

The Accusing Shadow

HARRY BLYTH

'Ah, yes, my friend, success in our profession has its joys, but when one becomes my age, and has seen as much as I have of tragedy and evilness, fraud and generosity, dark plottings, and the grimmest of humour, repose offers delights which, in my younger years, were undreamed of by me. So it comes that now I say gladly, let my good partner, Sexton Blake, take the rewards and the honours, while I sit peacefully under my vine, and cultivate my garden.'

'In other words, Jules Gervaise, the most astute of cosmopolitan detectives, the expertest unraveller of mysteries, and the most profound of observers, will cease to be a terror to evil-doers, and those who seek his sage counsel and quick action will seek in vain.'

'That, my dear Saul Lynn, is precisely my determination. Unfortunately I have not quite settled where my vine shall grow, or in which particular part of Europe I shall raise my cabbages. Like most men who are at home in any part of the world. I have had no real home anywhere, so I have a wide choice before me.'

These two men—Jules Gervaise, of Paris, thin, wiry, alert, and wonderfully keen-eyed, and Saul Lynn, a stout, florid man, with rubicund, unwrinkled face, and short white hair, which stood up like bristles on a short brush—sat together in the latter's dining-room in a small comfortable house in the neighbourhood of Kennington Oval.

It was a heavy, gloomy afternoon, in the dreariest autumn London had known for some years, which is a great deal to allow; and both men regarded the fire which glowed in the grate with encouraging appreciation.

'In a few days I shall be pretty much in the same position as yourself, said Mr Lynn. 'When my dear daughter Daisy is married, I shall stand alone in the world, without chick or child. Two lone men might do worse than rent a house between them.'

'Indeed, yes,' replied Gervaise, without enthusiasm. 'Although we have not seen much of one another, our acquaintanceship dates

from some years back. But, tell me, my friend, is your daughter's prospected union satisfactory to you both, and especially to her?"

'Bless me, yes! It is a most desirable match from every point of view. George Roach is older than Daisy, that is true, but he is a steady, generous man, wonderfully well off, and devoted to her. What more can any parent desire?'

'And the young lady returns his affection?'

'Of course. There had been some foolish flirtation between her and a young fellow named Rupert Peel, one of Mr Roach's clerks; but it was nothing worth speaking about, and when Mr Roach himself appeared on the scene, Rupert very properly ceased his visits. A worthy young man he is, but, unfortunately, poor.'

'This Mr Roach has been a very great friend to you, I suppose?'

'He literally saved me from ruin. Nothing but misfortune dogged me during all my business efforts in the City. But for the generous offices of Mr Roach, I should not now have a roof over my head, and my name would be stained with a very unsatisfactory bankruptcy. He was my principal creditor, and he proved at the critical moment to be my only friend. He got me out of the tangle. By his help my business was set on its legs again, and now he is soon to become my son-in-law, all indebtedness between us will be wiped out.'

'I see,' said Gervaise drily, shooting a keen glance at his companion. 'Your daughter's wedding will include that rare combination of a love-match enveloping a business necessity.'

Up to this moment the famous criminal investigator had spoken carelessly—lazily; but now his interest was aroused, for he was a man peculiarly solicitous about the happiness of young people. Often had he declared that it gave him more satisfaction to attend a funeral than to witness a marriage which did not promise real happiness to the bride and bridegroom. He came from a country where loveless unions were, alas! too common.

'Not a necessity, my dear Gervaise,' objected Saul Lynn, with a smile. 'Under no circumstances would Mr Roach have pressed his claims against me.'

'Such generous creditors are rare. Is it possible that I may be honoured with an introduction to your future son-in-law?'

'Undoubtedly. In the ordinary way you would have seen him this evening, for he gives us a call nearly every night. Yesterday, however, he was summoned hurriedly to Glasgow. He left St Pancras by the

night express. We have been expecting a telegram from him all day, announcing his safe arrival in Scotland. He is generally most particular about wiring to Daisy when he is away. He must be terribly busy not to have done so this time. I suppose we shall not hear now until the morning. Hullo! There's a knock at the front door. It's a telegraph boy, I'll be bound! They don't hesitate to give a double rattle, with all the confidence of a duke's footman. Dear me! it's Rupert Peel's voice. Something very strange must have happened to bring him here. Daisy has ran to admit him. No doubt the poor child is anxious for news of George Roach.'

Mr Lynn's further reflections were cut short by the entrance of the two young people he had named.

Daisy was a fair, sunny creature, all grace and vivacity, with dazzling hair and bright eyes, in which the detective discerned more affection for her companion, Rupert Peel, than her father had any suspicion of. The young clerk himself was tall, lithe, with deep black locks, and strikingly large and luminous orbs, while his cheeks were peculiar for their perfect whiteness. His was a striking face, darkly handsome, but not altogether an alluring one, until he smiled, when a great light shone in it.

'We are anxious at the office about Mr Roach,' he explained to Saul Lynn. 'We have received a message from his Glasgow friends saying he has not called on them, and desiring to know the reason. We have wired to the manager of the hotel where he always stays, and he has not been there. On the other hand, it is quite certain Mr Roach arrived at St Pancras with his luggage in ample time for the train. It is also plain that while ten through tickets for Glasgow were issued for that express, only nine have been given up. So far this is all we are able to ascertain. I thought it just possible that you might be able to throw some light on this erratic behaviour of our principal. We know that he often thinks more of writing to you than to the office.'

'Indeed, I can give you no assistance. We have been very much surprised and disappointed at receiving no message from him. It's a strange business, Mr Peel. What do you make of it?'

As Mr Saul Lynn put this question, he looked more anxious than anyone there.

Jules Gervaise would have been singularly unobserving had he failed to note how absolutely unconcerned Daisy appeared to be.

'Really, sir, I have no suggestion at all to make,' returned Rupert Peel, 'and our Mr Felix Sark—he is our cashier, and the oldest servant in the firm—says that no doubt our principal changed his mind at the last moment, and, for some good reason, with which his employees have nothing to do. "Mr Roach is not a baby," says the cashier, "and no doubt he is safe enough." At any rate, it's not our business to tell him when he should communicate with us. He will let us know where he is in good time.'

'I quite agree with Mr Sark,' said Daisy decisively. 'Mr Roach is a well-travelled man, and if any accident had befallen him we should have heard of it. There is no occasion for alarm.'

'I am sure, my dear, I am glad to see you treat the matter so coolly,' said Saul Lynn, regarding his daughter with some displeasure. 'I am sure that something very unusual has occurred to our friend, or he would have written to you. However, I suppose we can do nothing but wait, and see what the morning brings forth.'

Just then someone called to see Mr Lynn on a small matter of business. He went into another room to have his interview with his visitor, and Daisy busied herself in preparing tea, to which Mr Rupert Peel had been invited, so the latter gentleman and Jules Gervaise were left together for a little.

'How are you progressing with your lessons in French, Mr Peel?' the detective asked, as carelessly as possible.

The clerk started slightly, and red spots burned in his white cheeks.

'How did you know I was learning French?'

'That is a simple matter enough. Whenever an Englishman determines to conquer the Parisian accent, he, quite unconsciously, gives a peculiar intonation to his native words, which he never gets in any other way. Yes, my friend, you are studying French, and because you contemplate taking a visit to Paris—Paris, the beautiful! Paris, the gay! Ah, yes!' Gervaise added, with that pathetic touch with which old men, so often tinge their recollections, 'I also have loved my Paris.'

'Your surmises are correct, sir. I have been studying your language. Mr Roach promised me a holiday while he was on his honeymoon, and I have resolved on seeking the distractions of the French capital, in the hope of forgetting there many things it is pain to remember here.'

'There is no forgetting,' declared the detective sagely. 'We cannot

bring back a yesterday, because it lives eternally. Though we may not find it at the moment we want it, nevertheless it is stored up in one of those millions of secretive cells which go towards making up what we call brain, mind, memory. Now, be quite free with me, and tell me what you think of this coming wedding. I judge that George Roach is quite an old man—eh?’

‘He is forty-eight. Daisy—Miss Lynn—is only nineteen.’

‘What a gulf between! Now, had it been yourself——’

‘Well, sir, to be quite frank with you, I had a true and honest affection for Miss Lynn. I believe I was not distasteful to her. I should have asked her in marriage from her father, had not Mr Roach informed me, in quite a casual way, that it was in his power to make Mr Lynn a beggar, and drive his daughter into the world to earn her bread. On that hint I ceased my visits. How could I have looked my darling confidently in the face, if she knew it was through me her father was going hungry? My income is small, and though I might have supported Daisy, I could not possibly have kept her father.’

‘So,’ said the detective, with a pleasant smile, ‘if it should turn out that anything very serious has overtaken George Roach, our friend Saul Lynn will be relieved from his oppression, and you may yet be free to marry Daisy?’

‘That is true,’ said Rupert, with some hesitation, ‘but I had never reckoned on my master’s death.’

‘Bah!’ ejaculated Gervaise, ‘a lover thinks of everything, and risks his life’s happiness on a chance. You are inwardly praying now that George Roach may never be heard of again.’

‘It is not in human nature for a man to be anxious for the success of his rival,’ was the quiet, and even dignified, declaration of Rupert. ‘But,’ he added, ‘at present there is a reason for supposing that anything at all out of the way has occurred to the gentleman who is so soon to call Daisy his wife.’

‘Surely, my young friend, after having your waistcoat washed you have put it on before it was properly dry! See how it smokes before the blaze of the fire!’

‘Really, sir!’ protested the clerk, his white face crimsoning all over, ‘your comments are uncommonly personal, and scarcely free from insolence. It is surely my own affair whether I have my waistcoat washed or not.’

'Certainly. But that material is not made to wash. It is two-thirds cotton, and all shoddy. It crinkles up as it dries. You will never be able to wear it again. If you listen to me you will put it into the first convenient fire you can use, and you will be careful to see that it is all consumed. There, there! do not fly into a temper. You will soon want my help and advice. Never forget that the smell of wet blood drying has an unmistakable odour to those who have even once known it.'

'You are a miracle—a wizard!' exclaimed Rupert, gazing aghast at the detective, and swaying before him with his fierce, inward agitation.

'Hush!' cried Gervaise, 'Saul Lynn is coming. I am neither of the things you call me. I am simply YOUR FRIEND!'

'The fellow who just called on me,' said Mr Lynn, as he reentered the room, his face more ruddy, and again beaming, 'came from the confectioner's, to arrange about the wedding-breakfast. I shall have a marquee erected in our back garden—indeed, I assure you, Gervaise, I am going to make this marriage quite a stylish thing—absolutely a function. Why, Mr Peel, do you want to leave us so suddenly? I quite understood you were going to remain for tea? Oh! well, if you remember you must go back to the office, I'll not detain you. Business before anything—especially Mr Roach's business. I do hope all is well with him,' he continued fervently, as he followed the clerk to the door, and let him out into the street, with an ill-disguised sigh of relief. 'I don't suppose there is any real cause for anxiety about my future son-in-law. Do you, Gervaise?' added Saul, as he once more returned to the room.

'I cannot tell,' was the grave answer. 'I shall be at St Pancras Station before eight tomorrow morning. The guard who took the Scotch express out of St Pancras last night will probably be returning from St Enoch to London tonight. If I see him he will be able to tell me whether Mr Roach was among his passengers or not.'

'Thank goodness you are so interested in my affairs!' cried Saul Lynn half-incredulously. 'But only an hour ago you declared you had cast all professional work aside. You were sure you would never more busy yourself with the concerns of others. Is the old instinct too strong for you? Must you for ever remain the detective?'

'No, no, my friend,' declared Gervaise gently. 'I hope not. I pray it

may not be so. But your daughter is young; she is fair to gaze on. An atmosphere of goodness surrounds her. I should not like to see her stricken down by a great sorrow. Such enquiries as I may make in this affair shall be for Daisy's sake—for her sake only.'

'Of course I know Mr George Roach, sir,' said the guard of the Scotch express, whom the detective interviewed early on the following morning. 'He has often travelled to Glasgow with me. We know our "through" passengers, and they know us. I remember quite well seeing that gentleman's portmanteau and handbag, his rug, and his newspapers in the carriage which I had selected for him. I did not miss him until we reached Leicester. When I discovered that he was not in the train I took the gentleman's traps into my own van, and left them in the cloakroom at Glasgow when we arrived there. I thought he had stayed a little too long at Bedford, our first stopping-place, and so had missed us. Bless you, sir, some of our "regulars" often do that! Under such circumstances a gentleman does not bother much about his luggage, especially by the night train. He knows his things are safe enough in our hands. I did ask a question or two about Mr Roach when I was at Bedford this morning, and when I found he had not got out there I came to one very natural conclusion.'

'And what was that, pray?' asked Gervaise.

'Why, sir, that he did not travel with us. At the last moment something must have happened to make Mr Roach change his mind, and he abandoned our train before it left St Pancras. It's quite plain,' added the guard, 'folks don't disappear out of railway carriages, except in books. If your friend had committed suicide, we should have heard of the body by this time. Take my word for it, sir, he never started by that train at all.'

'My friend,' said Gervaise, as solemnly as though he was reading a funeral oration, 'you are gifted with monumental sense. I am quite sure Mr Roach never did leave London. It is quite refreshing for me to meet with such a piece of living sanity as yourself, but it is odd I should have to go to the guard of a Scotch express to find it. Ah!' added the detective to himself as he walked very thoughtfully along the Euston Road. 'I am glad I have no Sexton Blake with me. He would inevitably ride a bicycle, plunge into a stream, or stop an engine in full career, before he got to the end of this business. I must do my acrobatic feats in my head, and on the ground. Poor Daisy Lynn! I fear much there are some heavy revelations in store for her.'

Then, as though struck by a sudden thought, he walked into Gower Street Station.

In following closely on Jules Gervaise's heels, in his steps to unravel the desperate mystery which was soon to confront him, we shall find it necessary to omit many touching interviews which he had with Daisy, and also many of his conferences with her less unselfish father. It will be sufficient if we give the salient features of the celebrated detective's investigations.

In that labyrinth of narrow streets, with towering buildings, which lies between Fore Street and Cheapside, where railway vans for ever block the road, and great bales of 'soft' goods monopolize the pavement, might be found the warehouse of George Roach and Co., wholesale dealers in Manchester goods. It appeared to have been accidentally jammed in between two larger buildings, and it wore a constant look of pain, as though suffering from the tightness of the squeeze.

It was one of those dark places where the gas is never extinguished till the last stroke of business has struck, and there was so much hurrying to and fro, and shouting out of marks and figures, that the clerks gave one the idea of being in a perpetual state of altercation.

It was in the midst of this atmosphere, thick with commerce and cotton-dust, that Jules Gervaise soon found himself enquiring for Mr Felix Sark, the firm's cashier and oldest servant.

He proved to be a somewhat meagre individual, but sinewy withal. The bottoms of his trousers showed a marked tendency to creep up to his knees, while his sleeves were absolutely eager to get about his neck.

He had a hairless, parchment-like face, and his eyes might have been of glass for all the expression there was in them.

'No, sir,' he said, in answer to the detective's question, and regarding that worthy gentleman with scant favour, 'we have not received any letter from Mr Roach this morning, but I have no doubt that our principal will communicate with us in his own time. I trust you will tell Mr Saul Lynn what I say. Mr Roach is not a baby, to be tied to the coat-tails of his future father-in-law, and I may assure you, sir, that when he knows that a stranger has been fussing round here about his absence, he will be vastly indignant. Jules Gervaise is, if I do not err, the name of a detective. That is so, eh? Very good, then. I

may tell you, sir, that you will not be paid for your meddling by this side. And, as for Mr Saul Lynn, if you expect anything from him I advise you to get it in advance. I have the pleasure of wishing you a very good-morning.'

'Good-day, my friend,' returned Gervaise, smiling blandly on the cashier. 'I look forward with great pleasure to meeting you again.'

As Jules was leaving the place he met Rupert Peel entering it. The young man's face expressed no pleasure at the encounter. With a cold 'Good morning', he would have passed on.

'There is still no news of Mr Roach,' said the detective, stopping him.

'So I believe,' was the indifferent answer. 'But at present there is no need for alarm,' Peel continued, 'and I am sure the governor will be very cross when he hears that Mr Lynn has engaged you to come down to the warehouse making enquiries about him. Mr Roach is a very passionate man, and such a liberty as he will judge your behaviour to be may be sufficient to make him break off the match.'

'Ah!' said Gervaise, with a dry smack of his lips, fixing the clerk with his keen eyes, 'Don't you think that Death may have already done that?'

'Really, Mr Gervaise, I have not the time nor the inclination to discuss the subject with you.'

He, too, hastened away from the detective, who still smiled blandly.

'I shall get no help there,' he murmured, 'and I am glad it is so. Their aid would be misleading, while their dislike to my interference is significant.'

'It is ridiculous for Mr Sark and young Peel to feel so confident that all is well with George Roach,' declared Saul Lynn, when Gervaise next saw him. 'I am convinced that something very serious has occurred. I know of nothing that would prevent him from writing to Daisy. As he seems never to have gone by that train, the mystery becomes deeper and more alarming. Thank goodness, my dear child does not realize all that his strange silence may mean.'

'I should like you to take me to his home—the place where he lived,' said Gervaise.

'That is easily done. Being a bachelor, he occupied furnished apartments in a good house, situated in Highbury Park. We will go there at once, my dear Gervaise, if you are willing.'

'Mr Roach gave up his rooms more than a week ago,' declared

Mrs Ballard, the landlady of the handsome villa at which they called and enquired about the missing man. 'Of course, you know, Mr Lynn, that he has taken a large, old-fashioned house in Canonbury, for your daughter to be mistress of. Well, he has furnished it from cellar to attic, and very beautifully, too, I believe. Latterly he has become nervous lest, as the place is empty, thieves should break into it, and so he determined to sleep there himself.'

'Alone?' asked Gervaise.

'Quite alone.'

'What a remarkable thing to do,' declared Mr Lynn. 'I suppose he said nothing to us for fear of alarming Daisy. Of course, we knew all about the house, and he was very anxious for my daughter to go over it. But the child has a superstitious notion that she must not enter her future home until she does so as its mistress.'

'I presume you found Mr Roach regular in his habits,' asked the detective.

'Most regular,' answered the lady. 'Had he been set by clockwork he could not have gone about his affairs more methodically. No club kept him out till early in the morning, though, of course, since he has been visiting at Mr Lynn's, we have not seen him home so early. I don't think, though, that he was a very happy man, for he used to be subject to long and silent fits of depression. Oh! by the way, Mr Lynn, he left an old scrapbook behind him. It's of no value to anyone but the owner, as the saying is, and not much to him, I should say. Perhaps you'll take it, sir, and give it to Mr Roach when he does make his reappearance?'

'I must enter that house at Canonbury,' said the detective, as he walked away with Saul Lynn.

'Well, so you shall, but I don't see how we can do it today. If George Roach has been sleeping there, he probably has the keys with him. I should not care to break into the place on my own responsibility. I must get some authority from the office before I will do that, so we must wait until tomorrow, at least. The worst part of this business is that no one has any legal right to set the law in motion to find our lost friend.'

The detective returned to Kennington with Mr Lynn, and there he interested himself in examining the pages of the scrapbook.

He found it to consist exclusively of extracts from the public journals, describing the almost innumerable exploits of a notorious

adventuress, whose real name was Julia Barretti, but whose aliases were to be counted by the score.

She had been guilty of every variety of fraud, and had suffered various terms of imprisonment, long and short. Her beauty of face and figure was said to rival her deformity of character. She was a complete marvel of grace and wickedness.

Jules Gervaise wondered what peculiar fascination the sordid character of such a creature could have for a steady-going City merchant like Mr George Roach, till his brightened eyes lit on the following paragraph, when all his wonder vanished.

It ran as follows:

THE NOTORIOUS JULIA BARRETTI IN A NEW CHARACTER.—In our yesterday's issue we gave the trial of, and sentence passed on, this most expert and dangerous swindler, the more to be feared because of her extreme fascination of manner and appearance. We now learn that three days before her last arrest she had succeeded in luring into matrimony a well-to-do City merchant, named George Roach. The lady's capture by the police brought the honeymoon to an abrupt termination, and Mr Roach is to be congratulated on his escape from the clutches of such a designing harpy. The fact that she has another husband still living has been proved beyond a doubt; so the Court will have no hesitation in releasing the too-confiding City man from his bonds.'

'And that was sixteen years ago!' mused Gervaise. 'It is no wonder that George Roach sometimes looked pensive. This was the skeleton he had in his cupboard. It is more than possible I now hold a clue to the mystery of his disappearance.

When the notion of making a search in the house the missing man had taken in Canonbury was put before Mr Felix Sark, he very promptly, and with great decision, washed his hands of the matter.

'Do as you please, gentlemen,' he said, with a shrug of his lean shoulders, 'but I will be no party to such a desecration of what will yet prove to be my employer's happy and sacred home.'

Rupert Peel also begged to be excused from taking any part in the contemplated proceedings, on the plea that he was sure it was the last thing Mr Roach would care for him to do.

'Of course, Mr Roach has the keys of the house with him,' said Mr Lynn, 'so we shall have to break into it.'

'As for the keys,' answered Felix Sark, with an ugly laugh, 'they are hanging up over Mr Peel's desk.'

'I did not know that,' exclaimed Rupert, with a scared look. 'The master must have put them there before he started for Scotland.'

'If neither of you gentlemen will accompany us yourselves, perhaps there will be no objection to me asking some of the others engaged in the warehouse to do so?'

As Mr Lynn asked this question he took the keys from Rupert Peel's trembling hands, and wondered why that young man looked so faint and ill.

'Do as you please about that,' answered Mr Sark. 'Two of our travellers are on the premises now, and, as a traveller's time always seems to be his own, doubtless they will be glad of the outing. As for me, I have to keep strictly to my time. I am never late coming in nor early in leaving.'

'A very treasure of a cashier,' said Jules Gervaise, with his bland smile.

The gentlemen Mr Sark had alluded to were quite willing to accompany the detective and Saul Lynn to the old Gothic house in Canonbury, which they found to be standing in a goodly piece of ground, well hidden from the roadway by tall, umbrageous trees and rotund shrubs. But neither of the 'bagmen' appeared to merit the disparaging comments of the cashier. One, indeed, was so intent on his business that he carried his account-book with him, and utilized such spare moments as fell to him during the journey in making entries therein, and casting up accounts.

'This place could not be more silent or seemingly more remote were it in the midst of the Black Forest,' said Gervaise. 'My friends!' he cried, with sudden excitement, 'you must, if you please, refrain from mounting these steps leading to the front door. I see, impressed on the green mould which clothes them, the forms of three pairs of boots. These imprints may prove to be of splendid help to us, and they must not be disturbed or confused until we have photographs of them. Stay a few moments here, and I will admit you by the back way.'

The detective himself climbed up the left-hand parapet, which ran by the side of the steps to the main entrance. He sat on it while he bent down and turned the key in the lock. Then, having thrown the door open, he sprang into the house, landing on the mat in the hall,

never once letting his feet touch the outside stone landing and steps.

His desire, born of professional pride, to be the first to enter that house, and to enter alone, was gratified.

He closed the door carefully and struck a light, for the vestibule was in darkness.

Nothing there attracted his attention, save the fact that, when he turned on the burner of the gas pendant, the illuminant issued freely from it, showing that it was not off at the meter. He went into a large room on the left-hand side, mainly because its door was wide open. Here he was sufficiently surprised to see that, though the blinds were drawn down, the shutters had not been closed.

'A man who is afraid of thieves breaking into his place does not leave it so unprotected, especially when he is going on a journey,' reflected the detective, as he lit the gas. 'Ah! what is this? The return half of a double ticket between Paris and London, issued by the tourist agents, Thomas Lock and Co. I will keep it. It should prove a valuable piece of paper. In the grate there are ashes of burned paper—stiff, clayey paper, like the pages of account-books. I will put this little cloth over the fireplace, so that those precious remains may not be blown away. Now I must admit my friends, or they will fancy I am committing crimes myself.'

Making his way to the back of the house, he let his companions in by the tradesmen's entrance, at the side of the building.

'There are evidences of a great struggle having taken place in one of the rooms of the hall,' he said. 'I think it will repay us to examine every part of this house very carefully.'

In the apartment which the detective had first entered there was every proof of a desperate conflict having taken place. Chairs were overturned, some vases broken, the hearthrug heeled up, and other unmistakable signs of disorder. There was some blood, too, on the fender, and on the edge of the table. All the other rooms were locked. They opened readily to the call of the keys the detective had with him. In no other part was there any sign of disturbance, or of recent occupation.

'Now, gentlemen, we will see what the basement has to tell us,' said Gervaise.

Every cupboard and cranny was carefully examined, by the detective, at least, but he found nothing which added to his existing knowledge, or which was even suggestive.

Presently they came to a great iron door let into the wall. It evidently guarded a strong-room, built in the house—a place in which former residents had stored their plate and jewels, perchance.

None of the others would have thought it worth while looking into this, but Jules Gervaise did.

‘It is odd,’ said he, ‘that this bunch contains a key for the meanest cupboard in the house; yet the one to open this strong-room is not on the ring. Possibly it is not locked.’

He seized the big knob which stood out in the centre of the ponderous door, and, putting some strength into the attempt, managed to swing it slowly back, disclosing an iron-clad recess, into which the sun streamed through a small, heavily barred window, which looked out from the receptacle on to the bush-covered ground outside.

The four men thronged to the narrow opening, and, looking within, saw, to their horror, the mangled form of a dead man, whose name in life had been George Roach!

Natural it was that this ghastly discovery should produce more effect on Saul Lynn than on any of the others, though each one of them was inexpressibly shocked. But Saul had been the dead man’s familiar friend, and, besides, the death of the merchant meant the shattering of Saul’s hopes.

The detective was cool and scarcely surprised. His bland countenance was in queer contrast with the blank faces round him.

‘Gentlemen,’ he said gravely, ‘it is not necessary for me to tell you that this is a case of murder—brutal and determined murder!’

‘We must lose no time in informing the police!’ cried one of the travellers, who was obviously a very excitable man.

‘Of course, the police must know of this,’ agreed Jules coolly, ‘there is no help for it. But, first, I will see what the poor man has left in his pockets. Aha! Here are another set of keys belonging to the house. On this bunch is a key for the door of this strong-room. A significant and suggestive fact.’

‘And observe,’ said Mr Lynn, ‘his rings are on his fingers, his watch and chain are untouched, and now you have found his purse with money in it. So robbery did not prompt this dreadful crime.’

‘One may plunder a man, yet not condescend to pick his pockets,’ declared Jules. ‘Mr Roach’s money does not amount to six pounds,

all told. It is less than one would expect a man in his position to have with him when he contemplates a journey. There is no cheque-book here. Now, sir,' added Gervaise, to the excitable individual, 'since you are so anxious to see the police, perhaps you will walk round as far as the station and summon them.'

While Mr Lynn and the other traveller were asking one another, in fearful whispers, who could have done this fell deed, and their other companion set about the errand Jules had suggested to him, the detective very carefully gathered together the ashes he had seen in the grate in the room upstairs. He made a little box of brown paper for them, and this he put inside his hat. After this he busied himself in making a minute examination of the grounds at the back of the house, until the inspector at the station, with two of his men, made his appearance.

To him Jules Gervaise explained what had occurred. Nor did he fail to point out to these gentlemen the importance of not disturbing the footprints he had detected impressed on the green mould which covered the steps leading to the entrance-hall. But, even as he spoke, there came a fierce knocking at the front door, and it was soon seen that three other constables had followed their chief, and had come blundering up the marble ascent, to the utter destruction of those imprints which might have proved of such invaluable help in tracking down the assassin.

'Come,' said Gervaise to Saul Lynn, 'we can do no more good here. I want to return to Mr Roach's warehouse.'

'May Providence help me!' murmured Lynn, 'but this terrible tragedy leaves me a ruined man! I had counted too much on my daughter's marriage. Never was a man so doomed to misfortune as I am.'

'Let me forget how wretchedly selfish you are,' said the detective. 'Your losses are nothing compared with the misery this crime will cause others.'

'It will be a blow to my daughter, of course,' said Lynn, 'but she is young, and will soon get over it, whereas I am old. I need my little comforts, Jules! I need them very much!'

Jules smiled grimly.

'Poor human nature,' he muttered to himself, 'what a ragged thing you are at the core! It savours of madness for me to pursue this case, for I shall not get even the husks of thanks for my pains. But there is

poor little Daisy! It would be wicked of me not to put out a hand to save her.'

When Mr Felix Sark heard this distressing news, his face took an expression of such profound consternation and grief that it did not seem possible it could be feigned.

'Gentlemen,' he declared, 'I have dreaded this news all along. It has been my waking fear, and the horror of my dreams. I appeared indifferent to you only because I did not want to have my shocking presentiment realized. Poor Mr Roach! Poor Mr Roach! No better employer ever lived. And then Rupert Peel—a mere boy—so amiable! so well-intentioned! so exact to his time! Think of him! I have loved him as a father might his son! It is too awful to dwell on!'

'What has happened to Rupert Peel?' asked Jules sternly.

'My dear sir, who can possibly have committed this monstrous crime but that most unhappy of young men? Driven insane by love; love and jealousy have done it. Mr Roach had not another enemy in the world, and poor Rupert did not hate him till he took Miss Lynn from him. You don't know how he loved Miss Daisy, sir,' he added, addressing Saul, 'you never would know! I am convinced he would not have survived her wedding-day. But, dear me! how much better for him to have died himself than to have slain his master. Oh! the misery of it! And what a disgrace to our firm!'

'You are quicker than the law will be in your condemnation!' said Gervaise sharply. 'What right have you to say that Rupert Peel is guilty of this murder?'

The old, quiet, sinister look came back to the cashier's face, as he replied:

'What I say to you, gentlemen—as friends taking an interest in my late employer—need not go any further, but I may tell you that since you were here this morning I have discovered in Peel's desk a key which belongs to the door of a safe or strong-room. It is still clammy with the dried blood which stains it. It is a sad piece of evidence against him, but of course, I must not hide it from the police. Would you advise me to do so, Mr Gervaise?'

'Certainly not,' replied Jules; 'but don't forget to tell them that you found it. I think it better for the police to discover such things for themselves. Is Mr Peel here now?'

'No. He went out soon after handing that bunch of keys to you. He has not come back. It is my impression that he never will.'

'I wonder if Sark is right,' said Saul Lynn, in a musing kind of way, as he and the detective elbowed their way through the narrow thoroughfare in which stood the premises of the late George Roach. 'I never thought that Rupert Peel had the pluck to kill a rabbit, much less a man. It's a horrible business altogether.'

'Yes,' answered Gervaise, in an abstracted way with the air of a man who is deeply pondering some problem. 'I want you to go at once to Rupert's house,' he added, with sudden life. 'If you find that he is preparing for flight be sure and make him see me before he takes that step or any other. I will go straight to Kennington, and break the news to Daisy. I will wait there for you. If you do manage to bring Rupert with you, all the better; but I fear that you are already too late—too late!'

'I suppose I must do as you wish,' said Lynn grumblingly, 'but, upon my word, I don't see why I should bother about young Peel.'

By this time they had reached Cheapside, and Jules put an effective stop to any further discussion on the subject by jumping into a passing cab, the driver of which he directed to take him to Saul's house at Kennington, leaving that gentleman to either look up Rupert Peel or follow on as he might choose, or as he best could.

Daisy listened to the horrible story the detective very gently broke to her with blanched cheeks. All its terribleness was reflected in her large, frightened eyes; but her voice was firm and clear, and she displayed no tendency to tears or towards any hysterical symptoms.

'It is very awful! very awful indeed! If it does not quite strike me down, helpless and broken, it is only because I never loved Mr Roach, and I looked with horror towards the day which was to see me his wife. He knew I did not love him. He was well aware that I agreed to marry him to save my father from ruin. This is the truth, my good friend, and it may be told now.'

'It is not news to me, any more than the fact that you do love Rupert Peel.'

'Ah, yes!' sighed the girl, burying her face in her hands. 'And I shall love him to the end of my days, as he will love me.'

'It is odd that he should have relinquished you so readily?'

'Not at all, Mr Gervaise. In the first place, he would not see my father a pauper, and myself reduced to such humble means as he is gaining; and, again, there is some mystery connected with his own father which compels him to say he will not marry anyone until his

parent is dead. Ours was a hopeless case, you see, so there was little credit to me in resolving to do my duty to my father, and accept George Roach's offer.'

'Tell me, Daisy, tell me truthfully'—the voice of Jules Gervaise was most convincing and tender as he spoke—'tell me, without fear or hesitation, whether you think it possible that, driven to frenzy by the thought of the sacrifice you contemplated, made savage and reckless by the prospect of losing you for ever, Rupert Peel can have committed this crime?'

'It is impossible!' she declared, standing up, and elevating her hands to heaven, as though imploring the azure dome beyond the clouds to bear witness to her truth. 'It is absolutely impossible! There does not live a man less likely to spill human blood than Rupert. And yet—and yet!' she cried sinking again on to her chair, 'he knew that if anything did befall George Roach he would be accused of having done the mischief!'

'Did he tell you this?' asked Jules, with a slight start.

'Oh, yes. He told Mr Sark, too, and Mr Sark quite agreed with him. He was very frightened of you, though I did try to persuade him that you would prove his friend.'

'It will be more than he deserves, if I do,' said the detective sharply. 'Ah! here is your father; back at last. You may speak freely, Mr Lynn,' added the detective, as Saul, looking very flurried, entered the room. 'Your daughter knows all about the wretched tragedy.'

'Well,' said Mr Lynn, 'my news is startling enough, but I don't see that it helps us at all. Rupert Peel has undoubtedly made a clean bolt of it. A warrant has already been issued for his apprehension, and the evening papers are all alive with more or less imaginary accounts of the crime. But, what is more extraordinary, Rupert Peel's father lies dead in his house, and his head is battered about pretty much the same as is poor George Roach's.'

'Well, well,' said the imperturbable Jules, 'this is a rare complication. I must go away now. It may be some days ere you see me again. Keep up your heart, little one,' he said to Daisy, 'if your Rupert is innocent he shall not suffer.'

'Never mind Rupert!' cried Saul angrily. 'Where are you going to, Jules?'

'To Paris, my friend. I shall leave by tonight's express. If I am not mistaken, Mr Sark will call on you presently. It may be wise to

welcome him.' He nodded to Daisy as he made this remark. 'There! that short, snappy, half-defiant, half-hesitating knock at the door must be directed by Sark's hand, and by no other.'

The detective's guess proved to be a correct one. The two men passed one another in the hall. Felix Sark was much better pleased to see Jules leave the house than the detective was to observe the cashier entering it.

It will be remembered that the kind-hearted detective had picked up, in the house where the luckless merchant lay murdered, the return portion of a ticket available between the capitals of England and France; and it scarcely need be told that he did not use it on his journey to Paris.

His first care, on his arrival in that city, was to call on the tourist agents who had issued it. As it bore their imprint, and their own number, he was hopeful that Thomas Lock and Company might be able to give him some clue as to the identity of the original purchaser.

'Ah, sir!' cried the clerk, when questioned, 'I have indeed cause for remembering that ticket from us. It was no less celebrated a personage than Madame Ollivier, the magnificence of whose receptions is the wonder and delight of our metropolis. Her superb equipage honoured our office by remaining outside it while she herself paid for the ticket.'

'Tell me,' said Jules, 'is this Madame Ollivier very beautiful?'

'She is incomparable! But, after all, it is not so much her face as the exquisite grace of her manner.'

'And, of course, a Frenchwoman?'

'Ah! Who can tell? I am told she can converse in all languages with equal charm and facility.'

The detective made his way to the offices of the secret police.

'My dear Jules Gervaise, I am delighted to see you,' cried the chief of the secret police, as he grasped our detective's hand with genuine warmth. 'And not the less so because you want information concerning that brilliant but mysterious woman, Madame Ollivier. Our positions are precisely similar. We also are most anxious to learn all we can about the lady, because, though she has succeeded in attracting some of the best people in France, we are convinced she is merely an adventuress. Her residence is the nest of a crowd of conspirators; and there they hatch their nefarious schemes against our Government.'

'We want to put an end to these plots,' continued the chief, 'break up for ever these intrigues, and drive Madame Ollivier out of Paris. Now, Jules, you are the very man for our purpose. By helping us you will gain all the information you desire for yourself. You know quite well that, were we against you, it would be as well for you to return to England at once. It is a bargain, then? Very good. Now let us devise some good scheme that will enable you to enter Madame Ollivier's house this very night as a welcome and unsuspected guest.'

In one of the most fashionable quarters of Paris, standing in its own tastefully arranged grounds, hidden from the gaze of the vulgar by high walls and more lofty trees, stood the ornate building wherein Madame Ollivier had made her sumptuous home.

Here by the lavishness of her hospitality, and the brilliancy of her receptions, she had succeeded in capturing, dazzling, and alluring many of the most renowned men and women of the famous city. On this particular night, carriage after carriage had rolled to her gates, depositing on the rich carpet, which ran to the very gravel, its glittering occupant.

Light streamed from every window, while inside all was colour, movement, and melody. The very air seemed rich with delight and harmony.

But, even when the decorous revelry was at its height, the fascinating hostess, the much-applauded Madame Ollivier, withdrew from the crush of the distinguished guests, and, seating herself in a small, deserted ante-chamber, she sighed wearily. There was that pained expression about her features, too, which told how much relief her feelings would experience could she but let tears loosen the mental strain which made her temples throb.

'Do you think the English lord will come tonight?' she asked a swart, heavy-browed man, who followed her into this retreat.

But for the glamour of his surroundings, and the elegance of his apparel, he might very easily have passed for a common cut-throat, or for one of the meaner kind of brigands who infest Greece.

'He is late, but I do not yet despair of him,' answered Den Lockier. 'Oppression sits on my sister's brow, and the smile has fled from her lips.'

'It is no wonder,' answered Madame Ollivier sharply. 'Unless the big collection is made tonight, all our great schemes fall to the ground, and we must fly from Paris like hunted game, the laughing-

stock of those who now drink our wine. Our tradesmen clamour for money, and nothing less than gold will now stop their demands. The day for promises has passed.'

'It is even as you say,' agreed the man, smiling sardonically, 'but the grand collection shall be made tonight. Gold shall replenish our coffers, and then, with our princely fortune, another country shall provide us with grateful ease. All our friends are here, my sister.'

'Except the English nobleman, and his purse is richer than all the others put together.'

'Ah! If I am not mistaken, he has this moment entered the house. Let us approach him. Surely it is he. Though I have never seen him, I could swear that he is the wealthy lord.'

'He is the only stranger we expect here tonight, so no doubt he is the one we have been so anxiously looking for. Welcome, my Lord Sellford, to Paris, and to my poor house,' she added, addressing an elaborately attired old gentleman, who had taken very obvious care to disguise his wrinkles, and to appear young.

'I presume I have the pleasure to address Madame Ollivier,' said he, adjusting his eye-glass, and surveying her with a look of unqualified approval. 'Delighted to make the acquaintance of so charming a lady. And this gentleman?'

'My brother.'

'Entirely at your service, my lord,' said the man, with a profound bow.

'That is very good of you, I am sure. I am afraid, madame, I have made a mistake in the night,' continued his lordship, lowering his voice. 'I understood that some trusty friends were to meet here in secret conclave tonight, to decide when the final and decisive blow at existing authority should be struck, but I find your house thronged with merry-makers.'

'Ah!' said madame, smiling sweetly on him, 'many a deep conspiracy has been hatched under the cloak of gay deception. While the music plays and the dance proceeds, our friends meet in a private part of the mansion. The fateful decision will be arrived at while the spics, who are everywhere, have their suspicions lulled by soft sounds and choice wines.'

'It is now the appointed hour,' said Den Lockier. 'If your lordship will condescend to follow me, I will lead the way.'

They passed through many effulgent rooms and strangely silent

corridors, till they stood in the grounds, and the revelry within was no more than a low, faint murmur in the air.

‘So the meeting place is not actually in your own house, madame?’ said Lord Sellford, looking about him as well as the darkness would allow.

‘It is not in the main building,’ answered the lady, ‘but it stands in my own grounds. We have to be very careful. Discovery would mean at least ruin to our friends, if not death.’

‘Indeed, yes,’ added Den Lockier, ‘so the sooner we strike the blow the safer it will be for us all. Some of our contrivances are very cunning,’ he went on. ‘There does not appear to be any outlet from this garden, save through the house we have just left. A high, strong wall surrounds us. But do you see that huge tree which grows against the stonework at the end of the grounds? Its trunk is hollow. Its front bark slides back like a semicircular door. Observe! You see there is room for one person to pass at a time through the tree to an opening in the wall beyond, where steps lead into a building which looks out on to quite another street from the one my sister’s house is in.’

‘Capital!’ chuckled his lordship.

‘Yes.’ agreed the other man, ‘it is rather good. You see we could keep a man imprisoned for years in that building, and he would never be found.’

‘Exactly! A most brilliant notion. But surely your friends are of more use to you free than in confinement.’

‘Undoubtedly. But I was thinking how we could serve a traitor or a spy. Let me show your lordship the way in, or you may stumble. The light from the lantern shall guide you.’

Having ascended a few steps, the English aristocrat found himself in a long room, hung from floor to ceiling with black velvet. If there were any windows in the place this heavy drapery effectually concealed them. The carpet was also of a deep dark colour, and so thick and soft, that one’s feet sank into it as into feathers, and it deadened all sound.

A large oval table stood in the middle of the room, and round this a number of men were gravely seated. At each end was an empty chair, and another one at the side. In the centre of the table stood a large, heavy-looking silver bowl.

'Lord Sellford!' said Madame Ollivier, in a low tone, as she entered the room, and presented his lordship.

The twelve guests rose, and bowed solemnly to the new arrival. He was motioned to take the vacant seat at the side, while madame arranged herself at what was presumably the head of the table; her brother took the chair at the other end, and facing her.

A few minutes passed in absolute and oppressive silence. Then Den Lockier rose, with much dignity, and addressed them in a most impressive manner.

'Gentlemen of the campaign,' said he, 'I need not at this late day recapitulate our aims or our fervent hopes. We are all in accord. The plan of our warfare has been agreed on. My Lord Sellford, who has missed the pleasure of our nightly conferences, has been advised of the progress we have made, and of the determination we have come to. That he approves of our resolves, and is willing to assist our efforts in the most practical way possible, is proved by his presence here now. One cannot, as we all know, initiate a conflict without those golden sinews of war which every nation finds to be of more importance than even its cannon or its soldiery. So, gentlemen, we have met tonight to contribute, each one of us, as much as we individually can towards the furtherance of the campaign we are pledged to support. We have each been furnished with a similar envelope. Into that envelope each gentleman will put his contribution, and cast it into the open bowl which is on the table. So no one will know what the other has given. But we are men of honour, and we shall be sure that each one has given to his utmost. Gentlemen, I cast my portion into the bowl, and my heart with it.'

With these words, and with dramatic action, he threw a well-filled envelope into the silver basin.

'My fortune follows my brother's!' cried Madame Ollivier, rising, and drawing from her bosom a packet similar to her brother's. As she dropped it into the receptacle she appeared to be overcome with emotion. With a sudden effort she snatched the diamond bracelet from her wrist, she plucked a magnificent spray of precious stones from her hair, and a glittering circle of gems from her throat. 'Let them all go!' she exclaimed grandly, dropping them on the top of the little parcel.

A light shone in madame's eyes which lit fires in the hearts of the

hitherto impassive conspirators. This, combined with her emotional declamation, made them start to their feet as one man. Each one of them produced his packet.

'Hold!' cried a small, weazened-faced man. 'Hold! I beseech you!'

A dead silence followed this intimation. Anxious faces were turned on the speaker.

'Gentlemen,' he continued, with most grave mien, 'I am pained to have to tell you that we are BETRAYED!'

'Betrayed!' repeated the conspirators,' and each one replaced his contribution in his most secret pocket.

'Yes, gentlemen,' continued the little old man, 'betrayed!'

'By whom? By whom?'

Each man now felt stealthily for his revolver, and friend eyed friend with suspicion.

Lord Sellford, the English nobleman, is not with us!' screamed the little gentleman, and every eye was turned on his lordship, who had remained in his seat calm—imperturbable.

'That man who has taken his name, who has adopted his mincing airs, who has personified his lordship to the life, is a spy—a friend of the secret police! His disguise is good, clever, complete! But I see through it. He is JULES GENVAISE, THE NOTORIOUS DETECTIVE!'

Each man showed his weapon now, and furious looks were thrown on Jules.

Had Madame Ollivier been struck by a bullet, she could not have sunk into her chair with a more lifeless expression of face or with a keener cry of pain.

'Jules Gervaise, eh?' sneered Den Lockier, showing his teeth. 'Gentlemen, we need not let this incident disturb us. Surely we know what to do with a detective.'

'There is only one fate possible for him,' said madame, in a low tone. 'He must die. If he lives not one of us will be safe. It is a sad necessity,' she added, shedding her bright eyes first on one and then on the other, 'but it is the law of man that one should suffer rather than many.'

'Gentlemen,' said her brother, in his matter-of-fact way, 'a spy has been discovered among us. Our oath compels us to take the life of any of our comrades who prove traitors. Shall we show more mercy to a mere creature of the police? Such a thing cannot be. There are thirteen of you round the table. It is a significant number for a spy.'

The detective is naturally debarred from voting on the subject of his own funeral. As I hope to have the honour of being his executioner, I, also, will remain passive. As you number a dozen and one, equal voting is impossible. Those who are in favour of the swift "removal" of Jules Gervaise, the detective, will signify their wishes by placing their right hands on the table.'

'I would not condemn him to death to save myself,' said one gentleman, 'but, while he lives, the cause is not safe, and the cause must be above every other consideration.'

Then sixty white fingers showed themselves on the sombre cloth, and, last of all, madame placed her delicate palm on it. So the sentence of execution was pronounced!

'I shall give him such a tap as will render him insensible,' said the self-constituted executioner complacently. 'Then we will weight him with shot, and drop him into the Seine, the close mistress of so many secrets! Bah! It will be but one detective the less, and such rats can be easily spared. I promise you, gentlemen, that Jules Gervaise shall not trouble you again.'

The speaker resumed his seat, an acid smile of triumph making his evil face look more revolting than before.

Jules Gervaise—for the so-called Lord Sellford was no other than he—rose quietly to his feet, and addressed that assembly for the first time. Had he been proposing an after-dinner health he could not have been more calm or more at his ease.

'My friends,' said he, 'I perceive that you are gentlemen—too much men of honour to deny to me the privilege which is accorded to the most atrocious criminal in every Court of the civilized world and that is the right to say some words in my own defence. If I am to speak at all, it is obvious I must do so before my execution, for you will not be able to hear me afterwards.'

Every face was fixed on the detective's. A grim smile moved their anxious lips, as he uttered this bit of bitter sarcasm.

'It is a long time since I severed my connection with the French police,' he added, 'and I have ceased to take any active interest in the government of France. I have made my home in England, and I have for ever washed my hands of the internal intrigues of Paris. Believe me, gentlemen, I do not know even the name of your society. I am unacquainted with your pass-words, I can only guess at your aims! You may laugh scornfully. You may ask how it comes that I am here

if I am no traitor; but still, I will show you that I am your friend, and not your foe. A lucky chance threw me in the way of the true Lord Sellford. It is by his permission that I am here, in his name. It is by his wish that I appear among you to save your fortunes, your persons, maybe your very lives, as I have preserved his!

'You are here to save us?' many cried at once. 'What mean you?'

Madame gazed at the detective, as though fixed and fascinated by him. Her brothers' face blazed fiercely.

'I am here, gentlemen, to save you from being the dupes of two outrageous swindlers—this so-called Madame Ollivier and her cut-throat brother. That woman,' cried Gervaise, directing his finger at their quivering hostess, his voice growing in volume and scorn as he spoke, 'is not the patriot she pretends to be. She has neither the birth nor the wealth she claims to have, and she is as destitute of truth as she is of either. That woman, I say, who would have decamped with all your fortune's to-morrow morning, and have had you all arrested into the bargain, is no other than the infamous English adventuress Julia Barretti, now wanted for the murder of George Roach at Canonbury, London!'

A low wail came from between madame's parched lips, while her brother hissed defiantly:

'It is a lie—an infamous lie! He will tell you a tale to save his life!'

'It is no lie,' replied Jules firmly, casting an illustrated paper on the table before them. 'There is a picture of Julia Barretti, and a detailed account of many of her crimes. See, gentlemen! See for yourselves that Julia Barretti, the ex-convict, and the grand Madame Ollivier, are one, even to the small mole which shows behind her ear.'

'You are a fiend in your malice!' shouted Den Lockier, livid with passion. 'You libel my sister, and you must die!'

He fired his revolver straight at Jules, but it chanced that the gentleman standing next to the latter bent forward at the critical moment, and he received the bullet in his ear. With a deep groan he sank to the floor.

'Wretch!' cried an aristocratic-looking man on the other side of the table, 'you have killed my dearest friend. Let your own life answer for the deed!'

Very deliberately he shot the villain through the heart—dead.

'For heaven's sake, gentlemen, do not let us lose our senses! Calmness is essential.' The speaker was one whose voice commanded

instant attention. 'It is quite plain that Jules Gervaise has told us the truth. We are in a den of thieves, and the sooner we escape from it the better. Our friend still lives. Pray help me to carry him to my carriage, and in my own house he shall have every attention. Den Lockier well deserves his doom. Madame has gone off in a dead swoon. But Jules Gervaise is a clever man, and he will know what to do with the corpse and the unconscious lady. Let us leave them both to him.'

A few minutes later the detective was the only conscious person in that black and mournful room.

'I save them their money and their liberty, and this is their gratitude,' growled Jules, as he gloomily watched the last conspirator disappear behind the arras. 'But if they do not close the opening through the tree, I shall be all right. I have only to make the call, and the police will be here to help me.'

Gervaise ran down the steps, and to his infinite joy found himself in the garden.

In reply to his signal, two men issued from among the shrubs.

'This has been a busy night,' cried one. 'There is not one of us who, is not engaged in shadowing someone. It is a splendid time for us all. Ah! Jules Gervaise, you bring the best of luck with you. But you disappeared like magic. We searched the walls for a secret door, but we never thought of that fraudulent old tree. We will attend to the lady, who is alive, and to the conspirator, who is dead. Come and see his excellency the chief tomorrow, and discuss matters further. You have done well—very well indeed.'

'Do not let the woman escape,' said Jules.

'You can trust us,' the men laughed.

A little later, Jules turned into his well-aired bed in a near hotel, and slept as soundly as a philosopher should.

The morning came, and Jules Gervaise was closeted with his friend the chief of the secret police.

'The rascal's death is no loss to the world,' said the chief of the police smilingly. 'We have the name of each of the conspirators, and can put our hands on them whenever we feel inclined. But they were more dupes than knaves, and as, thanks to you, we have broken up the combination, I do not propose to take any further action in the matter, unless some further indiscretion is committed. But I think

they have had a lesson sufficiently sharp to last them a lifetime. As for Madame Ollivier—Julia Barretti, as you will call her—I leave her in your hands, on condition that you take her out of the country. I cannot very well prosecute her; without bringing out the whole pretended conspiracy, and it is not our policy to encourage gossip about political plots. Take her, and, if you can contrive to have her hanged in England, I shall be infinitely obliged to you.'

'You are too kind to me,' declared Gervaise. 'You know I am not invested with any power to arrest her. In charging her with the murder of George Roach, I was but following out one of the theories I have formed concerning that crime. If I succeed in getting her to accompany me to England, it must be by diplomacy.'

'And you are a born diplomat. You will find the lady in the adjoining room.'

Gervaise discovered Julia Barretti, deadly pale, and with such dark rims round her large eyes as suggested that the latter and sleep had been strangers for a long time. Yet she was as calm as though no emotion had ever stirred her dark and secret heart.

'You accuse me of the murder of George Roach, who once called me his wife,' said she, in cold, steady tones to the detective. 'How you obtained any information to warrant you in making such a charge is entirely beyond my comprehension. It is possible that you may be able to make out so strong a case against me that I shall be hanged for the crime; but I tell you, Jules Gervaise, that I am as innocent of spilling that man's blood as you are. My past record has been a bad one, yet I, Julia Barretti, the adventuress, can on occasions speak the truth, and I declare it now!'

'Madame,' answered Jules gravely, 'you were in George Roach's house in Canonbury on the night of this murder.'

'That is true,' she replied quietly, 'but I had no hand in the deed.'

'Then you have but to say who the murderer was to escape from the accusation which now confronts you.'

'Alas! that I cannot do.'

'That is one of those misfortunes which will probably cost you your life.'

For a brief space there was silence between them. The woman appeared to be in deep thought.

Suddenly she said:

'I will tell you my story. You are a clever detective, a shrewd man

of the world, surely you will be able to judge clearly whether I speak the truth or not.'

Gervaise motioned to her to proceed.

'A few months back, when I was in London, accident made me acquainted with a young man, named Rupert Peel.'

'Ah!' muttered the detective.

'He took me to be a great lady—a countess at the very least—and he regarded me as a possible wealthy patroness, who would procure for him a lucrative appointment in France, when he had once acquired the language, which he set about learning. You may well ask me why I amused myself with so unimportant a person, but I had discovered that he was in the employ of George Roach, who had once married me, and I was curious to learn all about the doings of that man, often thinking that the information might, some day, prove of pecuniary value to me. Not only did I know when George Roach took that house in Canonbury, but, after much trouble, I persuaded Rupert Peel to "borrow" the keys, and take me all over it. He was very nervous lest it should ever be discovered that he had done this.'

'That fact may possibly account for his confusion when he handed the keys to us,' thought Gervaise.

'My visits to London were occasional ones,' continued Julia Barretti. 'As the day fixed for the marriage of Mr Roach and Daisy Lynn grew nearer and nearer, I became more deeply and more terribly pressed for money. Then, when we were every day threatened with a crisis in our affairs, I resolved to see whether I could not frighten George Roach into paying me a couple of thousand pounds. In many matters he was a most nervous man, and I judged he would rather part with this money than have me appear before his affianced wife, and relate to her my story. Of course, he could prove that he had been the wronged and injured one, but this would take time; besides, if people considered how easily they could repel a false accusation, there would be an end to blackmailing as a profitable industry altogether. I wrote to George Roach on the day he should have started for Glasgow. In my letter I declared that if he did not meet me at his house in Canonbury at ten o'clock that same night, and agree to my demands, I would, late though it might be, proceed at once to Miss Lynn's residence at Kennington, and expose him. I relied very much on my intimate knowledge of his private affairs,

drawn from the well-intentioned Rupert Peel, to add terrors to my threats. My letter was posted so as to reach him in the evening, and, from all I have since gleaned, I judge that it was put into his hand as he was starting for St Pancras Station. Thinking it was some ordinary communication, I believe, he thrust it into his pocket, and did not again think of it until he had taken his place in the railway carriage, and his train was on the point of starting. Then he opened it, and, terrified at the thought of the pain I might cause Miss Lynn, he jumped from the train, and made for Canonbury with all possible haste.'

'So far, I believe, you have not wandered from the truth,' said Gervaise. 'From my point of view, I think it in your favour that you have not attempted to excuse your own wicked part in this bad business.'

'I shall make no attempt to play on your credulity, monsieur. I believe that when Mr Roach reached his house he found someone already in possession of it.'

'Indeed?'

'Yes. I arrived there rather after my time. A light burned in one of the front rooms. I saw a form distinctly shadowed on the blind, but it was not the figure of my husband. I found the front door open, as though Mr Roach, on putting his key into the lock, had heard someone moving about inside, and had made a dash in to secure the trespasser. When I entered the room, Roach stood facing me. Another man faced him. The latter swung a bar of iron over his head to bring down on George's skull, but I, being just behind, was struck by it, and rendered unconscious. How long I remained so I cannot tell. I have a dim recollection of a fierce voice whispering in my ear these words:

"Do not dare to breathe a word of what you have seen tonight, or I will take care that you are found guilty of having committed the deed." For a considerable period I remained dazed, and too weak to move. When at last I was able to crawl from that place I did, hoping I should never again be reminded of the fearful experience I had gone through. When I reflected on my past history, on the object of my errand, and, as I remembered that even then he might bear on his slaughtered body the threatening letter I had sent him, I realized how easy it would be to persuade a jury that I had been guilty of bringing about his death. Yes, yes, Jules Gervaise, you, at any rate, will readily

understand why I resolved to keep my lips sealed regarding that dark night's work!

'Well, madame,' said Jules drily, 'if you are innocent of the crime you should not have any difficulty in identifying the assassin, when he is brought before you?'

'Indeed, that I cannot do. When I entered the room his back was towards me, and I was rendered insensible before I could notice even that particularly. But I should know his shadow. The shadow which I saw thrown on the blind of that house at Canonbury is indelibly printed on my brain. I could swear to that shadow, if it ever met my eyes again.'

'Come!' said Gervaise cheerfully, 'that is something. I suppose you are aware that Rupert Peel is at present in prison on suspicion of having committed this murder?'

'I am sorry to hear it,' was the quiet reply. 'He regarded his master with acute bitterness. They were rivals in love. Perhaps Peel did kill him. I could tell you if I saw his shadow.'

This reply was unexpected by the detective. It was a view he was not at all disposed to take.

'Well,' he said sharply, 'will you come with me willingly to England, and help me to prove Rupert Peel innocent or guilty, or do you prefer to go as a prisoner, as which. I candidly confess, you will be of no use to me in establishing the truth of the theory I have formed?'

'I will go with you, and loyally help you as far as I am able. But, remember, I cannot speak to the murderer's tones or to his appearance. I can recognize nothing about him but his shadow.'

'So be it,' said Gervaise 'I shall not be the first detective who has set out in chase of such airy and unsubstantial nothings. We will leave for London tonight.'

'I shall be glad to get from Paris,' was the woman's answer.

'I am placing more confidence in you than your previous record warrants,' said Gervaise severely to Julia Barretti, as he left her in a quiet private hotel he had selected for her in the neighbourhood of the central London squares, 'but you know quite well that the Continent is closed to you, and if you manage to slip me here I shall soon find you.'

'I have no desire to break faith with you,' was her cold reply. 'I

believe it is not unusual for even criminals to keep their word to detectives.'

'That woman is a born rogue,' Gervaise muttered to himself, as he made his way to Holloway Prison, for he was already armed with a permit to interview Rupert Peel, who was in confinement there. 'She pursues crime as a legitimate profession. What can you do with such people but keep them under lock and key?'

At first, Rupert Peel was somewhat shy of his visitor, who had been working so hard on his behalf, but when Jules Gervaise explained to him who the French lady Rupert had regarded with such awe really was, the young man threw aside all reserve, and spoke quite freely.

'Truly,' said the unhappy young man, 'I cannot suggest to you the name of anyone who is likely to have done this terrible deed. I recognize myself that theoretically I am the one most likely to have been guilty of the murder. And,' he added, 'if the whole truth were known about that woman, what a horribly strong case might be established against both of us! Perhaps the woman did it after all!' he added musingly, 'What a fool I was to have ever taken her into that house!'

'She thinks you may be guilty,' said Jules slowly.

'She is not alone in that opinion,' returned the young man bitterly. 'But, Jules Gervaise, I am an innocent man!'

Rupert spoke with calm, convincing earnestness; and, though the detective made no comment on the young man's declaration, he was not inclined to disbelieve him. All he said was:

'It will be well for you if you can account for every minute of your time on the night on which the murder must have taken place.'

'Ah!' sighed Rupert. 'That sounds an easy thing to do, but it is impossible in my case. The only man who could help me in that way is dead. I mean my father.'

'Tell me about him,' said Jules.

'My life has been a very unhappy one,' said the young man, after a pause. 'My mother died when I was very young, and my father fell into the hands of some low-class betting men. His smooth temper and unsuspecting disposition made him an easy prey to their wiles. To make my painful story short, I will say at once that I have worked all my life to keep him, and to the end I loved him dearly. On the evening when Mr Roach was supposed to have left for Glasgow, my father was brought home sadly injured about the head in some

disgraceful racecourse quarrel. Blood still poured profusely from his wounds and, in applying bandages to these cuts, my waistcoat became saturated with the blood. My wardrobe was so scantily furnished that I had to wash this waistcoat that same night, so as to be able to wear it at the office the next day. Now you can understand why I was so upset when you called my attention to the odour of blood which the fire drew out of the half-dried garment. Some days afterwards my father managed to totter out again. He met some of the gang who had previously assaulted him. They once more attacked him, and when he was brought home it was to die. When Mr Roach was murdered, I was nursing my father. But there is no one to prove this but he, and his lips are closed for ever!

‘Your life has been a sad one,’ said the sympathetic detective.

‘Indeed it has. You see, I could never have married Daisy so long as my father lived.’

‘Tell me,’ said Jules, with a resumption of his quaint, abrupt way. ‘do you ever eat musk lozenges?’

‘Never. Why do you ask such an odd question?’

‘I will tell you. The key—the key so stained with blood, which fitted the door of the strongroom in which the remains of Mr Roach were found—this key, I say, which was said to have been found in your desk, had still a strong flavour of musk about it when it was shown to me.’

‘I cannot account for that at all,’ declared Rupert.

‘Then I must discover for myself why this was so. Now my time is up, and I must go.’

‘What do you think of my case, Mr Jules Gervaise? Will they convict me?’

‘Undoubtedly, if you are guilty. If you are innocent, I have already promised to save you, and I will!’

‘When I want you I will send for you, and you will come.’ Jules had said to Julia Barretti, and she remained in her hotel, waiting for his sign.

For some days the detective disappeared from the resorts where he was usually to be found, and even at his own lodgings scarcely anything was seen of him. Some of his acquaintances had met him in the City, going in and out of business premises with which it did not seem probable he could have anything in common.

One man declared positively that he had come across Jules Gervaise in the neighbourhood of Hampstead, carrying on his back the outfit of a travelling glazier; and it is certainly a fact that when a rude-mannered boy was brought before the local magistrate, charged with breaking windows belonging to Mr Felix Sark, it was the detective who paid the fine inflicted.

At last Julia Barretti received a communication from Gervaise, and, on the same night, he visited the house of Saul Lynn, and found that gentleman in very much better spirits than might have been looked for.

'Fate is proving most kind to me, after all,' said he. 'It is an extraordinary thing, but Mr Felix Sark has suddenly taken a wonderful fancy to Daisy. To be quite candid with you, Jules, he is anxious to marry her, just as soon as this disagreeable murder business is forgotten. It seems that poor George Roach always left Mr Sark with a power-of-attorney, authorizing him to carry on the business should Mr Roach be taken suddenly ill or detained in some distant part. Sark says it is as good as a will, and that he is quite justified in constituting himself owner of the concern.'

'Mr Sark is a little wrong in his law,' said Gervaise quietly, with an air of indifference. 'Practically no deed survives death, except a man's final testament. But we can let that pass. You make me very tired of human nature, Saul,' the detective added, placidly. 'If you would only hide your selfishness a little, it would be a kindness to your friends. I do not think we shall ever take that house together we once spoke of.'

'And why not?' queried Saul, his red face growing more crimson.

'Because, my friend, there would not be room for me in it. You would want it all.'

'You are a queer fellow, Jules,' said Saul, not in the best of humours. Then, as Daisy came into the room, he left it, suddenly determining that it might be well to buy an evening paper.

'Oh, Mr Gervaise, I am so thankful to see you!' cried the golden-haired little woman. 'I do hope you have brought me good news.'

'Poor little girl! Poor little girl!' said the detective sympathizingly, 'How sorrow has thinned your pretty cheeks. Yes, I hope to have good news for you soon, but not today—not today!'

'I did as you told me,' said Daisy, 'and I was quite civil to Mr Sark after you had gone; but it has been a hard task to keep it up, for I do dislike him so. There! I do believe this is his knock!'

'Let us hope so!' The detective spoke so fervently that Daisy regarded him in a bewildered way.

'You appear to be upset, Mr Sark,' was his comment, as that gentleman joined them.

'Upset? I should think so, indeed!' was the vicious reply. 'And I daresay you would be if a thievish glazier had ransacked your rooms, and broken open your desk and most secret places! Upset is not the word for it, Mr Gervaise! Why, the rascal hires a boy to break glass when he himself finds work slack. He absolutely creates business, which seems to me to consist mainly of robbery. Ah! but I must not forget a little present I have for you, Miss Lynn.'

'What a pretty box!' cried the girl, as she opened the packet he presented her with.

'Musk lozenges,' said Jules reflectively. 'Are you very fond of them, Mr Sark?'

'If I ever buy anything in that way,' was the answer, 'I get musk lozenges from the chemist.'

'They have a remarkably strong scent,' said Jules. 'It clings to everything, even to steel.'

'What are you going to do with the light, Mr Gervaise?' cried Daisy, as she saw the detective lift the lamp from the table.

'I am going to put it on the sideboard, if you don't mind,' he said blandly. 'That is higher than the table, where it hurts my eyes. Now, I am sure that is better. Did you ever see so old a sixpence as this before?' he added, addressing Mr Sark, compelling that gentleman to cross the room between the light and the blind to examine the coin.

Mr Sark saw nothing at all remarkable in the thin piece of silver offered for his inspection. His own private opinion was that Jules Gervaise was afflicted with an eccentricity which perilously bordered on madness. The detective took Felix Sark's contemptuous comments in good part, and very soon after this left the house to join Julia Barretti, who was waiting for him outside.

The little twisted street wherein stood the warehouse of George Roach and Co. was made still narrower by the erection of complicated scaffolding outside the murdered man's premises, for they were being repainted, and the brickwork generally was undergoing repairs. The thoroughfare was made impassable by the roadway being

denuded of its granite blocks to make way for less noisy ones of wood.

In connection with the new foundation for these a huge cauldron of boiling asphalt stood under the planks, and close to the doorway of the murdered man's busy office. Jules Gervaise observed how the black smoke curled heavenwards from this as he conducted a select party of gentlemen into the presence of Felix Sark, who received them with the sulky inquisitiveness characteristic of him.

'My business, though of a particularly delicate nature from one point of view, cannot be kept private,' said the great detective blandly; 'but, if you prefer it, I will disclose the matter in hand to you in your own room, if you do not care for me to speak openly here.'

'Go on,' said Mr Sark, with an air of indifference, perching himself on a high stool, and looking from one to the other of Jules Gervaise's companions sharply and interrogatively.

'Very good,' said the detective. 'I am here, Mr Sark, to tell you the story of a crime. I will not torture you with suspense, so I will tell you at once that two of these gentlemen come from Scotland Yard. They hold a warrant for your arrest, and they are bent on taking you away with them.'

Mr Sark's face assumed a deeper hue, but he regarded Jules defiantly, and did his utmost to preserve a calm exterior.

'Now, Mr Sark, perhaps you will be so good as to let these gentlemen look at your cash-book for last year?'

'I shall do nothing of the kind,' answered the cashier, with a perceptible start.

'Of course you won't,' said Jules pleasantly, 'because you can't. The cash-book is here.'

The detective rested a large square bag on a bale of goods, and drew out a portly white-bound volume.

'You villain!' cried Sark thoughtlessly. 'It is you, then, who broke into my rooms and stole my goods. You shall suffer for it, you rascal!'

'But,' continued the placid Jules, 'this book is not complete. It wants pages 29 and 30. They are here.'

He now produced the ashes he had taken from the grate of the house at Canonbury. They had been cleverly arranged between two sheets of thin glass, and, by a chemical process, a brilliant red ink followed every trace of writing which was on them, so that each entry in the cash columns could be deciphered with the utmost ease.

'Yes, Mr Sark, they are here; and they show, in your own handwriting, that Messrs Fellow and Mark paid into your hands, on Thursday, the fifth day of May, one hundred and fifteen pounds ten shillings. That's all plain enough, isn't it? Unfortunately for you, Mr Sark, it chanced that Messrs Fellow and Mark paid you five hundred and fifteen pounds ten shillings, and it is for this amount they hold your receipt. You put down in this book the one hundred odd and pocketed four hundred pounds, Mr Sark. Not your first defalcation, by any means, sir.'

By this time the guilty man had turned green and evil-looking, but his composure was perfect.

'The day poor Mr Roach was summoned to Glasgow he chanced to meet Mr Fellow, whom you see before you, ready to corroborate all I say. He mentioned the account, the bulk of which he believed to be still due from that gentleman to him. Your receipt in full was shown to your employer; his suspicions were aroused, and, to your consternation, he took home with him the cash-book containing the fraudulent entry, determined to go carefully through every item in it at the first opportunity. It was the most unfortunate thing George Roach ever did. It signed his death-warrant!

'The agents from whom your master had taken the house at Canonbury had handed you two sets of keys for the premises, but you only gave up one. So, when you fondly fancied Mr Roach was being whirled northward, you entered his house, and commenced to destroy the incriminating cash-book. Naturally enough, you burned the two most damning pages, but you see that even fire refuses to hide your guilt. In the midst of your work, when you were exultant and fearless, who should suddenly appear before you but your too-trusting master himself. A desperate struggle ensued, but finally you killed him—and with this!

From the detective's bag came a heavy bar of iron.

'You carried away the book and kept it at your lodgings,' continued Jules quietly, 'because, as you had made up your mind to seize this business, you knew it would be useful to you. But why you should have preserved this murderous piece of metal is best known to yourself. The blood-stained key of the strongroom, which you pretended to find in Rupert Peel's desk, came from your own pocket. The flavour of your musk lozenges still clings to it. You were anxious to marry Miss Lynn because you were well aware Mr Roach had

bequeathed her, by a legally attested will, which is at present in my possession, every penny he died possessed of. Now, Mr Sark, I think I have brought my story of your crime to a convincing conclusion.'

'It is all an infamous concoction!' cried the wretched man, his eyes blood-red and furtive. He had not yet abandoned all hope; he would escape them yet, if he could. 'It is a malignant series of lies. I am innocent of this crime. If my dear dead master could rise from his grave he would himself declare that to the end I was faithful and true to him.'

'You lie, Felix Sark, you lie!' declared Julia Barretti, coming among them at that moment. 'I saw you strike the fatal blow! The shadow I observed on the blind of the house at Canonbury I saw again last night at Saul Lynn's house in Kennington, and your shadow has condemned you!'

A look of wild terror changed the entire aspect of his face as he gazed at this woman. Had a spectre confronted him he could not have been more staggered.

He stared hopelessly, first to the right then to the left of him. His eyes caught sight of the stairs leading to the rooms above, and he made a dart for them.

'After him!' cried Jules, to the plain-clothes men from Scotland Yard. 'He will climb that scaffolding, get on to the roof, and we may miss him altogether. Don't hesitate to follow him wherever he goes!'

The moment Felix reached the upper apartment, he made a plunge for the window, and reached the planks outside.

Taking the detective's advice, one of the young officers dashed through the same opening on to the scaffolding. He was just in time to see the fugitive seize the heavy hanging chain, and then a dreadful thing happened.

It may be presumed that Felix's intention was to reach the street by this means, but he had not observed that it dangled immediately over the great cauldron in which seethed and smoked the boiling pitch.

The murderer's weight brought the chain down with a rasping rush, and he completely disappeared in the molten substance, only to be rescued when life was extinct, and his body most horribly disfigured.

Though there was no question about the guilt of Felix Sark, it took a little time to procure the release of Rupert Peel. It need hardly be said that he married Daisy Peel after a short lapse of time, but it

should be mentioned that he now carries on the business of George Roach and Co., as may be seen by anyone who searches for the premises in the street we have described.

Jules Gervaise was very proud of his success in this case, because it made Daisy happy. It brought him such fame, too, that he was compelled to abandon his idea of retiring, until he had, at any rate, solved one more mystery, and about that we may have something to write another day.