

The Record

TO PROSPER

\$1.50 at the end of the year

THURSDAY, MAR. 27, 1884.

NO. 22

Jack answered quietly.

"Where was it kept?"

"It was kept in my study at Oaklea and how it was removed thence I do not know."

"Who have free access to your study?"

"All my household."

"Was the pistol, then, left where any of your household could have taken it?"

"It was in its case in a cabinet."

"Was the cabinet open?"

"It may have been left open by some chance; but it was usually kept locked."

"And you retain the key?"

"Yes."

Things were not looking very promising for Mr. John Derringer; the proofs against him were strong and he had no witness to testify to his innocence but the valet, who said he had left his master in bed at eleven o'clock that night, but had to confess that he had not seen him again until the morning, whereas not only the groom could swear to having seen him enter the stable-yard that night, or rather early morning, but a gamekeeper of Sir Philip's had met him riding on the high-road, and had exchanged a "good night" with him.

"Will you swear that you were not riding on the night of the 22nd of August, Mr. Derringer?" the magistrate's clerk said presently; and Jack hesitated for a moment.

"How can I swear it?" he said impatiently. "I often ride out late, and I don't keep a diary; therefore how can I tell whether I was riding or not on that particular night?"

"There is one question I wish to ask you, Mr. Derringer," Sir Henry Langburg said. "Is it true that you would have tried to escape this inquiry if it had been possible?"

"It is quite true, Sir Henry."

"But, declaring yourself innocent, setting all grudge against Mr. Gilmore, why should you wish to do so?"

"For reasons I prefer to keep to myself," said Mr. Derringer calmly.

"Good reasons, I suppose?"

"Excellent ones."

"And, in face of this grave evidence against you, you refuse to give them?" Sir Henry said, leaning forward and speaking with some earnestness. "You are the son of an old and valued friend of mine, Mr. Derringer, and I grieve more than I can say to see you in this position. I should be glad if you could prove to our satisfaction that you are innocent."

"You are very good, Sir Henry. I will swear to my innocence readily. I had no grudge against Mr. Richard Gilmore, and, even if I had, I should not have taken the means attributed to me to avenge myself; and my reasons for wishing to escape this enquiry were purely personal considerations."

"You will not state them?"

Jack bowed silently in silence; the magistrates looked at each other with some significance.

Dick, who had been giving a very divided attention to the case, and who looked weary and fatigued, glanced round the court and caught sight of Mr. Holmewood's talkative head as he stood talking to the lawyer who watched the case for Mr. Derringer, and who was looking triumphant at the communication, whatever it was, which the old farmer was making to him. Dick pondered a little, and, when the old man had ceased to speak, made him a sign to come and sit with himself and Sir Philip, a sign which Mr. Holmewood either did not see or chose to ignore, for Dick followed him with his eyes and saw that he returned to a seat somewhat apart, and that he was bending over a slender little figure in seal-skin and fur, the sight of which made Dick's heart beat fast and his blue eyes often and grow very tender.

The next moment they darkened again. Why had Maysie come there? He wondered—for he had recognised her, in spite of her thick veil. It was no place for a delicate-minded girl. Uncle Geoff was very wrong to bring her, and it was foolish of her to wish to come; she must have known that neither he (Dick) nor Sir Philip would approve of such a proceeding. She seemed shy and ashamed too, he fancied, for she was leaning against uncle Geoff, and her head was drooping upon her breast, and her hands were tightly clasped together. What had possessed her to come?

There had been a little pause in the proceedings; the magistrates were gravely conferring with their clerk, and "committed for trial" was written upon every line of their grave faces. Jack Derringer was talking to his lawyer, and Dick saw that he was much agitated at what the other was saying to him, for he glanced round the court eagerly, and shook his head at some one in

Maysie's immediate vicinity, as if forbidding something; but almost immediately the lawyer rose with the quiet announcement that he had another witness for the defence. There was some excitement in court; and then Maysie's name was spoken. The girl stood up, drooping a little; and Sir Henry, leaning forward, told her gently to lift her veil. As she did so, there was a little murmur among the spectators, while Sir Philip turned anxiously to Dick, who had risen but reseated himself immediately, very pale, but stern.

Good Heaven! How pale she was, how ghastly pale! Beside her pallor Dick Gilmore's face was ruddy, and the ashy gray hue upon her face seemed to have robbed her of all beauty; but there was something irresistibly pathetic in her face, in the drooping girlish figure, in the tremor of the pale lips, which parted twice to speak in answer to the questions put to her, but from which no sound came.

"I do not wish to distress you in any way, Miss Luttrell," the lawyer said, speaking very gently and deferentially; "but I should be glad if you could throw some light upon this matter. It is a serious one for my client."

"Miss Luttrell will serve me better by keeping silent," Jack Derringer said aloud and earnestly. "I appreciate fully the generosity which has brought her here; but I am willing—more than willing—to bear the punishment of the crime of which I am accused, rather than expose her to such a painful ordeal."

The girl had never lifted her eyes, and she did not raise them now; but at the words so earnestly, almost tenderly spoken her lips trembled, and over the pale face which had been so fixed and deathlike passed a little tremor which gave it a look of life again.

"I am at a loss to know what light my ward can throw upon this business," Sir Philip said haughtily. "But, since it seems that she has some testimony to give, it will be better to hear it. Pray proceed at once, Mr. Dean."

Mr. Dean, his own professional calm rather marred by the little, wan, hopeless face of the witness he was about to examine, hurried over the preliminaries; and asked Maysie some questions, which she answered in a voice so low as to be almost inaudible.

"Pardon me," he said gently—"I must ask you to repeat the statement. Do I understand you to say that Mr. Derringer could not have fired the shot which wounded Mr. Gilmore, since, at the time when it was fired, a minute or two after midnight on the night in question, he was in your company?"

There was a little stir among the audience, which, slight as it was, deadened the answer; but those immediately around her knew that the girl had answered "Yes."

"You met him by appointment?"

"Yes."

"Was the hour fixed for your meeting twelve o'clock?"

"Half-past eleven."

"Did Mr. Derringer remain with you until twelve o'clock?"

"Until one o'clock."

"You are sure?"

"I am quite sure."

She was speaking more steadily now, but still she had not lifted her eyes. The bitterness of death itself was upon her as she stood there, knowing that Dick's ears were listening to her words, and that she was losing the love which was more to her than her life; she felt as if everything were leaving her, as if she were opening her hands and letting fall from them her home, her friends, her lover, and her love. Death itself would have been easier, she thought.

"You are quite sure that you are correct as to the hours, Miss Luttrell?" Sir Henry Langburg asked more coldly than he had previously spoken to her.

"Yes."

"You heard twelve o'clock strike while Mr. Derringer was with you?"

"Yes."

"And one o'clock?"

"Yes."

"He left you at one?"

"Yes."

Only the poor little monosyllable; she could not force herself to utter any other word; but that one was enough.

"And you are equally sure that you heard twelve o'clock strike almost immediately before the shot was fired, Mr. Gilmore?"

"I am quite sure," Dick replied steadily; "and my uncle, Mr. Holmewood, will tell you that I left him at about a quarter to twelve."

"It would take about a quarter of an hour to ride from Holmewood to the Court."

"It could be easily done in less," replied Dick very calmly, even smiling. "But it was such a pleasant night that I was enjoying the air, and rode slow-

ly."

"Thank you. I think that will be all, Miss Luttrell."

"One moment," interposed one of the magistrates. "May I ask you, Miss Luttrell, if there were any reasons for your meeting Mr. Derringer at such a time and such a place? It seems a strange proceeding for a young lady in your position. Could you not have met Mr. Derringer at a more fitting opportunity?"

There was no answer; but into the ghastly face came two burning spots of colour, making her extreme pallor yet more apparent.

"Was there any reason why you could not see him in the daytime?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"My gnar—Sir Philip Gilmore—had forbidden me to speak to Mr. Derringer."

"So you met him clandestinely!" remarked the magistrate, in a tone which said infinitely more than his words. "What made you keep the truth secret so long?" he added more gently, seeing that the girl was trembling so violently that she could hardly stand. "Surely it would have been easier to tell your guardian, and so spare yourself such an ordeal as this!"

Easier! It would have been easier to die, Maysie thought vaguely, as she raised her eyes for a moment to the grave face.

"I hoped—I always hoped," she began feebly, as the faces seemed to grow confused and misty, all jumbled together except one, a stern beautiful face with blue eyes, which looked at her with pain and contempt and anger.

"I understand," was the grave remark; "you wished still to keep your secret, and hoped the confession would have been unnecessary. It will not need testimony to assure us of its truth; it has cost you too much to doubt it. That will do."

The sea of confused faces still rose and fell before her eyes; the stern pitiless anger in Dick's gaze seeming to burn itself into her brain as she turned feebly, putting out her hands, as if to grope her way. The next moment they were taken in uncle Geoff's strong clasp; and almost unconsciously she found herself in the cold autumn air; the mass of faces had disappeared; and only uncle Geoff's was bending over her.

CHAPTER IX.

In utter and unbroken silence uncle Geoff drove home to the farm. Maysie was leaning against him as she sat by his side, her head drooping upon her breast. As they left the town and entered the quiet country road, she pushed up her veil with a little gasping sob and uncle Geoff saw that the hectic colour had disappeared, and that she was white as death; even her lips were colourless.

He did not speak to her, for something in the wide-open desolate eyes staring straight before her told him that she could neither heed nor understand; and in complete silence she drove to the farm.

At the little wicket-gate uncle Geoff pulled up; gave the reins to the groom, and lifted Maysie to the ground, perceiving as he did so that the girl was utterly unable to stand or walk without assistance. But uncle Geoff's strength was more than sufficient for such a light weight as hers; and he half led, half carried her into the old-fashioned oak-panelled parlour, and put her quietly on the couch, leaving her there for a few moments, while he went himself and brought a tonic, and forced a little through the white dry lips. The girl herself seemed perfectly unable to resist or to second his endeavours; she sat just where he had placed her, her head drooping forward on her breast, her little gloved hands falling helplessly at her side, her eyes still fixed and staring.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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