, Dr. Halifax, exactly what has occurred."

"Come into the smoking-room," said Brabazon, not unkindly.

"No," answered the poor lad. "If you will allow me, I will tell my story here. There is not much to tell, but what there is had best be told in the presence of——" his lip trembled—he could not get further words out. He sank suddenly into a chair, and

covered his white face with his shaking hands. "We must humour him," I said, turning and speaking in a whisper to Brabazon—"and before God," I continued, impulsively,



"HE COVERED HIS WHITE FACE WITH HIS SHAKING HANDS."

"I believe he is as innocent as I am."

I drew forward a chair for myself as I spoke, but Brabazon stood by the hearth.

Carleton began to speak almost directly—his emotion was quickly mastered.

"I have loved Barbara Farnham for two years. At intervals she has given me great encouragement, and I had fair hopes of winning her until she met Randall in this house a fortnight ago. This morning I felt desperate, and resolved to put my fortunes to the test. I asked her to give me an interview after breakfast, as you doubtless noticed." He paused, and looked at me—I nodded my head, and he continued: "We went into the conservatory, and I—I spoke to her. I told her the naked truth, perhaps a little too bluntly. I asked her if she really meant to—no, I must not say what I did ask her. It is unfair—unfair to her. From her manner and her words I plainly gathered that she preferred Randall to me, and that I had no chance whatever of winning her. Perhaps I lost my temper—anyhow, it was unmanly of me to say what I did. I accused her of valuing Randall's position. I told her plainly that if Randall and I could change places, I should

be the favoured one. We had a disagreement: our interview was full of pain, at least to me.

When I left Miss Farnham the Evil One seemed to enter into me, and I hated Randall as I never knew before that I could hate anyone. I would not ride with the others, but went away by myself, and the whole day has been a long agony to me.

"My hatred to Randall grew worse and worse, until its vehemence half frightened me. We used to be good friends, too. After dinner I felt that I could not bear a couple of conventional hours in the drawing-room, and went out to nurse my misery in the open air. I had no idea that Randall was also out. I went along by the shore, but mounted to the higher cliffs on my way back. I intended to leave Penporran early to-morrow, and felt impatient for the hour when I could get away from the loathsome sight of my successful rival.

"As I was walking along by the edge of the cliffs, and had just entered Porran's

field, I felt my heart jump into my mouth, for Randall was coming to meet me. He was about a hundred yards away when I first saw him. He is a taller man than I, and he seemed to stand out sharply between me and the sky. I knew by his attitude that he was smoking a cigar. I stood still for a moment. I did not want to pass him. My heart was full of torment, and I hated to meet him out there, with not a soul to stand between us. You know that part of the cliff, Mr. Brabazon? Randall had just come to that portion of it which is railed in to keep the cattle from tumbling over. I don't know what possessed him to take the outside path, which is very narrow and slippery. He did so, however; and now, for the first time, he must have noticed me. I was within fifty yards of him, coming also along the edge of the cliff. He stood stock still, as if something or somebody had shot him. I thought he was about to shout to me, but instead of doing so, he threw up one hand and clutched his brow. The next instant he began to sway from side to side, and before I could approach him, he had fallen over the cliff, sheer down that awful height!

"My absolute surprise stunned me for a moment—then I ran up to the spot where he had fallen, and throwing myself on my face and hands, looked over the cliff, in the hopes that he might have clung on to something. The moon was bright, but I could not see him. Looking down from that height made me dizzy, and I saw there was nothing for it but to retrace my steps as fast as possible to the shore. I ran quickly, and was breathless when I got up to him. He was lying on his back, with his arms stretched out—some blood was oozing from his mouth. I wiped it away and called to him, and putting my arms under his head, tried to lift him. He moaned and moved faintly. I felt his limbs—they seemed all right. I had a wild hope that he was only stunned, and tried to drag him along the shore. He was too heavy for me, however, and I feared that I was only injuring him in my attempt to get him back to the house. I laid him as easily as I could on a piece of sand above high-water mark, and then ran back to Penporran. It was on my way back that the awful idea first occurred to me that Barbara would think I had killed him. I seemed to see all the circumstances of his terrible death with preternatural clearness, and I felt sure that the gravest suspicion would attach to me. I have come to this room now to tell you both, before Heaven, and in the presence of the dead man, the solemn truth. Of course, I cannot compel you to believe me."

Carleton stood up as he uttered these last words. His attitude was very manly, and the look on his face was at once straightforward and quiet. I liked him better than I thought I ever could have liked him. I felt deep sympathy for him, and looked at Brabazon, expecting him to share my sentiments. To my surprise, however, I saw by the expression round his lips that he was not favourably impressed by Carleton, and that his feelings towards him were the reverse of sympathetic.

Carleton looked full at him, expecting him to speak. When he did not, the poor fellow repeated his last remark, a faint quaver perceptible in his voice:—

"Of course, I cannot compel you to believe me."

"Thank you for coming to see us," said Brabazon then; "you have been the first to give name to a suspicion which will, doubtless, be harboured by more than one person who has known all the circumstances of this unhappy case. I sincerely pity you, Carleton, but I prefer to keep my judgment in

abeyance for the time being. Halifax will tell you that a coroner's inquest will be necessary. At the inquest the whole matter will be gone carefully into. You may be certain that all possible justice will be done you."

"Justice!" exclaimed Carleton, a faint smile playing for an instant round his lips. "Justice, when there were no witnesses! Oh, that the dead could speak!" He turned abruptly and prepared to leave the room.

Brabazon called after him.

"You must give me your word of honour that you will not attempt to leave Penporran before the inquest."

"You may rest assured on that point," said Carleton.

He left the room. The restraint he was putting upon himself gave a dignity to his whole bearing which impressed me much.

"I fully believe in that poor fellow's innocence," I said, as soon as the door had closed behind him. Brabazon gave me a keen glance.

"You are a good judge of character," he said, after a pause; "still, I prefer to keep my judgment in abeyance."

Shortly afterwards he bade me good-night, and I retired to my own room. I closed the door and stood by the hearth, where the ashes of the fire, which had been lit some hours previous and had long ago burnt itself out, were to be seen.

I felt too restless to go to bed, and wished the morning would come. I was standing so, thinking over all the circumstances which had turned our gay party into one of mourning, when I heard a footfall outside my door. I thought it might possibly be Carleton, and going across the room, I opened the door and went out into the corridor. To my astonishment, Miss Farnham, still wearing her gay evening dress, stood before me.

"I was thinking of knocking at your door," she said, "but had scarcely courage to do so. I want to speak to you."

"I will see you in the morning," I said.

"It is morning already," she replied. "This is no time for conventionality, Dr. Halifax; I wish to speak to you now. You cannot sleep, and no more can I. Please follow me to Mrs. Brabazon's sitting-room, where a fire and a lamp are still burning."

She led the way, and I obeyed her without a word.

"Now tell me the truth," she said, the moment we found ourselves in the room. "Will Mr. Carleton be accused of having murdered poor Arthur Randall?"



"PLEASE FOLLOW ME."

"There is no doubt that grave suspicion will attach to him," I answered, without hesitation.

"But you think him innocent?" she queried.

"I think him innocent. As innocent as you or I."

"Oh, don't speak of me," she said, sinking suddenly on the sofa. "Pray don't mention my innocence. But for me this tragedy would never have happened."

I looked long at her before I replied.

"In one sense you may be right," I answered; "it is quite possible that but for you Carleton would not have witnessed Randall's death. Still, you must not be unfair to yourself—you are not accountable for the sudden brain seizure which must have caused Randall to reel and fall over the cliff."

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Carleton has just described the accident to Brabazon and me," I answered. "He saw Randall sway and fall over the cliff. I believe his story, although I fear few people will agree with me."

"I don't know the story," she said, faintly. "Pray tell it to me."

I did so in a few words.

"You believe all this?" she said, with intense eagerness, when I had done speaking.

"Yes."

"How do you account for Mr. Randall's death?"

I could not help sighing deeply.

"You allude now to the difficulty of the position," I said. "At the present moment I cannot account for Randall's death. A man in perfect health is not often attacked with such violent vertigo as to cause him to lose the power of keeping himself upright." Then I paused—I was thinking deeply. "Undoubtedly there have been such cases," I said, "but they are rare."

I remembered, as I spoke, Randall's change of colour and the sudden pressure of his hand to his head that morning at breakfast.

"You have seen a good deal of the poor fellow," I said. "Did he ever at any time complain of peculiar symptoms to you? Did you ever notice anything about him which would lead you not to suppose him in perfect health?"

"Never," she said at once, emphatically. "He always seemed to me to be the perfect embodiment of the rudest health and strength."

"The death is very mysterious," I said; "and while I personally believe poor Carleton's story, I fear matters will go hard with him."

I was about to leave the room, as I did not imagine Miss Farnham could have anything further to say to me, when she exclaimed, impulsively, her eyes filled with the most terrible anguish, her face turning white as death: "If, indeed, this thing is true, and if Ronald Carleton has to suffer in consequence of Mr. Randall's death, I shall put an end to my own life."

"Nonsense!" I said, sharply. "You must not speak in that wild way. You know you don't mean a word that you say."

"You mistake me," she replied. "I exaggerate nothing. I state a simple fact when I tell you that if Ronald Carleton suffers for this, my remorse will be greater than I can bear. I have behaved badly to him."

"Yes, God knows you have!" I interrupted. I felt angry with her, and did not want to spare her at that moment. "You have

behaved badly to as honest and true-hearted a man as ever breathed. When will beautiful women like you learn that men's hearts are not mere balls to be kicked here and there?"

"Oh, yes, you are right to abuse me," she said. "Go on, go on. I am so unhappy that nothing you can say will add to my pain. My cup of misery is full. I have ruined the man I love."

"The man you love?" I queried, looking at her in astonishment. "Nay, you must not be too hard on yourself. You surely are not accountable for Randall's tragic end. If Carleton's story is true, he died from sudden vertigo. You were kind to him while he lived — you have nothing to reproach yourself with on that score."

"Yes, I have," she answered, with sudden passion. "I deceived him. I made him think that I loved him; in reality, he was nothing to me. It is Ronald Carleton whom I love."

"Then, in the name of the Evil One——" I began.

"Yes, you may well quote the Evil One," she retorted. "I think he has been about the house all day. I think he entered into me this morning when poor Ronald spoke to me. The Evil One held me back then from telling him what I really thought. I gave him to understand that I—I hated him, and all the time I loved him—I loved him then—I love him now—I shall love him for ever! The dead man is nothing to me: less than nothing!"

She began to walk up and down the room; fever spots burnt on her cheeks; her eyes looked wild; she clenched her right hand.

"What can I do for you?" I asked, after a pause. "You have been good enough to confide in me: you must have done so for a reason."

She stopped her restless walk and came close to me.

"I have heard of you before, Dr. Halifax," she said. "This is not the first time you have been asked to help people in trouble. I want you to help me—will you help me?"

"With all my power, if I can."

"You can. Find out what killed Mr. Randall. Save Ronald Carleton."

"I wish I could," I said, reflectively.

"Oh, it won't be difficult," she replied.

I looked at her in surprise.

"What can you mean?" I asked.

To my amazement, she flung herself on her knees at my feet.

"You can invent something," she said, clasping my hand and pressing it frantically



"SHE FLUNG HERSELF ON HER KNEES AT MY FEET."

between both her own. "Oh, it would not be a crime—and it would save a life—two lives. Say you saw symptoms of apoplexy. Say—oh, you will know what to say—and you are a great doctor, and you will be believed."

"Get up," I said, sternly; "I will forgive your wild words, for circumstances have excited you so much that you do not quite know what you are saying. Believe me that nothing would give me more sincere satisfaction than to be able to discover the real cause of poor Randall's death. But you mistake your man utterly when you make the suggestion you do. Now I must leave you. It is almost morning, and I have

promised to meet Brabazon downstairs at an early hour."

I went back to my own room, where I sat in anxious thought until the time which Brabazon had appointed for us to meet arrived. I then went down to the smoking-room, where I found him.

He looked harassed and ill—no wonder. The subject we had met to discuss was how best the news of their only son's death was to be broken to Lord and Lady Hartmore. The Hartmores' place was situated about a hundred miles away. Brabazon said that there was nothing whatever for it but to telegraph the unhappy circumstance to them.

"And I fear doing so very much," he added, "for Hartmore is not strong: he has a rather dangerous heart affection."

"Don't telegraph," I said, impulsively; "I will go and see them."

"You!" exclaimed Brabazon. "That would be an immense relief. You will know how to break the news in the least startling way. I should recommend you to see Lady Hartmore if possible first—she is a strong-minded woman, and has a fine character. But, at best, the shock will be terrible—it is, good of you, Halifax, to undertake so fearful a mission."

"Not at all," I replied. "Will you come with me?"

"I fear I cannot. My wife is very much shaken, and I ought not to leave her with a house full of people."

"I suppose most of your guests will leave to-day?"

"Probably; still, for the time being, they are here. Then there is the inquest, which will most likely take place to-day."

"I was going to propose," I said, "that a post-mortem examination should precede the inquest."

Brabazon raised his brows—he looked annoyed.

"Is that necessary?" he asked—"a post-mortem examination will only add needlessly to the sufferings of the unfortunate parents. In this case, surely, the cause of death is clearly defined—fracture of the skull?"

"The cause of death is clearly defined," I answered, "but not the cause of the sudden vertigo."

"The sudden vertigo, according to Carleton's account," corrected Brabazon. He did not say anything further for a moment—nor did I. After a pause, he continued: "As you are good enough to say you will go to Tregunnel, I will ask you

to take poor Randall's last letter with you. I went into his room yesterday evening, and found one directed to his mother on the writing-table. She will prize it, of course. Now I had better look up your train."

He did so, and half an hour afterwards I was driving as fast as a pair of horses could take me to the nearest railway station. I caught an early train to Tregunnel, and arrived there between nine and ten that morning. A cab conveyed me to the castle, which stood on a little eminence above the sleepy-looking town.

My errand was, in truth, a gloomy one. During the journey I had made up my mind for every reason to see Lady Hartmore first. When the servant opened the door, I asked for her, and giving the man my card, told him that I wished to see his mistress alone on a matter of urgent importance. I was shown into a morning-room, and in a very short time Lady Hartmore came in. She was a tall, fine-looking woman, with a likeness to her dead son about her kindly, well-opened eyes and pleasant mouth.

My name and the message I had sent to her by the servant naturally startled her. She gave me a keen glance when she entered the room, which I returned with interest. I saw at once that her heart was strong enough, her nature brave enough, to stand the full weight of the terrible calamity without breaking down.

"I have come to see you on a most painful matter," I began at once. "I am just now visiting the Brabazons at Penporran."

"Then it is something about my son," she exclaimed, instantly. Her face grew very pale; she pressed her hand to her left side, and looked hurriedly towards the door.

"Lord Hartmore may come in, if you are not quick," she said. "He was in the breakfast-room when the servant brought me your card and message. Please tell what you have got to say at once—I can bear a shock, but he cannot."

Poor wife! poor mother! Her eyes looked at me with dumb entreaty, while her lips uttered the words of courage.

"Women like you, Lady Hartmore," I could not help uttering, impulsively, "are always brave. It is my terrible mission to inflict a great blow upon you—your son has met with an accident."

"Is he dead?" she asked. She came close to me as she spoke, her voice had sunk to a hoarse whisper.

"He is dead," I replied, instantly; "sit down."

I motioned her to a chair—she obeyed me.

"Lock the door," she said; "Lord Hartmore must not—must not know of this—quite yet."

I did what she asked me, and then went and stood with my back to her in one of the windows.

As I did so I felt in my pocket for the letter which Brabazon was to have given me. It was not there. I then remembered that in the excitement of my getting off in time to catch the train we must both have forgotten it.

After a time Lady Hartmore's voice, sounding hollow and low, reached my ears.

"Tell me the particulars," she said.

I did so. I sat down near her and told them as briefly as possible. She listened attentively. When I had finished she said, in a puzzled tone:—

"I cannot account for the sudden giddiness. Arthur always had excellent health." Then she looked me full in the face. "Do you believe the story, Dr. Halifax?"

I thought for a moment, then I said, emphatically:—

"Yes, I believe it."

She did not speak at all for the best part of a moment. Then she gave a heavy sigh.

"After all," she said, "the thing that affects us is the death. He is dead. The inevitable has overtaken him. It scarcely matters how it happened—at least not now—not to me."

"Pardon me," I interrupted, "it matters a great deal how it happened. The cause of your son's death will be a question of anxious investigation—of the gravest and most searching inquiries. I fully believe the story which Carleton told us last night, but there are others who will—who must—suspect him of foul play. Is it possible, Lady Hartmore—is it in any way within the province of woman,



"'IS HE DEAD?' SHE ASKED."

so completely to forget herself in this moment of terrible anguish, as to live for another? You can do nothing now for the dead, but you can do much, very much, for the living."

"You mean for my husband?" she inquired.

"Not alone for your husband—not even principally for him. You can do much for the man who will be accused of the crime of having murdered your son. I can only repeat my firm conviction of his innocence, but the

grounds for my belief, at present, go for nothing; circumstances prove a grave case against him. Your son, to all appearance, was much attached to the girl whom Carleton loved and loves. Yesterday morning Carleton received what he considered a final rejection from Miss Farnham. She spent the day with your son; she gave him every encouragement. Carleton was morose, gloomy, jealous. His jealousy and gloom were noticed by every member of our party. Carleton and your son both absented themselves from the drawing-room after dinner. It was during that time that the accident, which deprived your son of his life, took place. There will, of course, be a coroner's inquest. At the inquest the circumstances which I have just alluded to will come out, and there is no question but that Carleton will be arrested on suspicion and sent to trial—unless, indeed, you will help me."

"How can I help you?" she asked. "What am I to do? You ask me to share your belief, which seems to me to be based on nothing. Suppose I cannot share it?"

I was silent for a moment.

"I will tell you what I want you to do," I said then. "I want you to join me in insisting on having a post-mortem examination."

She gave me a glance of horror.

"Why?" she asked. "Why must the sleep of the dead be disturbed?"

Before I could answer her, Lord Hartmore's voice was heard at the door.

She was a brave woman, but at the sound of her husband's voice her courage for a moment deserted her.

"How—how can I break it to him?" she gasped. "Oh, please, don't leave me."

"No," I said, "I will stay with you."

I unlocked the door myself, and a white-headed, feeble-looking man came querulously into the room.

His wife rose to meet him. She put her arms round him and some way, somehow, conveyed the terrible tidings to his mind. I need scarcely linger over the hour that followed. At the end of that time I was accompanying the Hartmores back to Penporran. During the journey my companions were almost completely silent. Lady Hartmore kept her veil down, and, I felt sure, wished to avoid speaking to me. The old lord was completely prostrated with grief. Not by word or hint had either parent given me the slightest clue by which I could insist on a post-mortem examination. Their son had evidently enjoyed perfect health during his brief life. I saw that circumstances were very black against Carleton.

It was evening when we reached Penporran. Lord and Lady Hartmore went at once to a private suite of rooms which had been got ready for their reception. As soon as I could I sought an interview with Brabazon.

"Most of our visitors have left us," he said. "But Miss Farnham and, of course, Carleton, remain. The inquest is to take place in the library at an early hour to-morrow."

I was silent for a moment, then I said, abruptly:—

"Even at the risk of annoying you, Brabazon, I must repeat my strong desire that a post-mortem should precede the coroner's inquest."

"Have you spoken to the Hartmores on the subject?" inquired Brabazon.

I told him that I had mentioned my wish to Lady Hartmore.

"And what did she say?" he asked.

"She shrank from the idea with horror," I was obliged to confess.

"You can scarcely blame her," said Brabazon. "Why should the poor fellow's body be unnecessarily disturbed? The fact is, I have the greatest faith in your judgment, Halifax, but I think in the present instance

you carry your sympathy for Ronald Carleton too far. The cause of death in the case of poor Randall was so absolutely apparent, that I do not think you will get the coroner to consent to a post-mortem."

"There is one thing that occurred to me," I said: "if Randall met his death by violence, there would be some traces of a struggle at the spot where he fell over. Randall would not tamely submit to murder—he was a big man and muscular. Has the path along the cliff been carefully searched?"

"Yes," replied Brabazon, "and there is no trace anywhere of a struggle. A little blood has been discovered on a sharp point of rock just where Carleton described the fall to have taken place. The marks of a heavy body being dragged along the sands above high-water mark have also been seen. All these evidences are, of course, I am bound to say, quite consistent with Carleton's story. The blood on the rock indicates also the exact spot of the accident."

"That was where the vault of the skull was broken," I said. "By the way, you forgot to give me poor Randall's letter to his mother. Doubtless Lady Hartmore would like to have it without a moment's delay."

Brabazon started, and put his hand in his pocket.

"I put the letter here," he said, "intending to give it to you as you were starting; of course, I forgot it. Here it is: no, though, there is nothing in my pocket. Surely I can't have dropped it anywhere. I know I put it here this morning. I rushed up to the poor fellow's room to fetch it just when the brougham was coming round."

"You did not give it to me," I said; "that letter ought to be found: it may be of the utmost importance. Was that the coat you wore this morning?"

"Yes, I have not been out of it all day; you don't know what a rush and confusion the whole place has been in."

"You will look for the letter, won't you, Brabazon? I cannot quite tell you why, but it will give me a sense of relief to know that it has been found before the inquest takes place to-morrow morning."

Soon afterwards we parted. I went into one of the morning-rooms, where I found Mrs. Brabazon. I made inquiries with regard to Carleton and Miss Farnham.

"I have not seen either of them," replied my hostess. "I believe Mr. Carleton has spent the day in his room, and a servant told me that Barbara Farnham was not well. I hear she has not risen at all to-day."

"Poor girl!" I ejaculated.

Mrs. Brabazon looked at me with languid interest—she was a very lethargic person.

"Yes," she ejaculated, after a pause—"this tragedy will be a sad blow to Barbara. She is as ambitious as she is handsome. She would have made a regal-looking Lady Hartmore."

I said nothing further—I could not betray the poor girl's secret, nor let Mrs. Brabazon know what a small place high position and greatness occupied just now in Miss Farnham's thoughts.

Just before the inquest the next morning, I asked Brabazon if the missing letter had been found.

"No," he said—"I cannot tell you how vexed I am about it. Every conceivable hole and corner both in the house and out has been searched, but no trace of the letter has been discovered. What I fear is that when I was down on the shore yesterday making investigations, it may have dropped out of my pocket and been washed away with the incoming tide. I cannot think of any other cause for its absolute disappearance. I beg of you, Halifax, not to say anything to Lady Hartmore about it for the present."

"Of course not," I answered, in some surprise at the request.

I then ran upstairs. I must, of course, be present at the inquest, but I had still a moment at my disposal. I went boldly to Miss Farnham's door and knocked. After a very brief pause she opened it herself and stood before me. She was fully dressed. Her face was of a dead white—all the beautiful warmth of colour had fled.

"I am told I must be present at the inquest," she said. "Is it time for me to go downstairs? Have you come to fetch me?" She shuddered visibly as she spoke.

"I have come to ask you to help me," I said, eagerly. "I will manage to account for your absence in the library. Put on your hat; I want you to go out at once."

"What do you mean?" she asked, in astonishment.

"I will tell you," I said. "On the day of his death Randall wrote a letter to his mother. That letter has been lost. Brabazon had it in his pocket and has dropped it—no one knows where. There is no saying, Miss Farnham, what important evidence that letter may contain. I am sure it is not in the house. Brabazon believes that he dropped it when exploring the coast yesterday. Will you go at once and look for it? The moment you discover it, bring it

to the library. Now, be as quick as ever you can."

"Yes," she replied, the soul in her eyes leaping up with a sudden renewed joy. She turned, pinned a hat on her head, wrapped a shawl round her, and ran downstairs. Her woman's wit grasped the whole situation at a glance. I went to the library, feeling assured that if poor Randall's letter were still in existence, Miss Farnham would find it.

There were present at the inquest Lady Hartmore, Brabazon and his wife, Carleton, and two gentlemen who had not yet left the house. Also, of course, the coroner and the jury. The moment I entered the room I glanced at the coroner; I had not seen him before. He was a little old gentleman, with a somewhat irascible expression of face, and a testy manner. I looked from him to poor Carleton, whom I had not seen since the time when he told his story in this room. The body of the dead man had been placed in a shell, and still occupied the central table of the library. Lady Hartmore sat near it. A sheet covered the face of the dead. Once I saw her raise her hand and touch the sheet reverently. She had the attitude of one who was protecting the body from intended violence. Her position and the look on her face reminded me of Rispah.

I looked again from her to Carleton. It was necessary for me to glance at the poor fellow, and to notice the despair on his face, to enable me to go up to the coroner, and urge upon him the necessity of a post-mortem preceding the inquest. He did not take my suggestion kindly.

"The cause of death is abundantly evident," he said, with irritation. "I cannot counsel a post-mortem examination."

"And I will not hear of it," said Lady Hartmore, looking at me with eyes full of reproach.

"Pray say nothing more about it," exclaimed Carleton.

I bowed, and sat down.

The inquest was conducted with extreme care, but soon Miss Farnham's presence was found necessary, and her absence commented upon. I saw Carleton start when her name was mentioned, and a look of extreme distress filled his eyes.

"I will go and find her," said Mrs. Brabazon, leaving the room.

She returned in a moment to say that Miss Farnham was not in her room, and that no one seemed to know anything about her.

"I have sent several servants into the grounds to look for her," she said.

As Miss Farnham was an important witness, having spent almost the entire day previous to his death with poor Randall, proceedings were delayed during her absence.

The case, however, seemed as black as could be against Carleton, and I had not the least doubt that the coroner would order a warrant to be issued for his arrest on suspicion.

My one last hope now hung on Miss Farnham's being able to find the missing letter, and then on the letter containing evidence which would give a medical cause for poor Randall's extraordinary death.

I seldom found myself in a more torturing position than during the time of this inquest. Relief, however, was at hand. I heard the sound of light and quickly moving feet in the hall. The door of the library was opened, not softly and with reverent hush, but with the eager, impetuous movement of someone in hot haste. Miss Farnham came into the room with a wild colour in her cheeks and a wild, bright light in her eyes. Her skirts were dragged and wet, her hair was loosened and fell over her shoulders—she had cast away both hat and shawl.

"There," she said, going straight up to Lady Hartmore; "there's your letter—the last letter your son ever wrote to you. It was lost, or supposed to be lost, but I found it. I walked along the cliff, close to the edge—very close. There is a part where the cliff is undermined. I lay on my face and hands and looked over. I saw, far below me, a tiny ledge of rock: there was a bush growing there, and, sticking in the bush,

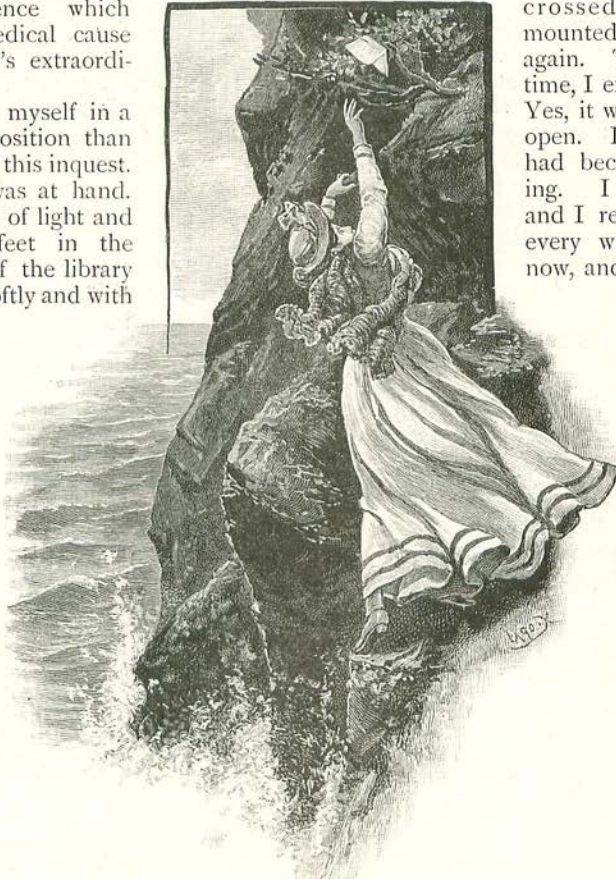
something white—it might be a useless rag or a piece of torn paper, or it might be a letter of importance. The tide was coming in fast; still, I thought that I had time. I put wings to my feet and rushed down a narrow path which led to the beach below. The tide had already come up and was wetting the base of the rock above which the bush which contained the white paper stood.

"I waded through the water and climbed the cliff and got the paper. I scrambled down again. When I came back the water was up to my knees. I crossed it safely, and mounted to the higher cliff again. Then, for the first time, I examined my prize. Yes, it was a letter—it was open. I don't know what had become of its covering. I sat on the grass and I read it—yes, I read every word. Here it is now, and you can read it.

Read it aloud, please, for it is important—it explains—it saves! Ronald, it saves you!" Here the excited girl paused in her eager narrative, and turned her full gaze upon Carleton, who was bending forward to listen to her. "It saves you," she repeated; "it exonerates you completely!"

The commotion and interest which Miss Farnham's words and man-

ner excited can be better felt than described. Lady Hartmore stood up and confronted the breathless girl. She held out her hand and clutched the letter, which was torn and dirty from its long exposure to wind and weather. She held it close and looked at it. It was in the beloved writing of the dead. The dead man was her only son—the letter was addressed to her, his mother. It contained a



"I CLIMBED THE CLIFF AND GOT THE PAPER."

last message from the brain now silent—from the heart now still.

Tears filled her eyes.

"I must read this letter in private," she faltered. "This last letter of my boy's is too sacred for anyone but his mother to hear—I must read it alone."

"No," interrupted Miss Farnham, "it contains important information. I will call upon the coroner to insist on its being read aloud. I risked my life to get it. Another life hangs upon the information it contains. Dr. Halifax, you are a medical man—will you insist on this letter being read aloud?"

I went up to Lady Hartmore and said something to her in a low voice. She listened attentively—she considered my words. After a pause she put the letter into my hands.

"If it must be, it must," she said. "This is the last drop in the bitterness of my cup."

She sat down, and flinging out her two arms, stretched them over the body of the dead man. Once more her attitude and manner reminded me of Rispah.

Miss Farnham stood close to Lady Hartmore. She forgot her dishevelled hair, her disordered appearance. All her soul filled the eyes which she raised expectantly to my face.

I glanced hurriedly through the letter—then I spoke.

"There is a good deal in this sheet of paper which is strictly private," I said, "and need not be read for the benefit of the coroner and the jury; but there are some sentences referring to the state of Mr. Randall's health which are, as Miss Farnham remarked, of the utmost importance. I will now proceed to read that portion of the letter."

I did so in a loud, clear voice.

These were poor Randall's words:—

"As far as I can tell, I am in perfect health, but for the last week or so, I have been suffering at intervals from a strange form of giddiness. I feel as though I were made to turn round and round, or against my will impelled to go forwards, or backwards, or to one side. Sometimes the giddiness takes another form—I fancy that objects are revolving round *me*. I am perfectly conscious all the time, but the giddiness is generally accompanied by a distinct sensation of nausea. Very often the act of closing my eyes removes the vertigo completely for the

time being. When the attack goes off I feel perfectly well, only I fancy I am suffering from continued deafness in my right ear. I don't know why I am impelled to tell you this—it is not worth making a fuss over. If I were to consult a medical man, he would probably set it down to a form of indigestion. I had a slight attack this morning at breakfast. If it continues or gets worse, I will take the opportunity of consulting a London doctor who happens to be in the house."

I did not read any more, but folding up the letter returned it to Lady Hartmore. Both Carleton and Miss Farnham had approached each other in their excitement.

I looked beyond them to the coroner.

"I am sure," I said, "that I now express Lady Hartmore's sentiments as well as my own, when I demand that this inquest be adjourned until a post-mortem examination has been made on the body of the dead man. The symptoms which he describes in the letter which I have just read aloud distinctly point to a disease of the inner ear, well known to the medical faculty, although not of common occurrence. I will ask the coroner to take immediate steps to get the services of two independent doctors to conduct the post-mortem, at which I should wish to be present."

My words were followed by a slight pause—the coroner then agreed to my wishes, and the inquest was adjourned.

The post-mortem took place on the afternoon of that same day, and the results amply accounted for the strange symptoms which poor Randall had so faithfully described in his last letter to his mother. On the right side of that portion of the base of the skull which contains the delicate organs of hearing, we found a small, bony excrescence growing down into the labyrinth or inner ear. This, though small, was undoubtedly the cause of the terrible attacks of vertigo which the poor fellow complained of, and in one of which he met with his tragic death.

The coroner's inquest was resumed on the following day, and, of course, Carleton was abundantly exonerated.

It was two years afterwards, however, before I accidentally saw in the *Times* the announcement of his marriage with Miss Farnham.