

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### HOW THE GAME ENDED

Mr. Quest entered the house by a side door, and having taken off his hat and coat went into the drawing-room. He had still half an hour to spare before starting to catch the train.

"Well," said Belle, looking up. "Why are you looking so pale?"

"I have had a trying day," he answered. "What have you been doing?"

"Nothing in particular."

"Reading the Bible, I see."

"How do you know that?" she asked, colouring a little, for she had thrown a newspaper over the book when she heard him coming in. "Yes, I have been reading the Bible. Don't you know that when everything else in life has failed them women generally take to religion?"

"Or drink," he put in, with a touch of his old bitterness. "Have you seen Mr. Cossey lately?"

"No. Why do you ask that? I thought we had agreed to drop that subject."

As a matter of fact it had not been alluded to since Edward left the house.

"You know that Miss de la Molle will not marry him after all?"

"Yes, I know. She will not marry him because you forced him to give up the mortgages."

"You ought to be much obliged to me. Are you not pleased?"

"No. I no longer care about anything. I am tired of passion, and sin and failure. I care for nothing any more."

"It seems that we have both reached the same goal, but by different roads."

"You?" she answered, looking up; "at any rate you are not tired of money, or you would not do what you have done to get it."

"I never cared for money itself," he said. "I only wanted money that I might be rich and, therefore, respected."

"And you think any means justifiable so long as you get it?"

"I thought so. I do not think so now."

"I don't understand you to-night, William. It is time for me to go to dress for dinner."

"Don't go just yet. I'm leaving in a minute."

"Leaving? Where for?"

"London; I have to go up to-night about some business."

"Indeed; when are you coming back?"

"I don't quite know--to-morrow, perhaps. I wonder, Belle," he went on, his voice shaking a little, "if you will always think as badly of me as you do now."

"I?" she said, opening her eyes widely; "who am I that I should judge you? However bad you may be, I am worse."

"Perhaps there are excuses to be made for both of us," he said; "perhaps, after all, there is no such thing as free will, and we are nothing but pawns moved by a higher power. Who knows? But I will not keep you any longer. Good-bye--Belle!"

"Yes."

"May I kiss you before I go?"

She looked at him in astonishment. Her first impulse was to refuse. He had not kissed her for years. But something in the man's face touched her. It was always a refined and melancholy face, but to-night it wore a look which to her seemed almost unearthly.

"Yes, William, if you wish," she said; "but I wonder that you care to."

"Let the dead bury their dead," he answered, and stooping he put his arm round her delicate waist and drawing her to him kissed her tenderly but without passion on her forehead. "There, good-night," he said; "I wish that I had been a better husband to you. Good-night," and he was gone.

When he reached his room he flung himself for a few moments face downwards upon the bed, and from the convulsive motion of his back an observer might almost have believed that he was sobbing. When he rose, there was no trace of tears or tenderness upon his features. On the contrary, they were stern and set, like the features of one bent upon some terrible endeavour. Going to a drawer, he unlocked it and took from it a Colt's revolver of the small pattern. It was loaded, but he extracted the cartridges and replaced them with fresh ones from a tin box. Then he went downstairs, put on a large ulster with a high collar, and a soft felt hat, the brim of which he turned down over his

face, placed the pistol in the pocket of his ulster, and started.

It was a dreadful night, the wind was blowing a heavy gale, and between the gusts the rain came down in sheets of driving spray. Nobody was about the streets--the weather was far too bad; and Mr. Quest reached the station without meeting a living soul. Outside the circle of light from a lamp over the doorway he paused, and looked about for the clerk Jones. Presently, he saw him walking backwards and forwards under the shelter of a lean-to, and going up, touched him on the shoulder.

The man started back.

"Have you got the ticket, Jones?" he asked.

"Lord, sir," said Jones, "I didn't know you in that get-up. Yes, here it is."

"Is the woman there still?"

"Yes, sir; she's taken a ticket, third-class, to town. She has been going on like a wild thing because they would not give her any liquor at the refreshment bar, till at last she frightened them into letting her have six of brandy. Then she began and told the girl all sorts of tales about you, sir--said she was going back to London because she was afraid that if she stopped here you would murder her--and that you

were her lawful husband, and she would have a warrant out against you, and I don't know what all. I sat by and heard her with my own ears."

"Did she--did she indeed?" said Mr. Quest, with an attempt at a laugh.

"Well, she's a common thief and worse, that's what she is, and by this time to-morrow I hope to see her safe in gaol. Ah! here comes the train. Good-night, Jones. I can manage for myself now."

"What's his game?" said Jones to himself as he watched his master slip on to the platform by a gate instead of going through the booking office. "Well, I've had four quid out of it, any way, and it's no affair of mine." And Jones went home to tea.

Meanwhile Mr. Quest was standing on the wet and desolate platform quite away from the lamps, watching the white lights of the approaching train rushing on through the storm and night. Presently it drew up. No passengers got out.

"Now, mam, look sharp if you're going," cried the porter, and the woman Edith came out of the refreshment room.

"There's the third, forrard there," said the porter, running to the van to see about the packing of the mails.

On she came, passing quite close to Mr. Quest, so close that he could hear her swearing at the incivility of the porter. There was a third-

class compartment just opposite, and this she entered. It was one of those carriages that are still often to be seen on provincial lines in which the partitions do not go up to the roof, and, if possible, more vilely lighted than usual. Indeed the light which should have illuminated the after-half of it had either never been lit or had gone out. There was not a soul in the whole length of the compartment.

As soon as his wife was in, Mr. Quest watched his opportunity. Slipping up to the dark carriage, he opened and shut the door as quietly as possible and took his seat in the gloom.

The engine whistled, there was a cry of "right forrard," and they were off.

Presently he saw the woman stand up in her division of the compartment and peep over into the gloom.

"Not a blessed soul," he heard her mutter, "and yet I feel as though that devil Billy was creeping about after me. Ugh! it must be the horrors. I can see the look he gave me now."

A few minutes later the train stopped at a station, but nobody got in, and presently it moved on again. "Any passengers for Effry?" shouted the porter, and there had been no response. If they did not stop at Effry there would be no halt for forty minutes. Now was his time. He waited a little till they had got up the speed. The line here ran

through miles and miles of fen country, more or less drained by dykes and rivers, but still wild and desolate enough. Over this great flat the storm was sweeping furiously--even drowning in its turmoil the noise of the travelling train.

Very quietly he rose and climbed over the low partition which separated his compartment from that in which the woman was. She was seated in the corner, her head leaning back, so that the feeble light from the lamp fell on it, and her eyes were closed. She was asleep.

He slid himself along the seat till he was opposite to her, then paused to look at the fierce wicked face on which drink and paint and years of evil-thinking and living had left their marks, and looking shuddered. There was his bad genius, there was the creature who had driven him from evil to evil and finally destroyed him. Had it not been for her he might have been a good and respected man, and not what he was now, a fraudulent ruined outcast. All his life seemed to flash before his inner eye in those few seconds of contemplation, all the long weary years of struggle, crime, and deceit. And this was the end of it, and /there/ was the cause of it. Well, she should not escape him; he would be revenged upon her at last. There was nothing but death before /him/, she should die too.

He set his teeth, drew the loaded pistol from his pocket, cocked it and lifted it to her breast.



What was the matter with the thing? He had never known the pull of a pistol to be so heavy before.

No, it was not /that/. He could not do it. He could not shoot a sleeping woman, devil though she was; he could not kill her in her sleep. His nature rose up against it.

He placed the pistol on his knee, and as he did so she opened her eyes. He saw the look of wonder gather in them and grow to a stare of agonised terror. Her face became rigid like a dead person's and her lips opened to scream, but no cry came. She could only point to the pistol.

"Make a sound and you are dead," he said fiercely. "Not that it matters though," he added, as he remembered that the scream must be loud which could be heard in that raging gale.

"What are you going to do?" she gasped at last. "What are you going to do with that pistol? And where do you come from?"

"I come out of the night," he answered, raising the weapon, "out of the night into which you are going."

"You are not going to kill me?" she moaned, turning up her ghastly face. "I can't die. I'm afraid to die. It will hurt, and I've been wicked. Oh, you are not going to kill me, are you?"

"Yes, I am going to kill you," he answered. "I told you months ago that I would kill you if you molested me. You have ruined me now, there is nothing but death left for /me/, and /you/ shall die too, you fiend."

"Oh no! no! no! anything but that. I was drunk when I did it; that man brought me there, and they had taken all my things, and I was starving," and she glanced wildly round the empty carriage to see if help could be found, but there was none. She was alone with her fate.

She slipped down upon the floor of the carriage and clasped his knees. Writhing in her terror upon the ground, in hoarse accents she prayed for mercy.

"You used to kiss me," she said; "you cannot kill a woman you used to kiss years ago. Oh, spare me, spare me!"

He set his lips and placed the muzzle of the pistol against her head. She shivered at the contact, and her teeth began to chatter.

He could not do it. He must let her go, and leave her to fate. After all, she could hurt him no more, for before another sun had set he would be beyond her reach.

His pistol hand fell against his side, and he looked down with

loathing not unmixed with pity at the abject human snake who was writing at his feet.

She caught his eye, and her faculties, sharpened by the imminent peril, read relentment there. For the moment, at any rate, he was softened. If she could master him now while he was off his guard--he was not a very strong man! But the pistol----

Slowly, still groaning out supplications, she rose to her feet.

"Yes," he said, "be quiet while I think if I can spare you," and he half turned his head away from her. For a moment nothing was heard but the rush of the gale and the roll of the wheels running over and under bridges.

This was her opportunity. All her natural ferocity arose within her, intensified a hundred times by the instinct of self-protection. With a sudden blow she struck the pistol from his hand; it fell upon the floor of the carriage. And then with a scream she sprang like a wild cat straight at his throat. So sudden was the attack that the long lean hands were gripping his windpipe before he knew it had been made. Back she bore him, though he seized her round the waist. She was the heavier of the two, and back they went, /crash/ against the carriage door.

It gave! Oh, God, the worn catch gave! Out together, out with a yell

of despair into the night and the raging gale; down together through sixty feet of space into the black river beneath. Down together, deep into the watery depths--into the abyss of Death.

The train rushed on, the wild winds blew, and the night was as the night had been. But there in the black water, though there was never a star to see them, there, locked together in death as they had been locked together in life, the fierce glare of hate and terror yet staring from their glazed eyes, two bodies rolled over and over as they sped silently towards the sea.