

PART TWO

CHAPTER I

THE WHEELS OF JUSTICE

London, in the spring! Sunshine; the Thames a gleam with silver ripples, singing as it flows; red sails! Joyous London that has emerged from fogs and basks beneath blue skies! Thoroughfares that give forth a glad hum; wheels singing, too; whips that crack in sprightly arpeggios. On the streets, people, not shadows, who walk with a swing; who really seem to breathe and not slink uncannily by! Eyes that regard you with human expression; faces that seem capable of emotion; figures adorned in keeping with the bright realities of the moment. London; old London young again; grimy, repulsive London now bright, shimmering, beautiful!

In such a London, on such a day, about ten o'clock in the morning, three persons whose appearance distinguished them from the ordinary passers-by, turned into a narrow thoroughfare not far from the Strand.

"Quite worth while going to hear John Steele conduct for his client, I assure you!" observed one, a tall, military-looking man, who walked with a slight limp and carried a cane. "He's a new man, but he's making his mark. When he asked to be admitted to the English bar, he surprised even his examiners. His summing-up in the Doughertie murder case was, I heard

his lordship remark, one of the most masterly efforts he ever listened to. Just tore the circumstantial evidence to pieces and freed his man! Besides his profession at the bar, he is an unusually gifted criminologist; takes a strong personal interest in the lowest riffraff; is writing a book, I understand--one of the kind that will throw a new light on the subject."

"Just what is a criminologist?" The speaker, a girl of about eighteen, turned as she lightly asked the question, to glance over her shoulder toward several persons who followed them.

"One who seeks to apply to the criminal the methods of psychology, psychiatry and anthropology," he answered with jesting impressiveness.

She laughed. "But you said this Mr. Steele comes from our part of the world, did you not, Captain Forsythe?"

"So I understand, Miss Jocelyn. Not much of a person to talk about himself, don't you know,"--tentatively stroking an imposing pair of mustaches, tinged with gray,--"but he has mentioned, I believe, living in New Zealand; or was it Australia?"

"Australia?" the cold, metallic tones of the third person, a man of about three-and-thirty, inquired. "Most likely the other place, or we should have heard--"

"True, Lord Ronsdale!" said the other man, pausing before a great door.

"But here we are."

"All ye who enter, etc" laughed the girl.

"Not if one comes just to 'do' it, you know," was the protesting answer.

"Quite the thing to take in the criminal courts!"

"When one is only a sort of country cousin, a colonial, just come to town!" she added, waving a small, daintily-gloved hand to the little group of friends who now approached and joined them. "Captain Forsythe is trying to persuade me it is a legitimate part of our slumming plan to take in murder trials, uncle," she said lightly, addressing the foremost of the new-comers. "Just because it's a fad of his! Speaking of this acquaintance or friend of yours, Mr. Steele,--you are something of a criminologist, too, are you not, Captain Forsythe?"

"Well, every man should have a hobby," returned that individual, "and, although I don't aspire to the long name you call me, I confess to a slight amateur interest."

Lord Ronsdale shrugged his shoulders, as to say, every one to his taste; but the girl laughed.

"Slight?" she repeated. "Would you believe it, aunt"--to a portly lady among those who had approached--"he never misses a murder trial! I

believe he likes to watch the poor fellows fighting for their lives, to study their faces, their expressions when they're being sentenced, perhaps, to one of those horrible convict ships!"

"Don't speak of them, my dear Jocelyn!" returned that worthy person, with a shudder. "When I think of the Lord Nelson, and that awful night--"

"You were three days in an open boat before being sighted and picked up, I believe, Lady Wray?" observed Captain Forsythe.

"Three days? Years!" returned the governor's wife. "At least, they seemed so to me! I thought every moment would be our last and goodness knows why it wasn't! How we managed to survive it--"

"Narrow squeak, certainly!" said Lord Ronsdale, his lids lowering slightly. "But all's well that ends well, and--"

"Every one behaved splendidly," interposed Sir Charles. "You," gazing contemplatively at the girl, "were but a child then, Jocelyn."

She did not answer; the beautiful face had abruptly changed; all laughter had gone from the clear blue eyes.

"She is thinking of the convict who saved her!" observed Sir Charles in an explanatory tone to Captain Forsythe. "Quite an interesting episode,

'pon honor! Tell you about it later. Never saw anything finer, or better. And the amazing part of it is, the fellow looked like a brute, had the low, ignorant face of an ex-bruiser. He'd gone to the bad, taken to drink, and committed I don't know how many crimes! Yet that man, the lowest of the low--"

"You must not speak of him that way!" The girl's hands were clasped; the slender, shapely figure was very straight. Her beautiful blue eyes, full of varying lights, flashed, then became dimmed; a suspicion of mist blurred the long, sweeping lashes. "He had a big, noble spark in his soul. And I think of him many, many times!" she repeated, the sweet, gay lips trembling sensitively. "Brave fellow! Brave fellow!" The words fell in a whisper.

"Fortunate fellow, I should say, to be so remembered by you, Miss Jocelyn!" interposed Captain Forsythe. "Eh, Ronsdale?"

"Fortunate, indeed!" the thin lips replied stiffly.

"Pity he should have been drowned though!" Captain Forsythe went on. "He would, I am sure, have made a most interesting study in contrasts!"

She, however, seemed not to hear either compliment--or comment, but stood for a moment as in a reverie. "I am almost sorry I was persuaded to come here to-day," she said at length, thoughtfully. "I don't believe I shall like courts, or," she added, "find them amusing!"

"Nonsense!" Sir Charles laughed. "I have heard his lordship has a pretty sense of humor, and never fails, when opportunity offers, to indulge it."

"Even when sentencing people?"

"Well; there is no need of turning the proceedings into a funeral."

"I don't believe I should laugh at his wit," said the girl. "And is this Mr. John Steele witty, too?"

"Oh, no! Anything irrelevant from any one else wouldn't be allowed by his lordship."

Here Ronsdale lifted his hat. "May happen back this way," he observed.

"That is," looking at Jocelyn Wray, "if you don't object?"

"I? Not at all! Of course, it would bore you--a trial! You are so easily bored. Is it the club?"

"No; another engagement. Thank you so much for permission to return for you--very kind. Hope you will find it amusing. Good morning!" And Lord Ronsdale vanished down the narrow way.

The others of the party entered the court room and were shown to the

seats that Captain Forsythe had taken particular pains to reserve for them. The case, evidently an interesting one to judge from the number of people present, was in progress as they quietly settled down in their chairs at the back. From the vantage point of a slight eminence they found themselves afforded an excellent and unimpaired view of his lordship, the jury, prisoner, witness and barristers. Presumably the case had reached an acute stage, for even the judge appeared slightly mindful of what was going on, and allowed his glance to stray toward the witness. The latter, a little man, in cheap attire flashily debonnaire if the worse for long service, seemed to experience difficulty in speaking, to hesitate before his words, and, when he did answer, to betray in his tone no great amount of confidence. He looked weary and somewhat crestfallen, as if his will were being broken down, or subjected to a severe strain, the truth being ground out of him by some irresistible process.

"That's John Steele cross-examining now!" Captain Forsythe whispered to the girl. "And that's Dandy Joe, as he's called, one of the police spies, cheap race-track man and so on, in the box. He came to the front in a murder trial quite celebrated in its day, and one I always had my own little theory about. Not that it matters now!" he added with a sigh.

But the girl was listening to another voice, a clear voice, a quiet voice, a voice capable of the strongest varying accents. She looked at the speaker; he held himself with the assurance of one certain of his ground. His shoulders were straight and broad; he stood like an athlete,

and, when he moved, it was impossible to be unconscious of a certain physical grace that came from well-trained muscles. He carried his head high, as if from a habit of thought, of looking up, not down, when he turned from the pages of the heavy tomes in his study; his face conveyed an impression of intelligence and intensity; his eyes, dark, deep, searched fully those they rested on.

He had reached a point in his cross-examination where he had almost thoroughly discredited this witness for the prosecution, when turning toward a table to take up a paper, his glance, casually lifting, rested on the distinguished party in the rear of the room, or rather it rested on one of them. Against the dark background, the girl's golden hair was well-calculated to catch the wandering gaze; the flowers in her hat, the great bunch of violets in her dress added insistent alluring bits of color in the dim spot where she sat. Erect as a lily stem, she looked oddly out of place in that large, somber room; there, where the harsh requiem of bruised and broken lives unceasingly sounded, she seemed like some presence typical of spring, wafted thither by mistake. The man continued to regard her. Suddenly he started, and his eyes almost eagerly searched the lovely, proud face.

His back was turned to the judge, who stirred nervously, but waited a fraction of a second before he spoke.

"If the cross-examination is finished--" he began.

John Steele wheeled; his face changed; a smile of singular charm accompanied his answer.

"Your lordship will pardon me; the human mind has its aberrations. At the moment, by a curious psychological turn, a feature of another problem seized me; it was like playing two games of chess at once. Perhaps your honor has experienced the sensation?"

His lordship beamed. "Quite so," he observed unctuously. "I have to confess that once in a great while, although following a case very closely, I have found it possible to consider at the same time whether I would later have port or sherry with my canvasback."

Of course every one smiled; the business of the morning ran on, and John Steele, at length, concluded his cross-examination. "I think, your Lordship, the question of the reliability of this man, as a witness, in this, or--any other case--fully established."

"Any other case?" said his lordship. "We are not trying any other case."

"Not now, your Lordship." John Steele bowed. "I ask your lordship's indulgence for the"--an instant's ironical light gleamed from the dark eyes--"superfluity."

"Witness may go," said his lordship brusly.

Dandy Joe, a good deal damaged in the world's estimation, stepped down; his erstwhile well-curved mustache of brick-dust hue seemed to droop as he slunk out of the box; he appeared subdued, almost frightened,--quite unlike the jaunty little cockney that had stepped so blithely forth to give his testimony.

The witnesses all heard, John Steele, for the defense, spoke briefly; but his words were well-chosen, his sentences of classic purity. As the girl listened, it seemed to her not strange that Captain Forsythe, as well as others, perhaps, should be drawn hither on occasions when this man appeared. Straight, direct logic characterized the speech from beginning to end; only once did a suggestion of sentiment--curt pity for that gin-besotted thing, the prisoner!--obtrude itself; then it passed so quickly his lordship forgot to intervene, and the effect remained, a flash, illuminating, Rembrandt-like!

Time slipped by; the judge looked at his watch, bethought him of a big silver dish filled with an amber-hued specialty of the Ship and Turtle, and adjourned court. His address interrupted by the exigencies of the moment, John Steele began mechanically to gather up his books; his face that had been marked by the set look of one determined to drive on at his best with a task, now wore a preoccupied expression. The prisoner whined a question; Steele did not answer, and some one hustled the man out. Having brought his volumes together in a little pile, Steele absently separated them again; at the same time Sir Charles and his party walked toward the bench. They were met by his lordship and

cordially greeted.

"A privilege, Sir Charles, to meet one we have heard of so often, in the antipodes."

"Thank you. His lordship, Judge Beeson, m'dear, whose decisions--"

"Allow me to congratulate you, sir!" The enthusiastic voice was that of Captain Forsythe, addressing John Steele. "Your cross-examination was masterly; had you been in a certain other case, years ago, when the evidence of that very person on the stand to-day--in the main--convicted a man of murder, I fancy the result then would have been different!"

John Steele seemed not to hear; his eyes were turned toward the beautiful girl. She was standing quite close to him now; he could detect the fragrance of the violets she wore, a fresh sweet smell so welcome in that close, musty atmosphere.

"My niece, your Lordship, Miss Wray."

Steele saw her bow and heard her speak to that august court personage; then as the latter, after further brief talk, hurried away--

"Sir Charles, let me present to you Mr. Steele," said Captain Forsythe.

"Lady Wray--"

"Happy to know you, sir," said the governor heartily.

"Miss Jocelyn Wray," added the military man, "who," with a laugh, "experienced some doubts about a visit of this kind being conducive to pleasure!"

John Steele took the small gloved hand she gave him; her eyes were very bright.

"I enjoyed--I don't mean that--I am so glad I came," said the girl. "And heard you!" she added.

He thanked her in a low tone, looking at her hand as he dropped it. "You,--you are making England your home?" His voice was singularly hesitating!

"Yes." She looked at him a little surprised. "At least, for the present! But how--" she broke off. "I suppose, though, you could tell by my accent. I've lived nearly all my life in Australia, and--"

Sir Charles, interrupting, reminded them of an appointment; the party turned. A slender figure inclined itself very slightly toward John Steele; a voice wished him good morning. The man stood with his hands on his books; it did not occur to him to accompany her to the door. Suddenly he looked over his shoulder; at the threshold, she, too, had turned her head. An instant their glances met; the next, she was gone.

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