

## CHAPTER LV - Flight

Inspector Bucket of the Detective has not yet struck his great blow, as just now chronicled, but is yet refreshing himself with sleep preparatory to his field-day, when through the night and along the freezing wintry roads a chaise and pair comes out of Lincolnshire, making its way towards London.

Railroads shall soon traverse all this country, and with a rattle and a glare the engine and train shall shoot like a meteor over the wide night-landscape, turning the moon paler; but as yet such things are non-existent in these parts, though not wholly unexpected. Preparations are afoot, measurements are made, ground is staked out. Bridges are begun, and their not yet united piers desolately look at one another over roads and streams like brick and mortar couples with an obstacle to their union; fragments of embankments are thrown up and left as precipices with torrents of rusty carts and barrows tumbling over them; tripods of tall poles appear on hilltops, where there are rumours of tunnels; everything looks chaotic and abandoned in full hopelessness. Along the freezing roads, and through the night, the post-chaise makes its way without a railroad on its mind.

Mrs Rouncewell, so many years housekeeper at Chesney Wold, sits within the chaise; and by her side sits Mrs Bagnet with her grey cloak and umbrella. The old girl would prefer the bar in front, as being exposed to the weather and a primitive sort of perch more in accordance with her usual course of travelling, but Mrs Rouncewell is too thoughtful of her comfort to admit of her proposing it. The old lady cannot make enough of the old girl. She sits, in her stately manner, holding her hand, and regardless of its roughness, puts it often to her lips. 'You are a mother, my dear soul,' says she many times, 'and you found out my George's mother!'

'Why, George,' returns Mrs Bagnet, 'was always free with me, ma'am, and when he said at our house to my Woolwich that of all the things my Woolwich could have to think of when he grew to be a man, the comfortablest would be that he had never brought a sorrowful line into his mother's face or turned a hair of her head grey, then I felt sure, from his way, that something fresh had brought his own mother into his mind. I had often known him say to me, in past times, that he had behaved bad to her.'

'Never, my dear!' returns Mrs Rouncewell, bursting into tears. 'My blessing on him, never! He was always fond of me, and loving to me, was my George! But he had a bold spirit, and he ran a little wild and went for a soldier. And I know he waited at first, in letting us know about himself, till he should rise to be an officer; and when he didn't

rise, I know he considered himself beneath us, and wouldn't be a disgrace to us. For he had a lion heart, had my George, always from a baby!'

The old lady's hands stray about her as of yore, while she recalls, all in a tremble, what a likely lad, what a fine lad, what a gay good-humoured clever lad he was; how they all took to him down at Chesney Wold; how Sir Leicester took to him when he was a young gentleman; how the dogs took to him; how even the people who had been angry with him forgave him the moment he was gone, poor boy. And now to see him after all, and in a prison too! And the broad stomacher heaves, and the quaint upright old-fashioned figure bends under its load of affectionate distress.

Mrs Bagnet, with the instinctive skill of a good warm heart, leaves the old housekeeper to her emotions for a little while--not without passing the back of her hand across her own motherly eyes-- and presently chirps up in her cheery manner, 'So I says to George when I goes to call him in to tea (he pretended to be smoking his pipe outside), 'What ails you this afternoon, George, for gracious sake? I have seen all sorts, and I have seen you pretty often in season and out of season, abroad and at home, and I never see you so melancholy penitent.' 'Why, Mrs Bagnet,' says George, 'it's because I AM melancholy and penitent both, this afternoon, that you see me so.' 'What have you done, old fellow?' I says. 'Why, Mrs Bagnet,' says George, shaking his head, 'what I have done has been done this many a long year, and is best not tried to be undone now. If I ever get to heaven it won't be for being a good son to a widowed mother; I say no more.' Now, ma'am, when George says to me that it's best not tried to be undone now, I have my thoughts as I have often had before, and I draw it out of George how he comes to have such things on him that afternoon. Then George tells me that he has seen by chance, at the lawyer's office, a fine old lady that has brought his mother plain before him, and he runs on about that old lady till he quite forgets himself and paints her picture to me as she used to be, years upon years back. So I says to George when he has done, who is this old lady he has seen? And George tells me it's Mrs Rouncewell, housekeeper for more than half a century to the Dedlock family down at Chesney Wold in Lincolnshire. George has frequently told me before that he's a Lincolnshire man, and I says to my old Lignum that night, 'Lignum, that's his mother for five and for-ty pound!'

All this Mrs Bagnet now relates for the twentieth time at least within the last four hours. Trilling it out like a kind of bird, with a pretty high note, that it may be audible to the old lady above the hum of the wheels.

'Bless you, and thank you,' says Mrs Rouncewell. 'Bless you, and thank you, my worthy soul!'

'Dear heart!' cries Mrs Bagnet in the most natural manner. 'No thanks to me, I am sure. Thanks to yourself, ma'am, for being so ready to pay 'em! And mind once more, ma'am, what you had best do on finding George to be your own son is to make him--for your sake --have every sort of help to put himself in the right and clear himself of a charge of which he is as innocent as you or me. It won't do to have truth and justice on his side; he must have law and lawyers,' exclaims the old girl, apparently persuaded that the latter form a separate establishment and have dissolved partnership with truth and justice for ever and a day.

'He shall have,' says Mrs Rouncewell, 'all the help that can be got for him in the world, my dear. I will spend all I have, and thankfully, to procure it. Sir Leicester will do his best, the whole family will do their best. I--I know something, my dear; and will make my own appeal, as his mother parted from him all these years, and finding him in a jail at last.'

The extreme disquietude of the old housekeeper's manner in saying this, her broken words, and her wringing of her hands make a powerful impression on Mrs Bagnet and would astonish her but that she refers them all to her sorrow for her son's condition. And yet Mrs Bagnet wonders too why Mrs Rouncewell should murmur so distractedly, 'My Lady, my Lady, my Lady!' over and over again.

The frosty night wears away, and the dawn breaks, and the post-chaise comes rolling on through the early mist like the ghost of a chaise departed. It has plenty of spectral company in ghosts of trees and hedges, slowly vanishing and giving place to the realities of day. London reached, the travellers alight, the old housekeeper in great tribulation and confusion, Mrs Bagnet quite fresh and collected--as she would be if her next point, with no new equipage and outfit, were the Cape of Good Hope, the Island of Ascension, Hong Kong, or any other military station.

But when they set out for the prison where the trooper is confined, the old lady has managed to draw about her, with her lavender-coloured dress, much of the staid calmness which is its usual accompaniment. A wonderfully grave, precise, and handsome piece of old china she looks, though her heart beats fast and her stomacher is ruffled more than even the remembrance of this wayward son has ruffled it these many years.

Approaching the cell, they find the door opening and a warder in the act of coming out. The old girl promptly makes a sign of entreaty to

him to say nothing; assenting with a nod, he suffers them to enter as he shuts the door.

So George, who is writing at his table, supposing himself to be alone, does not raise his eyes, but remains absorbed. The old housekeeper looks at him, and those wandering hands of hers are quite enough for Mrs Bagnet's confirmation, even if she could see the mother and the son together, knowing what she knows, and doubt their relationship.

Not a rustle of the housekeeper's dress, not a gesture, not a word betrays her. She stands looking at him as he writes on, all unconscious, and only her fluttering hands give utterance to her emotions. But they are very eloquent, very, very eloquent. Mrs Bagnet understands them. They speak of gratitude, of joy, of grief, of hope; of inextinguishable affection, cherished with no return since this stalwart man was a stripling; of a better son loved less, and this son loved so fondly and so proudly; and they speak in such touching language that Mrs Bagnet's eyes brim up with tears and they run glistening down her sun-brown face.

'George Rouncewell! Oh, my dear child, turn and look at me!'

The trooper starts up, clasps his mother round the neck, and falls down on his knees before her. Whether in a late repentance, whether in the first association that comes back upon him, he puts his hands together as a child does when it says its prayers, and raising them towards her breast, bows down his head, and cries.

'My George, my dearest son! Always my favourite, and my favourite still, where have you been these cruel years and years? Grown such a man too, grown such a fine strong man. Grown so like what I knew he must be, if it pleased God he was alive!'

She can ask, and he can answer, nothing connected for a time. All that time the old girl, turned away, leans one arm against the whitened wall, leans her honest forehead upon it, wipes her eyes with her serviceable grey cloak, and quite enjoys herself like the best of old girls as she is.

'Mother,' says the trooper when they are more composed, 'forgive me first of all, for I know my need of it.'

Forgive him! She does it with all her heart and soul. She always has done it. She tells him how she has had it written in her will, these many years, that he was her beloved son George. She has never believed any ill of him, never. If she had died without this happiness--and she is an old woman now and can't look to live very long--she

would have blessed him with her last breath, if she had had her senses, as her beloved son George.

'Mother, I have been an undutiful trouble to you, and I have my reward; but of late years I have had a kind of glimmering of a purpose in me too. When I left home I didn't care much, mother--I am afraid not a great deal--for leaving; and went away and 'listed, harum-scarum, making believe to think that I cared for nobody, no not I, and that nobody cared for me.'

The trooper has dried his eyes and put away his handkerchief, but there is an extraordinary contrast between his habitual manner of expressing himself and carrying himself and the softened tone in which he speaks, interrupted occasionally by a half-stifled sob.

'So I wrote a line home, mother, as you too well know, to say I had 'listed under another name, and I went abroad. Abroad, at one time I thought I would write home next year, when I might be better off; and when that year was out, I thought I would write home next year, when I might be better off; and when that year was out again, perhaps I didn't think much about it. So on, from year to year, through a service of ten years, till I began to get older, and to ask myself why should I ever write.'

'I don't find any fault, child--but not to ease my mind, George? Not a word to your loving mother, who was growing older too?'

This almost overturns the trooper afresh, but he sets himself up with a great, rough, sounding clearance of his throat.

'Heaven forgive me, mother, but I thought there would be small consolation then in hearing anything about me. There were you, respected and esteemed. There was my brother, as I read in chance North Country papers now and then, rising to be prosperous and famous. There was I a dragoon, roving, unsettled, not self-made like him, but self-unmade--all my earlier advantages thrown away, all my little learning unlearnt, nothing picked up but what unfitted me for most things that I could think of. What business had I to make myself known? After letting all that time go by me, what good could come of it? The worst was past with you, mother. I knew by that time (being a man) how you had mourned for me, and wept for me, and prayed for me; and the pain was over, or was softened down, and I was better in your mind as it was.'

The old lady sorrowfully shakes her head, and taking one of his powerful hands, lays it lovingly upon her shoulder.

'No, I don't say that it was so, mother, but that I made it out to be so. I said just now, what good could come of it? Well, my dear mother, some good might have come of it to myself--and there was the meanness of it. You would have sought me out; you would have purchased my discharge; you would have taken me down to Chesney Wold; you would have brought me and my brother and my brother's family together; you would all have considered anxiously how to do something for me and set me up as a respectable civilian. But how could any of you feel sure of me when I couldn't so much as feel sure of myself? How could you help regarding as an incumbrance and a discredit to you an idle dragooning chap who was an incumbrance and a discredit to himself, excepting under discipline? How could I look my brother's children in the face and pretend to set them an example--I, the vagabond boy who had run away from home and been the grief and unhappiness of my mother's life? 'No, George.' Such were my words, mother, when I passed this in review before me: 'You have made your bed. Now, lie upon it.'

Mrs Rouncewell, drawing up her stately form, shakes her head at the old girl with a swelling pride upon her, as much as to say, 'I told you so!' The old girl relieves her feelings and testifies her interest in the conversation by giving the trooper a great poke between the shoulders with her umbrella; this action she afterwards repeats, at intervals, in a species of affectionate lunacy, never failing, after the administration of each of these remonstrances, to resort to the whitened wall and the grey cloak again.

'This was the way I brought myself to think, mother, that my best amends was to lie upon that bed I had made, and die upon it. And I should have done it (though I have been to see you more than once down at Chesney Wold, when you little thought of me) but for my old comrade's wife here, who I find has been too many for me. But I thank her for it. I thank you for it, Mrs Bagnet, with all my heart and might.'

To which Mrs Bagnet responds with two pokes.

And now the old lady impresses upon her son George, her own dear recovered boy, her joy and pride, the light of her eyes, the happy close of her life, and every fond name she can think of, that he must be governed by the best advice obtainable by money and influence, that he must yield up his case to the greatest lawyers that can be got, that he must act in this serious plight as he shall be advised to act and must not be self-willed, however right, but must promise to think only of his poor old mother's anxiety and suffering until he is released, or he will break her heart.

'Mother, 'tis little enough to consent to,' returns the trooper, stopping her with a kiss; 'tell me what I shall do, and I'll make a late beginning and do it. Mrs Bagnet, you'll take care of my mother, I know?'

A very hard poke from the old girl's umbrella.

'If you'll bring her acquainted with Mr Jarndyce and Miss Summerson, she will find them of her way of thinking, and they will give her the best advice and assistance.'

'And, George,' says the old lady, 'we must send with all haste for your brother. He is a sensible sound man as they tell me--out in the world beyond Chesney Wold, my dear, though I don't know much of it myself--and will be of great service.'

'Mother,' returns the trooper, 'is it too soon to ask a favour?'

'Surely not, my dear.'

'Then grant me this one great favour. Don't let my brother know.'

'Not know what, my dear?'

'Not know of me. In fact, mother, I can't bear it; I can't make up my mind to it. He has proved himself so different from me and has done so much to raise himself while I've been soldiering that I haven't brass enough in my composition to see him in this place and under this charge. How could a man like him be expected to have any pleasure in such a discovery? It's impossible. No, keep my secret from him, mother; do me a greater kindness than I deserve and keep my secret from my brother, of all men.'

'But not always, dear George?'

'Why, mother, perhaps not for good and all--though I may come to ask that too--but keep it now, I do entreat you. If it's ever broke to him that his rip of a brother has turned up, I could wish,' says the trooper, shaking his head very doubtfully, 'to break it myself and be governed as to advancing or retreating by the way in which he seems to take it.'

As he evidently has a rooted feeling on this point, and as the depth of it is recognized in Mrs Bagnet's face, his mother yields her implicit assent to what he asks. For this he thanks her kindly.

'In all other respects, my dear mother, I'll be as tractable and obedient as you can wish; on this one alone, I stand out. So now I am ready even for the lawyers. I have been drawing up,' he glances at his writing on the table, 'an exact account of what I knew of the deceased

and how I came to be involved in this unfortunate affair. It's entered, plain and regular, like an orderly-book; not a word in it but what's wanted for the facts. I did intend to read it, straight on end, whensoever I was called upon to say anything in my defence. I hope I may be let to do it still; but I have no longer a will of my own in this case, and whatever is said or done, I give my promise not to have any.'

Matters being brought to this so far satisfactory pass, and time being on the wane, Mrs Bagnet proposes a departure. Again and again the old lady hangs upon her son's neck, and again and again the trooper holds her to his broad chest.

'Where are you going to take my mother, Mrs Bagnet?'

'I am going to the town house, my dear, the family house. I have some business there that must be looked to directly,' Mrs Rouncewell answers.

'Will you see my mother safe there in a coach, Mrs Bagnet? But of course I know you will. Why should I ask it!'

Why indeed, Mrs Bagnet expresses with the umbrella.

'Take her, my old friend, and take my gratitude along with you. Kisses to Quebec and Malta, love to my godson, a hearty shake of the hand to Lignum, and this for yourself, and I wish it was ten thousand pound in gold, my dear!' So saying, the trooper puts his lips to the old girl's tanned forehead, and the door shuts upon him in his cell.

No entreaties on the part of the good old housekeeper will induce Mrs Bagnet to retain the coach for her own conveyance home. Jumping out cheerfully at the door of the Dedlock mansion and handing Mrs Rouncewell up the steps, the old girl shakes hands and trudges off, arriving soon afterwards in the bosom of the Bagnet family and falling to washing the greens as if nothing had happened.

My Lady is in that room in which she held her last conference with the murdered man, and is sitting where she sat that night, and is looking at the spot where he stood upon the hearth studying her so leisurely, when a tap comes at the door. Who is it? Mrs Rouncewell. What has brought Mrs Rouncewell to town so unexpectedly?

'Trouble, my Lady. Sad trouble. Oh, my Lady, may I beg a word with you?'

What new occurrence is it that makes this tranquil old woman tremble so? Far happier than her Lady, as her Lady has often thought,



why does she falter in this manner and look at her with such strange mistrust?

‘What is the matter? Sit down and take your breath.’

‘Oh, my Lady, my Lady. I have found my son--my youngest, who went away for a soldier so long ago. And he is in prison.’

‘For debt?’

‘Oh, no, my Lady; I would have paid any debt, and joyful.’

‘For what is he in prison then?’

‘Charged with a murder, my Lady, of which he is as innocent as--as I am. Accused of the murder of Mr Tulkinghorn.’

What does she mean by this look and this imploring gesture? Why does she come so close? What is the letter that she holds?

‘Lady Dedlock, my dear Lady, my good Lady, my kind Lady! You must have a heart to feel for me, you must have a heart to forgive me. I was in this family before you were born. I am devoted to it. But think of my dear son wrongfully accused.’

‘I do not accuse him.’

‘No, my Lady, no. But others do, and he is in prison and in danger. Oh, Lady Dedlock, if you can say but a word to help to clear him, say it!’

What delusion can this be? What power does she suppose is in the person she petitions to avert this unjust suspicion, if it be unjust? Her Lady's handsome eyes regard her with astonishment, almost with fear.

‘My Lady, I came away last night from Chesney Wold to find my son in my old age, and the step upon the Ghost's Walk was so constant and so solemn that I never heard the like in all these years. Night after night, as it has fallen dark, the sound has echoed through your rooms, but last night it was awfulest. And as it fell dark last night, my Lady, I got this letter.’

‘What letter is it?’

‘Hush! Hush!’ The housekeeper looks round and answers in a frightened whisper, ‘My Lady, I have not breathed a word of it, I don't believe what's written in it, I know it can't be true, I am sure and certain that it is not true. But my son is in danger, and you must have

a heart to pity me. If you know of anything that is not known to others, if you have any suspicion, if you have any clue at all, and any reason for keeping it in your own breast, oh, my dear Lady, think of me, and conquer that reason, and let it be known! This is the most I consider possible. I know you are not a hard lady, but you go your own way always without help, and you are not familiar with your friends; and all who admire you--and all do --as a beautiful and elegant lady, know you to be one far away from themselves who can't be approached close. My Lady, you may have some proud or angry reasons for disdain to utter something that you know; if so, pray, oh, pray, think of a faithful servant whose whole life has been passed in this family which she dearly loves, and relent, and help to clear my son! My Lady, my good Lady,' the old housekeeper pleads with genuine simplicity, 'I am so humble in my place and you are by nature so high and distant that you may not think what I feel for my child, but I feel so much that I have come here to make so bold as to beg and pray you not to be scornful of us if you can do us any right or justice at this fearful time!'

Lady Dedlock raises her without one word, until she takes the letter from her hand.

'Am I to read this?'

'When I am gone, my Lady, if you please, and then remembering the most that I consider possible.'

'I know of nothing I can do. I know of nothing I reserve that can affect your son. I have never accused him.'

'My Lady, you may pity him the more under a false accusation after reading the letter.'

The old housekeeper leaves her with the letter in her hand. In truth she is not a hard lady naturally, and the time has been when the sight of the venerable figure suing to her with such strong earnestness would have moved her to great compassion. But so long accustomed to suppress emotion and keep down reality, so long schooled for her own purposes in that destructive school which shuts up the natural feelings of the heart like flies in amber and spreads one uniform and dreary gloss over the good and bad, the feeling and the unfeeling, the sensible and the senseless, she had subdued even her wonder until now.

She opens the letter. Spread out upon the paper is a printed account of the discovery of the body as it lay face downward on the floor, shot through the heart; and underneath is written her own name, with the word 'murderess' attached.

It falls out of her hand. How long it may have lain upon the ground she knows not, but it lies where it fell when a servant stands before her announcing the young man of the name of Guppy. The words have probably been repeated several times, for they are ringing in her head before she begins to understand them.

'Let him come in!'

He comes in. Holding the letter in her hand, which she has taken from the floor, she tries to collect her thoughts. In the eyes of Mr Guppy she is the same Lady Dedlock, holding the same prepared, proud, chilling state.

'Your ladyship may not be at first disposed to excuse this visit from one who has never been welcome to your ladyship'--which he don't complain of, for he is bound to confess that there never has been any particular reason on the face of things why he should be-- 'but I hope when I mention my motives to your ladyship you will not find fault with me,' says Mr Guppy.

'Do so.'

'Thank your ladyship. I ought first to explain to your ladyship,' Mr Guppy sits on the edge of a chair and puts his hat on the carpet at his feet, 'that Miss Summerson, whose image, as I formerly mentioned to your ladyship, was at one period of my life imprinted on my 'eart until erased by circumstances over which I had no control, communicated to me, after I had the pleasure of waiting on your ladyship last, that she particularly wished me to take no steps whatever in any manner at all relating to her. And Miss Summerson's wishes being to me a law (except as connected with circumstances over which I have no control), I consequently never expected to have the distinguished honour of waiting on your ladyship again.'

And yet he is here now, Lady Dedlock moodily reminds him.

'And yet I am here now,' Mr Guppy admits. 'My object being to communicate to your ladyship, under the seal of confidence, why I am here.'

He cannot do so, she tells him, too plainly or too briefly. 'Nor can I,' Mr Guppy returns with a sense of injury upon him, 'too particularly request your ladyship to take particular notice that it's no personal affair of mine that brings me here. I have no interested views of my own to serve in coming here. If it was not for my promise to Miss Summerson and my keeping of it sacred--I, in point of fact, shouldn't have darkened these doors again, but should have seen 'em further first.'

Mr Guppy considers this a favourable moment for sticking up his hair with both hands.

'Your ladyship will remember when I mention it that the last time I was here I run against a party very eminent in our profession and whose loss we all deplore. That party certainly did from that time apply himself to cutting in against me in a way that I will call sharp practice, and did make it, at every turn and point, extremely difficult for me to be sure that I hadn't inadvertently led up to something contrary to Miss Summerson's wishes. Self-praise is no recommendation, but I may say for myself that I am not so bad a man of business neither.'

Lady Dedlock looks at him in stern inquiry. Mr Guppy immediately withdraws his eyes from her face and looks anywhere else.

'Indeed, it has been made so hard,' he goes on, 'to have any idea what that party was up to in combination with others that until the loss which we all deplore I was gravelled--an expression which your ladyship, moving in the higher circles, will be so good as to consider tantamount to knocked over. Small likewise--a name by which I refer to another party, a friend of mine that your ladyship is not acquainted with--got to be so close and double-faced that at times it wasn't easy to keep one's hands off his 'ead. However, what with the exertion of my humble abilities, and what with the help of a mutual friend by the name of Mr Tony Weevle (who is of a high aristocratic turn and has your ladyship's portrait always hanging up in his room), I have now reasons for an apprehension as to which I come to put your ladyship upon your guard. First, will your ladyship allow me to ask you whether you have had any strange visitors this morning? I don't mean fashionable visitors, but such visitors, for instance, as Miss Barbary's old servant, or as a person without the use of his lower extremities, carried upstairs similarly to a guy?'

'No!'

'Then I assure your ladyship that such visitors have been here and have been received here. Because I saw them at the door, and waited at the corner of the square till they came out, and took half an hour's turn afterwards to avoid them.'

'What have I to do with that, or what have you? I do not understand you. What do you mean?'

'Your ladyship, I come to put you on your guard. There may be no occasion for it. Very well. Then I have only done my best to keep my promise to Miss Summerson. I strongly suspect (from what Small has dropped, and from what we have corkscrewed out of him) that those

letters I was to have brought to your ladyship were not destroyed when I supposed they were. That if there was anything to be blown upon, it IS blown upon. That the visitors I have alluded to have been here this morning to make money of it. And that the money is made, or making.'

Mr Guppy picks up his hat and rises.

'Your ladyship, you know best whether there's anything in what I say or whether there's nothing. Something or nothing, I have acted up to Miss Summerson's wishes in letting things alone and in undoing what I had begun to do, as far as possible; that's sufficient for me. In case I should be taking a liberty in putting your ladyship on your guard when there's no necessity for it, you will endeavour, I should hope, to outlive my presumption, and I shall endeavour to outlive your disapprobation. I now take my farewell of your ladyship, and assure you that there's no danger of your ever being waited on by me again.'

She scarcely acknowledges these parting words by any look, but when he has been gone a little while, she rings her bell.

'Where is Sir Leicester?'

Mercury reports that he is at present shut up in the library alone.

'Has Sir Leicester had any visitors this morning?'

Several, on business. Mercury proceeds to a description of them, which has been anticipated by Mr Guppy. Enough; he may go.

So! All is broken down. Her name is in these many mouths, her husband knows his wrongs, her shame will be published--may be spreading while she thinks about it--and in addition to the thunderbolt so long foreseen by her, so unforeseen by him, she is denounced by an invisible accuser as the murderess of her enemy.

Her enemy he was, and she has often, often, often wished him dead. Her enemy he is, even in his grave. This dreadful accusation comes upon her like a new torment at his lifeless hand. And when she recalls how she was secretly at his door that night, and how she may be represented to have sent her favourite girl away so soon before merely to release herself from observation, she shudders as if the hangman's hands were at her neck.

She has thrown herself upon the floor and lies with her hair all wildly scattered and her face buried in the cushions of a couch. She rises up, hurries to and fro, flings herself down again, and rocks and

moans. The horror that is upon her is unutterable. If she really were the murderess, it could hardly be, for the moment, more intense.

For as her murderous perspective, before the doing of the deed, however subtle the precautions for its commission, would have been closed up by a gigantic dilatation of the hateful figure, preventing her from seeing any consequences beyond it; and as those consequences would have rushed in, in an unimagined flood, the moment the figure was laid low--which always happens when a murder is done; so, now she sees that when he used to be on the watch before her, and she used to think, 'if some mortal stroke would but fall on this old man and take him from my way!' it was but wishing that all he held against her in his hand might be flung to the winds and chance-sown in many places. So, too, with the wicked relief she has felt in his death. What was his death but the key-stone of a gloomy arch removed, and now the arch begins to fall in a thousand fragments, each crushing and mangling piecemeal!

Thus, a terrible impression steals upon and overshadows her that from this pursuer, living or dead--obdurate and imperturbable before her in his well-remembered shape, or not more obdurate and imperturbable in his coffin-bed--there is no escape but in death. Hunted, she flies. The complication of her shame, her dread, remorse, and misery, overwhelms her at its height; and even her strength of self-reliance is overturned and whirled away like a leaf before a mighty wind.

She hurriedly addresses these lines to her husband, seals, and leaves them on her table:

If I am sought for, or accused of, his murder, believe that I am wholly innocent. Believe no other good of me, for I am innocent of nothing else that you have heard, or will hear, laid to my charge. He prepared me, on that fatal night, for his disclosure of my guilt to you. After he had left me, I went out on pretence of walking in the garden where I sometimes walk, but really to follow him and make one last petition that he would not protract the dreadful suspense on which I have been racked by him, you do not know how long, but would mercifully strike next morning.

I found his house dark and silent. I rang twice at his door, but there was no reply, and I came home.

I have no home left. I will encumber you no more. May you, in your just resentment, be able to forget the unworthy woman on whom you have wasted a most generous devotion--who avoids you only with a deeper shame than that with which she hurries from herself--and who writes this last adieu.

She veils and dresses quickly, leaves all her jewels and her money, listens, goes downstairs at a moment when the hall is empty, opens and shuts the great door, flutters away in the shrill frosty wind.