



Class PZ3

Book H882B2

Copyright N^o _____

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

Hume, Fergus

"

Black Carnation

PZ 3

H882

BL

THE BLACK CARNATION.

CHAPTER I.

THE CRIME OF THE OPERA HOUSE.

IT has been said, truly or otherwise, that every man has in his own life the materials for at least one romance, and for my part I am inclined to subscribe to the saying, seeing that the story I have to tell is as romantic as any I have read. Moreover, it happened to myself, though truly I was more of spectator than actor; still it came within the experience of my latter days, and out of such experience have I constructed this tale. I say constructed, for, indeed, I did but little else than arrange the events in due order, so as to make them understandable to all. Between chapter one which relates the committal of a crime and chapter seventeen which reveals the name of the person who committed it, there is a deal of unravelling to be done, and had it not been for the idleness of my

life, I am afraid I would never have had time or patience to disentangle the mysterious circumstances which surrounded the death of Marietta Mazzucata.

Up to the age of fifty years my life was as smooth and happy as any mortal could desire. Of course, in common with all men, I suffered from petty annoyances, still, no very startling event ever happened to lift me out of the common ruck of humanity. I was born of wealthy parents, I went to Eton, I migrated to Oxford, I entered the army, I left the army, I travelled here, there and everywhere, enjoyed all things, exceeded in none, and between my fortieth and fiftieth years had become one of those well-dressed, well-preserved old fogies whom you may see any day in St. James' Street, or at the windows of respectable clubs. My life, I am afraid, has been an extremely negative one—as I did neither harm nor good, but “dandered on,” as the Scotch say, in a pleasant, aimless fashion, which had, at least, the merit of being happy.

Then occurred that extraordinary event which turned my placid existence into one of great trouble and distress, though, doubtless, I was not called upon to mix myself up in the affair, and had I so chosen could have held aloof, which I

certainly would have done had I not been seized with "detective fever." What! You don't know what it is? then I hope for your own peace of mind you never will know, for it is a disease which entails sleepless nights, much thought and ceaseless vigilance. In many cases the game is not worth the candle, and even in this instance, I doubt not, it would have been wiser for me to have left the affair to Scotland Yard, and not to have meddled with what did not concern me. But as I said before, I was seized with detective fever; and if it did not concern me, it greatly concerned Gilbert Tressinger and Lawrence Dallas, both good friends of mine. However, I have now prologized enough, so I will begin to tell you the story of Mazzucata from the very commencement, which, so far as this book is concerned, starts from Covent Garden Theatre on the first night of the new season.

I am very fond of music, and for years have been an assiduous attendant at the opera whenever it chanced to be on at Covent Garden or Her Majesty's. I have heard Jenny Lind, Malibran, Mario, Grisi—in fact all the great singers of the past, and remember well those palmy days of the Italian Opera, when Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini were composing master-pieces. Then it was

all melody and exquisite vocalization, but now, what with this Wagner craze and Dvorak-Grieg-Brahms-mania, music seems to be nothing but noise. Probably I am wrong—in fact my nephew Charles, a graceless young dog who has no respect for age, tells me I am wrong,—but I had much rather hear an Italian aria, sung by a highly trained singer, than this incessant fiddle playing and drum banging, with every now and then a feeble note from the stage when a fortunate pause gives the vocalist an opportunity of being heard. Oh, Grisi, or Alboni, or Lablache, what could even your strong lungs do against this roar of brass, and shrieking of strings which is called orchestration.

Yet in spite of my distaste for such new-fangled music, I still go to the opera, and it was on that night of the sixteenth of May, one thousand eight hundred and ninety, when hearing Mazzucata in “*La Reine d’Ecosse*,” that the catastrophe occurred which resulted in the death of that great singer.

She was a great singer, I admit, a worthy successor to Grisi and Persiani, full of fire and dramatic force, not a mere musical box, twittering like a mechanical bird, which seems to be the

prevailing style of the new school of singers. When I was a young man—but there, this is not a book of reminiscences, and I grow wearisome. I speak of the present not of the past, and will therefore defer criticising this degenerated age, with which I am decidedly “out of joint.”

Renaud had composed “*La Reine d’Ecosse*,” and as he was the chief exponent of the most advanced French school, combining—so they say—a thorough knowledge of musical technique with a rare gift of melodic inspiration, the dilettanti of London, whose name is legion, looked forward to a treat of no common order, especially as Mazzucata had created the *rôle* of Mary Stuart in Paris to the complete satisfaction of Renaud who was notoriously difficult to please.

It being the first night of a new season, the first night of a new opera, and the first night of a new singer, the house was naturally crowded on account of the triple novelty, and I recognized many of my friends. The stall next to mine was vacant, however, and it was not until the overture had commenced that it was occupied, when to my surprise my neighbor proved to be young Lawrence Dallas, whom I had fancied was still abroad. A handsome young fellow he was, somewhat

bronzed by tropical suns, but I thought for the moment that his face looked a trifle careworn, as though he were consumed by some secret sorrow. Of course he recognized me at once and shook hands, after carefully depositing under his seat a large bouquet of flowers.

“I didn’t know you were back, Dallas,” I said, as he sat down beside me.

“Oh, I returned to-day.”

“And came to the opera to-night. That is rather sharp work.”

“I had reasons for coming to-night,” he answered, hurriedly.

“Do those flowers form part of the reasons?”

“No! they are for Mazzucata.”

“What, is she so good as that?”

“She is splendid. I saw her in Vienna.”

“Vienna!” I repeated, somewhat amazed. “I did not know you had been there. I thought the East——”

“I’ve been everywhere,” interrupted Dallas with a frown. “East, west, and all over the world. Don’t I look all the better for my travels?”

“No! you look worried.”

He started at this, and cast a searching look on my face.

“You are a close observer, major,” he said, slowly. “I have been worried, but it’s all over now. I am here to enjoy myself.”

“And see Mazzucata.”

“Precisely. But here, you know everyone, major. Who is the man with the flowers, over yonder?”

“Sir Gilbert Tressinger,” I replied, following the direction of his eyes, “his uncle has just died and left him eight thousand a year, and a title. Rather a change.”

“Why ‘rather a change’?”

“Oh, it’s a long story, but the pith of it I can tell you in a few words. Gilbert’s father married an opera singer, who was by no means his social equal. The Tressinger family cut him off, and when the parents died, Gilbert was studying for the stage in Milan. He has a fine tenor voice, and was going to be a new Mario, but when his uncle died all these fine schemes were knocked on the head, and he came in for the property.”

“Lucky fellow,” said Dallas, raising his opera glass to a pair of brilliant black eyes, “but why does he carry flowers otherwise than in his button-hole?”

“As far as that goes, why do you? Mazzucata

must be very good if you young fellows all honor her with bouquets."

"Well, you see I know Mazzucata very well."

"In that case you ought to know Tressinger," said I, coolly.

"Never set eyes on him before to-night."

"But you surely have heard his name?"

"No! why should I?"

"And yet they say a woman can't keep a secret."

"Meaning Mazzucata," observed Dallas, with a frown.

"Of course."

Dallas looked straight ahead, but I noticed he was observing me out of the tail of his eye, so, wondering at the persistent way in which Mazzucata was mixed up in his conversation, I adopted the masterly policy of silence, thereby drawing him on to further explanation of his enigmatic utterances.

"I don't know what you mean," he said, at length in a hesitating manner.

"Oh, well, if you don't know, you don't know," I answered ambiguously, "but if you bring a bouquet to throw to Mazzucata, why should not Tressinger do the same?"

"He doesn't know her."

“There you are wrong. He knows her very well.”

Dallas bit his lip and said something under his breath, the meaning of which I could not catch, but it sounded uncommonly like bad language. Then he laughed in a constrained manner, and tossed back his head, a trick he had with him when annoyed.

“Well, and why not?” he said, after a pause, “Mazzucata knows plenty of people.”

“Of course, especially rich young men.”

“What have you heard?”

“Nothing but town talk. Hush, the curtain is rising.”

The fact was, I knew a good deal about the lady in question, for my club, like the ear of Dionysius, gathers all news, and the relations between Tressinger and this singer had been pretty well discussed, but of course, I was going to mention nothing of this to my fiery young friend, Dallas. It is a weakness of my character that I am over fond of gossip, but I never repeat what I hear, so, having thus an excellent character for secrecy, I am the recipient of many things of a private nature. Dallas knew that I would not hint my knowledge without good reason, and not at all daunted

by my abrupt closing of the discussion, touched me on the shoulder as the curtain went up, to invite my attention. Now if there is one thing above another I dislike, it is being interrupted in my enjoyment, so I was not in a very amiable frame of mind when I turned in response to his touch.

“Well! what is it?”

“Is Tressinger a very dear friend?”

“Yes, too dear to be respectable.”

“It’s a ——.”

“Look here, Dallas,” said I, now thoroughly angry, for I knew his impulsive temper, “if you want to make a noise go outside, I came here to enjoy the music, not to gossip.”

“Well, will you tell me all about this fellow tonight?” he persisted.

“Yes, yes. In fact I’ll introduce you to him.”

“Good, I’ll bear that in mind.”

Having thus satisfied his curiosity for the time being, I concentrated my attention on the stage, but to tell the honest truth, my enjoyment for the evening was over, as the demeanor of Dallas had quite piqued my curiosity, and knowing what I did about Tressinger and Mazzucata, I was puzzled to think how the introduction of this new element would affect the position of affairs. Dallas was Irish

and had a most ungovernable temper, so if it were the case, as I suspected, that the singer had been flirting with him, there was no doubt that when he found out she had thrown him over in favor of Tressinger, things would become unpleasantly warm for everyone concerned. I determined to find out all I could from Dallas with the idea of smoothing matters, though at the same time, I must confess, I was considerably curious to know the meaning of all this social mystery.

At this period of my reflections, Mazzucata appeared on the stage, and without doubt she was a beautiful woman, not unworthy to represent the dead loveliness of Mary Stuart. It was the Scottish queen herself, not worn and gray with the shadow of a violent death near at hand, but bright and youthful, holding her court in grim old Holyrood with the poet-lover Chastelard at her feet. Ivan, of course, took the part of the French chevalier, and sang the difficult music allotted to the *rôle* as only he can sing it. He put me much in mind of Mario, both as regards voice and appearance, but his face was somewhat after the style of Charles Stuart, with grave melancholy eyes—too sombre for a lover, and yet fitted for the character, seeing what was the end of the original.

The stage was very brilliant, representing the throne room of the old palace, filled with silken-clad courtiers and lovely women all grouped round the dais whereon sat Mary Stuart in the spring-time of her fatal beauty. There was a chorus of stern Scottish barons, a counter chorus of Presbyterian fanatics, and when these latter insulted the queen, Chastelard, bold, gay and wrathful, dashed, sword in hand, before the throne to defend his mistress. As I said before, I do not care about modern music, but the stirring finale of this act was worked up in a manner worthy of Meyerbeer's Huguenots, and when the curtain fell, I, in spite of my prejudices, applauded as heartily as the rest of the audience. I am a just man, and, from long experience, esteem myself a good critic, so I am not ashamed to give it as my opinion that Mazzucata was but little inferior to Giulia Grisi either as regards acting, voice or vocal production.

“ Well, what about Tressinger ? ”

It was Dallas who spoke, and I must say I was distinctly annoyed, as his incessant desire for information quite spoilt my appreciation of the new singer. Under these circumstances I answered him sharply, as I am sure I had every right to do, for his very *mal à propos* question.

“ Good heavens, Dallas, are you still harping on that fellow—cannot you enjoy the music ? ”

“ Oh, the music is well enough, but I want to know about Tressinger.”

“ You have Tressinger on the brain. What is he to you ? ”

“ Nothing,” retorted Dallas, promptly, “ but, from what you say, he’s a good deal to Mazzucata.”

“ Ah ! you are jealous.”

“ Rubbish ! ”

“ I quite agree with you,” I answered, smiling, “ it is rubbish to be jealous—especially on account of that lyric coquette.”

“ How do you know she’s a coquette ? ”

“ Common report——” I began, but he interrupted me rudely.

“ Common report is a common liar.”

“ I’ve heard that before.”

“ It’s a truism,” said Dallas, crossly, “ but look here, major, don’t abuse Mazzucata any more, for I love her better than my life—in fact, I want to marry her.”

I stared at him in dismay.

“ Are you mad ? ”

“ No ! I’m as sane as you are. Because you’ve never married, that doesn’t say I shouldn’t.”

“ Don’t talk so loud,” said I, soothingly, for he had raised his voice more than I liked, “ marry if you like—but Mazzucata——”

“ Well, what have you to say against her ? ” he demanded, defiantly.

“ I’ll tell you all I know to-night.”

This closed the conversation for the time being, as the curtain was now rising on the second act, and Dallas, therefore, held his tongue, for which boon I was very thankful, not caring to be worried much more by his incessant questioning and bad temper. I had a good deal to say against Mazzucata ; but who would be such a fool as to ignite this mass of gunpowder ? Dallas, as I well knew, had a very bad temper, and no respect for age ; so, in such circumstances, a wise man holds his tongue. I am a wise man, so I held mine—for the time being.

The second act of the lyric drama, as ’tis now the fashion to call an opera, consisted mostly of intrigue, in which the queen, Chastelard, Murray, and John Knox were all involved, ending in a fine scene, in which Mary banishes the poet from her presence for his presumptuous passion. From a musical point of view, I did not consider it so fine as the first act ; but, probably, Renaud had pur-

posely restrained his genius at this part, in order to accentuate more fully the splendid third act, which was said to be a triumph of melodic inspiration and harmonic cunning.

When the curtain fell for the second time, I saw Gilbert Tressinger rise from his seat, and go out into the vestibule of the theatre. Upon seeing this, Dallas touched my arm, and hastily followed him. I arose with considerable reluctance, as, not smoking myself, I find a tobacco-impregnated atmosphere extremely disagreeable, and would much preferred to have remained quietly in my place, or visited the boxes of my friends. Dallas, however, was so anxious to meet Tressinger, and I was so anxious to see why he desired such a meeting, that we both followed the young man,—a thing I would not have done under any other circumstances.

“There he is,” whispered Dallas, when we were in the smoking-room, “leaning against the wall.”

“You won’t wait a moment,” said I, crossly; but, nevertheless, for the sake of peace, walked across to Tressinger, holding out my hand.

“How do you do, Gilbert?” I said, using the privilege of an old friend, and calling him by his Christian name. “So you are back from Paris?”

“Yes; I only ran over on business, major.”

“Mazzucata business,” I murmured, under my breath. “Oh, by the way, let me introduce you to my friend: Mr. Dallas—Sir Gilbert Tressinger.”

“Lawrence Dallas,” said Gilbert, with a bow. “I know you very well, Mr. Dallas. We have a mutual friend, I think.”

“Signora Mazzucata,” replied Dallas, in a marked tone; and then they eyed each other with considerable curiosity, while I, wondering what was to be the outcome of the meeting, stood aside, watching the comedy.

“I knew Signora Mazzucata in Italy,” said Lawrence, at length, in an agreeable manner, evidently considering it best to be diplomatic.

“So she told me. Some time ago, is it not?”

“About eighteen months, or thereabouts. Since then, I have been travelling in the East, and only returned to-day.”

“Oh!” murmured Gilbert, significantly. “And you patronize the opera on the first night of your arrival! You are fond of music?”

“Yes, very,” replied Dallas, who saw at what Tressinger was hinting, and determined not to gratify his rival by showing that he did.

“So fond,” said I, interposing amiably, with the intention of preventing a quarrel between those hot-headed youngsters, “that he brought a bouquet to throw to the lady.”

“I am afraid I also must plead guilty,” observed Gilbert, with a laugh, upon which Dallas half frowned, then recollecting his manners, smiled quietly.

“One cannot pay too many compliments to an artist of Signora Mazzucata’s standing,” he said, carelessly; “do you know her well, Sir Gilbert?”

“Yes, very well, I saw a great deal of her in Paris.”

“Ah!” said Dallas, jealously, and made no further remark about the singer.

On his part Tressinger scrupulously refrained from further discussing Mazzucata, and for the rest of the conversation the two young men, both eaten up with jealousy about this woman, behaved in a regulation society manner. This conversation puzzled me more than ever, and when we were once more seated in our stalls I spoke to Dallas on the matter.

“Well!”

“Well,” he replied, stolidly.

“You are a riddle to-night,” I said, shrugging my

shoulders, "you get into a vile temper with a man you do not know, and when I introduce you to him at your express request, you are positively agreeable to one whom I verily believe you regard as your enemy."

"If he loves Mazzucata I do regard him as my enemy."

"And why?"

"Because I also love her."

"There are always two to a bargain," I observed, sapiently; "so far as I can see, you are both in love with this woman. Now the chances are that she prefers one of you—which one?"

"Myself!" said Dallas, promptly.

"Well, supposing it's Tressinger?"

"In that case, I would kill her," he replied equally promptly. I stared in surprise, upon which he broke out into a harsh laugh which had the effect of making several people turn their heads to look at him.

"Oh, you wonder at my melodrama," he said, at length in a low voice, "but I tell you I would. You have no idea how I love her—of the encouragement she has given me. I heard all about Tressinger—oh yes, you told me nothing new, and knowing he was to be here to-night, I came with

the intention of being introduced to him. Well, I have been introduced to him, and now I know——”

He paused suddenly, and, much impressed by his manner, I spoke at once.

“ Know what ? ”

“ That which I desired to know.”

“ My good fellow, you rave,” I said in calm despair at the hopelessness of extracting sense from this erratic maniac.

“ Wait till to-morrow,” he whispered harshly, “ and you will see if I rave.”

I was about to make a further remark when the curtain rose, and as Dallas obstinately refused to speak again, I was obliged to turn my attention to the stage, though I wondered much at the strange manner in which he was behaving. However, I put down his extraordinary conduct to an attack of love, and prepared to listen to this famous third act which had been extolled throughout Europe as a miracle of musical excellence.

The stage was set to represent the queen’s chamber in Holyrood, and after half the act had passed in chorus and songs from Chastelard and the queen, the great duet which was so famous, began. Chastelard has hidden himself in the room, the queen sees him and runs to call her guards, but he, throwing

himself at her feet, implores her to forgive what he has done for love's sake. He appeals not to the queen, but to the woman, and she, forgetting her royalty, is about to confess that she loves him, when the sight of the crown recalls to her what she owes to her race, to her country. With a cry she breaks from his encircling arms and summons the guard. The chorus pour in, there is a splendid and stirring finale, and the curtain falls on Mary ordering Chastelard to prison.

It was a great performance on the part of both artists, and when the curtain fell they were called before the footlights to receive the applause which they had honestly earned. The enthusiasm of the audience recalled to me the triumphs of Jenny Lind, especially when a perfect hail of flowers fell on the couple on the stage. Tressinger rising in his stall threw his bouquet to the prima-donna, upon which Dallas, not to be behindhand, also arose and threw his. Ivan picked up some flowers, but whether they were those of my two friends I am not prepared to say, and presented them to Mazzucata. The singer, all smiles, bowed first to one side of the house, and then to the other, pressing the bouquet she held to her breast. Suddenly she looked at it and gave a cry of horror—a cry that was

drowned in the frightful explosion which followed.

There was a cloud of smoke which slowly dispersed, and then through the smoky veil I saw, as in a dream, that which was once a lovely woman lying a mangled corpse on the stage. Ivan was leaning back against the curtain with a white face, half stunned with the noise of the explosion—a thrill of horror ran through the crowded house—there was a dead silence, then the vast audience arose with a roar of alarm and made for the doors. The cries of women, the curses of men, I heard half confusedly, but higher than all I heard a cry of terror—

“Dynamite!”

CHAPTER II.

DETECTIVE FEVER

I AM not so young as I was, therefore the catastrophe of the previous night unnerved me so much that I lay longer in bed the next morning than was my custom. Pointer was greatly concerned—Pointer is my man—and wished to send for a doctor, but this extreme proceeding I sternly forbade, knowing I should be quite recovered by noon, which indeed proved to be the case. After an excellent breakfast—for Pointer tempted me with my favorite dishes—I sent for the principal morning papers, in order to acquaint myself with the reports of this terrible calamity, which had so abruptly brought the performance of the previous night to a close.

It is not my intention to set forth a full report of what the papers contained, as anyone who so desires can turn up the case for himself, but merely to incorporate herein the gist of the matter so far

as is requisite for an understanding of the events which followed the committal of the crime. Judging from the frank admissions of the press, the whole affair was veiled in mystery, and not even the most imaginative dared to put forward any theory as to the reason for the crime. All that was known appeared to be the barren fact that Mazzucata had been killed by the explosion of a dynamite cartridge concealed in the bouquet which she had held to her breast, but why such a crime should have been perpetrated in so bold and open a manner appeared to be quite inexplicable. Some of the papers indeed suggested that the dead woman had enemies, but so far as that goes, everyone in a public position has enemies, yet, as a rule, they refrain from letting their enmity carry them to such extreme lengths.

At all events, whatever theories were put forward to account for the affair, the actual fact remained the same, that Mazzucata had been killed by the explosion of a dynamite cartridge which formed the handle of a bouquet thrown to her on the stage. The whole question as to the detection of the crime lay in the discovery of the person who threw the fatal bunch of flowers. This, on the face of it, was utterly impossible, and one might as well try

to find a needle in a haystack, as attempt to discover the owner of one particular bouquet flung at the feet of a prima-donna in company with several hundred tributes of the same kind.

Clearly, therefore, nothing was to be gained from the papers, so I placed them all on one side, and discarding them as useless, sought in my own mind for an explanation of this hideous mystery. Here was a beautiful woman barbarously done to death in a public manner by some unknown enemy. Now the question was to find that enemy, and to do so it would be necessary for me to make myself acquainted with all circumstances connected with the early life of this unfortunate singer.

In this respect I was absolutely ignorant, as, beyond the bare facts that Mazzucata had appeared in Italy, Vienna, Paris, and now London, with great success, I was quite in the dark regarding her previous history. Nowadays a public person's private life is known to all, thanks to society papers, who search into matters better left alone, but hitherto Mazzucata had escaped their prying, and beyond the gossip of clubs, little was known of her life or personality. As to the latter she was reported to be a singularly charming woman, attractive in the highest degree, not so much on

account of her undeniable beauty, as for a certain magnetic influence she exercised over all who came in contact with her. Her life, according to common report was not by any means a blameless one, as she was said to affect the society of rich young men, and having squeezed all their money out of them, let them die broken-hearted at her scorn. Not that I believe any young man of the present day ever died of a broken-heart; but whatever might be the cause of their death, it was undeniable that all who had anything to do with this modern Lamia, either perished in the flower of their youth when she tired of them; or were ruined through her extravagant caprices which in many cases were scarcely those of a sane woman.

All this information, however, I had gained from the gossip of clubs. It was not to be found in the papers, and the general public knew nothing of Madame Mazzucata save that she was a great artiste. Now, however, the tragic event of her death would inspire the press to find out and publish all they could about her, in which case something would be found in her past life which would probably point to a reason for the manner of her death. In an ordinary case I would have

left all this unravelling to the papers, the detectives, to whomsoever it might concern, but having witnessed the death of the singer I was unwilling to await such a slow method of solving the mystery and therefore determined myself to find out the cause of the crime. In two words I had detective fever.

So far, so good, but the question was, how was this fever to be cured; and the obvious answer was, by finding the assassin of Mazzucata and handing him over to justice. The reason of the crime was to be found in her past life, so the first thing to be done was to seek information on this point from someone who had been intimate with her before she came to England. To find such a person I had not far to go—in fact two persons who could give me information were at hand, namely, Lawrence Dallas, and Gilbert Tressinger.

Now what struck me as curious about these two young men was that each on the previous night had carried a bouquet of white flowers, and both bouquets had been thrown to Mazzucata shortly before the fatal event. Could it be possible that in one of those bouquets had been concealed the dynamite cartridge which caused the death of the singer? I could not believe it, as I deemed both

my friends incapable of such a crime; and yet, when I recalled Dallas's wild words regarding his intention of killing Mazzucata should she prove false to him, I confess that doubts began to creep into my mind.

“Dallas said he would kill her if she loved Tressinger,” I said to myself as I dressed slowly, “but then he did not know the truth of that until he met Tressinger, and between such meeting and the explosion he never left my side, therefore could not have prepared the bouquet with the intent of killing her. No! that infernal machine which formed the handle of the bouquet must have been carefully constructed, and as Dallas, in spite of his wild words, had no reason to think Mazzucata false until he met Tressinger, he could not have brought the flowers with the dynamite cartridge concealed therein. Clearly then Dallas had nothing to do with the death; and as to Gilbert——”

I sent Pointer out of the room at this moment, for having a habit of talking aloud to myself, I noticed he was eagerly listening, and not willing to admit him so far into my confidence, I got rid of him by some trivial excuse, and resumed my soliloquy.

“As to Gilbert, there is no doubt he did not commit the crime, for he had no reason to do so.

He was Mazzucata's favorite lover, and doubtless had seen her just before the performance, so, even granted he wished to kill her, he would hardly have done in public what he could have done in private. But there, such arguing is ridiculous—he had no reason to murder her, and therefore must be innocent. Dallas, even though he wished to kill her, had no time to prepare his infernal machine, therefore must also be innocent. It is apparent that neither of these young men is responsible for the death of Mazzucata, so the assassin must be sought elsewhere."

It was all very fine arguing in this manner, but there was absolutely no clue to start from, and until some clue was discovered, the assassin of Mazzucata would certainly escape the consequences of his crime. I had no doubt that by this time the matter was in the hands of the police, but notwithstanding this, seized as I was with detective fever, I determined to search for a clue to the crime myself, and with this intent left my rooms to call on Dallas.

"If anyone be acquainted with Mazzucata's past life it will be Dallas," I said to myself as I walked along Piccadilly, "and he may be able to tell me of some jealous lover, some lyric rival, some un-

successful suitor, who had a motive for desiring the death of the singer; once I find a motive for the crime, there will be no difficulty in tracing the criminal."

So I spoke, but alas! too confidently, for I little knew how difficult was the task I had undertaken. It is just as well that detective fever is such a virulent disease, for were it not for the insatiable curiosity of the same, the strongest and boldest man would hesitate before venturing on such a difficult quest as searching for a criminal. The labor is intense, the fatigue terrible, and every nerve must be strained if the matter is to be brought to a successful issue. In spite of all dexterity and every care, the great factor in the discovery of crime is chance—and chance, although I knew it not, was guiding me in the right direction for the detection of Mazzucata's assassin.

"Dallas," I said to myself as I went upstairs to his rooms in Half-Moon Street, "Dallas will be able to tell me what he knows of her life; and where he fails Tressinger may possibly supply the information, so by putting this and that together I may arrive at some conclusion. The question is whether Dallas will tell me all I wish to know."

I found the young man sitting in an arm-chair

reading the *Telegraph's* account of the crime, and by his white set face, his clenched hand, his dishevelled hair and red eyes, I saw that he was profoundly affected by the catastrophe which had robbed him of the woman he so much loved. With such a spectacle of despair before me, I knew it could not be Dallas who had committed the crime, and yet in my heart there was a doubt, a doubt which could only be set at rest by his solemn assurance of innocence.

“Major Granby,” he said, in a dull voice when I entered, “You here? Well!”

Sitting down in a comfortable chair near him I pointed solemnly to a glass of brandy and soda standing at his elbow.

“You should not fly to that for consolation.”

Dallas turned his lack-lustre eyes on the drink and then looked at me with a bitter smile.

“Don't preach, major,” he said, harshly, “you don't know what it is to have loved and lost, therefore you are no judge as to what means should be taken to quieten one's conscience.”

“Quieten one's conscience,” I repeated, significantly, “is there need of that?”

“Need of that,” he said, rising to his feet with a frown, “yes, great need.”

“Why, did you treat her badly?”

“On the contrary, she treated me badly,” he cried, walking to and fro in a state of uncontrollable agitation, “still I might have restrained my temper and we would not have parted.”

“Parted where?”

“In Italy. Oh, yes! we were great friends in Milan, I saw her at the opera and she was so beautiful that I fell in love with her. Del Orto introduced me to her, and as I was English she took a great fancy to me.”

“Why because you were English?”

“Like drawing to like I suppose. She was English also.”

“What?” I cried, in amazement, “Mazzucata English?”

“Or Irish if you wish to be particular, major. Yes, her real name was Magallan, but of course she took an Italian name when she went on the stage, and from Mary Magallan changed to Marietta Mazzucata.”

“I never knew that before.”

“There are a good many things you don't know.”

“You are right. For instance: how she came by her death.”

Dallas was leaning against the mantel-piece, looking listlessly at the carpet; but at my last remark he looked up with blazing eyes.

“What the deuce has that to do with you?”

I am an old man, but, nevertheless, my temper is as fiery as that of a young one, and I would have resented Dallas's remark very promptly, but that a thought of my desire to learn all about Mazzucata from him restrained me. With this in my mind, I therefore answered quietly, though I was much disposed to show my sense of the man's impertinence by leaving the room.

“It has nothing to do with me, certainly, but I would like to know who killed the woman.”

“So would I! So would I!” he repeated, viciously; “if I did I would strangle him—or her.”

“Do you think the crime was committed by a woman?”

Dallas looked at me keenly, then crossing the room resumed his seat and finished his brandy and soda.

“How should I know. It's none of my business.”

“Considering what you said last night about killing her and what you say this morning about

quietening your conscience, I should think it was a good deal of your business."

The young man sat quite still as I said these words, but I saw the knuckles of his fingers grow white as he suddenly clutched the arms of his chair.

"Major Granby," he said at length, in a measured voice, "do you think I killed Mazzucata?"

"I don't know."

"Thank you, major, I am much obliged to you for your good opinion. So you have come here to spy out traces of the crime, and put a rope round my neck, eh?"

I kept quiet as long as I could, but evidently I was not born to be a detective, for at this last insulting speech I arose to my feet and poured forth the vials of my wrath on Dallas.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself speaking like that to a man old enough to be your father," I cried, excitedly, "I came to you out of friendship and to ask you to put my mind at rest. You say I suspect you of killing this woman, God knows, I do not wish to suspect you, but look at the way you spoke last night—look at the way you speak this morning. If you are not guilty, why do you act as if you were—I only came to

warn you not to speak to others as you did to me, lest they suspect you of what I am sure you are innocent."

"Oh!" he said, sneeringly, "so you are sure I am innocent."

"I bid you good-morning, Mr. Dallas," I replied, in a dignified manner, and walked towards the door. Before I reached it, however, he bounded across the room and stood with his back to the door, thus barring my exit.

"Major Granby," he cried, in a voice shaking with passion; "I want a plain answer to a plain question, and until I get it you do not leave this room. Do you think I am a murderer?"

I certainly felt that I occupied a very undignified position, for in my desire to begin unravelling this mystery I had unwittingly sought to know more of my friend's inner life than I had any right to. It seems to me that in becoming a detective, it is absolutely necessary to cast off all gentlemanly feeling so that one can press home questions which good taste demands should not be asked. Now, at this eleventh hour, I felt inclined to retreat from the position I had taken up, but so strongly was I seized with the detective fever, that crushing down all objections on the part of my

conscience, I answered Dallas, if not directly, at least boldly,

“I think you know more about the affair than you admit.”

“Admit,” he retorted, scornfully, “I have admitted nothing.”

“And will admit nothing, I suppose?”

“I may do so—to the proper authorities.”

“In that event you may get into trouble.”

“Oh, that’s your opinion, is it, major?” he said, derisively, “but you are wrong. I am afraid you will find but little romance in this affair.”

“A beautiful woman with two lovers, both at the theatre on the night of her death. It seems to me, Dallas, that there is a good deal of romance there.”

“Oh! so you suspect Tressinger also,” said Dallas, returning to his seat, and flinging himself down with a frown on his mobile face.

“I don’t suspect Tressinger and I don’t suspect you,” I retorted, irritably, “if you will give me leave to speak plainly, I will tell you what I think.”

“Very well! Speak as plainly as you will.”

He filled himself a glass of soda and leaned back in his chair, while I sat down on the sofa and began to talk freely.

“Lawrence! have you ever had detective fever?”

“No!”

“Then I hope you never will have it, for it makes one feel the meanest man out.”

“Oh! and you have detective fever?”

“Very badly! That is why I came to you see you this morning.”

“But what have I to do with your disease?”

“Simply this. Mazzucata is dead—murdered by an unknown person, and I wish, for the sake of gratifying my own curiosity, to find out the name of that person.”

“You will never find out,” replied Lawrence, gloomily. “How can you trace the owner of a bouquet thrown from the centre of a crowded theatre?”

“Perhaps not in that way; but you know Mazzucata’s early life, and can perhaps tell me of some one who wished her death.”

“Beyond myself I know no one who wished her death.”

“You don’t mean to admit that you killed her?” I cried in a horrified tone.

“No, my friend. I’m too fond of my own skin to admit such a thing. It is true that I said I

wished her death, but that was merely an expression of rage from a jealous man."

"Then who do you think killed her?"

Dallas turned away his face.

"I don't know," he said at length, in a husky voice.

"But you suspect," I persisted, feeling sure he was concealing something from me.

"No! No!"

"Yes, you do, Dallas. Tell me her name."

"Her name!" he cried, fiercely. "What right have you to think a woman is guilty of the crime?"

"Well, from what you said——"

"I said nothing, and I say nothing. Major Granby, if you are a wise man, you will leave this affair alone. Mazzucata is dead—I am sorry she is dead in one way, because I loved her. I am glad she is dead in another way because she deceived me. What my suspicions are I decline to say, but merely tell you that you will never find the person who threw the bouquet."

"I'm not so sure of that," I retorted, now growing suspicious; "at all events I will try."

"As you please. Try, and fail."

"I will not fail—if you will help me."

“I won’t help you,” retorted Dallas, harshly, rising to his feet. “I will not lift a finger to avenge the death of a woman who deserved to die.”

I arose to my feet and walked slowly towards the door.

“Where are you going, major?” asked Dallas, coolly.

“I am going to see Gilbert Tressinger, and find out from him what you refuse to tell me.”

“He can tell you nothing.”

“You are wrong. He can tell me what parted you and this woman in Italy.”

Dallas grew pale. As I looked at him steadily I seemed to see a guilty look on his face, but this was probably only my fancy, and I therefore opened the door to depart when he called me back.

“Major Granby.”

“Yes!”

“You are going to see Gilbert Tressinger?”

“I am.”

“To ask about my former acquaintance with Mazzucata.”

“Precisely!”

“Well, if you want to learn more than you think, ask him about that flower.”

“What flower?”

“The Black Carnation.”

“What do you mean?”

Dallas came swiftly across the room and pushed me gently outside the door with a mocking laugh.

“Ask him about the Black Carnation,” he said, sneeringly. “Good-day, Major Granby.”

MAJOR GRANBY'S THEORY.

NUMBER ONE.

I firmly believe that Lawrence Dallas murdered the singer Marietta Mazzucata, and my reasons for such belief are as follows:—

Last night he said if he discovered she loved another man he would kill her.

Last night he discovered she was in love with Gilbert Tressinger, and doubtless thereupon determined to kill her.

Mazzucata was killed by the explosion of a dynamite cartridge concealed in a bouquet of white flowers, with one dark one in the centre.

Dallas threw Mazzucata a bouquet of white flowers with a dark one in the centre, and im-

mediately after it was thrown the explosion occurred.

To-day Dallas says he is glad she is dead, and refuses to tell me anything about his past connection with this singer.

CHAPTER III.

AN UNIQUE FLOWER.

So far as I could see, up to the present I had made but little progress in my efforts to unravel the opera house crime, and in my interview with Dallas had gained no definite information. Certainly, those doubts of his criminality which I had entertained before my visit were more or less confirmed, as his whole attitude seemed to favor the idea of his guilt. If he were innocent he certainly acted in a way likely to cause suspicion, yet, on the other hand, if he were guilty, as I began to believe, he was crafty enough not to commit himself in any way. As he very truly observed, it was an impossibility to trace the owner of the bouquet, and until such a result was achieved, there was no chance of Mazzucata's assassin being brought to justice.

Without doubt, judging from his conversation and demeanor, he might have thrown the bouquet which contained the explosive, and I myself

saw him throw Mazzucata some flowers, but, as I said before, I am not prepared to say whether it was Dallas's bouquet she picked up, and so brought destruction on herself. Dallas denied his guilt, and taking everything into consideration, there was no chance of proving anything against him, so, having thus failed in one interview, I lost no time in seeking another with Tressinger, in the hope that I would be more successful in finding a clue.

At this moment I recollected that I had already a clue, for the mention by Dallas of "A Black Carnation," suggested a starting-point, from whence one could hope to advance with a considerable degree of certainty. For myself, I was puzzled to know what was meant by a Black Carnation, as I had never heard of such a flower; and unless it were the password of some secret society, I was completely bewildered as to what could it be. As to the term "secret society," I argued it out in this way:

Mazzucata was destroyed by an infernal machine on a small scale, hidden in a bouquet of innocent looking flowers. Such a mode of death suggests Nihilism, Anarchism, Communism, and these three words separately and collectively at once suggest

a secret society. Now what was more likely than that Mazzucata was mixed up in some way with conspirators, and belonged to a secret society entitled The Black Carnation. As is usual with such leagues the members are bound to secrecy by oath, the breaking of which entails death. Mazzucata had cried out in alarm the moment before her death, and in the light of the above argument I could now understand her cry, for she had seen in the centre of the bouquet a Black Carnation, which was to her the symbol of a violent end.

“Yes,” said I, exultingly, on coming to this conclusion, “there is no doubt now in my mind that this is the true explanation of the mystery. Dallas cannot be guilty of her death, nor was the cause of such death a love affair. Mazzucata, doubtless, belonged to a secret society whose sign of death was a Black Carnation, and having betrayed the secrets of such a society was condemned to die. The black flower—an artificial flower I suppose, since no natural flower is black—was placed in the bouquet to warn her she must die, hence her cry of horror, and before she could throw away the dangerous flowers the explosion took place which killed her. Yes, I am right this time—she was a Nihilist and suffered the death of a traitress.”

I could see all this plainly enough, but still it did not solve the riddle as to who threw the flowers. Dallas knew about the Black Carnation, so perhaps he also was a member of the society and had been appointed by the association to carry out the fatal order. Then again, he denied that he had killed Mazzucata and had referred me to Tressinger for information regarding the Black Carnation. Could it be possible that Gilbert had killed her? Was he also a member of this Nihilistic club? Had the carrying out of the death sentence devolved on him? Impossible, for he loved this woman; and no orders, no oaths would have led him to commit such a crime. Love that laughs at locksmiths would also laugh at Nihilism, and had it come to Gilbert's knowledge that Mazzucata had been condemned to death, he would have at once warned her to fly, and not been base enough to carry out the vile commands of a parcel of villains.

All these arguments were truly admirable, but as yet they had no very solid basis of fact. The Nihilistic idea might be true and it might not. All I knew was that Dallas had told me to question Tressinger about a Black Carnation, and as this at least was a starting-point, I determined to

call on Gilbert at once and demand an explanation of this mysterious flower.

In addition to the title and the income, Gilbert possessed a very pleasant little house in Curzon Street, admirably fitted up in a bachelor fashion. The late Sir Ralph having been a misogynist, had remained single all his life, and being extremely well off had made himself very comfortable in a selfish male fashion. Indeed I often envied him that perfect establishment in Curzon Street, which would have suited me excellently, for I have the tastes of a duke and the income, if not of a pauper, at least of a city clerk. It is true I have my half pay, and this, in conjunction with a few thousands invested in consols, is all I have to live on. Fortunately, however, I know a great many people and dine out nearly every night, while on other nights I enjoy myself at the O. F. Club, which possesses an excellent cook.

The O. F. Club to us who frequent it,—the Old Friends' Club to the world, and the Old Fogies' Club to graceless young men—is situated in St. James' Street and is very select. No one under forty years of age is admitted, and we prefer bachelors to married men, so that as our club consists of men of experience, you can guess that

everything is conducted in the most admirable manner. We are all good judges of wine, of dinners, and of cigars, so that we insist upon the cellar and the cuisine being perfect, as it is—if it were not, the Old Friends would dissolve, as a desire for good living holds us together. Sometimes a member will introduce a young man into the sacred dining-room of the Old Friends as a treat, but modern youths do not appreciate the triumphs of our Vatel as they should do, and we generally discourage these introductions. I myself on one occasion took Gilbert Tressinger to dine there, and, in contrast to the rest of his compeers, he appreciated our menu so much, and complimented us so highly that he was invited again, and became quite a favorite with our members. In fact we were very indulgent to him and were always glad to see his merry face in our smoking room, therefore, when I called in at the Old Friends' on my way to Curzon Street, I was not at all astonished to find Gilbert ensconced in a large arm-chair in the writing-room.

Stay! I was astonished; not at seeing him there exactly, but at the idea that instead of remaining in seclusion after the tragedy of the previous night, he had ventured out into society so

soon. Upon my word, considering how he professed to love Mazzucata, it was hardly decent, but the young men of the present day have no hearts, nor palates either, seeing they appreciate neither women nor dinners to the extent which such delights demand. Now, when I was a young man—but there, I must digress no longer, but come back to the story and to Gilbert, who, as I said before, was seated in the writing-room looking at an envelope he had just addressed.

So absorbed was he in his own thoughts that he did not notice me when I entered, and as we had the apartment to ourselves, I determined to try the effect on him of a little surprise. Evidently he was thinking of the Mazzucata tragedy, so if I suddenly asked him about the Black Carnation, he would be so startled that he might blurt out the truth, whatever it was, about that ridiculous flower. My interview with Dallas had put me on my guard against giving a man time to collect himself and tell lies, so I judged it wisest for my purpose in this instance to startle Tressinger, and, so to speak, bounce all he knew out of him. Having thus made up my mind I stole quietly behind him and sharply uttered the cabalistic words used by Dallas an hour previous.

“What about the Black Carnation?”

Such a cry as he gave I never heard before and I trust I never will again, for it made my blood curdle to hear it, as he sprang to his feet with a horrified face.

“Major Granby,” he gasped at length, “Major Granby.”

Being an old soldier I have always my wits about me, and therefore seeing he was more upset than I bargained for, I touched the bell and ordered a glass of cognac when the waiter appeared.

“Major!” said Gilbert, again recovering himself with an effort, “what do you mean?”

“About the Black Carnation?”

He put up his hands to his face with a kind of groan and fell back in his chair as though in a faint. I own I was much puzzled at this extraordinary behavior and would have spoken at once so eager was my curiosity, when fortunately the brandy arrived. Having sent the waiter out of the room, I took the glass in my hand and approached Gilbert, who still remained seated in the arm-chair, with his face covered.

“Here, my boy, take this,” I said, in a kind tone, for I felt sorry for the way in which I had

startled him. "Drink it down and you will feel better."

With a sigh, he removed his hands from his face and took the glass, the contents of which he drained in one breath, then looked up into my face with a forced smile which he strove to render as careless as possible, but the attempt was not successful with me.

"Well, Major Granby, you rather startled me."

"So I see, but why should my remark startle you?" I asked, looking at him sharply.

"Because I did not know you knew anything about the Black Carnation."

"Nor did I until this morning."

"Who told you about it?" asked Gilbert, nervously.

"Dallas."

"Dallas!" he repeated, with a start, "the fellow to whom you introduced me last night?"

"The same."

"And what does he know about the Black Carnation?"

"I am not aware of the extent of his knowledge. I called on him this morning, and when I was going he said, 'Ask Tressinger about the Black Carnation.' What he meant I do not know."

“I know, however,” muttered the young man, thoughtfully; “yes, I know, so I have no doubt she told him also.”

“Who told him and what?”

“Mazzucata told him about the Black Carnation.”

“What is the Black Carnation?” I asked, desperately curious regarding this mysterious flower.

Tressinger hesitated a moment and looked steadily at the carpet, then raised his eyes and met my eager gaze.

“I don’t know why I should not tell you,” he said, at length, in a low voice, “it is a flower.”

“An artificial flower?”

“No, a real flower.”

“Rubbish! who ever heard of a Black Carnation.”

“No one! but it exists for all that.”

“I don’t believe it.”

“I do! I must, because I have seen it.”

“Seen a Black Carnation! You are joking, Gilbert.”

“Upon my word of honor I am not. I have seen a natural carnation as black as your hat.”

“Dyed or painted?”

“ No! grown by nature.”

“ Impossible. Nature does not indulge in such freaks.”

“ Perhaps not often, but in this case she has created a black flower.”

“ Well,” said I, impatiently, “ whether this flower be natural or artificial, what has it to do with the death of Mazzucata?”

“ It was a sign that she was to die.”

“ Why? did she belong to a secret society?”

“ I don't know.”

“ Do you belong to a secret society!”

Tressinger looked up in some surprise at my question.

“ I? No! Why do you ask?”

“ Oh, because—because—well, I hardly know how to explain myself.”

“ Major Granby,” said Gilbert after a pause, during which he eyed me keenly, “ you seem to take a great interest in the death of Mazzucata.”

“ Yes, I do. I want to know who killed her.”

“ And your reason?”

“ Not a very worthy one. I have detective fever.”

“ In this instance I would advise you not to have detective fever.”

“ In Heaven’s name, why ? ”

“ Because you will never find out who killed Mazzucata.”

“ You, too ! ” I cried, curiously ; “ why, Dallas said exactly the same thing to me.”

“ Dallas said the same thing,” repeated Gilbert, with lively interest ; “ why, what has he got to do with it ? ”

“ That’s just what I wish to find out.”

My companion rose to his feet, and took a few turns up and down the room with a perplexed look on his face.

“ I can’t conceive why Dallas should say that,” he muttered, after a pause ; “ he cannot suspect her.”

“ Her ! ” said I, overhearing this remark, which was not meant for my ear, “ oh, it is a woman, then ? ”

“ No, no ! certainly not,” replied Gilbert, sharply ; “ who said such a thing ? ”

“ First Dallas, then you.”

“ What ! did Dallas say that the crime had been committed by a woman ? ”

“ Well, he hinted as much, and now you——”

“ I ! I said nothing. I meant nothing. It was a slip of the tongue.”

“ Slips of the tongue sometimes tell more than

the most carefully prepared speech," I answered, with a shrewd nod of my head.

"I wish you would stop talking like a sphinx," cried the young man, in an ill-tempered tone, resuming his seat. "What do you mean by all this questioning?"

"I wish to find out who killed Mazzucata."

"Then you never will find out."

The agreement of Dallas and Tressinger on this point puzzled me greatly, and it seemed as though I were likely to learn as little from the latter as I had done from the former, when, in desperation, I determined to appeal to his love of life by showing him the perilous position in which he stood.

"Listen to me, Gilbert," I said, gravely, laying my hand on his shoulder: "I knew your uncle intimately, and promised him before he died to do all I could for his nephew. The time has now come when I can do a great deal—that is, if you will be plain with me."

"What do you want me to tell you, major?" he asked, in a wondering tone.

"Tell me all about Mazzucata and this Black Carnation."

"To what end?"

"Because I want to find out who killed this

woman, and it seems to me that there is a clue to be found in this flower you speak of."

Tressinger remained silent for a few moments in deep thought, and then spoke out plainly.

"I will tell you all I know, but I am afraid it will neither solve the mystery nor go any way towards elucidating it. I know no more than you do who killed Mazzucata."

"You know that it is a woman."

"No, I do not, it is only my fancy."

"Then why are you and Dallas agreed on this point?"

"Dallas puzzles me," said Gilbert, evading the point of my question, "and I cannot conceive why he should make any mention of the Black Carnation."

"Confound you and this Black Carnation. What does it all mean?"

"I wish I knew. However, I will make you as wise as I am myself, and then you can draw your own conclusions."

I waited impatiently for the story, and seeing this he began without further preamble, which was just as well, seeing that my curiosity was bringing on a fit of bad temper.

"I met Mazzucata some six months ago at

Monte Carlo, where she was then singing. You know I was brought up to be a singer, and have studied at Milan, so on being introduced to her she took a great interest in me on this account. From interest we rapidly passed into a state of affection for one another, and from thence to ardent love. I really believed she loved me truly. Oh, yes, I know what you are going to say, that she had many lovers before she met me. I am aware of all that—she told me all about her past life, and believe me, major, she was not so bad as people make out. Every singer's reputation is at the mercy of a scandal-loving public, and because my poor Marietta disregarded the conventionalities she laid herself open to censure, therefore her fair fame suffered, but I believed in her, despite all scandal, and would have made her my wife had she lived."

"Dallas also."

"I know all about Dallas's infatuation. He met her eighteen months ago in Italy, and persecuted her with his attentions, but beyond accepting such attentions as a pretty woman is accustomed to receive from a man, she gave him no encouragement. Still, notwithstanding her coldness, he persisted in his suit and offers of mar-

riage, so she promised to give him an answer when he returned from his tour in the east. Meanwhile she met me, and as I tell you, we fell in love with one another; she promised to become my wife when we heard that Dallas had returned."

"You heard yesterday, I suppose, for he told me he only came back to town in the morning."

"Exactly, ill news travels fast, you know. Well, she was going to tell him to-day that she intended to be my wife, when the catastrophe of last night occurred and robbed me of the woman I adored."

He buried his face in his hands, much affected, and respecting his grief, I remained sympathetically silent until he recovered himself.

"But what has all this to do with the Black Carnation?"

"Everything; listen. Marietta would not tell me anything of her girlhood, and to this day I am absolutely ignorant of her name."

"It is Mary Magallan according to Dallas."

"Mary Magallan," he replied, scornfully, "that is a lie she told Dallas to keep him quiet, but it is not her real name, for that she told to no one, not even to me. No one knows her real name, least of all, Dallas, and my knowledge of her life does

not extend further back than her *début* in La Scala three years ago as Marietta Mazzucata."

"She is Irish."

"Yes, I am aware of that, but I don't know which part of Ireland she came from."

"Do you know if she had any enemies?"

"Not that I ever heard of, but she must have had some unknown enemy, for on several occasions she told me she would die a violent death, and would receive a warning in the shape of a Black Carnation."

"Which you saw?"

"Well, to tell you the truth I did not believe there was such a thing in existence as a Black Carnation, but she assured me there was, and that she would receive one and be killed shortly afterwards."

"Well, did she receive the warning?"

"Yes! two days after she arrived in England I called at her hotel, and without a word she handed to me a flower, which was nothing more than a carnation, coal black. She then said she would be killed shortly, but refused to tell me any more, so I know nothing of the person who sent her the token, or who killed her."

"Didn't such a warning unnerve her?"

“ Yes ! she was in a terrible state of mind, and wanted to forfeit her engagement. Indeed she did so, and was going back to Paris to-day with me, when we were to have been married at once.”

“ But why did she sing last night ? ”

“ The manager persuaded her, and she told me that she felt safe on the stage, as no one could kill her before a thousand people. Yet you saw what happened. Oh, the demon who killed her, if I could only find out who it was ! ”

I took his hand and comforted him as well as I was able. “ We will search for the assassin of Mazzucata together, Gilbert.”

MAJOR GRANBY'S THEORY.

NUMBER TWO.

Discarding the theory that Dallas murdered Mazzucata out of sheer jealousy, I firmly believe that she met her death at the hands of an emissary of some secret society, and that the Black Carnation was the official notice of her death. My reasons are as follows :—

She was Irish, and therefore likely to be con-

ected with some organization for the purpose of freeing her country.

She refused to tell Tressinger from whom she expected the token of a Black Carnation, and was doubtless sworn to secrecy, on that and other points.

She duly received the fatal token and expected her death.

She was killed by an infernal machine, which is plainly the method usually employed by secret societies.

The explosion took place in public, so as to show all other members of the society that nothing could protect them from death if they once incurred the wrath of their organization.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE QUEEN'S NAME.

MY conversation with Gilbert afforded me much food for reflection during the next few days, as it tended rather to deepen than to solve the mystery of Mazzucata's death. I must own that the episode of the Black Carnation seemed to favor the idea that she had fallen a victim to the vengeance of a secret society. This being the case, as I now began to believe, my suspicions regarding the criminality of Dallas were set at rest, and I sought him out with the idea of securing his co-operation in hunting down the dastardly assassin who was guilty of this wicked crime.

On calling at his rooms, however, I found that he had departed from town for a few days' rest, being, as his valet informed me, quite unnerved by the opera house catastrophe. His servant was unable to give me further information, so, considerably disheartened by this unforeseen absence

of Dallas, I came away in a very downcast frame of mind.

It was now nearly a week since that tragic occurrence, but up to the present no arrest had been made in connection with the crime, and it seemed as though the mystery would never be solved. It is true that the papers notified the public that the police had a clue, which would undoubtedly lead to the discovery of the assassin, but the papers always make that statement, though, in nine cases out of ten, it is quite untrue. Scotland Yard, infallible as it deems itself to be, knew nothing further than that Mazzucata had been killed by the explosion of an infernal machine, while the curious episode of the Black Carnation, which might have given them a key to the riddle, was quite unknown to the authorities.

As to Gilbert Tressinger, he and I had many conversations together about the tragedy, but neither of us could come to any satisfactory conclusion, and, indeed, differed considerably in our theories on the subject, for while I leaned to the opinion that it was the work of a secret society, he thought it more likely to be the outcome of some circumstance connected with the unknown girlhood of the singer.

Things were thus at a standstill when I inquired for Dallas and found him absent, but not to be beaten in this matter, for my detective fever was more virulent than ever, I went straight to Gilbert's house in Curzon Street, with the idea of ventilating a theory, which I had lately formed concerning the Black Carnation.

Gilbert was engaged with some visitor in his drawing-room, so I took my seat in the smoking-room, which was very comfortable, and read the morning papers. While thus occupied, I heard the sound of voices raised in anger, and became aware that Gilbert and his visitor were having high words. Only a thin wall divided the rooms, and though I could not make out what they were fighting about, I heard a word here and there which roused my curiosity considerably. One of the voices was Gilbert's, the other that of a woman, and it was this latter that seemed to be the noisier of the two. First imploring, then wrathful, this woman seemed to be urging Tressinger to do something against his will. That it was connected with the opera house crime I knew perfectly well, for I twice caught the words "Black Carnation" pronounced by the woman in a menacing tone of voice.

At last I heard the door open and knew that the

visitor was leaving the house ; so, true to my new profession as a detective, I rushed at once to the window of the smoking-room, which fortunately afforded a view of the street. A few moments afterwards, I saw a tall, dark woman, dressed in a bizarre red costume, dart out of the house with a frown on her face, and walk rapidly away down the street. Just as she was turning the corner, I heard Gilbert's footsteps, so, unwilling to be caught in such an undignified situation, I came back to my chair and resumed the perusal of the paper.

Tressinger entered the room, and greeted me in an agitated manner, rendered still more emphatic by the haggard look on his young face.

"What is the matter, Gilbert?" I said, as he took a seat, "you seem to be worried over something."

"I am worried," he replied, with a frown. "I have just had a very unpleasant quarter of an hour."

"So it would seem, judging from the row you were making next door."

He looked up quickly.

"Did you hear what we were saying?"

"No, saving some reference to the Black Carnation."

“Always that infernal flower,” answered Gilbert, gloomily; “it is becoming a perfect nightmare.”

“Well, and what did this woman wish to see you about?”

“How do you know it was a woman?”

“I heard her voice, and I saw her leave the house.”

“You are progressing in the detective business, major,” said Tressinger, smiling bitterly. “Yes, you are right; my interview was with a woman, and it concerned Mazzucata’s death.”

“In what way?”

Tressinger made no reply, so I sought for information in another way.

“What is this woman’s name, Gilbert?”

Still no answer, upon which, feeling somewhat nettled at being thus shut out from his confidence, I took up my hat and moved towards the door.

“Where are you going, major,” he asked quickly, seeing my movement.

“I am going away, sir,” I replied, in a dignified manner, for I own I was angry; “you promised to let me assist you in this matter, but as you now refuse to tell me anything, there is no use my staying here.”

“Sit down, major, and don’t be angry about noth-

ing. I do not refuse to tell you what you wish to know, I was only thinking."

"About what?" I asked, resuming my seat.

"About my future movements. Shall I go abroad or stay here?"

I stared at him in some surprise.

"Why should you go abroad?"

"I have been warned that I may be arrested."

"Arrested?" I cried, jumping to my feet with an astonished look, "and for what?"

"The murder of Mazzucata."

"Nonsense."

"It is true, I assure you. This woman came here to warn me."

"But who is this woman?"

"Ilma Celinski."

"Humph! I am as wise as I was before."

"You don't know her name?" he said, curiously.

"No, of course not—it is not yet in the papers. Well, Ilma Celineki is a Pole."

"I can tell that much myself."

"And she is—or rather was—the maid of Mazzucata."

"The maid of Mazzucata—well?"

"Well!" he repeated impatiently, "can't you see the connection?"

“Between this woman and the murder? No, I’m sure I can’t.”

“I’m afraid you are not such a good detective as I thought, major.”

“Oh, by the way,” I said, with a sudden flash of memory, “both you and Dallas referred to some woman in connection with the crime; is this the woman?”

“No. Oh, you are quite wrong.”

“How can I help being wrong when I am in the dark. For heaven’s sake, Gilbert, stop this choppy conversation, and tell me what you mean.”

“Willingly. Ilma Celinski is, or was, the maid of Mazzucata, and was more of a companion than a servant. She knew more than anyone else about Mazzucata, and among other things she knew of the warning of the Black Carnation. Well, it appears that after the murder of her mistress she went on to the stage to view the scene of the tragedy, and while they picked up the remains of a flower which was——”

“A Black Carnation?”

“Precisely. So in that bouquet which contained the dynamite cartridge, there must have been a Black Carnation and that was the reason Mazzucata cried out just before she was killed. The

first flower was a warning to her that death was coming, the second that death had come—and speedily, as you saw.”

“I understand. But what has all this to do with you?”

“Simply this. That the police think I threw the bouquet which contained the Black Carnation.”

“Ridiculous. Do you mean to say the police think you killed the woman you love?”

“So Ilma says, and she came here this morning to warn me to fly.”

“And by doing so thus acknowledge your guilt.”

“Well, I am not going to acknowledge my guilt either by word or deed. I am innocent of the crime.”

“My dear Tressinger,” I said, grasping his hand, “you need not tell me that. I know you are innocent.”

“Thank you, major,” he said, warmly, much affected, “I am glad to hear you say so, as I shall need all the friends I can get when I am arrested.”

“Will you be arrested?”

“Assuredly; and I am going to remain here.”

Flight would acknowledge guilt; and I am innocent, so I will remain."

"Why is this woman so anxious for you to fly?"

"She wants to save my life."

"But why?"

Gilbert looked down at the carpet with a flush on his face.

"Don't think me conceited, major, but I believe she loves me."

"Well, she is certainly doing you a good turn in thus warning you," I replied, grimly; "but tell me, Gilbert, if you are arrested what defence will you make?"

"What defence can I make except declare that I am innocent. I loved Mazzucata. I threw a bouquet to her, but I swear that there was nothing harmful in the bouquet."

"Not even a Black Carnation?"

"No. It was a bouquet of white flowers with a black rose in the centre, but a rose is not a carnation."

"Certainly not. Where was the bouquet made up?"

"At the shop of Phillis & Co., in Jermyn Street."

"Then the flower girls there can give evidence

that the bouquet contained nothing but white flowers and a black rose."

"Most certainly."

"Phillis & Co. are not likely to go in for Black Carnations."

"I should think not. It is an unique flower and worth its weight in gold. For the bouquet I bought I only paid a guinea, but if there had been a Black Carnation in it the price would have been treble."

"You say you have seen a Black Carnation."

"I have seen the one which Mazzucata received as a warning that she was to die. A perfect flower and as black as ink."

"I suppose there are others in existence?"

"I don't know, I never heard of any."

"It could not possibly have been your bouquet that contained a Black Carnation?"

"No, I'm certain of that."

"Well, the bouquet concealing the cartridge had a Black Carnation, so it could not have been yours; and as it was not yours, you are not guilty."

"My dear major," cried Gilbert impatiently, "you are arguing in a circle. I tell you the centre flower of my bouquet was a black rose, and I had

no more intention of killing Mazzucata than yourself."

"I know that, but why should the police suspect you?"

"I am quite in the dark."

"Someone must have seen a Black Carnation, or thought they saw one in your bouquet."

"What nonsense. How could they see what wasn't there? Besides, no one saw the bouquet but myself."

I thought over the matter for a few moments and then asked Gilbert a leading question.

"Tell me all you did on that night from the time you bought the flowers."

"I had promised Mazzucata some flowers to carry in the opera, and during the day went to Phillis & Co., where I ordered a bouquet of white blossoms and a black rose in the centre. It did not come to my house in time, so on my way to Mazzucata I called at the shop and took it from there. I held it in my hand all the way to the Hotel Europa, where Mazzucata was staying, and went upstairs to her rooms. Ilma, who was there, making ready to go to the theatre, told me Mazzucata had already gone, so I left the rooms at once and went on to Covent Garden."

“Did you lay down the bouquet when you were in Mazzucata’s rooms?”

“Yes, for a few minutes; but no one was in the room but Ilma, and you surely don’t suspect her?”

“No, certainly not. But in the theatre?”

“Well, I put the bouquet under my stall, and then threw it to her on the stage as you saw.”

“By the way, you left it there when you went out after the second act to have a smoke.”

“Of course, but what of that?”

“Simply this, that the bouquet might have been changed while you were away.”

“Impossible. In a crowded theatre?”

“I don’t know why it should be impossible. Look here; it is quite improbable that Phillis & Co. would make up a bouquet with a dynamite cartridge in it.”

“Yes, the idea is absurd.”

“Well, from the time you left the shop till the time you went out to smoke in the theatre after the second act, you never lost sight of the bouquet?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Then it must have been changed in the theatre,” I finished, triumphantly.

“But who would do such a thing?”

“The person who killed Mazzucata.”

“My dear major,” said Gilbert, ironically, “if the person who killed Mazzucata had a bouquet of white flowers with a Black Carnation, and a dynamite cartridge in the handle, why couldn’t he throw it himself—why run the risk of changing it for mine?”

“To lessen the risk,” I answered, quietly. “You were well-known to be the lover of Mazzucata, and probably that circumstance gained you the enmity of someone. Well, supposing out of jealousy—or say, as the emissary of a secret society—that ‘someone’ went to the theatre with the Black Carnation bouquet. He sat directly behind you—at least we will suppose for the sake of argument that he did—and saw you there—a man on intimate relations with the woman he desired to kill. Well, in order to save himself the risk and make you the innocent instrument of his vengeance, what was easier for him than when you were away, to bend down in his seat and change the bouquets. Thus, when you threw the bouquet, it was not yours but his with the Black Carnation.”

Gilbert turned pale as if he saw an abyss open before him. “Great heavens!” he groaned, covering his face with his hands, “if this is so, I am lost. But no, it is impossible. Granted, that all took

place as you have so ingeniously described, who would know that the bouquet I threw had a Black Carnation?"

"Everyone round you."

"Pardon me, that cannot be so. For no one seeing a dark flower in the centre of a bouquet would believe it to be such a monstrosity of nature as the Black Carnation. No, if things are as you say, the person who changed the bouquets and made me the instrument of his vengeance, must also have denounced me to the police, thus at one blow destroying both Mazzucata and myself."

"That is my theory also," I answered, delighted to see how the case was unfolding itself; "but the question is, who changed the bouquets?"

"Ah, if we could find that out we could lay our hands on the assassin. But after all, this is mere theorizing."

"I daresay the police have not much more to go on."

"They must have more evidence against me, or no magistrate would grant the warrant for arrest."

"But is there a warrant of arrest against you?"

"I don't think there is at the present time, but Ilma tells me the police are going to issue one shortly."

“How does she know?”

Gilbert shrugged his shoulders.

“I’m sure I do not know.”

A sudden thought struck me and I rose to my feet.

“Gilbert, I know who denounced you to the police.”

“Who?”

“Ilma Celinski!”

“Impossible! she loves me.”

“But how does she know of this Black Carnation business? If the bouquets were changed in the theatre, as I suspect, she must have had information that they were going to be so changed.”

“I tell you it’s impossible,” cried Gilbert, much agitated, walking up and down. “Ilma loves me—she came to warn me to fly—she would not do that if she had denounced me. Good heavens!” he added, stopping short with a gesture of despair, “when will all this end? Against my will I am being brought into the affair—on all sides there is perplexity and peril, which I know not how to escape. Major, what am I to do? You are my friend, tell me what to do.”

“Yes, I will tell you,” I answered, taking his

hand. "I am your friend, so leave the affair in my hands and leave England for the present."

"What, fly! That would be tantamount to a confession of guilt."

"If you are in prison you will be suspected all the same, and you can do more to aid yourself while free. Leave England, and I will see if I can discover who it was that changed the bouquets. I will see this Ilma and find out her attitude towards you—I will go to Phillis & Co.—I will find out where these accursed flowers came from—I will."

"Major," cried Gilbert with a shudder, "hark, what is that?"

There was a sharp knock at the door and immediately afterwards it was thrown open. A man in plain clothes and two policemen stood on the threshold.

"Too late," cried Tressinger, reeling back against the wall, "it is too late."

"Gilbert Tressinger, I arrest you in the Queen's name," said the man in plain clothes advancing.

"And for what?" he asked, with pale lips. "For what crime?"

"For the murder of Marietta Mazzucata."

CHAPTER V.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE BLACK CARNATION.

NEEDLESS to say there was great excitement in London over the arrest of Gilbert Tressinger. The Opera House Tragedy was one of those romantic crimes such as the world loves to read about. A famous singer; a handsome, rich and titled young man, and a terrible death—it contained all the elements of a romance, and you may be sure that this romance lost nothing in the telling. Things had been rather quiet lately, and the big papers were at a loss for material to fill their columns and attract their readers, when lo, this fantastic tragedy took place and became the sensation of the day. Reporters sharpened their pencils and their wits, editors heaved sighs of relief at the prospect of inserting attractive matter in their empty columns, and all the world of Whitechapel, Belgravia, and respectable Brixton gaped hungrily for news concerning the guilt

of this—as they thought—past lover, present murderer, and future felon.

For myself, the arrest of my poor young friend had taken me completely by surprise, but I never for a moment thought him guilty of the monstrous crime laid to his charge. He had laid bare his heart before me, he had described the occupations of the minute in due order before the occurrence of the tragedy, therefore, in my own mind I was quite positive that whosoever was guilty, Gilbert at least was innocent. The committal of a crime presupposes a motive; but from all I knew, saw and heard, Tressinger had absolutely no motive which could make him kill the woman he loved, and bring himself within the grasp of the long arm of the law.

The young baronet was a great favorite in the world of society, and both in clubs and drawing-rooms his friends and acquaintances declined to believe in his guilt. All the sympathies of the upper ten thousand were with this representative of their order who was accused of committing a foul crime; but the radical section of the public, the middle class, the religious multitude, and the mob of the slums, all believed the poor fellow guilty, even before he had been tried. He was a

gentleman, a baronet, a wealthy man, and that was quite enough reason for those who hated the upper classes to rejoice over the downfall of a prominent member of the same. As to the religious folks, they roundly asserted that the committal of the crime was only the logical outcome of the iniquitous life which Tressinger had been leading—for iniquitous they said it was, simply because his name had been coupled with that of Mazzucata. No good could come out of Nazareth, according to these bigots, and the junction of a singing woman and a fast young man was quite enough to account for all kinds of enormities.

Thus did the one half of the world defend Gilbert, while the other condemned him, and between these two great divisions many violent arguments took place both in favor and against the accused. Naturally enough as the man had not been tried, and the public at large were ignorant of the evidence in the hands of the police, neither party was able to settle the argument in a satisfactory manner, therefore, the preliminary inquiry before the magistrate was looked forward to with the utmost impatience by everyone.

I foolishly thought that when Dallas heard of the arrest of his rival he would at once come back to

town, but as day after day passed and he did not return, I began to have a very bad opinion of the young man for such ungenerous conduct. From his remarks about the Black Carnation which had led me to invite the confidence of Tressinger, it was evident that he knew something of the affair, and if his evidence in any way tended to exculpate Gilbert, it was a shameful thing of him to hold back, when such evidence might free the unfortunate young man from this terrible charge.

As it was, however, I did my best to enlist sympathy on all sides for my young friend, and also visited him frequently in prison, much to his comfort. Owing to the strong expressions of public opinion, particularly that of the lower classes, the magistrates refused bail, so poor Tressinger had to remain in prison, a prey to a hundred fears while waiting for his preliminary trial.

He was much downcast, as was only natural, as he saw himself environed on all sides by perils, and his enemies being unknown he did not know where they would strike next. His liberty was already gone, so perhaps he would lose his life next; for if it were proved that he had thrown the fatal bouquet, no denial on his part would hold good against such damnatory evidence. The worst of

it was that he could do nothing but deny, as, saving Phillis & Co., he had no witnesses to prove that the bouquet he had thrown was a harmless one.

The only hope I had of saving him was in finding out who had denounced him to the police, and then, searching into that person's past life, as whoever knew that the bouquet contained a Black Carnation must undoubtedly know who had committed the crime—and may perhaps himself have been the person who had changed the bouquets and thus indirectly killed Mazzucata.

With Gilbert's consent, I engaged a good firm of solicitors to take up his defence, and they in their turn gave the affair into the hands of Mark Tancred, a rising young barrister, who had already distinguished himself greatly in criminal cases. Tancred heard all that was to be said on the subject and shook his head doubtfully over the matter.

“I'm afraid he'll be committed for trial,” he said at length, “as he has at present no defence. Before the trial comes off, however, we must go to work and find out the real assassin.”

“It seems impossible.”

“At present it does. But reflect, Major Granby,

Here is a Black Carnation—there is a gallows—a chain runs between these two, but after hearing all you have told me, I am sure that Sir Gilbert won't be bound by that chain. No; we will do our best now, but if Tressinger is committed for trial, then we must go to work in earnest."

"Yes, but the first step?"

"Will be to find the garden which contains the Black Carnation."

It seemed but a slender hope, still this conversation cheered my heart and also that of Gilbert, to whom I repeated it, so when the day of the preliminary examination came off, both of us were much more hopeful regarding the final outcome of the case than we had hitherto been.

Nowadays a criminal case is looked upon by the public in much the same light as a successful play, with this difference, that while the last is fictitious, the first is real, and attracts an audience for the same reason as did the gladiatorial shows of ancient Rome. What representation on the stage can compare with a drama of real life, in which the ideal villain is supplanted by an actual murderer, who is being tried for his crime, and who will perchance suffer the extreme penalty of the law. In the Roman circus, the ideal Orpheus was

actually torn to pieces by the bears ; in the English law courts, the real murderer is fighting inch by inch for his life. You say, that the thirst for blood has died out in these latter days, that the refined population of the nineteenth century shudders at the idea of gloating over the death-agonies of a fellow creature. Pshaw ! I tell you it is not so. We have simply transferred the drama of blood, from circus to law court, and substituted worrying lawyers for wild beasts, but the principal actor is the same now as then—a man fighting for his life.

To this realistic drama, therefore, came the jaded Londoners, to see Gilbert's struggles with the octopus of the law, which would, if it could, squeeze him to death. From Belgravia came refined ladies, his intimate friends, who would not kill a fly ; from St. James' Street came those who had shaken hands with him a week previous, but would not do so now, despite their protestations that they believed him innocent ; from the city came opulent stockbrokers, eager for a new sensation ; from the Strand came actors, actresses and singers, to see the man who—they thought—had killed a sister of their craft ; all these various people crowded the narrow precincts of the court, to stare at the

pale young fellow who stood in the dock with a terrible charge hanging over his head.

Outside the court thronged Whitechapel roughs ; slatternly women from the purlieus of Drury Lane ; drunkards torn for the nonce from their beloved tap-rooms by a stronger attraction than that of drink ; and all the idle vagabond population of the town who have nothing better to do. All these discussed the case without, as the more refined portion of humanity stared at the prisoner within, and the opinions of both leaned in the direction of guilt, of condemnation, of hanging.

When the principal witness for the prosecution appeared, I was astonished, for it was a woman ; when she threw back her veil, I was stunned—it was Ilma Celinski. Yes, the woman who professed to love Tressinger, who had gone to Curzon Street to warn him, was the chief witness against him, and on her evidence hung the balance of his fate ; liberty or prison, guilt or innocence, life or death. I was thunderstruck when she appeared, and glanced towards Gilbert, who was evidently as much amazed as myself.

“What does it mean ?” I whispered to Tancred, by whom I was seated.

“I think I know,” he replied, in the same tone,

“but I shall be more certain when I hear her evidence.”

She was a handsome woman in a bold insolent way, with large black eyes, black hair and a voluptuous red mouth, speaking excellent English with a slight foreign accent, which added piquancy to her speech. She gave her evidence in a cool and collected manner, but I noticed that all the time she kept her eyes on the lawyers, and never once glanced in the direction of the reproachful face of the prisoner. Tancred noticed this also, and I saw him imperceptibly smile as he wrote something on a scrap of paper and passed it on to me. I glanced at it and read as follows:—

“I thought I knew, now I do know.”

What did he know. I was puzzled to answer; but without doubt Tancred, learned in the subtleties of the law, had discovered some clue which had hitherto escaped my less experienced wits. I should have liked to ask for an explanation, but at this moment Ilma Celinski began to give her evidence, of which I here give a condensed report.

“My name is Ilma Celinski, I was born in Warsaw and am a Pole by nationality. For the last four years I have been lady’s maid to Madame Mazzucata, and was with her on the night of her

death. She was a very good mistress to me, and I was more her companion than her servant, being quite in her confidence. I know nothing about her past life before she became a singer, as she was very reticent on that point."

Here, the witness gave many unimportant details which did not apply to the case, and afterwards proceeded as follows:—

"In Italy some eighteen months ago, madame was much in love with a M. Dallas who desired to marry her. As he wished her to give up the stage she refused to do so at first, but ultimately promised to marry him when he returned from the East, where he was then going. When M. Dallas left, madame went to fulfil an engagement in Vienna; afterwards, in course of time she came to Paris, and there met with Sir Gilbert who was much in love with her. He also wished to marry her, but madame, mindful of her promise to M. Dallas refused to marry him."

I saw Gilbert start at this last piece of evidence, and with an indignant flush on his face would have spoken but that Tancred made a sign to him to remain silent.

"Sir Gilbert," resumed the witness, "was so much enamored of madame that he said he would

sooner see her dead than married to M. Dallas, at which remark madame laughed, treating it as a jest. When madame came to England, just before the beginning of the opera season, she received a letter from M. Dallas saying he was returning to London to marry her, and Sir Gilbert finding this out had a violent scene with madame, which enraged her very much, and she forbade him to come near her."

"What falsehoods," cried the prisoner, upon which the witness shuddered.

"Silence," said the magistrate, severely, "you must not interrupt the witness."

Gilbert would have spoken again in spite of this order, when Tancred hurriedly arose from his seat and crossed over to the dock.

"Be silent," he whispered, eagerly, "let her go on. All this lying evidence means more than you think."

Ilma Celinski, at this point, without displaying any emotion, resumed her evidence.

"Madame was a very practical woman, but had one superstition connected with a Black Carnation. She often told me that she would die a violent death, and that she would receive a warning in the shape of a Black Carnation. After Sir Gilbert

had been forbidden the house, she received a Black Carnation." (*Sensation*).

COUNSEL FOR THE PROSECUTION: "From Sir Gilbert?"

WITNESS: "I do not know."

COUNSEL: "Was Sir Gilbert aware of Madame Mazzucata's superstition regarding the Black Carnation?"

WITNESS: "Yes, she had often talked about it to him."

COUNSEL: "When she received this token, did she make any remark?"

WITNESS: "She cried out 'Gilbert.'" (*Sensation*).

COUNSEL: "Meaning, I presume, that the prisoner had sent the flower?"

WITNESS: "That was my belief, but she refused to say anything more."

COUNSEL: "And what did she do with the flower?"

WITNESS: "She placed it in a glass of water on the table, and said to me, 'I have my death before me.'"

COUNSEL: "When did all this take place?"

WITNESS: "About four days before the first night of the opera; just after madame arrived in England."

COUNSEL: "Had Sir Gilbert then been forbidden the house?"

WITNESS: "Yes, the Black Carnation arrived just after the quarrel between madame and Sir Gilbert about the letter of M. Dallas, when he went away saying he would sooner see her dead than married to Dallas."

I was near Gilbert and overheard him murmur to himself, "My God! what falsehoods. What does it mean?"

"On the first night of the opera," resumed Ilma, calmly, "which was the night upon which madame was killed, Sir Gilbert came to the hotel. After madame had forbidden him to see her, he had gone to Paris, but on the previous day he had returned, and wrote to her asking her to see him."

The letter produced and read in court was as follows:—

"CURZON STREET,

"15th May, 1890.

"DEAR MADAME,

"I must see you. If not, it will be the worse for yourself. I know all about Dallas; he comes back to-morrow. What of the Black Carnation?"

"Yours in haste,

"G. T."

The reading of this short note produced a profound sensation, and seemed to many to confirm the guilt of the unhappy young man, as it contained a distinct threat, an allusion to the Black Carnation, and the name of Dallas. I own, my belief in Gilbert's innocence was for the moment shaken, but when I glanced at him, and saw how open was his look, how calm his demeanor, I repented of even the momentary treachery to my friend. As for Tancred, he merely smiled when the letter was read, and looked steadily at Ilma, who, catching his penetrating gaze, looked considerably discomposed. In a short time, however, she recovered her nerve, and went on calmly with her evidence.

“ On receiving this note, madame was much agitated, and wrote to Sir Gilbert, saying, he could come the next night before she went to the theatre. He came just after she went, and I was left behind to look after some things which I was to take to the theatre later on. I saw Sir Gilbert in the sitting-room—he had a large bouquet of white flowers with a dark one in the centre, and said he wished to give them to madame. I said madame had gone, but if he would give me the flowers, I would take them to the dressing-room at the

theatre when I went down. He refused to let me do this, and said he would let no one but madame take the flowers, as they were meant especially for her."

A thrill of horror ran through the court at this last speech, for all present firmly believed that this was the fatal bouquet, and this piece of evidence regarding Gilbert's refusal to give them to anyone but the dead woman was regarded as an additional sign of his guilt.

"I had to go into the next room," continued the witness, after a pause, "and as I went I heard Sir Gilbert murmur, 'I must let her know it comes from me.' The door of the next room—a bedroom—was open, and there was a mirror on the opposite wall which gave a partial view of the sitting-room. While looking in this, I saw Sir Gilbert take the Black Carnation out of the glass on the table and place it in the bouquet. When I came back to the sitting-room he was gone."

This evidence was dead against the prisoner, as all present knew that the fatal bouquet had contained a Black Carnation, and this then was the mode in which it was obtained. Ilma then took a drink of water and went on weaving the rope she desired to put round the neck of the prisoner.

“When I got to the theatre, I told madame all about Sir Gilbert’s visit and the Black Carnation. She said to me that she did not care for that night at least, as he could not hurt her on the stage. During the opera, I was down each act at the side wings in accordance with madame’s instructions. When she was given the bouquet after the third act, by M. Ivan, I heard her cry, and knew that the bouquet she held contained the Black Carnation. After that, the explosion took place, and the bouquet was blown to pieces, but afterwards, I went on to the stage and found this.”

“This” proved to be a faded Black Carnation, which was handed up to the magistrate and examined by him with considerable curiosity. Afterwards, Ilma Celinski stepped down from the witness-box and left the court, having given evidence enough to have hanged a dozen men, let alone one. At least, such was my humble opinion, but not Tancred’s.

“What do you think now?” I asked, bending over to him.

“I think I’ve got a clue to the assassin,” he answered, in a whisper; “hush, I’ll tell you all when the case is over.”

There were several other wit

evidence was comparatively unimportant, saving that of Signor Ivan, who deposed having handed to Mazzucata a bouquet of white flowers, with a dark one in the centre.

When all the evidence for the prosecution was ended, Tancred walked over to Gilbert, and had a short conversation with him, the upshot of which was, that the prisoner reserved his defence.

The speech of the magistrate was dead against Gilbert, as indeed was the weight of public opinion, and he was duly committed for trial at the next Bailey sessions. After this, he was removed in custody, bail being refused, though several of his friends, myself included, offered security. The court gradually emptied of its throng, all discussing the case eagerly, and the reporters, who had been taking notes, hurried off to their different offices. I went with Tancred to see my poor friend, but only the lawyer was admitted and I was left to cool my heels outside, which treatment I resented very much indeed.

As it was I had plenty to think about, and had just come to the conclusion that things looked very black for Gilbert, when Tancred came out again with a cheerful smile on his face. I must say that
r disgusted me, considering the

position of our friend, but lawyers have no hearts, and would hang their own fathers for six and eight pence. Perhaps this is a strong expression, but I have some money in Chancery which I cannot get out, so that will doubtless explain why I am so severe on the brethren of the long robe.

“Well,” said I to Tancred, in an annoyed tone, “what are you rubbing your hands together for?”

“Because I see a gleam of light,” he answered gayly, as we took our seats in a hansom.

“It’s more than I do.”

“What, did you not hear the evidence of Ilma Celinski?”

“Yes, but that seemed to me to be bad for Tresinger.”

“Not a bit of it,” answered Tancred, quickly; “why, it is the best thing that could have happened. I can see through their little game.”

“Whose little game?”

“Mademoiselle Celinski’s and her friend.”

“And her friend,” I echoed, in surprise. “Who is her friend?”

“That is exactly what I want to find out,” he said, dryly, “all that evidence she gave was not her own invention, but that of a man of whose name at present I am ignorant.”

“And this man is the assassin?”

“Yes, I believe he is.”

“What does Tressinger say?”

“He says nothing, because he is quite bewildered by the lies of the little viper.”

“I don’t wonder at that,” said I, sourly, “he thought she loved him.”

“Bah!” cried Tancred with derision, “she doesn’t love him a bit—but she loves the other man.”

“You have no idea who the other man can be?”

“No, but I’ll know to-morrow after I have seen my client again.”

“Tancred,” I remarked, after a pause, “I think I can tell you the name of the other man.”

“The deuce, you can?”

“Dallas. Lawrence Dallas.”

Tancred whistled thoughtfully, but made no reply.

CHAPTER VI.

A SERIOUS DISCUSSION.

THE next day, according to my promise, I went with Tancred to see Tressinger, in order to talk over the position of affairs, which did not look flourishing for our poor friend. A very black aspect had been put on his conduct, owing to the extraordinary evidence of Ilma Celinski, who, for some reason best known to herself, had turned traitress. In truth, her conduct was most peculiar, savoring greatly of caprice, as having at first attempted to save—if not his life—at least his liberty by warning him to fly, she had gone to the other extreme and done her best to convict him of the crime. I call it caprice, but it was, doubtless, more than that, as no woman would play such a dangerous game without some strong motive. I suspected that the motive was a man, and that the man was Dallas, but waited to hear Tressinger's opinion,

before committing myself wholly to this view of the case.

Tancred was deeply interested in the affair, the more so on account of its difficulty, as there was nothing he liked better than to unravel one of those enigmas so frequently offered to the world by the criminal classes. Talk about the difficulty of putting together a Chinese puzzle ; it is as nothing compared with the task of weaving the rope out of his own actions to encircle the neck of a criminal. As a stone at the source may determine the direction of a mighty stream, so the slightest step in the wrong direction on the part of a detective, may lead him further away from the solution of the problem, and it is only by patient observation, deep thought, and the inspiration of the moment, that a definite conclusion can be reached. A criminal case is made up of little actions, as a mosaic is formed of tiny stones ; but the latter makes a picture, the former builds a gallows.

“ I have been mixed up with one or two queer cases,” said Tancred, as we drove to the prison, “ but this is the strangest which has come within my experience. If it were the plot of a novel, the omnipotent detective, who only exists in fiction, would find out all about it without the slightest

difficulty ; but as it is an episode of real life, we lack the assistance of the omnipotent Lecoq, and must do our best to solve the mystery alone."

"Do you think we shall succeed?" I asked, doubtfully, for things looked anything but promising.

"I cannot say," replied Tancred, shrugging his shoulders, "at present we are entirely in the dark, and the only gleam of light I can see is the lying evidence of that woman."

"Lying evidence?"

"My dear sir, you surely didn't think she was speaking the truth. Why, the whole story was most carefully prepared to blacken our friend's character, and had I cross-examined the witness, I could have shown the falsity of several statements."

"Well, and why did you not do so?"

"Because I was not quite sure of my ground. Now I know the line taken by the prosecution I will go to work and get up a defence. As I told you yesterday, I believe there is a man behind this girl, who put the story into her mouth. A man who hates Tressinger."

"Dallas hates him like poison."

"The deuce he does. Yes, I remember your

suggestion, and there may be something in it. After we have seen Tressinger, we might call on this Mr. Dallas in a friendly way, and see what position he takes up in reference to our friend."

"But Dallas is out of town."

"Out of town," repeated Tancred, thoughtfully, "I don't like that."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this, that if Dallas is, as you suspect, the man behind this Ilma Celinski, he would have stayed in town to direct operations. His going away at such a critical time, argues that he has not much interest in the case."

"I'll never believe that, never!" I said, emphatically, "he loved the dead woman too much, not to be deeply interested in the tragedy of her fate."

"Well," said Tancred, philosophically, as the cab stopped at the prison door, "we will discuss the matter with Tressinger, and after hearing his opinion, may find ourselves in a better position regarding how to proceed."

Gilbert was much relieved to see us, as judging from his haggard face, the poor lad had been suffering terribly since his arrest. The death of Mazzucata had been a terrible blow, but as misfortunes never come singly, hardly had he realized that

the woman he loved was dead, when to add to his misery he was arrested on the charge of being her assassin. While yet suffering from the effects of this second blow, a third had fallen on him in the shape of Ilma Celinski's evidence, which took him completely by surprise. Up to the time of Mazzucata's death he was unaware he possessed enemies, but after these three blows which had fallen in regular succession, he could not but see that he had some powerful and unseen enemies who were determined to destroy him. They had deprived him of his beloved, they had deprived him of his liberty, and now it seemed as though they were determined to crown their iniquity by depriving him of his life.

Every since his arrest, Gilbert had been vainly racking his brains in the attempt to find out the meaning of these terrible misfortunes which were crushing him to the earth. He was quite sure he had never injured any person, yet these unknown persons whose machinations had hitherto been successful, evidently harbored some grudge against him. Convinced of his innocence, he could not believe that his life was in peril, yet, after the damning evidence of Ilma Celinski, he saw plainly that he was in a dangerous position. Innocent men have

suffered for less, and at the present juncture of affairs, it seemed as though nothing could save him from the gallows.

Thus environed on all sides by doubts, difficulties and dangers, he greatly felt the want of some one with whom to discuss the matter, and was therefore much relieved in his mind when we came to help him in his hour of need. Indeed, he was so overcome that he could not utter a word, but warmly clasped our hands, while we, in order to give him time to recover himself, took our seats silently in his cell and waited for him to speak.

“I am very glad to see you, major,” he murmured, at length, “and you also, Mr. Tancred. I have been thinking——”

“Precisely, and it is your thoughts we wish to know,” interrupted Tancred, cheerfully. “You have, I presume, some suspicions as to the person or persons to whom you owe your present position?”

Tressinger made a gesture of despair.

“I have no suspicions,” he cried, bitterly. “I do not know what it all means. I am completely in the dark.”

“So are we all,” I observed, slowly; “still, both Tancred and myself have certain ideas.”

“Pardon ;” said Tancred, lifting his hand, “do not say anything at present, Major Granby. I wish to ask Sir Gilbert some questions if he will answer them.” He accompanied this speech with such a significant glance, that Gilbert was taken by surprise.

“Of course I will answer them,” he said, in an astonished tone ; “I have no reason to keep back anything.”

“Humph !” said Tancred, apparently only half convinced. “Well, we shall see. Now, tell me, Sir Gilbert, what is your opinion of Mademoiselle Celinski’s evidence ?”

“My opinion is that it is a pack of lies,” retorted Tressinger, with an angry frown. “I don’t understand the reason of such falsehoods.”

“Then her evidence is not true ?”

“Not one word of it.”

“Good. I thought as much, and would now like to hear your version of the story.”

“That is simple enough. Mazzucata certainly met Dallas in Italy, and he wished to marry her, but she point-blank refused to have anything to do with him. There was no question of the matter remaining in abeyance until he returned from the East. As to my having quarrelled with her, that

is distinctly false—we never had a single disagreement.”

“And yet you were forbidden the house—or rather the hotel.”

“That also is false, and I can explain it all. I, as you know, came to England with Mazzucata, and two days after we arrived she received the token of the Black Carnation. It came from Paris.”

“From Paris?” we both exclaimed, in astonishment.

“Yes, it had apparently been pressed between the leaves of a book and was afterwards sent to England in an envelope. That envelope had a French stamp and the Paris postmark.”

“Worse and worse,” muttered Tancred, thoughtfully, “the foreign element is coming in now. We may chance to find the murderer in England, but if we have to search the Continent, I’m afraid it will be difficult.”

“But supposing the person who sent the Black Carnation is in England,” I suggested, pointedly.

“You are thinking of Dallas?”

“Yes, he was in Paris for some time before he came to England, and only returned on the night of the tragedy.”

“What has Dallas got to do with this?” asked Gilbert, curiously.

“I will tell you later on,” replied Tancred, quickly, before I could speak; “meanwhile, please continue your story.”

“There is not much to tell. When Mazzucata received the flower, she was in a terrible state of mind, and asked me to go to Paris in order to find out, if possible, who posted the letter.”

“An impossibility.”

“So I found. However, I did my best, and failed. I only got back to town in time for Mazzucata’s *début*, so that is the reason I was not at the Hotel Europa for a few days. Ilma says I was forbidden to call—I say, I was in Paris, and can prove it by the evidence of my valet.”

“Good,” said Tancred, in a satisfied tone, “that disposes of a certain portion of the evidence. And as to your putting the Black Carnation in the bouquet?”

“That also is false. I went up to Mazzucata’s rooms and found Ilma there, but when she told me her mistress had gone to the theatre, I left at once. While I was there I never saw the Black Carnation.”

“Did you lay down the bouquet while you were there?”

“For a few moments, yes. There was some coffee in the room, and I drank a cup.”

“Was Ilma in the room when you laid down the bouquet and drank the coffee?”

“Yes, why do you ask?”

“Because she might have changed the bouquet when your back was turned. You brought to the hotel an innocent bunch of flowers with a black rose—you left it with an infernal machine concealed in a bouquet, with a Black Carnation.”

“Impossible!”

“I think so too,” I said, gravely, “Gilbert would have noticed the substitution of a Black Carnation for a black rose.”

“By no means. He was preoccupied, and would pay but little attention to the flower.”

“That is true,” said Gilbert, quickly, “I never even glanced at the flowers—at least not closely.”

“Well, then—black rose—Black Carnation—it was easy to make a mistake. Yes, believe me, Sir Gilbert, my supposition is correct—those flowers were changed by Ilma Celinski, when your back was turned.”

“But why should Ilma have done such a thing.

Why should she want to kill a kind mistress and ruin me?"

"That's what we have to find out," said Tancred, cheerfully, "my own impression is, that she was the tool of another person."

"Dallas?"

"Perhaps, we are not certain of that."

"I don't follow you at all," cried Gilbert, in perplexity, "why should Dallas wish to kill Mazzucata?"

"Because she loved you and he loved her."

"I myself heard him say he would kill her if she married anyone but him," I explained at this moment.

"Then that supplies the motive. Dallas came back from the East more in love than ever, and while in Paris, heard that Tressinger was to be married to Mazzucata. Knowing her superstition, he sent the Black Carnation in order to work on her fears. As that did no good he determined to kill her, and, therefore, determined to do so by means of that devilish bouquet, which Ilma substituted for your own."

"My dear Tancred," said Gilbert, in a tone of raillery, "you have built up an excellent case all out of nothing. Let us grant, for the sake of

argument, that Dallas intended to kill my poor Marietta—that he sent the Black Carnation from Paris, but then he did not arrive from Paris till the night of her *début*, so how could he have known that I intended to throw a bouquet of flowers,—how could he know that such a bouquet would consist of white flowers with a black rose in the centre—how could he know I would call on Mazzucata before the performance with such bouquet, and lastly, how could he have induced Ilma to change the flowers, and for what reason?”

“Your objections are very just—on the face of them,” replied Tancred, good-humoredly, “but I think I can answer them. In the first place, I do not believe the story of Dallas as to his only arriving in London on the night of the *début*. He was in London for many days.”

“In that case, how could he have sent the Black Carnation from Paris?”

“Well, if you had time to go to Paris before Mazzucata’s *début* in search of the sender, he certainly had time to come to London and find out all about your movements.”

“Well, granted that he did come to London as you suggest; what about the rest of my objections?”

“On the flowers? Well, you doubtless sent Mazzucata flowers every day?”

“Yes. Women are fond of such attentions.”

“Exactly, and Dallas knew that women are fond of such attentions. You, doubtless, always ordered these flowers at the same florists?”

“Phillis & Co., Jermyn Street. Yes.”

“Dallas would not have much difficulty in finding that out either. Well, on the day of the *début* he discovered that a bouquet of white flowers with a dark centre was being prepared by your order for Mazzucata. He, therefore, ordered a duplicate.”

“But for what reason?”

“Because he wanted to kill two birds with one stone—in plain English, he wished to murder Mazzucata and then hang you for the murder.”

“Well, go on.”

“When he got his bouquet, he took it home and inserted the dynamite cartridge, and also removing the black rose, placed therein a Black Carnation.”

“So far so good; but all supposition.”

“Never mind; it's feasible at all events. Now, the next thing he had to do was to deliver this bouquet to Mazzucata, and for that purpose went to her hotel. He did not mean to kill her at the

theatre, but at her rooms. When he arrived there, he found Mazzucata had left for the theatre, and only Ilma was present. While talking to her they heard your voice, and Dallas concealed himself."

"Do you mean to say Dallas was in the room at the same time as myself," cried Gilbert disbelievingly.

"I say that he was in the next room. He saw you lay down the bouquet and turn your back on it, in order to drink the coffee. Then the idea occurred to him of changing the bouquets, a little task which Ilma performed at his bidding; so at the theatre you threw the bouquet of Dallas and he threw yours."

"But why should Ilma do this?"

"Why do women do many things?" asked Tancred, ironically; "because she loved him."

"Loved Dallas! oh, nonsense."

"I don't see why you should say that. Dallas is not a bad-looking fellow, and doubtless promised to marry Ilma if she did as he wished."

"All this is supposition; but supposing it to be true, why should Ilma come and warn me to fly?"

"Because she felt compunction at the idea of condemning an innocent man to the gallows. As you refused to take her hint, however, she let

you go on blindly to your fate. All those lies in the witness-box were not hers, but invented by Dallas.”

“I cannot—I will not believe it,” cried Gilbert, walking excitedly up and down.

“Well, we will try and prove it to you,” said Tancred, rising to his feet. “Major, can you find out anything about the movements of your friend, Mr. Dallas?”

“Don’t call him my friend,” said I, angrily, “as to finding out about Dallas, yes. My man Pointer knows his valet, so I have no doubt, if I tell Pointer what I wish to know, he will find out all about it.”

“Good; do that and I am sure you will find that I am right.”

“There is one thing you have overlooked,” said Gilbert, after a pause, “where did Dallas obtain the Black Carnation?”

“Ah! that is the question. However, I have no doubt we will find that out also.”

“In what way?”

“By means of the flower itself. If it had been a red carnation, or a yellow one, I would have been in despair, but a Black Carnation—to use an Irishism—is a *rara avis*. The gardener who has

been lucky enough to have discovered how to grow a black flower is a celebrated person in horticultural circles, so all I have to do is to make inquiries—say at the shop of Phillis & Co., in order to find out where this man lives. Then I will go to him and ask to see his famous plant—find out if he has sold any buds, or slips for setting—if so, discover to whom he sold them, and then, once the purchaser is discovered, the murderer won't be far off."

"There is another thing you must find out," said Gilbert, as Tancred was about to go, "what connection Mazzucata has with the Black Carnation."

"Oh, now you open up another romance," replied Tancred, in a perplexed tone; "the complications are bad enough now, so let us solve the problems we have in hand before we look for new ones. Good-bye, Sir Gilbert, when I see you again I shall know all about the Black Carnation."

MAJOR GRANBY'S THEORY.

NUMBER THREE.

I do not at all agree with Tancred's idea regarding Dallas, for I feel sure he is innocent, and, besides, has not enough brains to conceive and

execute such a difficult task. My belief is, that Ilma Celinski killed her mistress out of jealousy, and for the following reasons:—

She is in love with Dallas, who adored her mistress; and to destroy her rival invented that devilish bouquet.

She managed to get Gilbert to innocently throw it, in order to avert suspicion from herself.

She gives false evidence in the box in order to hang Gilbert, so as to be safe.

From a feeling of compunction she warned Gilbert to fly, knowing such flight would be a confession of guilt, and thus, without committing a further crime she would ward off suspicion.

CHAPTER VII.

A SURPRISING DISCOVERY.

HAVING thus laid our plans, Tancred and myself proceeded to carry them out; and in order both to lighten the labor and economize time, we divided the business into two portions. Tancred was to make inquiries at the shop of Phillis & Co. regarding the existence of a Black Carnation; and I, through the agency of my man, Pointer, was to discover the movements of Dallas from the time he arrived in Paris. Having thus arranged matters we parted to execute our several tasks; and I returned to my rooms to interview Pointer, while Tancred went off to Phillis & Co., ostensibly to purchase a buttonhole, but in reality to find out about that confounded flower. We were to meet next day at the Old Friends' Club, to report on our movements, and decide upon what was to be done.

I think I have mentioned Pointer before, but you only know his name, not his admirable qualities which make him the prince of valets. You

have doubtless read *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, by M. Dumas, which contains the admirable character of the lackey Planchet. If so, there is no need for me to describe Pointer; he is a replica of Planchet, faithful, shrewd, and blindly devoted to my interest. Nowadays, such a servant is a jewel of price, for what with the revolutionary ideas of the lower orders, and the all-men-are-equal theory, it is almost impossible to find a decent valet. I, therefore, valued Pointer very much, and as he has been with me for many years, he is completely in my confidence, being, I may say, a humble friend and adviser, though he has too much good sense to venture on any familiarity; if he did, egad, we should soon part, for I am a staunch supporter of class divisions.

Such remarks, however, are scarcely to the point, save in showing the reason why I trusted Pointer so fully; but, being an old man, I am naturally somewhat garrulous, and therefore a trifle egotistical, for I have noticed garrulous men generally stick to discussing themselves. However, I will not digress further, but merely remark that Pointer was an excellent servant, and well fitted to perform the mission with which I now entrusted him.

“By the way, Pointer,” I said, after having led

delicately up to the subject, "do you know the valet of Mr. Dallas?"

"Very well, sir."

One admirable quality about Pointer is, that he answers exactly what he has been asked, and makes no comments thereon.

"What is his name, Pointer?"

"Dabsworth, sir."

"He is in town, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"And his master?"

"Has left town, sir. No address given."

"Does Dabsworth expect him back shortly?"

"Can't say, sir."

"You can keep a secret, Pointer?"

"I can, sir."

"Good. I will trust you. Mr. Dallas is mixed up in this opera house tragedy."

"Is he indeed, sir?"

Another excellent qualification possessed by Pointer is, that he is never surprised at anything, but accepts the most startling statements in a calm and unemotional manner. Such a trait cannot be too highly valued in a servant.

"You know Sir Gilbert Tressinger has been arrested, Pointer."

“So the papers say, sir.”

“I am, as you know, a friend of Sir Gilbert’s, and I wish to assist him to prove his innocence, for of course he is perfectly innocent, Pointer.”

“Of course, sir.”

“I have reason to believe that Mr. Dallas knows more about this affair than he chooses to say. Not that he is guilty in any criminal sense, Pointer. I make no accusation against him—you understand?”

“I do, sir.”

“But, as I said before, he is connected in some way with the death of Madame Mazzucata. Now, Mr. Dallas told me that he arrived from Paris on the sixteenth of May, which was the date of the tragedy. I have reason to believe he was in London before that date, and has some strong cause to conceal his movements. What I wish you to do is, to find out from Dabsworth when his master returned to town.”

“I will do so, major.”

“And, Pointer; there was a letter posted to Madame Mazzucata from Paris, which, I fancy, came from Mr. Dallas. You might sound his man on that point also.”

“Yes, sir.”

“That is all, I think, Pointer.”

“Very good, sir. I will make my report to-night. Have I your permission, sir, to go out this afternoon to make inquiries?”

“Yes, Pointer.”

“Very good, sir, I will find out all you desire to know. Anything else, sir?”

“Not at present. Oh, by the way, give me that book.”

Pointer obeyed, and handed me a French novel in which I was just then much interested, after which he retired quietly and left me to my own reflections.

This confounded detective fever certainly disorganized my life very much. Formerly, my mind being completely at rest, I was the slave of habit, and with me, one day was exactly the same as another. I arose about ten o'clock, and after a light breakfast read the papers, then I dressed myself carefully and went for a ride in the park, afterwards, I had luncheon at my club, called on my friends, walked in the park, and amused myself according to my fancy until dinner-time. When that occurred I dressed again and took my meal at the club, after which there was either the theatre, a visit, or a game of whist, and bed before mid-

night. It was a very pleasant life and regular, but this detective fever put an end to all that by exciting my mind. Morn, noon and night, I was thinking about the case, and the idea of the Black Carnation was continually with me. I rode in the park—Mazzucata, I paid a visit—Mazzucata, I ate my dinner, I played whist, I retired to bed, Mazzucata—heavens, this woman dominated my entire life, and until I discovered and punished her assassin, I saw no way of escaping from her influence. I was the slave of an idea, a fancy, and the more resolutely did I strive to banish it from my thoughts, the more resolutely did it remain there, and the case, though interesting, was exhausting. Judging from my own sufferings, I should say that police officers died young, for such wear and tear of the imagination must inevitably end in wearing out the brain long before its due time in the course of Nature.

Detective fever had made me do many things which I considered unfit for a gentleman—it made me ask questions about my friends' private affairs—it made me suspect my social equals—it made me consult with my social inferiors, to wit, Pointer, yet so keen was I on the result, that I confess, with-

out blushing, that I did not care two straws about the means, provided the end was attained.

How I got through that afternoon I did not know. I could not read; I could not walk. I went to the club, and tried to converse with my friends, but failed dismally; so, in despair, I took a quick turn in the park by myself, and returned to my rooms at five o'clock in order to dress for dinner—which was a mere farce, seeing I had lost my appetite—and hear what Pointer had to say.

He was waiting for me, as calm and composed as ever; so, though I was burning to know the result of his inquiries, I emulated his stoical behavior, and saw him perform his various duties in connection with my evening toilet, without evincing any undue impatience.

“Well, Pointer,” I said, at length, when I was nearly ready, “did you have any success?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What, you found out all I desire to know?”

“I found out everything, sir.”

“Capital. Tell me all about it.”

Pointer, who has been in the army, held himself upright in a rigid fashion, and delivered his report in as few words as possible.

“According to your directions, sir, I called on

Dabsworth, and asked him to come with me to a public-house which is kept by an old friend of mine who was a butler. Dabsworth, sir, came at once, as, his master being out of town, he had plenty of time on his hands. So we went to my friend's house, and had a chat over a bottle of claret."

"The wine of gentlemen," I muttered, grimly, "and valets drink it. The world is going to the devil."

"While thus engaged, sir, I led up to the question of travelling, and asked Dabsworth how he liked the East, which he didn't, sir. Then, sir, he told me a queer tale about himself and his master in Paris."

"Yes, yes ; go on, Pointer."

"He promised not to tell a soul, sir ; but, Lord bless you, sir, 'When the wine's in, the wit's out,' and Dabsworth's got a poor head for the bottle. Even claret goes to his head, sir ; and it did to-day."

I felt a certain disgust for myself at countenancing such conduct as getting a man's secrets out of him through drink ; but, when I thought of the serious position in which my poor friend was placed, and of the scoundrelly fashion in which Dallas was acting, all my scruples vanished, and I commanded Pointer to proceed.

“Mr. Dallas, sir,” said Pointer, promptly, “arrived in Paris about the seventh of May, and came on to London on the eighth.”

“Oh!” I cried, startled at finding Tancred’s suspicions confirmed, “then he was in London at least a week before the day on which he said he arrived.”

“I suppose so, sir. But he didn’t tell Dabsworth he was going to England. No, sir. Dabsworth only found that out by the letter.”

“What letter?”

“The letter, sir, posted from Paris to Madame Mazzucata.”

“Did Dabsworth post it there?”

“Yes, sir, by the instructions of Mr. Dallas, who was then in London.”

“The deuce!” I murmured, rather at a loss to understand this complicated recital. “Be more explicit, Pointer.”

“Sir, it is difficult to tell all plainly; but, as far as I could understand Dabsworth, who told me the story in scraps, it is this way: On the eighth, Mr. Dallas told his valet that he was going to see some friends at Amiens.”

“Good. Amiens is a station on the line running from Paris to Boulogne and Calais.”

“Dabsworth, according to instructions, was to remain in Paris with the luggage of Mr. Dallas, till he was told to come on to Amiens.”

“I understand.”

“He remained in Paris, sir,” resumed Pointer, deliberately, “for some days; and on the eleventh, or thereabouts, received a letter from Mr. Dallas, enclosing another letter addressed to Madame Mazucata, which he was told to post—an order which he obeyed.”

“And the outside envelope, addressed to Dabsworth, bore an English stamp and postmark?”

“Yes, sir.”

“While all the time Dabsworth thought his master was at Amiens.”

“That is the strange part of it, sir. On the fifteenth, Dabsworth received a letter from Mr. Dallas, with a French stamp and the Amiens postmark, telling him Mr. Dallas would precede him to England, and that he was to come on to London on the sixteenth with the luggage.”

“Judging, then, by the first letter, Mr. Dallas was in England; and by the second, he remained at Amiens.”

“Yes, sir! I cannot understand it.”

“Queer,” I muttered, rather perplexed; “I ex-

pect the solution is this, Pointer: Mr. Dallas went straight to England on the eighth and posted that letter, then he returned to Amiens and wrote the other. What time did Mr. Dallas arrive in London?"

"On the morning of the sixteenth. He travelled by the night mail, sir."

"And Dabsworth?"

"Arrived in the evening about seven o'clock on the sixteenth of May."

"Egad," I said to myself in surprise, "Tancred is right after all, and Dallas was in London all the time. Our friend has a talent for intrigue."

"Anything else, sir?"

"No, thank you, Pointer. That is all I wish to know, and I congratulate you on your talent for finding out secrets. Keep this information to yourself."

"Yes, sir."

"And now I will go down to the club."

I was destined, however, not to reach the club for at least some time, as, just as I was leaving my sitting-room, a man rapidly mounted the stairs.

"My dear major, I am fortunate in thus catching you."

"Tancred,"

“The same. Come to your sitting-room, major. I have found out all I wish to know, and could not wait till to-morrow. And you——”

“Have discovered all the movements of Dallas.”

“Excellent. We will now put two and two together.”

“Will you have a sherry and bitters !”

“Thank you, yes. I can only spare a few minutes, as I have to catch a train for Surbiton, but I can learn and tell everything in that time. Come, major, you begin.”

Pointer placed the wine on the table, poured it out, and on a sign from me, retired, after which I began, and told Tancred the story of the letters, to which he listened quietly without evincing the slightest surprise.

“I was right, you see, major,” he said, sipping his sherry.

“You were, sir, you were,” I answered, generously, for when I am in fault, I always admit myself to be so. “Dallas was in London a few days.”

“At least a week.”

“But he returned to Amiens to post that second letter.”

“Not he,” answered Tancred, emphatically, “he wrote and addressed that letter before he left Paris, and left it at Amiens with instructions to be posted on the fifteenth.”

“You think so?”

“I am sure of it. Dallas, as I surmised, came to London to convince himself of the truth regarding Mazzucata. She left Paris on the sixth, and he arrived on the seventh, consequently he followed her to London on the eighth; but in order to establish an *alibi* should it be necessary, he invented that Amiens business, which I admit is very clever.”

“You were also right about that Black Carnation.”

“Yes, he sent that to Paris to be posted, but like a fool, forgot that he was betraying himself to his valet by the English postmark.”

“It is strange that such a clever man should make such an error.”

“It is, indeed, but the cleverest people always overreach themselves. Dallas came to England, found out that Mazzucata was about to marry Gilbert, and set himself to work to frighten her with the Black Carnation.”

“Which he obtained where?”

Tancred took a slip of paper from his pocket and read out an address—

Simon Maxwell,

Florist,

Lippinton.

“Where is Lippinton, Tancred?”

“It’s a little village near Harrow, where this man keeps a nursery garden.”

“And grows Black Carnations?”

“Yes; he is the inventor of the flower.”

“Where did you find out this?”

“From Phillis & Co. I saw the head of the firm, who, by the way, is a great friend of mine.”

“What’s his name?”

“It isn’t a ‘he,’ it’s a ‘she,’” replied Tancred, calmly; “the Hon. Mrs. Lanster.”

“My dear Tancred, you don’t mean to say——”

“But I do mean to say. Most women take to the millinery business, so Mrs. Lanster, to be novel and make money, has started a florist’s under the name of Phillis & Co.”

“Does she do well?”

“Rather; makes no end of money. You have, doubtless, observed how regularly Lanster pays his gambling debts now.”

“ Yes, but I didn't know——”

“ Of course you didn't, but that's not the question. Mrs. Lanster told me that the Black Carnation is in existence, and is grown by this man at Lippinton.”

“ Did she think Mazzucata's case had anything to do with this Simon Maxwell ?”

“ She thought it queer, certainly, but as she is a woman who can hold her tongue, she kept her own counsel. Few people know about the existence of this flower, as Maxwell guards the plant jealously.”

“ Then how did Dallas get a bud to send to Mazzucata ?”

“ That is the question. We must find out.”

“ By calling on Maxwell, I suppose.”

“ Precisely. Now then, Major Granby, here is a chance for you to do the Vidocq business. Will you go down to Lippinton and see this man ?”

“ Certainly. I will go down to-morrow; but what excuse can I make ?”

“ Oh, tell him you wish to look at his green-houses and buy plants; but above all do not ask to see the Black Carnation.”

“ Why not ?”

“ My dear major, neither you nor I know

anything about this man, and for all I know he also may be mixed up in the affair."

"What, a market gardener? Absurd."

"Yes, it sounds ridiculous, I admit; but just look at the facts of the case. Here is a man who has invented a Black Carnation, and has not let even a bud out of his hands—at least so says Mrs. Lanster. Well, Dallas, as we have found out from his valet, sent a letter from Paris to Madame Mazucata; that letter, as Gilbert proved, contained a Black Carnation. Now, in order to get that flower, Dallas must have gone to Maxwell, therefore Maxwell must know something about this case."

"But Dallas might have stolen the flower."

"True, but that is what you have to find out, and it is as well to be on our guard. Now, if Maxwell does chance to know anything about this case, which, going by the above reasoning is not improbable, if you ask straight out to see that Black Carnation plant, he will immediately become suspicious, and say nothing. Whereas, by a little dexterous diplomacy you can see the plant and find out all about it."

"It is a difficult thing to do."

"Yes, but I am sure you can do it. If I send a

detective, Maxwell may find out my emissary's business and refuse to show him the plant, but you—you are a gentleman wishing to buy plants, and, therefore, Maxwell will be off his guard."

"But why should Maxwell be on his guard?"

"Because I feel sure he is mixed up in the matter."

"And why?"

"Why," echoed Tancred, with a significant smile, "why, my dear major, just think over all the evidence we have collected in connection with this case. Mazzucata herself said she had seen a Black Carnation long before Dallas sent her one—in fact he sent her that particular flower, so to speak, on her own suggestion."

"Well?"

"Well," reiterated Tancred, impatiently, "don't you see that Mazzucata must have known Maxwell in order to have seen a Black Carnation?"

"That's true enough."

"Of course it is. I tell you what, major, I should not be surprised to find out that Dallas had nothing to do with the death at all."

"What, did he not send that Black Carnation from Paris?"

“Yes.”

“And did he not buy a bouquet similar to that of Gilbert’s on the sixteenth?”

“He did. I found that out from Phillis & Co. On the morning of the sixteenth Dallas went to Phillis & Co. and asked if a bouquet was being made up for Mazzucata. They told him yes, and described the bouquet.”

“Which they had no business to do.”

“Of course they hadn’t, but what can you expect from a parcel of chattering girls such as Mrs. Lanster employs. Well, Dallas had a bouquet made up—all white flowers.”

“With a black rose in the centre.”

“No, all white. He put in the centre-piece himself; not a black rose but a Black Carnation.”

“And changed the bouquets at the Hotel Europa.”

“I think so; but at all events, he ordered the bouquet as I told you.”

“And with all this you think Dallas is innocent,” I asked, ironically.

“I can’t say that for certain. We have an admirable case against him, still——”

“Still what?”

“I wish to find out why Mazzucata knew that her death would be preceded by the appearance of a Black Carnation.”

“And you think Maxwell knows?”

“My dear major, as Maxwell is the only man in possession of such an unique flower, it stands to reason that he must know.”

“Well, I will try and find out all about that tomorrow,” I said, finishing my sherry.

“Be very careful, major,” said Tancred, rising to his feet and putting on his hat—“by the way, major, I am a bit of a prophet, and I prophecy you will see someone down at Lippinton, or hear that someone has been down there whom you little expect either to see or hear of.”

“And this someone?”

“Guess.”

“Dallas?”

“No.”

“Ilma Celinski?”

“No.”

“Then I can't think who it can be.”

“What do you say to Signor Ivan?”

“The tenor! But why?”

“He handed Mazzucata the fatal bouquet. It was rather curious that such a bouquet should

have been picked up by Signor Ivan from among so many bunches of flowers.”

“Then you think——”

“I don’t think anything for certain. However, wait till I hear your report and I will give my opinion.”

“Regarding Signor Ivan?”

“Yes, and others. Look at the people mixed up in this affair, major—a list which is growing longer every day. Tressinger, Dallas, Ilma Celinski, Maxwell, and Ivan. Five of them.”

“Which of the five do you think guilty?”

“I don’t know. There may be a sixth for all I know.”

“And that sixth?”

“Will doubtless be a woman.”

CHAPTER VIII.

A DIPLOMATIC ERRAND.

I WAS so much excited by my interview with Tancred that I had but little sleep that night. Truly, the mystery was assuming gigantic proportions, for as soon as one problem was solved, another more difficult than the last presented itself. At first it had been hard to find anyone who had a motive in removing Madame Mazzucata, but now it seemed as though there were five people mixed up in the affair. Tressinger was innocent I knew, in spite of appearances being so much against him, and as to Dallas, notwithstanding that Tancred had constructed such a subtle case, it appeared as though, owing to the discovery of Maxwell, he also were guiltless. Ilma Celinski I suspected myself, and Tancred seemed to regard Signor Ivan as a possible accomplice in the tragedy. Five people, against whom suspicion could be

directed, and, in the words of the barrister, a possible sixth.

Certainly, it was no easy task from among this number to find the guilty person, but the solution of the whole mystery was doubtless to be found at Lippinton ; so for that village I left next morning by the mid-day train.

In this difficult matter I was somewhat puzzled how to proceed, as, according to Tancred, the slightest hint of my true errand might arouse the suspicions of Simon Maxwell and spoil everything. But then, I did not agree with the lawyer in his surmise about Maxwell being involved in the affair, as it was absolutely ridiculous to suppose that an obscure market gardener could be connected in any way with a world-famous prima-donna. True, Maxwell possessed the celebrated Black Carnation plant, but that did not argue that he himself sent a bud to Mazzucata, as he would have no reason for such a proceeding, and my theory was, that someone had stolen the flower for the purpose to which it was applied. Therefore, arguing in this way, Maxwell had nothing to do with the tragedy, and would not be in the least suspicious of my unexpected visit. Nevertheless, I determined to be careful and find out all I could about the unique plant,

without mentioning either the Black Carnation or Mazzucata.

In due time, I arrived at Lippinton, which is a pretty rustic village, situate not far from Harrow, and had no difficulty in finding Maxwell, who seemed to be very well known in the neighborhood. Flower gardening is a graceful occupation, and should suggest graceful ideas, but apparently, this was not the case with Mr. Maxwell, as the exterior of his house had a most forbidding appearance. While of no great size, it was severely plain ; and was built of white stone, with a black painted door, which seemed like the entrance to an undertaker's establishment. No garden in front, no flower boxes in the windows ; it faced the dusty road in aggressive ugliness, flanked by two pretty little houses on either side, which accentuated the black appearance of their starved-looking neighbor.

“ I suppose the garden is at the back,” I murmured to myself, as I rang the bell. “ It is to be hoped that it is more inviting than the front view. Judging by the house, Simon Maxwell, Florist, must be a singularly unpleasant person.”

In answer to my summons, a neatly attired maid-servant appeared, who forthwith conducted me through a passage to a courtyard at the back of

the house. Roofed with glass, it resembled a hot-house in temperature, and was filled with a profusion of tropical plants which bloomed radiantly in the moist air. The wall at the end of the courtyard was also glass half-way up, that is, from the centre to the roof, and through this transparent screen I could see the gardens stretching far into the distance. The walks, laid out at right angles to one another, gave this space a certain resemblance to a chess board; and here and there were long rows of greenhouses, their glass roofs glittering in the sun. At these, however, I cast but a casual glance, being fully occupied in admiring the wonderful beauty of the flowers growing under the glass dome of the courtyard. This latter was covered with a kind of green glaze, which produced a certain twilight effect, and on all sides, I saw masses of rainbow tints, while the odor of the flowers in the warm air was almost insupportable.

Unfortunately, I know nothing about flowers, my knowledge being confined to a few common specimens, such as a daisy, a marigold a sunflower, therefore, I am unable to describe the plants in any correct fashion. However, remembering the object of my visit, I sought everywhere in vain for the Black Carnation, but that unique flower was

conspicuous by its absence. It was the veiled odalisque of this botanical seraglio, and its jealous, master doubtless, kept it under lock and key.

At this moment of my reflections, a man entered the greenhouse from the nursery garden, and it did not take me long to come to the conclusion that this was Simon Maxwell. I am no stickler for beauty in a man, provided his appearance is passable, but I must say, that Maxwell was the most perfect type of a Caliban, which it has ever been my fortune to see. Short in stature, crooked in figure, with a sullen heavy face and ungainly hands and feet, he was more like a gorilla than a man; nor did his voice, language or demeanor prepossess me at all in his favor.

“Major Granby,” he said, in a harsh tone, looking at my card which he held in his hairy paw—I cannot call it a hand. “Well, sir, and what can I do for you?”

“Mr. Maxwell, I presume?” I remarked, affably, deeming it wise to get into the good graces of this monster.

“Yes, what is it?”

“I wish to look at some flowers.”

“They are all around you, sir. Is there any particular flower you wished to see.”

Upon my word, I felt inclined to ask for the Black Carnation, but such a proceeding would have been too abrupt, so I came to the subject in a roundabout fashion, which I judged to be eminently diplomatic.

“The fact is, Mr. Maxwell, I am tired of ordinary flowers and wish to procure some unique specimens.”

“I can give you what you wish, sir,” he replied, in a civil manner, though his voice was odiously harsh, “but the prices will be large.”

“Oh, that will be no bar to our dealings, I assure you.”

When I made this last remark he smiled in a gratified manner, and taking me round the courtyard, began pointing out the beauties of the various flowers, and explaining the peculiar excellence of each. To these explanations I listened attentively enough,—at least to all appearances, for in reality I was closely examining the face of this brusque individual. I flatter myself, and not without reason, that I am something of a physiognomist, but, to tell the truth, the contradictory face of this man puzzled me greatly. He had a hard, set mouth, an obstinate chin, but his eyes were singularly beautiful, and at times gleamed with a soft

expression, though at others they glittered like steel. His well-formed head was badly placed on his shoulders, and his stumpy fingers ended in club-shaped nails, always a bad sign. While thus inspecting him in a furtive fashion, I noticed that his eyes were blue and his hair dark, an association which is peculiarly Irish. The name Maxwell was distinctly Scotch, but the man himself I took to be Irish, a fact which I determined to make sure of. My reason for doing so was a mild one, nevertheless, strong enough for me to persist in finding out his nationality.

“You have certainly a wonderful show of flowers here, Mr. Maxwell,” I said, artfully. “I have only seen one nursery garden as good as this.”

“And where may that be, sir?” he demanded, curtly, not very pleased at the insinuation.

“In Ireland.”

Maxwell shook his head.

“No, I know Ireland thoroughly, and never yet saw a show of blossoms equal to mine.”

“Perhaps you are right,” I answered, carelessly, “no Irishman was ever a gardener.”

“You think so, sir?”

“I’m convinced of it.”

“Then you don't call me a gardener, sir.”

“Oh, yes, I do, but then you are a Scotchman.”

“No, sir,” he answered, promptly, “I am Irish.”

I inwardly rejoiced at having my belief thus confirmed, but with a view to obtain more information, continued carelessly,

“But the name Maxwell is Scotch.”

“Aye, but the man Maxwell is Irish. It's this way, sir: My ancestors crossed from Scotland to the North of Ireland some hundred and fifty years ago, so I am Scotch by descent, but Irish by nationality.”

“Oh, then I am correct in assuming that you are a Londonderry man?”

“Yes, from Omagh.”

“Ah, the wearing of the green.”

“No, sir, no,” he replied, violently; “I am an Orangeman. My forebears were Presbyterians, and I am so also, and please God shall continue so till I die.”

“A fanatic,” I thought, being now confirmed in my idea. “I wonder——”

“But this is not to the point, sir,” he said, hastily cutting short my meditations; “come with me and I'll show you some very rare flowers.”

He opened the door which led into the grounds, and we passed out into the sunshine.

"You send a great many flowers into town, I suppose, Mr. Maxwell," I observed, as we strolled along the sandy path.

"A great many. Phillis and Co. are my best customers."

"So I believe. It was Phillis and Co. that recommended you to me."

"They do a great business sir, if not a pious one."

The strangeness of this observation struck me so forcibly, that I stopped short in my walk and looked at him in amazement.

"A pious one," I reiterated, wondering what was his meaning.

"Aye, they make up flowers and wreaths for the opera."

"Well, why shouldn't they? It's not a sin."

"In my eyes it is a sin," he said, sternly. "I have a hatred of all such iniquitous doings, such as singing and dancing. Never would I send flowers to the opera from this place."

"Yet, you do so."

"I do business with Phillis and Co., so when I send flowers to them, my business ceases with delivery of the same. If they choose to make up flowers for singing women, it is none of my affair."

“You don’t seem well disposed towards singers, Mr. Maxwell.”

“I am not; and I have good reason for it.”

I made no comment on this last speech, though it did a great deal to confirm the suspicions I entertained when discovering his nationality.

“I am sorry to hear you have such a bad opinion of artistes, Mr. Maxwell. There are good and bad people in all professions.”

“All those connected with the stage are bad.”

“You speak rather wildly. Have you ever known any singers?”

Maxwell looked at me keenly for a few moments, then let his chin sink on his breast, with a heavy sigh.

“Aye. One or two.”

“You shouldn’t judge the whole profession by one or two samples.”

“By the one, we know the many, Major Granby, sir,” he answered, coldly. “I detest the whole pack of them, and will do no business with stage players of any kind.”

“Well, I don’t suppose they ever wish to do business with you.”

“Don’t they,” retorted Maxwell, grimly. “Why, one was down here the other day—Signor Ivan.”

“Signor Ivan!” I echoed, in amazement, as I thought of Tancred’s suspicions. “The tenor now singing at Covent Garden?”

“I don’t know where he is singing, sir. He came down here a week or so ago to select some flowers, but I refused to give him a single one.”

“Did he steal any?”

“Steal any? I dare say he would have been quite capable of it; but, so far as I know, he did not.”

“Not even a Black Carnation?”

It was imprudent, I know, to thus betray the purpose of my visit; but I was hardly prepared for the effect which my observation had on Maxwell. His face changed to a grayish pallor, his mouth closed like a vice, and his eyes glittered ominously.

“The Black Carnation,” he repeated, slowly, with suppressed savagery. “May I ask, sir, what you know about the Black Carnation?”

“Nothing more than I have learned from the papers.”

“What have the papers to say about it?”

“Have you not read the account of Mazzucata’s murder?”

“I never read the papers,” said Maxwell, in a hard tone. “When I require reading, I open my Bible, and neither know, nor care to know, what iniquity is being practised in London.”

“Mazzucata,” I explained, keeping my eyes intently fastened on his face, “was a prima-donna at the opera, who was killed on the night of the sixteenth of May, by the explosion of a dynamite cartridge hidden in a bouquet.”

“Is that so?” replied Maxwell, indifferently. “The ways of iniquity are hard. But why do you tell me this?”

“Because in the fatal bouquet there was a Black Carnation.”

“Impossible. I alone possess that plant; and I have never yet either sold or given away a flower.”

“Nevertheless, such is the case.”

“I tell you, such cannot be the case. I have invented and grown this flower. The bud in that bouquet must have been dyed.”

“No, it was not dyed. It was a real flower, for I saw it myself.”

“Are you sure?”

“Perfectly sure.”

Maxwell stood in a state of evident perplexity for a few minutes, as if he were making up his

mind to take some step, then lifted his head with sudden decision.

“Come, and I will show you the Black Carnation.”

I followed him with the greatest alacrity, as I was extremely anxious to see this famous plant, which seemed to be at the bottom of all this mystery surrounding the death of Mazzucata. Maxwell moved slowly along towards a greenhouse smaller than the others, and talked rapidly all the time.

“I tell you, it is impossible—impossible,” he said, in an obstinate tone. “No one else possesses the secret of tinting flowers but myself. I made the discovery by accident some years ago, and can produce any flower I please—that is, as to color. Yes. I have produced green carnations, blue roses, lilies the color of violet, and vermilion pansies; but my greatest triumph has been this Black Carnation; and there is only a single plant in existence, which is kept closely locked up in this house. No one but myself holds the key, so no one could have obtained a flower. The blossom you speak of must have been dyed.”

“My good sir,” I said, firmly, “I am positive it

was not dyed. It was a real flower, as black as your hat."

"Can someone else have the secret?" he muttered, to himself. "Impossible."

"Have you told the secret of changing the colors of flowers to anyone?"

"No, I have not."

"Then perhaps a bud was stolen, when you were showing the plant to someone."

Maxwell paused at the door of the greenhouse, and looked at me in a troubled manner.

"Certainly, I showed the plant to Signor Ivan."

"You did."

"Yes; but I was present all the time. He was not left alone with the plant."

"Did you turn your back any time while you were in the greenhouse?"

"Oh, yes; I left him looking at the plant while I went to find him a red pansy."

"Then, depend upon it, he took a bud while your back was turned."

"I will examine the plant," said Maxwell, opening the door; "and if a bud has been taken, I can soon tell."

We entered into the green-house, which was, as I have said, of a smaller size than any of the

others, and I felt as though I were transported to another world, for all the flowers contained therein were colored otherwise than by the laws of nature. There were green carnations, blue roses, red pansies, violet lilies, and one extraordinary camellia of blended red, white and blue.

“ I call that the Union Camellia,” said Maxwell, as I examined this bizarre flower, “ it is the only specimen extant. Well, sir, what do you think of these flowers ? ”

“ They are wonderful, but unnatural. I prefer nature.”

“ Look at this cardinal pansy, as red as fire ; and this azure rose—is it not a delicate blue ? ”

“ Hideous. This place is a museum of monstrosities. You must have a very perverted taste, Mr. Maxwell.”

“ I ? No ; but I am fond of trying experiments. As you see, I can change the colors of plants. Now I am trying to give perfume to those flowers which have no scents. This camellia, for instance, has no odor—well, I am going to give to it the perfume of a rose, then it will be a perfect flower.”

“ You can't do that.”

“ Why not ? ”

“ Because it is against the laws of nature.”

“So is a Black Carnation. Yet, you see.”

I uttered a cry of amazement, for in front of me was a carnation plant, covered with sooty-looking flowers, which looked as though they had been dipped in ink. The effect was striking, but very unpleasant.

“Horrible,” I said, with a shudder, “horrible. I feel as though I were transported to one of those strange planets which astronomers tell us have red skies and green suns.”

“I have seen a green sunset in the tropics,” said Maxwell, coolly, “so why should there not be a green sun? As to my Black Carnation, it is worth its weight in gold.”

“There is something unlucky about the sight of such a monstrosity of nature.”

“It is not a monstrosity of nature, it is a monstrosity of man. Nature could not produce a Black Carnation, but I can, as you see.”

“Well, Mr. Maxwell, if you are the only person who possesses this curious plant, I can tell you, that one of the flowers was used in a bouquet which murdered a woman.”

“We will see,” replied Maxwell, going over to the plant. “I have not counted the buds for a long time, nor have any new flowers bloomed

lately. Last time I counted, was before I saw Signor Ivan, who called on me. Then there were twelve blossoms. Now."

He counted the flowers quickly, and gave a cry of rage.

"Eleven! eleven!" he said, stamping his foot, "one of them has disappeared."

"Signor Ivan."

"Yes, it must be that man. He stole a bud—the villain. See, here is the stalk nipped off close to the mould in the pot. Thief, that he is, I will go up to town to see him. He stole my Black Carnation."

"Yes, and placed it in a bouquet which also contained a dynamite cartridge."

"What is that to me?" raged Maxwell, furiously. "I don't care what he did with it."

"But I do. For the man who placed the Black Carnation in the bouquet, is responsible for the death of Mazzucata."

"The singing woman," said the gardener, contemptuously, "well, let her die—or is she dead? Well, I care not, but I will see this thief, and punish him for stealing my Black Carnation."

"You can't punish him more than justice will. If he killed Mazzucata, he will be hanged."

“He deserves to be.”

“For killing Mazzucata?”

“No, for stealing my Black Carnation.”

He was perfectly beside himself with fury, at the loss of his single flower, and stamped about, raging like a lion, while I was so dumfounded at the discovery I had made, that I could do nothing but stare at him in stupefied surprise. Suddenly, I heard a soft voice call out to Maxwell,

“Father.”

I turned slowly and saw a woman standing in the door of the greenhouse. At the sight of her I started forward with a cry, for it was the dead returned to life.

“Mazzucata,” I cried, in amazement, for at that moment I verily believed that the prima-donna stood before me.

The woman at the door made a step forward, and an expression of horror overspread her face.

“Mazzucata,” she repeated, in a dismayed whisper, “who said that name?”

CHAPTER IX.

DOPPLEGÄNGER.

To say I was astonished would be but a weak way of expressing the state of bewilderment into which I was thrown by the unexpected appearance of this woman. All kinds of grim stories concerning doubles, apparitions, astral bodies, *Dopplegänger*, rushed on my mind, for though I had seen Madame Mazzucata killed on Covent Garden stage, lo, to all appearances, here she was in the flesh. It was horrible, incredible, impossible, and yet for the moment, I could have sworn it was the dead woman, and none other, who had pronounced her own name. When I recovered my senses, which had been rather upset by the occurrence, I saw that it was not, as for a mad moment I had thought, Mazzucata, but a woman who resembled her in every respect.

Face, hair, figure, height, this woman was the exact image of Mazzucata, and the startling likeness was rendered still more impressive by the

strange fact that the double was dressed in a loose robe of white similar to that which the singer had worn in the third act of *La Reine d'Écosse* when she met her tragic death.

For a moment that seemed an eternity she paused on the threshold, and then came towards me with outstretched hands, not in greeting, but as though to feel her way. I looked at her feet; they moved cautiously forward as those of one not quite certain of the ground. I looked at her eyes, they were devoid of any expression. Outstretched hands, stumbling feet, expressionless eyes, I fathomed the mystery at a glance—she was blind.

“Mazzucata,” she murmured, in a low voice. “Oh, who are you that talks of Mazzucata!”

“Edith,” said Maxwell, sharply. “What are you saying? Why are you here? This gentleman is here on business. You are disturbing us.”

“Not at all, not at all,” I interrupted hastily, for I felt indignant at the tone adopted towards this poor blind woman. “Pray, Mr. Maxwell, introduce me to this lady.”

“My daughter, Major Granby,” replied the gardener, in a grudging tone, and then walked quickly to the other side of the greenhouse in order to conceal his temper.

“I beg your pardon, Major Granby,” murmured Miss Maxwell, with a faint smile, as she gradually recovered her self-command. “I am not very strong, and you mentioned a name which rather startled me.”

“Mazzucata?”

“Yes.” She laid her hand on her breast as though she felt a cruel pain in her heart. “I—I know the name.”

“And the singer?”

“No, no,” she replied, vehemently, “I do not know her. I have heard the name as that of a famous singer.”

“Whom you resemble very strongly.”

“I?” she said, confusedly. “Oh, no, you must be mistaken.”

“I assure you, Miss Maxwell, that when I saw you enter, I thought you were the twin sister of Mazzucata, or the singer herself.”

“How absurd,” said the girl, with a faint attempt at a smile. “I ought to feel flattered, Major Granby.”

“As soon as you are done talking, Edith,” cried Maxwell, sharply, “perhaps you will let me finish my business with this gentleman.”

“We can finish it together,” I said, cheerfully,

determined not to let this old ruffian crush the girl. "Let us walk round the greenhouse, Miss Maxwell, and if you will accept my arm——"

"Oh! not at all. I assure you, I know my way about the whole place. It is my little kingdom, is it not, father?"

"A very small kingdom," said Maxwell, in a kinder tone than usual, on hearing which, she sighed faintly, and turned her sightless eyes in his direction.

"Large enough for one who is blind," she observed, at length, and then proceeded to converse in a livelier tone. "Well, Major Granby, have you seen all my father's treasures? His red pansies, his blue roses——?"

"And his Black Carnations. Oh, yes, I have seen them all, Miss Maxwell."

"Black Carnations," she said, with a terrified look. "Ah! you have seen the Black Carnations."

What could there be about this flower, to have such an effect on every person to whom it was mentioned? Mazzucata, Dallas, Tressinger, all quailed when any reference was made to it, and now this girl received the name as though it were something horrible. Surely, there was some fatality connected with this flower that made it so

awesome; the signal of death to one woman, a name of ill-omen to another. I was puzzled, I was startled, I was utterly perplexed, and all on account of this confounded Black Carnation, which was certainly the most obtrusive flower with which it had ever been my fortune to meet.

“Why should I not see the Black Carnation?” I asked, in reference to her last remark.

“Oh, you see, my father does not show it to everyone,” answered Miss Maxwell, with an attempt at light-heartedness. “You are very much in favor, Major Granby.”

“I wish to purchase the plant, if I may.”

“Purchase the plant!” cried Maxwell, wrathfully. “Do you think I would sell it?”

“Well, then, let me buy a bud at least.”

“No, certainly not.”

“My father will not part with a single blossom,” said the blind woman, with a laugh; “he values the plant too highly for that.”

“I suppose you send it to flower shows?”

“No!” answered the gardener, bluntly; “it never leaves this greenhouse. Indeed, hardly anyone knows that such a flower is in existence.”

“There you are wrong,” I observed, quickly;

“all the world knows about the Black Carnation.”

“All the world,” cried Miss Maxwell, in surprise; “why, how can that be. No bud has ever been shown to the world. You never saw a Black Carnation until to-day.”

“Indeed I have.

“But——”

“Edith,” said Maxwell, anxiously, “let me take you to your room. This interview is exhausting you.”

“By no means,” she replied, quietly. “I am delighted to have someone to talk with. I have not enjoyed a conversation so much since Mr. Dallas was down here.”

At this name her father started, uttered an angry sound, and seemed about to insist upon her retiring, but on second thoughts evidently thought better of it and turned away. As for me, I was so astonished at hearing the name that I did not know very well what line of action to take.

“Do you know Mr. Dallas, Miss Maxwell?”

“Just as I know you, Major Granby. He came down to Lippinton some few weeks since.”

“And on the same errand?”

“Well, I don’t know what your errand is.”

“I came to buy flowers.”

“Well, Mr. Dallas came to see the famous Black Carnation.”

“Edith,” cried Maxwell, angrily.

His daughter took no notice of the hint, and went on talking to me.

“Like yourself, Mr. Dallas wanted to buy the Black Carnation, but of course, my father refused to sell him a single bud.”

“He did, however.”

“Oh, no, you are mistaken.”

“Of course, Major Granby is mistaken,” said Maxwell, advancing towards us with an angry look. “I did not sell Mr. Dallas a bud, nor did he obtain one. Edith, how many flowers are on the plant?”

“Twelve.”

“You are wrong, there are only eleven.”

“What, father, have you sold a bud?”

“No, but one has been stolen.”

“Stolen!” said Miss Maxwell, with an astonished expression on her mobile face, “and by whom?”

“Mr. Dallas,” I said, promptly.

“Nothing of the sort,” retorted the gardener, quickly; “by Signor Ivan.”

“Oh, that singer who was down here,” said Miss

Maxwell, carelessly ; “yes, I remember, he spoke about the Black Carnation.”

This was said in so significant a tone, that Maxwell bit his lip, as if to keep down his fast-rising anger.

“He not only spoke of the Black Carnation Edith, but he stole a bud.”

“But why should he do that?”

“Ah! that is the question, Miss Maxwell,” I said, boldly, in spite of the furious look darted at me by Maxwell. “I told you I had seen a Black Carnation in London.”

“Yes ; was it Signor Ivan who showed it to you?”

“No, I saw it in a law court—in the police court.”

Miss Maxwell grew as pale as death, and shuddered.

“What! what!” she began, faintly, when her father took her arm, and tried to lead her to the door.

“Edith! Edith! it is nothing ; do go to your room. You are ill.”

“I will not go to my room,” she cried, suddenly, stamping her foot. “I want to hear the end of this.”

“Major Granby, tell her nothing,” cried Maxwell, greatly agitated.

“Major Granby, tell me all,” she said, in a commanding tone. “Why was this Black Carnation in a law court?”

The father told me to hold my tongue—the daughter ordered me to speak; so at first I hardly knew what to do. I could not understand the strange conduct of Maxwell, unless it were that he was trying to screen either Dallas or Signor Ivan; but being determined to find out what I could, from Miss Maxwell, since her father was so silent, I spoke out boldly,

“It was evidence in a murder case.”

“A murder case!” she echoed, in a sharp tone of anguish, “Mazzucata.”

I recoiled, when she said this name, for I could not conceive how she had derived the connection of the flower with the dead woman. Her father, however, came to her assistance.

“She read the papers, you know, sir, about the case.”

“Case, what case?” cried Miss Maxwell, turning round to her father, and clutching his hand. “I have read no papers, what do you mean?”

“You are ill, Edith. Come and lie down,” he said, trying to sooth her agitation.

“I will not go from here, till I hear all that there

is to be told about this case you allude to, Major Granby."

"For God's sake go," whispered Maxwell, pointing to the door.

"He will not go," said the blind woman, imperiously, overhearing the words. "I command him to stay. Father, I must know all."

"Then hear all," he cried, furiously, flinging her hand away, "and when you know the truth you will be sorry you did not take my advice."

He rushed out of the door, leaving me alone with the blind girl, and I, astonished at this strange scene which served to hint at hidden mysteries, stood my ground with the determination to learn the truth. Miss Maxwell, with a pale, set face, waited till her father's footsteps died away in the distance, then turned towards me with a commanding gesture.

"Major Granby, let us sit on this bench. There! give me your hand. Now, though I am blind, I can tell if you are speaking the truth. Begin."

"About what, Miss Maxwell?"

"Tell me about this law case. This murder. Who is murdered?"

"Marietta Mazzucata."

She tore her hand from my grasp, and covered

her face with a cry of anguish. For a few moments she continued thus, then motioned to me to continue.

“ Shall, I go on, Miss Maxwell? ”

“ Go on. ”

“ Mazzucata, as you know, is a singer, and was engaged to be married to my friend, Sir Gilbert Tressinger. On the sixth of May, Mazzucata arrived in London. On the twelfth she received the token of a Black Carnation, warning her that she was to die. On the sixteenth she was killed on the stage of Covent Garden Opera House by means of a dynamite cartridge concealed in a bouquet of white flowers with a Black Carnation in the centre. ”

Miss Maxwell sat as though turned into stone, then suddenly snatching her hands away from her face, broke into a hysterical laugh.

“ Oh! it is horrible, horrible. ”

“ It is horrible, ” I asserted, gravely, “ both for Mazzucata and Gilbert. ”

“ What, the lover? Is he dead also! ”

“ No, but he is at present in prison on suspicion of causing the death of Mazzucata. ”

She arose to her feet with a cry of horror.

“ An innocent man, an innocent man! ”

“ I know he is innocent, but how do you know? ”

“I cannot tell, I cannot tell. Oh ! great heavens, how terrible.”

Her agitation was truly pitiable, and many a man would have called for assistance, but I am too well used to women to be unprepared for such hysterical exhibitions, and promptly produced a bottle of smelling salts, which I always carry in case of emergencies. Thrusting this into her hands I gave her time to recover herself, which, with the assistance of the salts, she did speedily.

“Major Granby,” she said, at length, in a voice very much exhausted by emotion, “I am glad you told me all as you have done. I was completely ignorant of this matter, and am surprised that my father did not tell me about it.”

“He perhaps wished to spare you pain.”

Miss Maxwell’s lip curled.

“I don’t think so,” she answered quietly. “Oh ! never fear, major, I understand my father too well. He has no love for me ; it is his flowers he cares for, and particularly for that Black Carnation.”

“Which, by the way, seems to be very much mixed up in this case.”

“Yes, I cannot understand it.”

“Do you think, Signor Ivan took the bud your father speaks of as being lost ?”

"I do not know."

"Do you think Mr. Dallas took it?"

"I do not know."

"Then if neither of them stole it, who did?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"Because, Miss Maxwell," I replied, solemnly, "the person who took that bud killed Mazzucata."

"Impossible!"

"I tell you it is so. Now the person who stole that flower must have been down here—in this house. Who else was down here besides Signor Ivan and Mr. Dallas?"

"No one that I know of."

"Was there a woman?"

"I am certain there was not. I should have known. Why do you ask?"

"Because I suspect Mazzucata was murdered by her maid, Ilma Celinski."

Miss Maxwell rolled her handkerchief up into a hard knot.

"Why should the maid kill the mistress?" she asked in a faltering tone.

"I don't know! I merely suspect she did."

The blind girl said nothing.

"Miss Maxwell," I cried, in a pleading tone, "my friend is in prison on a charge of murder.

My friend is innocent of this charge and you know it."

"I?"

"Yes, you know more about this affair than you choose to tell."

"How can that be?" she replied, composedly, "a poor blind girl, who sees nothing—who knows nothing. You are talking at random, Major Granby."

"I am not talking at random, Miss Maxwell; I am convinced you can tell me something if you choose. You are the double of Mazzucata—when you hear her name you are much agitated—when you hear of her death you are thunderstruck. You say Mr. Dallas and Signor Ivan have been here; well, those two gentlemen were connected with the murdered woman. The Black Carnation which you assert has never been out of this greenhouse is involved in the case—it is the key to the whole mystery. The key of the mystery is here, and in this greenhouse is to be solved the problem as to who killed Mazzucata, and you know it."

During my speech she had risen to her feet, and was standing pale and trembling before me. She was ill, she was blind, she was a woman, and I felt like a brute in thus speaking to her, but Gilbert's

life was at stake, and I felt that she could save it if she chose to speak. For some time she kept silent but at length she spoke.

“Major Granby, I do not know who killed Mazzucata. I cannot tell how the Black Carnation was stolen.”

“You deny everything?”

“I have nothing to deny.”

“Why are you so like Mazzucata in appearance?”

She glided towards the door like a ghost, as if she would escape without replying to my question, but I followed her quickly.

“Who are you—Miss Maxwell?”

“You have said it. I am Miss Maxwell.”

“But why are you so like Mazzucata?”

“Major Granby,” she said, turning round, “I can tell you nothing; but all you wish to know you can learn from Signor Ivan.”

“Signor Ivan. What does he know?”

“He knows everything.”

I put out my hand, involuntarily, to detain her, but she was gone, and I remained alone, transfixed with astonishment.

“Signor Ivan,” I said, wonderingly. “Can it be,—Oh, impossible!”

MAJOR GRANBY'S THEORY.

NUMBER FOUR.

IT cannot be Ilma Celinski who killed her mistress, though, I confess, appearances are very much against her. No, I believe she is innocent; and I am firmly convinced that Signor Ivan is the real assassin, for the following reasons:—

Gilbert told me that Signor Ivan was in love with Mazzucata.

He is a Russian, and consequently passionate, so would be jealous.

Mazzucata was killed by a dynamite cartridge, which is a peculiarly Russian idea, savoring of Nihilism.

Signor Ivan picked up the fatal bouquet and presented it to Mazzucata.

Maxwell says that Signor Ivan stole the Black Carnation.

The Black Carnation was placed in the fatal bouquet; so I verily believe that Signor Ivan killed the singer out of jealousy.

CHAPTER X.

A MOST COMPLICATED AFFAIR.

“A MOST remarkable story,” said Tancred, stretching out his long legs. “A most remarkable story.”

We were talking together in his Temple chambers, for, on returning to Town from Lippinton, I had driven straight thither from the station, without a thought of going to my rooms before I had told Tancred all the events of that day. After Miss Maxwell's astonishing communication regarding Signor Ivan, I had left the house, but first, in order to give some colorable pretext for my visit, ordered some plants. This procedure, however, did not impose on Maxwell, as I could see by the expression of his face when I said “Good-bye,” moreover he evidently did not think it necessary to make any remark concerning his strange behavior. He did not even question me as to the result of my interview with his daughter; but I have no doubt,

as soon as I left the house, he obtained all necessary information from her by his usual process of bullying. That he suspected Ivan I saw plainly ; but he vouchsafed no opinion on the matter, so, as I had found out all I could from Miss Maxwell, I took my leave. Fortunately, I was able to catch a train just as I arrived at the Lippinton station, and speedily found myself steaming towards London, with my mind full of all kind of ideas.

My visit, instead of doing anything towards clearing up the mystery, only deepened it, and now that a new element was introduced in the person of Signor Ivan, I foresaw endless complications in store for us. I could not but help admiring the foresight of Tancred regarding the involvement of Ivan in the affair, and, as before mentioned, on my arrival in Town, drove straight to his Temple chambers to make my report and hear what he had to say on the subject.

I flatter myself that I told the story in a sufficiently dramatic style, for Tancred could hardly keep still during the recital ; and it was at the end of the narrative that he stretched himself out in his chair, with the common-place observation, " A most remarkable story."

" You've said that twice," I said, with some im-

patience ; for I certainly deserved congratulations, which I did not obtain from this dry stick of a lawyer.

“ Well,” he replied, coolly, lighting his pipe, “ and I’ll say it again, seeing there’s luck in odd numbers. It’s a most remarkable story. Have a cigar, major?”

“ No, thank you, Tancred, I don’t smoke.”

“ You ought to, then, especially at the present crisis. Your nerves are all jumping about, while I am as cool as a cucumber. Tobacco soothes the nervous system, my dear major.”

“ Are you not astonished?”

“ Yes, and no.”

“ I don’t understand.”

“ I am not astonished at your finding out about the visit of Signor Ivan, for, if you recollect, I prophesied that same. But as to this duplicate likeness of Mazzucata, yes. I am very much astonished at Miss Maxwell.”

“ Well, and what do you think?”

“ I can’t tell you until I arrange my ideas in due order. When you have a ball of tangled string, you first find the beginning and unravel it slowly and judiciously. Good, let us find our beginning, and we will unravel Miss Maxwell’s connection

with Ivan—Ivan's connection with Mazzucata, and her connection with Maxwell. It's all in a circle, you see."

"What do you mean? Surely you don't think —"

"Gently, major, gently. We must begin at the beginning. First, we will take Signor Ivan. Now, you remember I was suspicious about our Russian friend, seeing he picked out that bouquet, for presentation to Mazzucata, from among a mass of others. I knew you would hear something about him at Lippinton, so, to meet you half way and come to some conclusion regarding the guilt or innocence of this man, I made some inquiries."

"You couldn't find out much in twelve hours."

"Ah! I did not tell you I employed Melchizedek."

"One of the ten lost tribes?"

"No, one of the two that remained at home," retorted Tancred, dryly. "Well, Melchizedek is a wonder. He can find out anything, and he has found out a few episodes of Ivan's past life to which I wish to call your attention."

"Is he a detective?"

"Who, Signor Ivan?" asked the lawyer, provokingly.

“No, confound it. Mel—what’s his name?”

“Melchizedek. Yes, he has a private inquiry office, and finds out all sorts of things people don’t wish known.”

“What a horrible profession.”

“A very paying one, at all events, and Melchizedek charges pretty highly, I can tell you.”

“He wouldn’t be a Jew if he didn’t.”

“Probably not. However, he gives full value for the money. Now, my dear major, listen to this, and admire the dexterity with which our Jewish friend in twelve hours has found out what we wish to know.”

He took a sheet of foolscap covered with writing from his desk, and began to read out a series of notes made by Melchizedek, commenting thereon when explanations were required.

“Ivan Ivanvitch, born at Moscow in 1856, natural son of a nobleman and peasant girl. Went to Milan in 1876 to study for the lyric stage—made his *début* in 1881 as Raoul in *Les Huguenots*—sang with great success in all the principal European opera houses—has been in England for three seasons—has sang frequently with Mazzucata.”

“Well,” said I, interrupting this bold statement. “all this is very interesting from a chronological

point of view; but what has it to do with the murder?"

"Wait a minute," replied Tancred, in nowise ruffled by my interruption. "You see by the foregoing, that being a lyric artist, Ivan has been more or less connected with Mazzucata."

"And the result is love."

"Precisely. Your intelligence is wonderful, major. Yes, he was deeply in love with Mazzucata, but she would have nothing to do with him. Like our friend, Dallas, he said that he would rather see her dead than married to anyone but himself."

"Oh, did he? What a dog in the manger there is about these young men. Because they couldn't get the singer for themselves, they wouldn't let anyone else marry her."

"Man is the most selfish of all animals," said, Tancred, sententiously; "but to proceed—Ivan, besides being a lover, was also a patriot."

"You use the past tense. Is he not a patriot now?"

"Yes, of course he is, but I am reading from Melchizedek's notes," retorted the lawyer, impatiently. "We'll never get on if you interrupt, major."

“I beg your pardon. Proceed.”

“Ivan,” resumed Tancred, bending his brows over the Jew’s scratchy handwriting, “is a patriot, and has been mixed up more or less with Nihilism.”

“I see,” cried I, in a state of great excitement; “and he induced Mazzucata to join a secret society, who killed her through Ivan because she revealed its secrets.”

“Nothing of the sort,” said Tancred, in despair, laying down the manuscript; “nothing of the sort.”

No one can say I am not a veracious writer, for I have put down everything connected with this case in detail, even to the sacrifice of my own dignity. I considered my theory of a secret society to be excellent, and was not at all pleased with the crushing way in which Tancred pooh-poohed my idea. But these lawyers have no imagination, and confine themselves entirely to fact, which, for my part, I consider very dry reading without the aid of fancy. My suggestion was at least feasible, and Tancred, need not have been so severe on my deduction, nevertheless, he was severe, and such severity I set down in due form, though I am much averse to appearing in so humiliating a position before the public. Still the truth is the truth, and I stictly adhere to it throughout this history, so that

every one may see what indignities I suffered in my efforts to discover the assassin of Mazzucata.

“My dear major,” said Tancred, after a pause, during which he glared at me in the most aggressive fashion, “don’t interrupt me again, or you will not be able to understand the connection of Ivan with the case.”

“Well, go on,” I replied, philosophically, “I won’t say a word, but I reserve my right to criticize at the end of the performance.”

I could not help making this ironical remark in the hope that Tancred would feel ashamed of his conduct, but he was not at all ashamed—on the contrary, he smiled, and resumed his reading.

“Ivan has been involved in several Nihilistic plots, the last of which nearly cost him his liberty. For the sake of his great genius as a lyric artist, however, the Czar contented himself with banishing him from Russia. Abroad, Ivan has still carried on his plots against the Romankoff Dynasty, and is particularly interested in infernal machines.”

“Oh!” I cried, half rising, but remembering my promise I fell back in my chair, while Tancred read on hurriedly, so as to give me no further chance of interrupting him.

“There is a man in London, who makes these

dynamite bombs with clock work, timed to explode at a certain moment, and Ivan is frequently in his company. This man, Kutusoff, by name, lives near Soho Square, and has frequently been seen in conference with Ivan."

Here Tancred paused, and deliberately folding up the manuscript, put it away, a proceeding which somewhat surprised me, as I could not think the notes of Melchizedek had come to such an abrupt conclusion.

"Well, Tancred," I said, after a pause, seeing he kept silence, "is that all?"

"All!" he repeated, in surprise. "Isn't it enough? It shows us that Ivan was in love with Mazzucata, and mad with jealousy. That he was, and is, the intimate friend of a maker of infernal machines."

"Afterwards?"

"Afterwards, my dear major. Can't you put two and two together? According to your story, as constructed out of your interview with Maxwell, this Russian called down at Lippinton, and stole from thence a Black Carnation. According to my story, he is well acquainted with this Kutusoff who is an expert in dynamite cartridge manufacture. What is easier for him, than to make, with the as-

sistance of his friend, that fatal bouquet, and have it thrown at Mazzucata on the stage. His quick eye picks out the special bunch of flowers by means of the Black Carnation. He knows the cartridge is timed to explode by a certain moment. He gives the bouquet to Mazzucata, and then—well you know the rest.”

“Then you think he committed the crime?”

“Well, at present I think so.”

“Why at present?”

“Because who knows what new developments may take place in this case, and throw us out of our calculations. After Ilma Celinski’s evidence, I thought it was she who had murdered her mistress, at the instigation of your Mr. Dallas. Now, I know that Dallas had nothing to do with the affair, in spite of the case we have so carefully constructed against him. No, it was Ivan who obtained the Black Carnation from Lippinton. It was Ivan who obtained the clock-work cartridge from Kutusoff, and it was Ivan who was the lover of Ilma Celinski.”

“A Russian and a Pole—oh, absurd.”

“Love knows no nationalities, my friend; so why should not this Polish girl love a Russian, even though he belong to a nation hated by her

countrymen. Yes, believe me, major, I am right. This girl loves Ivan, and changed those bouquets at his request."

"Then you still believe those bouquets were changed?"

"I do."

"And that the fatal bouquet was thrown by Gilbert?"

"Yes; but I am hesitating as to whether the bouquets were changed at the Hôtel Europa or at the theatre, when Tressinger was absent from his seat."

"If they were changed in the theatre, Ilma Celinski could not have done so."

"No! no! You are right. How stupid of me," said Tancred, in a vexed tone, rising to his feet. "I am not infallible—I make mistakes—it is only your detective of romance that is never wrong. But I am convinced that this girl Ilma is mixed up in the affair, else why should she give false evidence against Sir Gilbert."

"Yes, indeed; and why should Dallas post Black Carnations from Paris, when he has nothing to do with the commission of the crime?"

"Oh, the deuce! I am completely at sea. You may laugh at me, major, but it is no laughing

matter, especially for your friend. I cannot reconcile all these conflicting statements, and whether the crime was committed by Dallas, Ilma, or Ivan, I am at a loss to say."

"Well, how are we to proceed?"

"Ask me something easier."

"You surely don't abandon the case?"

"No, I do not, but I am doubtful for the moment as to what is the best course to pursue."

"Why not ask Melchizedek?"

"A good idea. I'll see him to-night, so I will tell him the whole facts of the case, and obtain his opinion. You and I, Major Granby, are only amateur bloodhounds, and liable to error. We require a professional man hunter."

"Who is also liable to error?"

"True! true! Still Melchizedek is used to these perplexities, and may spy a way out of this labyrinth where we see none. I think it will be best to give the case into his hands."

"No, Tancred," I said, firmly; "I have taken up this case, and am determined to find out the truth."

"Melchizedek will do that for you."

"I prefer to do it myself."

"Well, well, major, have your own way; but do

not forget that this is no holiday task—a man's life is at stake."

"We will ask Melchizedek to assist us," I suggested, willing to meet the lawyer half-way, seeing that the case was of so grave a complexion.

"Certainly. I think that would be the wisest plan. I think I can guess what he will suggest."

"Well?"

"That we should interview three people."

"Dallas, Ivan, Ilma."

"Exactly. My dear major, you are truly an admirable detective. We must see Dallas, and find out the reason for his extraordinary proceedings regarding the Black Carnation."

"But he is out of town."

"No, he isn't. Melchizedek found out that he has returned."

"And Ilma?"

"We must discover her motives also, and her connection with Ivan or Dallas."

"By the way, I told you Dallas also had been to Lippinton."

"Yes; perhaps he stole the Black Carnation."

"In that case, Ivan must be innocent."

"I don't know! They each might have stolen one, and while Dallas sent his bud from Paris to

frighten Mazzucata, Ivan might have used his for the infernal bouquet."

"No, that is impossible, and I will tell you why. This carnation plant had twelve blossoms, now there are but eleven, so only one bud could have been stolen."

"In that case, the same bud must have been used for the warning and the bouquet."

"Which suggestion points straight to Ilma's evidence regarding Gilbert taking the Black Carnation from the Hôtel Europa and putting it in the bouquet."

"You are right, but if you recollect, I surmised that Dallas was also in the room, so he also might have taken the carnation from the glass of water and put it in the bouquet, after which the girl changed them."

"Then they could not have been changed at the theatre."

Tancred made no reply, but drummed on the table with his fingers, in a most irritating manner.

"Besides," said I, thoughtfully, "if what you say is correct, it proves the guilt of Dallas, and the innocence of Ivan."

"It does! it does! I am completely bewildered. But there's one thing I wish to find out."

“Yes?”

“What Ivan knows about Miss Maxwell.”

“Do you think he knows anything?” I asked, sceptically.

“Well, she hinted to you that he did. When we hear what Ivan has to say about her, it may throw some light on the present darkness.”

“Ivan may refuse to open his mouth.”

“It’s not impossible. But seeing how he is mixed up in this affair, in order to clear his own character, it will be wiser for him to speak.”

“He may explain everything.”

“It’s to be hoped he will for his own sake. What’s your opinion of the case, major?”

“My dear young friend,” I said solemnly, for at the moment, I felt solemn, “I cannot give you my opinion at present, for it changes at every new aspect of the case. I had a theory respecting the guilt of Dallas—then one about a secret society—a third making out that Ilma Celinski was guilty, and my last idea was in favor of Ivan being the criminal, which theory my conversation with you has just upset. Four theories, and as far as I can see, all wrong.”

Tancred roused.

“My dear major, both of us are poor hands at

this sort of business, so I really think we had better leave the case in the hands of our Hebrew friend."

"Melchizedek?"

"Yes. That name means King of Justice, you know, so perhaps in this case, he will prove his right to the name, by bringing this cunning assassin to the gallows."

"It's a most extraordinary case."

"It is a case, which, if written in a book, would cause the reader to say, 'Oh, ridiculous! such a thing never took place,' but then you know, my dear Major Granby, 'truth is stranger than fiction,' as this affair of the opera-house proves. When it is all over we will write a book on it, major, and make our fortune out of it as a shilling shocker."

CHAPTER XI.

THE MISSING LINK.

THE next day, I had the pleasure of being introduced by Tancred to Melchizedek, who was an ugly little Jew with an intelligent eye. Indeed, he put me very much in mind of the Baron of Cranstown's goblin page, owing to his dwarfish looks, and I suspect his nature was not very dissimilar, for there was a malicious look on his wizen face. Notwithstanding this unprepossessing exterior, he was remarkably shrewd, and listened attentively to Tancred's recital of all the evidence we had collected together touching on Mazzucata's death. At the conclusion of this narration both Tancred and myself waited to hear what remarks Melchizedek would make thereon, but to our surprise he held his tongue.

"Well, Melchizedek, what is your opinion?" asked Tancred, impatiently. The Jew twisted his soft hat into a ball in his thin hands, and looked at the lawyer cunningly, with his keen black eyes.

“I ’ave none,” he said, briefly, and again shut up like an oyster.

“Will you undertake the case?” demanded Tancred, in nowise disturbed by this reticence.

Melchizedek nodded, being a gentleman who evidently appreciated the value of words, and therefore wasted none.

“You will be paid well!”

Melchizedek nodded again, and smiled in an appreciative manner, after which, evidently deeming the interview to be at an end, he arose from his chair and shuffled towards the door.

“Where are you going?” I asked, curious to know what position this queer creature intended to take up.

“Lippinton,” answered Melchizedek, and thereupon vanished, leaving Tancred and myself looking at one another in surprise.

“I cannot congratulate you on his intelligence,” said I, shrugging my shoulders; “do you think he’ll find out anything at Lippinton?”

“He’ll find out all that there is to be discovered,” retorted Tancred, rather displeased at my remark; “never judge by appearances, major. That man, dull as you deem him, is one of the sharpest detectives in London.”

“Egad, he’ll need all his sharpness to find out the truth of this affair.”

“Well, he evidently thinks that the truth is to be found at Lippinton, although, I confess, I don’t see how he has arrived at such a conclusion. However, I am quite content to leave matters in his hands, and wait until he makes his report, which, I am certain, will go a great way towards solving the mystery, if indeed it does not explain the whole matter.”

“And, until he makes his report, I suppose we are to remain quiet.”

“By no means. What about your detective fever, major?”

“It is worse than ever.”

“Well, I will be your physician to-day, and cure you for the time being. It is now one o’clock,” continued Tancred, glancing at his watch, “so I think we had better have some luncheon, and afterwards call on Ivan.”

“Call on Ivan!”

“Yes. After your story last night, I wrote, asking him to make an appointment for to-day, as I wished to see him on business.”

“On Mazzucata’s business?”

“No. I did not specialize any business, so as

not to put him on his guard; well, this morning, he sent up a messenger from the Hôtel Europa, asking me to call between two and three o'clock this afternoon."

"Is he staying at the Hôtel Europa?"

"Yes. Wanted to be near Mazzucata, I suppose. But what about luncheon?"

"Come with me to the Old Friends," I said, and on his accepting the invitation, we left his chambers, and drove at once to St. James' Street.

Unfortunately, owing to our appointment with Signor Ivan we were unable to linger over our luncheon as I would have wished, which in itself was sufficient to put me out of temper. If there is one thing of which I am careful, it is my digestion, and a hurried meal is an experience which I am much averse to undergoing, especially as the Old Friends' cook had provided a most delightful repast. As it was, we had to devour our food with the utmost celerity, and then, without time for a soothing smoke, hurry off to the Hôtel Europa in order to see Ivan. Truly, detective fever is an unpleasant disease, as it upsets the entire system with a constant rush of thought and employment.

On giving our cards, we were taken at once to Signor Ivan, and ascended in the lift to the third

floor of the hotel, where the singer had his rooms. The apartment into which we were shown, was furnished in a tint of dull red, and the windows looked out on to Northumberland avenue. There was also a grand piano covered with loose sheets of music, and the scores of various operas, numbers of photographs, among which we espied one of Mazzucata, and in one corner of the room a slender rapier with mother-of-pearl handle, doubtless the sword of some stage hero. Far below, from the windows we could see the traffic flowing through the street, but the noise of the moving multitude came but faintly to our ears. Neither of us spoke a word, for, being as we thought on the verge of a tremendous discovery which involved the death of a man, we felt disinclined for conversation, and remained silent, looking out of the window into the abyss below.

Suddenly, we heard a door open, and turned sharply, to see Signor Ivan standing on the threshold with a conventional smile on his face. This famous tenor, this secret conspirator, this suspected criminal, was a tall, handsome young man with a mild expression of countenance. His tartar origin was betrayed by his high cheek bones, and his somewhat narrow eyes, but otherwise his features

were very good, which led me to suspect, what I afterwards discovered to be the case, that his mother was of Circassian nationality.

Advancing towards us in silence, he placed his feet close together, and bowed in continental fashion, after which, he begged us to be seated, and placing himself on the sofa, awaited our explanation regarding the reason of our visit."

"You speak English, Signor Ivan," said Tancred, noting with a sigh of relief that the singer's first speech was in that tongue.

"Oh, yes," replied Ivan, slowly, but distinctly. "I have spoken English for many years; so, if it shall please you, we will converse in that language, unless," he added laughing, "you prefer French, Italian, Spanish, Russian, or German."

"I prefer my own language, thank you," answered Tancred, also smiling; for, really, the manners of the young man were very ingratiating; "and so, doubtless, would Major Granby."

As my knowledge of foreign tongues is entirely confined to French, as rendered by the novels of Gyp, Mendes, Malot, and Loti, I hastily assented to Tancred's proposition, as the interview was too important to run the risk of any misunderstand-

ing on account of Parisian idioms and colloquialisms.

“Very well, gentlemen, we will talk English,” assented Signor Ivan, with another smile. “And now, may I ask your reasons for this interview?”

“We were told to see you by Miss Maxwell,” said I, pointedly.

Ivan started violently, and flushed red under his sallow skin.

“Miss Maxwell!”

“Yes, of Lippinton, where you went to see her about the Black Carnation.”

I saw Ivan was pressing his hands together with such force that the knuckles grew white, from which I judged, that he was striving to suppress some strong emotion, caused by my unexpected remarks.

“Miss Maxwell! Lippinton! Black Carnation!” he stammered, hurriedly. “Really, monsieur, I am at a loss to understand the meaning of these words.”

“Signor Ivan,” said Tancred, suddenly, “we have come to see you about the murder of Madame Mazzucata.”

“Indeed,” replied Ivan, coolly, having now re-

covered his nerve. "I told all I knew about that affair to the judge in open court."

"You told *all*," repeated Tancred, with a marked emphasis on the last word.

"All I was asked by the advocate. Ah!" ejaculated the singer, with a start, "I know you now; you are the advocate of Sir Gilbert."

"Yes."

"Then, why did you not question me in court, *Monsieur l'Avocat*? Why do you come here to ask me about things of which I know nothing?"

"Are you sure you know nothing?"

"Monsieur!" cried Ivan, in a rage, springing to his feet.

"I beg your pardon, Signor Ivan," said Tancred, suavely; "I do not mean to be personal, but my friend here has seen Miss Maxwell——"

"Who says that you know more of this matter than you revealed in court," I finished, neatly.

The singer reflected for a few moments with a serious face, evidently debating in his own mind as to the best course to be pursued.

"What I do know throws but little light on the crime," he said, at length, with marked hesitation.

“If it throws any light at all we shall be grateful,” observed Tancred, bluntly. “Come, Signor Ivan, tell the reason of your visit to Lippinton.”

“I do not see that I am called on to do that.”

“On the contrary, it is your duty to tell us all.”

“And for what reason, *Monsieur l’Avocat*?”

“For the strongest of all reasons. You may save the life of an innocent man, who is at present in great peril.”

“Sir Gilbert Tressinger?”

“Yes. You know he is accused of this crime, and you know he is guiltless.”

“How do I know he is guiltless?” demanded Ivan, sharply. “You assume too much, monsieur.”

“What is the use of all this fencing?” I broke in, impatiently, for my temper was rising. “Either Signor Ivan will tell all he knows, or he will not.”

“Suppose he will not?” said Ivan, coolly.

“In that case, I will go down again to Lippinton, and ask Miss Maxwell to reveal that which you wish to be kept silent.”

“I do not wish it to be kept silent,” said the signor, indignantly. “It has nothing to do with me.”

“Perhaps not,” interposed Tancred, promptly; “but it may have a good deal to do with Kutusoff!”

“Kutusoff!” repeated Ivan, with the most admirable self-possession, though his face turned gray. “And who is Kutusoff?”

“I don’t think I need tell you that, Signor Ivan.”

“And why not, *Monsieur l’Avocat*?”

“Because I know all about him and about you,” said the lawyer, sharply; “it’s no use your pretending ignorance, Signor Ivan, for I know everything.”

“If so, why come and ask me for information?”

“Because you may be able to exculpate yourself.”

“And from what?”

“Participation in the murder of Mazzucata.”

“Monsieur!” cried the singer, in an enraged tone, “you go too far. I am not a good tempered man, and I will not put up with your insults much longer.”

“What will you do, Signor Ivan. Call me out. I beg to decline. We are not in France.”

“Monsieur!”

“Gentlemen! gentlemen!” I said, stepping quickly between the two men, who were now standing opposite to one another, in anything but friendly attitudes; “do not behave like children.

Tancred, keep your temper, as all men in your profession should. Signor Ivan will, I am sure, supply us with all information about that cartridge."

"What cartridge, monsieur!"

"That with which Mazzucata was killed!"

"I know nothing about it."

"Do you not?" said Tancred, who had resumed his seat, "then perhaps Kutusoff does."

"I tell you, monsieur, I know no gentleman of that name."

"He tells a very different story."

"Why! what did he say about me?"

"Humph! that doesn't sound as if you didn't know him," said Tancred, delighted at having caught Ivan in a trap; "come, sir, it is no use your pretending ignorance in this way. You are an intimate friend of Kutusoff, who made that clock-work dynamite cartridge, which you placed in the bouquet, with the Black Carnation."

"I didn't, monsieur. I lost that cartridge."

"Oh!" I cried, before Tancred could speak, "then you admit having had that cartridge from Kutusoff."

Ivan stamped with rage at having made this mistake, and tried to nullify his admission in a

very clumsy manner, quite unworthy of a presumably acute conspirator.

“ I received a cartridge, certainly, from Kutusoff, but I did not receive the cartridge which killed Mazzucata.”

“ I thought you did not know Kutusoff,” said Tancred, ironically. The singer was nonplussed for a moment, and then burst out laughing, in nowise ashamed at having been caught tripping.

“ *Monsieur l'Avocat*, you are an excellent antagonist,” he said, good-humoredly; “ pray sit down—you also M. Granby, we will talk over this matter, and I will tell you all I know about it; but I warn you, that it will not assist you in any way.”

“ Well, let us hear your story first,” said Tancred, delighted at this unexpected surrender, “ we can then judge for ourselves.”

“ I suppose you know I am a Nihilist, monsieur,” remarked Ivan, airily, “ at least, I assume you do, seeing you know I am a friend of Kutusoff.”

“ Who is a Nihilist, pure and simple.”

“ Who is a Nihilist, without being either pure or simple,” retorted Ivan, dryly, “ he is a man who advocates reform in Russia by violent means, such as bombs and assassinations. I, on the other hand, trust to Time and the advancement of civilization.”

“ If so, why do you meddle with conspiracies ? ”

“ Because I wish to see reform in Russia within a reasonable time. I am not what you would call a Nihilist, though I get the name of being one of those people who desire the upset of anything. All I wish is to see my dear country with a civilized constitution, and not dependent on the caprices of a despot.”

“ A very modest desire, truly,” said I, ironically, being perfectly well acquainted with this cant of Anarchists, “ yet one which cost you dear.”

“ It cost me exile from my native land,” sighed Ivan, regretfully, “ and had it not been that I was a singer, I should have been exiled to Siberia.”

“ Well, you don't seem to appreciate the clemency of the Czar, seeing you now conspire against him.”

“ Clemency ! clemency ! ” cried the Russian, his eyes flashing at the word, “ why call it clemency ? The Czar has enough sins to answer for without having my death on his shoulders. But it is no use talking to you comfortable English about our troubles—only experience would teach you what tyranny we groan under in Russia. I will say no more on the subject, save that I am desirous of gaining a constitution for the Muscovite Empire,

but not by foul means. Kutusoff would stick at nothing to gain what we desire for our native land. I draw the line at secret assassination by means of infernal machines."

"Yet, you are a friend of Kutusoff," hinted Tancred, with a grim smile.

"As you say, I am a friend of Kutusoff," replied Ivan, with cold dignity; "yes, because I know that however misguided he may be, he is a good man who has suffered for the sake of his patriotic principles. Yes, I *am* a friend of Kutusoff—I honor him. He is a man who ought to occupy a great position."

"Which he certainly will, some day—on the gallows."

"You don't understand, Major Granby," said Ivan impatiently, "how can you understand, you that have lived in peace and security all your life. But this is not to the point. As you say—as I say, Kutusoff is my friend, and I frequently call on him to discuss the position of Russian politics."

"We are all attention," murmured Tancred, seeing the singer hesitate.

"Well," resumed Ivan, after a pause, "some weeks ago when I called on him, he showed me a new infernal machine. A dynamite cartridge,

which looks innocent enough, yet on touching a spring, it explodes. But stay, I will show you one."

He went to his desk, and taking from thence what looked like a roll of white paper bound with brass at either end, held it up for our inspection. I stretched out my hand to take it, but Ivan drew it back with a slight smile.

"Excuse me, monsieur, but I dare not place it in your hands. You might touch the spring by chance, and then we would meet with the same fate as the unhappy singer."

"Ugh!" cried Tancred, pushing back his chair, "what a horrible idea."

"You see this," resumed the singer, pointing to a tiny brass point at the side of the cartridge, "that, if touched, explodes the machine. Therefore, if a careless person grasped the whole cartridge, a catastrophe is bound to ensue. Such was the fate of Mazzucata."

"Then she was killed by one of these devilish machines!"

"Yes, I believe she was."

"Then you know who killed her?"

"No, I do not, but I will tell you all, and you can draw your own conclusions. Kutusoff gave

me one of these cartridges to take home and examine, I placed it carefully in a cardboard box to render it innocuous, and put it in my pocket. Then I lost it."

"But where?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. But my impression is, that some one picked it up and placed it in that fatal bouquet."

"You have no idea who could have picked it up?"

"Not the slightest."

Tancred and I looked at each other sceptically, at which Ivan became agitated,

"I swear on my honor, messieurs, that I do not know what became of that cartridge. I lost it; but when or where, I know not. I had nothing to do with the death of Mazzucata."

"If you had, I do not suppose you would speak so openly," replied, Tancred soothingly; "but you must admit circumstances are strong against you. Look here, Signor Ivan, you admit having this cartridge; you say it must have caused the death of Madame Mazzucata; and it was you who presented her with the fatal bouquet: all this looks bad."

"I admit it, *Monsieur l'Avocat*, I admit it," said

Ivan, quickly; "but I can explain. I did possess that cartridge; but I lost it, and know not who picked it up. As to my choosing that bouquet on the stage, to give to Madame Mazzucata, I did so at the request of a friend."

"And that friend?"

Ivan paused, for a moment, and then turned away his head.

"Can you bear a shock, messieurs?"

"Yes, yes."

"The friend who asked me to choose the bouquet was Sir Gilbert Tressinger."

CHAPTER XII.

AN ASTONISHING STORY.

THERE was a dead silence, lasting at least a minute, during which time, I looked at Tancred, who looked at me, and then, by mutual consent, we looked at the man who had made this startling statement.

“I cannot believe that Sir Gilbert is guilty,” I said, at length, in a voice which I acknowledge was a trifle tremulous.

“I did not say he was, monsieur,” responded Ivan, delicately; “I merely stated that he asked me to pick up the bouquet when it was thrown, and present it to madame.”

“How did you know which bouquet to select out of all those lying on the stage?” asked Tancred, reflectively.

“Sir Gilbert sent a note round to me shortly before the opera began, saying he had failed to give Madame Mazzucata a bouquet at her hotel,

and would, therefore, throw it to her at the end of the great scene in the third act. He, therefore, requested me to pick up his bouquet and present it to madame, saying, I would recognize it by its white flowers and single black rose."

"Black Carnation, you mean," said I, disbelievingly.

"No; a black rose."

"Have you the note, Signor Ivan?" demanded Tancred.

"I regret to say that I have not. I tore it up after reading it, and now, all trace of it is lost. But I distinctly recollect the description of the bouquet as being white flowers, with a black rose."

"That, then," said the lawyer, deliberately, "proves Sir Gilbert to be innocent; for all that story of his failing to give Mazzucata the bouquet at the hotel is perfectly true. His bouquet, as described by Phillis & Co., was of the kind you describe. Oh, yes; those flowers he asked you to pick up were perfectly harmless."

"Yet they killed Mazzucata, monsieur."

"Sir Gilbert's flowers did not kill Mazzucata. Those you picked up contained a Black Carnation—not a black rose; and, in the hurry of the moment, you did not notice the difference. All you

saw was that the bouquet was white with a black centre, and picked up the fatal bunch which caused the death of the prima-donna."

"Then Sir Gilbert did not throw those flowers?" said Ivan, in great perplexity.

"Ah! that I cannot say. But if he did, without doubt, the bouquet was changed, either at the Hôtel Europa, or at the theatre."

"But who possessed a similar bouquet?"

"A man you do not know, Signor Ivan—Mr. Dallas."

Ivan started, and looked towards Tancred, with an expression of surprise.

"Was that the man who loved madame?"

"Yes," said Tancred.

"Who went down to Lippinton in search of a Black Carnation?"

"Yes," said I, quickly; "but I did not know he went there for that flower, though he must have done so, in order to send Mazzucata the bud from Paris."

"Did M. Dallas send her a Black Carnation from Paris?"

"He did."

"Then, Maxwell was right," muttered Ivan, under his breath.

“Maxwell!” I cried, with lively interest. “What! did he accuse Dallas of killing Mazzucata?”

“I did not say that,” responded Ivan, deliberately, “but he certainly mentioned the name of Dallas in connection with the affair.”

“Tell us all about it, signor.”

“One moment,” cried Tancred, raising his hand to enforce silence, “Signor Ivan, may I ask if you suspected Sir Gilbert to be guilty?”

“Yes,” answered Ivan, firmly, “I did. I thought the bouquet I picked up was his—by the explosion of that bouquet madame was killed, and I knew nothing of the substitution of Black Carnation for Black Rose as described by Ilma Celinski.”

“All that evidence was false, as I can prove,” said the barrister, coolly; “but if you thought Sir Gilbert was guilty, why did you not denounce him?”

Signor Ivan looked down at the floor, and blushed deeply.

“He was to be married to Mazzucata,” he said, in a voice of emotion. “I also loved her. I was his rival. Would you have me behave in a mean fashion, and denounce him to the law because he was more successful than myself in gaining the

woman we both loved? No! I could not do that; I held my peace."

"Those sentiments do you credit, M. Ivan," said Tancred dryly, "still they are a trifle weak to account for your silence. It was your duty to bring this criminal to justice if you believed him guilty."

"Others could swear away his life and punish him for his crime, *Monsieur l'Avocat*, so why should I interfere. Had he not been arrested, I might have suppressed what you call sentiment, and brought him to justice, but as it was, I preferred to keep silence."

"Do you believe him guilty?"

"I do! most firmly."

"Then you are wrong. He is perfectly innocent. How could he have found your cartridge, with which alone the crime could have been committed?"

"Ah, that I do not know."

"You see, therefore, Monsieur Ivan, that there is something in his favor—besides, you suspect another person."

"I suspect another person!" echoed Ivan, in surprise, "no, you are wrong."

"I am not wrong. You hinted at Mr. Dallas."

“Pardon me. I said nothing about my own suspicions, I referred to those of M. Maxwell.”

“What on earth has he to do with it?” I asked, quickly, being somewhat weary of this protracted conversation.

“A great deal, monsieur, and as I promised to tell you all, I will do so, but you will be much astonished.”

“I have lost the faculty of being astonished of late, Signor Ivan. Every moment brings a fresh surprise.”

“Doubtless, but this is the greatest surprise of all.”

“What is it?”

“Pray be silent, major,” said Tancred, a trifle rudely, I thought, but these lawyers have no manners. “Signor Ivan will, I am sure, prefer to tell his story in his own way.”

Thus abjured, I held my peace, though sorely against my will, for I would have preferred to come to the point at once by questioning, without enduring the purgatory of this interminable narration which Ivan now proceeded to inflict upon us both.

“In order to make things perfectly clear,” he said, slowly, “I have, to a certain extent, violated

my own instinct of delicacy, by telling you of my love for this dead woman. I loved her ardently, not as you cold English love with caution and calculation, with an eye to surrounding circumstances, and a dread of gossip. No, I was devoted to her, I adored her, I worshipped her ardently, and would have laid down my life at her feet had she so desired. Alas! I was unfortunate, and your countryman won her heart. In Paris, I saw a great deal of her, but while accepting my attentions, she contrived to keep me at a distance by a certain reserve, which I failed to break down. At last, on the eve of our departure for England to fulfil our engagements, I told her of my love, how ardently I desired to make her my wife—how her face was constantly before me, and how she filled my life. She heard me to the end, and then in cold, calm words told me she was engaged to marry Sir Gilbert Tressinger. Those words broke my heart, and she said them.”

He struck his hand passionately against the piano, near which he was seated, and, affected by emotion, was for some moments unable to proceed. We kept silence out of sympathy for his misfortune, and after a pause of a few minutes' duration, he resumed his story.

“How cruel women are! She refused me as a lover, she desired me as a friend, and treated me with a frank cordiality which I found sufficiently painful—so much so, in fact, that I ceased to see her save when our professional duties brought us together on the stage. I knew that Sir Gilbert was constantly with her, and I could not bear to stand calmly by, contemplating that bliss in which I had no share, so I stayed away from her presence, and strove to crush in my heart this foolish love which was never to bring me happiness or peace of mind. Dante described Hell, but he omitted the worst Hell of all—the Hell of despised desire.”

While speaking thus passionately, his eyes blazed as with consuming fire, and great drops of sweat stood on his flushed brow, betraying the agony he felt in thus coldly dissecting the passion which had wrecked his life. Taking out his handkerchief he wiped his forehead, and passed it rapidly over his dry lips, then hastily pursued his narration.

“I heard by chance that Sir Gilbert had gone to Paris, and that night, between the acts of the opera, she sent for me to her dressing-room. I was loth to go, but had not strength of mind to refuse. When I came face to face with her, I found it

difficult to control my emotion, but she pretended not to notice my agitation, so cruel was she towards one whom she had rejected. At last I grew sufficiently calm to ask her what she desired, and then she told me that she wanted me to go at once to Lippinton."

"To Lippinton!" ejaculated both Tancred and myself, with breathless interest.

"Lippinton, she informed me," resumed Ivan, without noticing our interruption, "is a little village near your town of Harrow, and she gave me instructions how to go down there, which she wished me to do the next day."

"And her reason?" asked Tancred, quickly.

"To see a gardener called Maxwell."

"Great heavens," I murmured, a suspicion entering into my mind, which I strove to banish as absurd, "can it be possible?"

"Can what be possible?" demanded Ivan, his quick ears catching my remark.

"Nothing! nothing! a mere idea. Pray go on with your story."

"When I saw this gardener, I was to say, 'Why have you sent me the Black Carnation,' and await his reply."

"Which was——" I asked, breathlessly.

“Softly, softly monsieur, let me tell the story in my own way.”

I was forced to assent, though I was burning with curiosity, for this new description of the sender of the Black Carnation seemed to draw Maxwell—a rough, uncultured Irishman—into the affair. It was ridiculous, for there could be no connection between a famous prima-donna, and an obscure gardener, celebrated though he might be in his own circle as the grower of that curious plant, which was so prominent in the tragedy. Then I remembered Miss Maxwell; her emotion on hearing the name of Mazzucata; her extraordinary resemblance to Mazzucata; and felt that we were on the verge of a great discovery, which would either solve the mystery, or deepen it still more. As for Tancred, he preserved a rigid silence, but his eager eyes, the twitching of his nervous fingers, showed that he was as eager as myself.

“Naturally enough I asked her the meaning of this extraordinary message,” said Ivan, quietly, “but she refused to tell me anything. I had never heard of a Black Carnation, and was curious to know if there was such a flower in existence. She never showed me the blossom, and though her

message was in those words, I was in complete ignorance as to whether she had actually received a Black Carnation (of the existence of which I was ignorant), or whether the words, 'Why did you send me the Black Carnation,' hid some secret of her past life."

"And what did you do?"

"I accepted the mission," said Ivan, simply, "and next day I went down to Lippinton. When I saw this Maxwell, I asked him the question as directed, upon which he stared at me in surprise and asked me what I meant. Of course, I could tell him nothing, and explained as much, whereupon he informed me that he possessed a carnation, which was unique of its kind, bearing perfectly black flowers, but that he was too fond of the plant to part with even a single bud."

"In fact, he denied having sent Mazzucata a Black Carnation flower," suggested Tancred.

"Yes. Then he took me to a glass house and showed me the plant, which was certainly marvellous, though it looked rather weird, being so unnatural in the color of its blossoms. On his plant, Maxwell said, there were twelve buds, upon which I counted them and found eleven."

"Eleven!" I ejaculated, in surprise, "why, that

is the same number as there were when I was down. So you did not steal the twelfth bud?"

"I, monsieur! who accuses me of such a thing?"

"Why, this Maxwell; he told me there were twelve buds, but on counting them found only eleven, upon which discovery he said you must have stolen the twelfth."

"I certainly did not steal the twelfth," said Ivan, in a puzzled tone, "particularly as on my discovery of the missing bud, he guessed the thief's name."

"What was it?" questioned Tancred, impulsively."

"M. Dallas."

This name took us both by surprise, but of the two I was the most amazed, as I saw that Maxwell had been playing with Ivan the same comedy as he had played with me, only for the name of the singer, he substituted that of Dallas. We remained silent in sheer perplexity, for we knew not what to think or say, so Ivan, without waiting for our speech, resumed his story.

"I could get nothing else out of this Maxwell, so took my leave. He remained behind in the glass house, and ungraciously allowed me to find my way out into the street alone. While I was

passing through the front of the house, I felt a touch on my arm, and saw——”

“Mazzucata?”

“Well, I certainly thought so for the moment. The resemblance is truly wonderful, for this Mademoiselle Maxwell resembles my poor Mazzucata in all ways, save that she is blind.”

“Poor girl,” muttered Tancred, in a sad tone, “well, Signor Ivan, and what did she say?”

“She told me she had overheard my conversation with her father, and asked me if it were true that Mazzucata had received a Black Carnation. When I told her that I thought such was the case she was much disturbed.”

“Did she make any mention of Dallas?”

“No.”

“Did she say her father had sent Mazzucata the Black Carnation?” asked the lawyer, eagerly.

“My dear Tancred,” I said, impulsively, “what an absurd remark. What possible motive could this obscure Maxwell have for sending Madame Mazzucata such a flower? There can be no connection between them.”

“So I thought,” remarked Ivan, who had listened to my speech, with a queer smile on his lips, “but when I tell you, monsieur, what this blind lady

told me, I do not think you will find M. Tancred's remark so utterly absurd as you seem to fancy."

"Why, what did she tell you?"

"I cannot give you the whole conversation, it would take too long."

"Well, give us the pith of it," I rejoined, impatiently. "Who is Mazzucata, and what connection has she with this man?"

"I know what you are going to say," struck in Tancred, before Ivan could speak; "Mazzucata was Maxwell's daughter."

"Precisely," answered Ivan, with an emphatic nod; "she was Mademoiselle Maxwell's twin sister."

MAJOR GRANBY'S THEORY.

NUMBER FIVE.

I AM certainly much bewildered over the new aspect of this case, as after my interview with Signor Ivan, I cannot but think that my four previous theories are all wrong. Ilma Celinski, Dallas, Signor Ivan, and the secret society emissary, must be innocent, as all the evidence now obtainable seems to point in the direction of Simon Maxwell.

Now I have a theory, that he killed his daughter Mazzucata, and my belief is based upon the following circumstances :—

He is the only possessor of the Black Carnation, and no bud could have left the greenhouse without his knowledge.

He equivocated on the missing bud, and after accusing Dallas to Ivan, of being the thief, now accuses Ivan to me.

As to the dynamite cartridge, which was certainly manufactured by Kutusoff and possessed by Ivan, I fancy that the latter must have lost it down at Lippinton, where it was picked up by Maxwell and used in the fatal bouquet, together with the missing carnation which the gardener plucked himself.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WOMAN SCORNED.

WHEN Tancred and myself left the Hôtel Europa, we certainly had sufficient to think about, for the discovery of Mazzucata's relationship with the Maxwells complicated matters to a surprising degree. Seeing that Marietta Mazzucata, or, to give her real name, Mary Maxwell, was the daughter of this gardener, it was evident that she must have known of the existence of the Black Carnation created by her father. Hence her frequent reference to that flower. But why should it appear to her as a symbol of a violent death? This was the question which agitated our minds; and though we discussed it thoroughly, we could come to no conclusion as to the real meaning of the fancy.

Again, Mazzucata had sent Ivan to her father, to inquire why he had sent the Black Carnation,

so it was evident that Maxwell was the person from whom she expected the token. But why should that token refer to a violent death? Turn which way we would, that last question kept appearing in the most persistent manner, and defied our efforts to obtain a satisfactory answer to it.

“I would like to tell Melchizedek about this fresh discovery,” said Tancred, as we parted, “but, unfortunately, he is down at Lippinton, and I do not know where a letter will find him.”

“What will you do?”

“My dear major, I can do nothing except wait till Melchizedek returns to town, when we can consult as to what new move to make. Besides, it is probable Melchizedek will have discovered something at Lippinton likely to aid us in solving the mystery. At all events, now that we know the dead woman came from Lippinton, it is evident the secret is to be discovered there, and if so, you may be sure Melchizedek, who is on the spot, will ferret it out.”

“Well, it is to be hoped so, for at present, so far as we are concerned, the secret of Mazzucata’s death will remain one until the day of judgment. Good-bye, Tancred, if you make any fresh discovery, let me know at once.”

“Assuredly, but I must exact the same promise from you.”

“Whatever I learn, shall be known to you half an hour afterwards. But what about Gilbert?”

“I am going to see him now. Will you come?”

“No. Don't think me unkind, Tancred, but I am quite worn out for want of rest. Tell Tressinger, I will call and see him to-morrow morning, and not to worry too much.”

“My dear Major Granby, when I tell him that Mazzucata is this Maxwell's daughter, he will have too much to think about to waste any time in worrying. Good-bye, don't forget your promise.”

So we parted, and Tancred went off to see Gilbert; while I returned to my rooms, quite worn out, as I have stated, with the many surprises of the last few days. When this case was finished, I was quite determined to abstain for the future from the investigation of criminal matters, for the employment is too exhausting. It wearies the brain, it irritates the nerves, it spoils the temper, and yet is so confoundedly fascinating that one can no more stop in the middle of a case than cease to breathe of one's own free will. I wonder if detectives live to any great age? If they do, it is a puzzle to me how they manage to preserve the

body from the wear and tear of the mind. Formerly, I did not think much of detectives as an intelligent class ; but now that I have had some experience of the difficulties they meet with, I have the greatest respect for their acuteness, their brain power, and their physical endurance.

For that evening, at least, I got the better of my detective fever, and by resolutely fighting against the demon of curiosity, managed to secure a few hours of comparative rest to my brain. Reverting to my usual mode of life, I strolled in the park to gain an appetite, dined at the Old Friends' Club with an old army friend, and afterwards went to the theatre. Whist was out of the question, as I could not have fixed my attention on the cards, but the theatre to which we went was the Gaiety, and there, in the frivolities of the last up to date burlesque, I forgot for a time that infernal problem which I had so foolishly set myself to solve.

I might have known such peace of mind would not last, and remembered the calm before the storm proverb, for on my return to my rooms about midnight, I was met by Pointer with the extraordinary remark.

“ A lady is waiting to see you, sir.”

“ A lady, Pointer ? ”

“ Yes, sir, she has been waiting for three hours.”

I own I felt somewhat indignant at this, as the mere fact of a lady waiting to see me at midnight in my own rooms was enough to destroy my character with the people of the house. Pointer, I must admit, was perfectly respectful, and yet I felt that he was secretly amused at my embarrassment, which naturally put me into a towering rage.

“ I can't see any lady to-night, Pointer.”

“ She says she won't go away until she sees you, sir.”

“ Who is she ? ”

“ Miss Ilma Celinski.”

“ What, the witness in Mazzucata's case ? ”

“ Yes, sir, she is in the sitting-room.”

“ Oh, I'll see her at once. I wonder what she wants, Pointer. You must come with me in order to bear witness to anything she may say in connection with the case.”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ She needn't see you, Pointer. Go into my bedroom and busy yourself with something, but leave the door open. Keep your attention fixed, Pointer ; this is most important.”

Pointer, as a matter of fact, felt much flattered at being thus brought into the case, as, since his

conversation with Dabsworth, he had taken a great interest in the affair, therefore, he went into my bedroom by another door, while I entered the sitting-room, where I found Mademoiselle Celinski, impatiently awaiting my arrival.

“Major Granby,” she said, rising, as I came into the room.

“Yes. To what have I the honor——”

“It is no honor,” she retorted, abruptly, cutting short my polite speech, “I am in a rage.”

“Not with me, I trust.”

“No, with M. Dallas.”

“Ho! Ho!” I thought to myself, “when thieves fall out honest men get their dues.”

“Do you know me, monsieur?” said the Pole, sitting down again, “I am Mademoiselle Celinski—Ilma Celinski. Oh, yes, you know me.”

“I think so, mademoiselle. It was you who gave evidence against my poor friend, Sir Gilbert Tressinger.”

“Yes, I did tell a story against him; but why did he stay? I came and told him to go. He should have run away. Why did he stay?”

“Because he was innocent.”

“Innocent! Bah!”

“You are not polite, mademoiselle, and not

truthful. You know Sir Gilbert is innocent."

"I know, what I know," she answered, sullenly.

"Doubtless; but as you did not come here without a purpose, I would like to know what that purpose is."

Ilma Celinski had taken off her gloves, and was twisting them round and round in her strong hands. Still dressed in that bizarre red costume, hardly hidden by a thin black cloak, she was with her strongly marked features, flashing eyes, and eloquent gestures, sufficiently interesting, although hardly the kind of young person a steady old bachelor likes to entertain in his rooms at such an hour. I was glad Pointer was a witness in the next room. Besides, this girl had a temper, and was evidently in a towering rage about something, which rage she vented on me for want of a better person.

"Eh, monsieur, you are astonished to see me here," she burst out, rapidly, "oh, yes, but it is not my fault this midnight. I came here at nine hours, but you were not here, so I waited. I wished to see you, to ask about this woman—this lady—you know, monsieur, I think."

"I haven't the slightest idea to whom you are alluding."

“It is a conspiracy against me. You take his side.”

“Take whose side,” I asked, completely bewildered.

“M. Dallas,” she muttered, in a savage tone; “that coward, that infamous one.”

“Monsieur Dallas,” I repeated, reflectively. “Oh, yes, I think I know the gentleman you mean. He was in love with your mistress, was he not?”

“He was in love with me.”

“But you said in Court——”

“Oh, I said many things in Court—I told lies, and all for his sake.”

“Then you acknowledge that you spoke falsely against Sir Gilbert?”

“I acknowledge nothing, monsieur,” retorted the Pole, scornfully; “but if you tell me that which I wish to know, why then, indeed—eh, yes, I may say something of your Sir Gilbert.”

“I don’t understand you, mademoiselle.”

“Oh, yes you do,” she panted, eagerly, “this woman—the sister of madame.”

“Miss Maxwell?”

“Yes! yes! you have seen her. Oh, I know of your visit to that place; and he also was there.

Does he love her, this coward, who said I was his adored ? ”

“ You wish to know if Mr. Dallas is in love with Miss Maxwell ? ”

“ Yes ! yes ! Is it so ? ”

“ I cannot tell you, mademoiselle. I know he was down there about some business. ”

“ He is down there now. ”

“ At Lippinton ? ”

“ Yes. Oh, I know why he is there. He loves this woman who is like my dead mistress. ”

“ How do you know that Miss Maxwell is the sister of Madame Mazzucata ? ”

“ She told me so herself. Yes, I was the friend of madame, not the servant. She told me many things. I knew all her history. I know of the Black Carnation. ”

“ What do you know about that ? ”

It was an injudicious question to ask, for hardly had the words left my mouth, when Ilma Celinski closed her mouth with a snap and refused to answer. There was evidently nothing to be got out of this woman save by working on her jealousy, so, as I saw she knew a great deal likely to be useful to us in the case, I took that line at the expense of a few falsehoods, which I trust will be pardoned

to me, seeing how desperate was the dilemma in which I found myself.

“You have come to ask me about Mr. Dallas, I understand?”

“I have, monsieur.”

“What can I tell you, mademoiselle; I should think you were more likely to know his movements than I.”

“I know nothing—nothing,” she said, angrily, “after the death of my mistress, M. Dallas left the town, and I have not seen him since. Oh, I am sure he is down with that woman; he loves her because she is so like madame.”

“Does he not love you?”

“He has told me so, many times, and I, like a fool, believed him. I helped him all in my power. I told him madame’s name—of the Black Carnation—of the place where it was to be found—all—all that he wished to know, and this is my reward—he leaves me for another. I am neglected, despised; but let him beware, for I can speak, as well as keep silent.”

“I think it would be best to speak, seeing how badly he is treating you.”

“Yes, he is treating me badly, but I do not know yet that he is false.”

“ Oh, I can set your mind at rest on that point. He is false—he has been false all along. He never loved you as he loved Mazzucata.”

At these words she grew so pale, that, for the moment, I thought she was about to faint, but being evidently a woman with an indomitable spirit, she controlled her emotion, and answered me at once.

“ He did not love madame, he hated her. That is why he sent her the Black Carnation.”

“ Oh, he did send that flower then ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ And did he kill madame, also ? ”

“ That I do not know.”

“ Then tell me all you do know. Save an innocent man from death, and revenge yourself on your false lover.”

“ Is he false ? If I thought so ! ”

“ He is false,” I responded, eagerly. “ He told me that he loved Madame Mazzucata, and no one else. The Black Carnation was only sent to her because he wished to frighten her into breaking off her engagement with Sir Gilbert. You have been his tool all along.”

“ His tool ! I ! ” she screamed, in a rage. “ Impossible ! he loves me ! ”

“ He does not. He loved Mazzucata while she was alive, but now she is dead, he loves her sister.”

Ilma clutched her breast as if to prevent her fury bursting forth, but as it was, she was by no means sparing of words in condemning her false lover.

“ Oh, the infamous one—the deceiver. He swore by all that he held most sacred, that I was the only woman he loved. I see now it is false, and that he is with this woman—this sister of madame. But I will be revenged, I will tell all.”

I listened eagerly for the promised revelation, and after a pause she burst out again.

“ Madame told me that a Black Carnation existed, and that she was afraid to receive one. She did not tell me the reason ; I did not know it was a message of death. I knew her father was this Maxwell, who had this Black Carnation in his possession, and all of this I told to M. Dallas. He came back from Paris many days before madame appeared at the theatre—he told me in Italy he loved me, and that he loved me now. I, like a fool, believed him, and told him all. Then he assured me that he hated madame, who had treated him badly ; and when I told him how afraid

she was of receiving a Black Carnation, he determined to send her one. I informed him where the Black Carnation was to be found."

"Don't you think it was very cruel of you thus to treat your mistress?"

"I never thought of my mistress," she responded, recklessly. "I only did what he desired. I knew no law but his, and, fool that I am, I have been punished for my folly. He told me that his only reason for sending the Black Carnation to madame was to make her fear."

"A feeble excuse. Surely, you did not believe him."

"Why should I not, monsieur? I knew not that he loved her so dear, and also there was no harm in sending madame the flower. It would cause her fear, but do her no harm. Fear, ah! what foolishness!"

"Well, he sent the Black Carnation?"

"Yes. He told me so, and I gave madame the letter when it arrived. It was from Paris, and contained that black flower. I could not understand that coming from France, and thought M. Dallas had returned to Paris; but no, I saw him the same day. It was a lie, that letter—he had sent it to his servant to post from Paris."

“Did he ask you to keep silent about his being in London?”

“He did, monsieur, and I held my peace. I told him all. He pretended to be jealous of M. Gilbert and myself, but I said, ‘No, this milord loves madame, he is with her always, he gives her flowers,’ and then I showed him the shop where the flowers came from.”

“And Sir Gilbert’s bouquet?”

“Ah, yes. I knew of that. M. Dallas told me how he had gone to the shop and asked to have a bouquet the same as Sir Gilbert’s. He said the bouquet was for me, so as to be equal to madame. He brought it to the hotel after madame had gone to the theatre. We were talking—we heard the voice of Sir Gilbert. He came in, yes, but M. Dallas hid himself.”

“Where?”

“In the same room as Sir Gilbert, who was drinking coffee. The flowers of Sir Gilbert were on a table near the curtain. I was in the next room, but I saw all—yes, all, and I will tell.”

“What did you see?” I asked, much excited.

Ilma Celinski placed her finger on her lips.

“I saw M. Dallas put out his hand, when was

turned Sir Gilbert's back, and change the bouquets—yes, change the flowers.”

“How could he do that when Sir Gilbert was in the room?”

“You do not understand, monsieur,” she replied, impatiently. “The table was near the window, and M. Dallas was hiding behind the curtain. In front of him were the flowers of Sir Gilbert, so what did he do but stretch out his hand with the bouquet and leave it on the table, taking away Sir Gilbert's instead.”

“And you said nothing?”

“Nothing. I did not know there was danger in the bouquet. Sir Gilbert, he took up the flowers of M. Dallas, thinking they were his own, and went away. Then M. Dallas came out, and when I asked him why he changed the flowers, he laughed, and said it was a trick for laughter.”

“Then he gave you the bouquet, left by Sir Gilbert.”

“He gave me no flowers,” said the Pole, in an angry tone, “see, this was it, monsieur:—I was late to go to the theatre, and M. Dallas said he would put me in a *fiacre*. I go away from the room first, and leave my flowers behind. He came also with me, and had his cloak over his arm. I did not

know then, but I know now that my flowers were under that cloak. I did not see them; he puts me in a *fiacre*, says *au revoir*, and then I go, while he, infamous one, takes the flowers he gives to me, for madame at the theatre."

"What kind of flowers were they that he brought to the hotel?"

"The same as those of M. Gilbert; white with a black one in the centre."

"A Black Carnation?"

"I cannot tell. It was black."

"Try and recollect; this evidence is very important."

"I cannot say, monsieur. I was busy; I had the flowers but a moment."

"If that second bouquet had a Black Carnation in the centre, it was the one which killed Mazzucata."

"Yes, but I do not know if it was the Black Carnation. Oh, yes, it might have been; but why should he bring me flowers to kill me?"

"He didn't wish to kill you, but madame."

"And for why?"

"Because he loved her, and could not bear to see her marry Sir Gilbert."

"Oh, I have been a fool," she said, throwing up

her arms in despair, "I see now he did not love me. But I will make him suffer."

"It would serve him right. He has made others suffer. Why did you tell all those lies in court, about Sir Gilbert stealing the Black Carnation?"

"Because, M. Dallas said he would marry me if I did so."

"Oh!" I cried, revolted at this callous behavior, "would you have condemned an innocent man to death on so slight a cause. Shame!"

"I did not want him to die," answered Ilma, doggedly; "but I wished to marry M. Dallas. I warned Sir Gilbert to go away, but he would not."

"You are little better than a murderess."

"I am what I am," she retorted, defiantly, "I was good once, but now—oh, I will make him suffer. He never loved me—he loved madame, and now it is her sister."

"I am not sure if he loves the sister."

"It is a lie. You said it was so."

"Pardon me, I said I thought so, but I did not swear to it."

"Oh! old false one, you have deceived me. Perhaps he does love me after all."

"No, I'm sure he does not."

"And I have destroyed him with my tongue,"

she said, not heeding my speech, "but no matter, I will go down to this sister and ask her, 'Does he love you?' If she says 'yes' I will tell all that I have said to the justice, but if she says 'no,' I will swear that I spoke nothing of the changing of the flowers."

"And thus condemn Sir Gilbert to death?"

"No, no; but what is that to me. I will marry M. Dallas."

"A murderer."

"He is not a murderer. He did not change the flowers. He loves me. What I have said is lies—all lies."

"What you have said is the truth," I replied, sharply, rising to my feet, "and I will tell it to my lawyer."

"I will deny it."

"Quite useless, Mademoiselle Celinski; you have confessed in the presence of two witnesses."

"Two witnesses!" she gasped, falling back a step.

"Pointer."

He appeared at the door of the bedroom.

"Did you hear what this lady said?"

"Every word, sir."

"You can swear to it?"

“I can swear to it, sir.”

Ilma Celinski looked from one to the other, in a quietly vindictive manner, and then addressed herself to me.

“You have tricked me, monsieur. You are a brave man. I make you my compliments, but I will go to this girl, and if he loves her not, I will swear that I told you lies to-night. If he hates me, you can kill him. If he loves me, I will save him.”

And without another word, she turned and left the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALL IN THE DARK.

IT can be easily imagined that after two such exciting interviews I had but little sleep that night, and arose next morning earlier than was my custom. Every second of those dragging hours of darkness my thoughts were busy with that weary case, and, though I looked at the affair from every imaginable point of view, I was unable to arrive at any conclusion respecting the solution of the problem. Towards dawn, worn out with incessant thought, I fell into an uneasy slumber, from whence I awoke about eight o'clock, feeling jaded and unrefreshed.

When I caught sight of my face in the glass, I positively started, so haggard did I look, and when Pointer entered with my shaving water he was unable to refrain from an exclamation of surprise. Usually Pointer knows his place and makes no remark unless directly addressed, therefore, I knew

that my appearance must be singularly careworn to thus provoke uncalled-for condolences from my ordinarily reticent servant.

“I am afraid you have not slept, sir.”

“No, Pointer, I have been thinking over this confounded case.”

“It is a pity, sir, you saw that young person last night.”

“So far as my rest is concerned—yes; but as regards the case, I am glad I interviewed her, as her evidence will be of a great value.”

“I hope it will go a long way to releasing Sir Gilbert, sir.”

“I am sure there will be little difficulty now, in proving his innocence. But the question is—Who is the guilty person?”

“If I may make so bold, sir——”

“Well, what is it, Pointer?” I replied, in an encouraging tone of voice. “What is your opinion?”

“After what Dabsworth told me, sir, and after the story of that young person last night, I think Mr. Dallas is the guilty party.”

“Ah! Is that your conviction, Pointer?”

“My firm conviction, sir. I don't see that it can be anyone else.”

“I have my doubts about Mr. Dallas, myself, Pointer; but I can't be sure. However, when I am dressed, I will call on Mr. Tancred, and tell him about this woman. By the way, Pointer, you need not mention her visit.”

“By no means, sir.”

So anxious was I to hear Tancred's opinion about the matter, that it did not take me long to finish dressing; a most remarkable thing for me, as I usually dawdle about my bedroom for at least an hour. However, this matter was too important to admit of any delay; so, having hastily swallowed breakfast—another extraordinary thing for me to do—I went at once to the Temple, in search of Tancred.

What with dressing hurriedly, and eating quickly, I felt most uncomfortable; and thus realizing—that this detective fever was undermining my health, I made a solemn vow to myself, that, if the case were not concluded speedily, I would throw it up and go abroad for a time. Either at Monte Carlo or San Remo I should be sufficiently distracted to forget this foolish desire to unravel this mystery. I would return cured, and able to take up the pleasant, calm life of the days before this terrible criminal case had upset my existence.

Tancred was out when I arrived at his rooms. This hardly astonished me, for when anyone is in a hurry, Fate generally throws all kinds of obstacles in his way, both to delay his aim and try his temper. Mine was bad enough already, so I accepted the absence of Tancred with resigned despair, and sat down to read the *Times*. Generally, I enjoy that paper, but this morning I could not keep my attention fixed enough to even read it; so, throwing it on one side, I was about to go out and take a walk, when Tancred entered, with such a joyous look on his face, that my ill temper vanished like mist before the sun.

“What! Major Granby,” he said, shaking my hand. “I am glad to see you, major. I have much to tell you.”

“And I have very serious news to tell you.”

“Eh, major. Have you found out who committed the crime? Another theory, major?”

“No; but I have had an interview with Ilma Celinski.”

“What, the waiting-maid? Did you pay her a visit?”

“On the contrary; she paid me a visit—at midnight.”

“Major! major!”

“ Oh, Pointer was there—in the next room ; and I was very glad, as he overheard her evidence, and is prepared to swear to it.”

“ Did she confess to those lies she told in the court ? ”

“ Yes ; and she confessed a good deal more. Listen, Tancred ; I am going to astonish you.”

“ Good. I like being astonished. Where is my pipe ? Ah, here it is. Now, Major Granby, I am your most obedient servant.”

Seeing he was thus disposed to listen, I narrated, at great length, the conversation of the previous night with Ilma Celinski. Tancred was very attentive, though he frequently interrupted me with exclamations of surprise. When I finished my story he rose to his feet and walked to and fro for some moments in deep thought, then resumed his seat with a dissatisfied frown on his face.

“ That woman is such a liar that I don't know whether to believe her or not.”

“ I am sure she speaks the truth in this case.”

“ Oh, I have no doubt that she is in love with Dallas, and that he deceived her. Also, that story of the changing of the bouquets is perfectly true, but she has not told you everything.”

“What else is there to tell?”

“I wish to know if that bouquet of Dallas, which she said he presented to her, contained the dynamite cartridge. It is a lie she is telling about the flowers, I am sure, for Dallas had no reason to give her that fatal bunch of flowers. No, he meant it for Mazzucata!”

“Doubtless; but very likely, knowing the temper of this Ilma Celinski, he was afraid to say so, and all the time pretended that the bouquet was for her, although he meant it for Madame Mazzucata.”

“Well, there is only one way to prove the truth of the story, and that is to see Dallas at once.”

“But he is at Lippinton.”

“No, he isn't, major. I have no doubt, in order to be rid of this girl, he lets her think he is at Lippinton, but in reality he is in town.”

“How do you know?”

“Because I have seen him this morning.”

“Seen Dallas?”

“Yes. After our interview with Ivan, yesterday, I wished to see what attitude Dallas was taking up, and so called at his rooms an hour ago.”

“Did you speak to him personally?”

“Yes, but only for a moment, as he was not yet up. However, he promised to come here at once and have a conversation over the matter.”

I rose to my feet with an ejaculation of rage.

“What is the matter, major?” asked Tancred, calmly.

“Don’t you see that you have put him on his guard. He will not come here.”

“Oh, yes, he will, if he is innocent.”

“But I think he is guilty, and now that he knows you wish to see him, he will suspect something and run away.”

“Don’t be alarmed, major, he won’t run far. I have a detective watching his chambers, and he cannot move a yard without being followed.”

“Well, supposing he does come here, do you think that will prove his innocence?”

“I don’t go so far as that,” replied Tancred, quickly, “but it will be strong presumptive evidence that he is not guilty.”

“Or, that he is on his guard and knows he can baffle justice.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, Tancred, I don’t think my meaning is hard to guess. As I told you, when Ilma found that I had deceived her in the matter of Dallas

being in love with Mazzucata's sister, she withdrew all her previous statements."

"That does not matter. Her evidence was overheard by two witnesses, yourself and Pointer."

"Yes! yes! that is all right; but she said she would warn Dallas of the mistake she had made."

"She won't warn Dallas until she is satisfied he loves no one but her," responded Tancred, coolly, "and that she can't make sure of until she has a personal interview with Miss Maxwell, in which case, she will have to go to Lippinton, therefore, up till now, she cannot have called on Dallas."

"But, supposing she called at his chambers before she went to Lippinton, and told him all. That would put him on his guard, and he will come here with a prepared conversation and line of defence."

"If he comes here to tell lies, I think I can prove their falsity. But as to this woman calling on him, she won't do that for two reasons: the first being that she wishes to see Miss Maxwell and know the truth; the second that she thinks Dallas is at Lippinton, as she told you last night. So, my dear major, you need have no fear that Dallas knows of that midnight visit, for by this time, Ilma Celinski is on her way to Lippinton to

kill two birds with one stone, by seeing Miss Maxwell and Dallas at once."

"When she doesn't find Dallas there, she will come back to town and warn him."

"She can't; for Dallas will be here shortly, and we shall know all he has to tell before Ilma Celinski returns. Besides, when she is at Lippinton she will fall into the clutches of Melchizedek."

"He doesn't know her."

"Oh, yes, he does. He was in court and heard her evidence, which I proved to him to be a tissue of lies. When he sees her at Lippinton, he will suspect her intentions and watch her. If he overhears her conversation with Miss Maxwell, as he assuredly will do, I wouldn't be surprised if he found out the truth without further trouble."

"Do you think Ilma Celinski knows the truth?"

"Either she or Miss Maxwell."

"Why Miss Maxwell?"

"Because I distrust Miss Maxwell. I wish to know several things about Miss Maxwell."

"Such as——"

"Why was she so agitated at the mention of the Black Carnation? What does she know about

that confounded flower? Tell me her reason for revealing so much to Ivan."

"But surely, Tancred, you do not suspect this poor blind woman?"

"I don't know who to suspect," replied the lawyer, gloomily. "I am utterly at a loss to come to any conclusion. Oh, yes, I know that you think, I being a barrister, should be infallible—that I should at once put my finger on the weak spot of all this conflicting evidence. That I should seize some one by the arm, and cry, 'behold the assassin!' but such things, major, are only done in books where the author knows the end of the story. God alone knows the truth of this strange matter, and unless by some miracle He permits us to learn the truth, I do not see how we are to discover the real criminal."

"But, Tancred, you don't think Gilbert Tresinger will be hanged?"

"No, I do not think the evidence is strong enough against him. In fact, if this trial were taking place in Scotland, the verdict, I fancy, would be 'not proven.' But the English law knows no middle course. It is either guilt or innocence, and if Sir Gilbert is condemned for this crime—of which, mind you, I firmly believe he is innocent—

he will, probably, be imprisoned for life if he escape the gallows."

"Still the evidence is not, at present, sufficient to convict him."

"Certainly not, especially now that Ilma Celinski confesses that she has borne false witness. But will she stick to the story she told you, major?"

"She says she will not—that is if she finds out that Dallas does not love her. I can't say whether he does or not, but I am certain that he does not care for this blind Miss Maxwell; so Ilma Celinski will be satisfied with that, and retract her story. However, as I told you, both myself and Pointer heard her tell the truth, and can swear to it."

"I am glad of that. But I think the only way to get Sir Gilbert out of his difficulty is to force Dallas to tell the truth."

"Which he certainly won't do if it is harmful to himself."

"No, I suppose not. However, he will be here soon," answered Tancred, looking at his watch; "half-past eleven—I expect him every minute."

There was a pause of a few moments' duration, each of us being busy with his own ideas.

"Tancred," I said, at length, "do you think Dallas is guilty of this crime?"

“Ah, that I cannot tell you. Things certainly look black against him. He said he would kill Mazzucata—he sent that Black Carnation from Paris, he changed those bouquets—yes, things don't seem in his favor, and I think he will have some difficulty in clearing himself.”

“You can prove all that, I know, but as regards the dynamite cartridge?”

“Ivan can prove that Kutusoff made it and gave it to him.”

“Certainly, but he cannot prove how he lost it. Dallas does not know Ivan—he was never in his company, so even supposing the cartridge dropped out of Ivan's pocket, how are you going to prove that Dallas picked it up?”

“Yes, that is difficult. But the crime may not have been committed with that cartridge.”

“How else could the explosion have taken place. Why, everything points to that cartridge having been used for the handle of the bouquet—Mazzucata touched the spring by accident—it exploded, and there you are.”

“I don't say such a cartridge was not used,” said Tancred, with some asperity, “but I am doubtful as to the special one which was in the possession of Ivan. Kutusoff might have made another.”

“He might, and I dare say has made many. Still, you must prove that he gave one to Dallas, in order to bring home the crime to that gentleman.”

“Well, I will see Kutusoff.”

“Who will say nothing.”

“He might not to me, but he is a friend of Ivan, who, I think, is well disposed towards Tressinger, so if I fail, we will set Ivan to work.”

“You don’t think Ivan is guilty?”

“No, I do not,” replied Tancred, decisively. “His conversation quite exonerated him in my eyes.”

“Still he had the fatal cartridge—he might have stolen that Black Carnation—he presented the bouquet——”

“True,” said Tancred, interrupting me, “but the only two bouquets of that special appearance were in the possession of Dallas and Gilbert—Ivan had nothing to do with them.”

“Suppose Ivan is the accomplice of Dallas?”

“I don’t suppose anything so ridiculous. Ivan loved Mazzucata, and certainly would not help to destroy her in order to gratify the pride of a rival lover. No, major, Ivan did not commit the crime, and I don’t know who did.”

“But what is your opinion?”

“My opinion,” said Tancred, slowly, “well, my opinion is that the discovery of the real criminal will surprise us all. Come in.”

This last was in answer to a sharp knock. We both turned our heads sharply towards the door, which quickly opened, and on the threshold stood Lawrence Dallas.

CHAPTER XV.

AT BAY.

DALLAS was by no means pleased at seeing me ; in fact, I think he was somewhat disconcerted at the idea of my being present at what could not fail to be a painful interview. Judging by all the evidence I had heard from different people interested in the case, Dallas had acted in anything but an honorable manner ; and of this he seemed to be aware, for he only greeted me with a cool nod, while his greeting of Tancred was coldness itself. On my part, I was equally dignified, for, in spite of a long training in the world, I am quite unable to conceal my real feelings ; and, as I looked on the conduct of Dallas in anything but a favorable light, I could not help showing my condemnation of it. Dallas had more command over himself, and, though obviously ill at ease, was able to preserve at least a semblance of carelessness ;

yet, I noticed that he addressed himself particularly to Tancred, to the pointed exclusion of myself.

“I am here, Mr. Tancred, according to my promise,” he said, in what he strove to render a careless tone, though I detected a tremor therein. “May I ask if you wish to see me on private business?”

“Not private enough to exclude Major Granby,” answered Tancred, coolly; “in fact, I asked the major to be present.”

Dallas raised his eyebrows in a nasty, supercilious way, which made my blood boil.

“I am not aware that Major Granby has any interest in my private affairs.”

“It’s not a private affair,” I said, hotly, in spite of Tancred’s effort to keep me silent; “it is an affair with which the whole world will soon be acquainted.”

“Indeed. Perhaps you will kindly enlighten my ignorance, and tell me what you both are talking about.”

“We are talking about Mazzucata,” said Tancred, promptly.

“Mazzucata!” repeated Dallas, starting. “And what have I to do with Mazzucata?”

“A good deal, according to Ilma Celinski.”

“Your pardon, Major Granby,” observed Tancred rather sharply; “pray, let me interview Mr. Dallas alone. Afterwards, you can ask him any questions you think fit.”

“I will answer no questions, sir,” cried Dallas, stung by this speech. “What do you mean by these insults?”

“I think you know, Mr. Dallas.”

“I do not know,” retorted the young man, obstinately.

As for me, seeing that Tancred desired me to keep silent—and I could not but admit that he was the proper person to interrogate the witness,—I held my peace, but watched the verbal tussle between these two enemies, with keen interest. Tancred was perfectly cool, but Dallas, in the most foolish manner, had quite lost his temper, and was now making for the door in hot indignation.

“Where are you going, Mr. Dallas?” asked Tancred, serenely, not moving from his chair.

“I am going to leave this room, sir, where I have been subjected to such insults.”

“I hope not; for, if you do, it will entail on me the trouble of calling on the nearest magistrate.”

Dallas had his hand already on the handle of the door, but at these last words he turned pale, and

dropping his hand, looked inquiringly at Tancred.

“What do you mean, sir?”

“I mean, that if you don't remain here and answer any questions myself and Major Granby may think fit to ask, I will take out a warrant for your arrest.”

“And for what?” asked Dallas, in a tremulous voice.

“For being concerned in the murder of Marietta Mazzucata.”

“It's a lie. I did not murder her.”

“I did not accuse you of such a thing. All I said was that you are implicated therein.”

“I am not, it is false.”

“Come, Mr. Dallas,” said Tancred, persuasively, pointing to a chair, “don't you think it would be wiser of you to remain?”

“Of course, if you force me.”

“Pardon me, I do not force you, Mr. Dallas. Leave the room if you like at your own risk.”

Dallas paused for a moment at the door in order to regain command over himself, then, with a smile of bravado on his pale face, returned to his chair, threw his hat and stick on the table beside him, and placed his hands on his knees with a defiant look at Tancred.

“Now then, sir,” he said, hoarsely, “perhaps you will kindly explain the meaning of this comedy.”

“Comedy,” I grumbled to myself, “let us hope it will not turn out a tragedy.”

“Major Granby, pray let me speak,” remonstrated Tancred, upon which I apologized as I always do when I feel myself to be in the wrong. Dallas, whom up to this time I had never suspected of being of a vindictive disposition, shot a malignant glance at me, which fired my soul with righteous indignation. Indeed, so wroth was I at his ungentlemanly behavior, that I was much put to in holding my tongue, but my promise was given to Tancred, so I kept silent, with the firm determination to speak my mind as soon as I was permitted to do so.

“Well, sir,” said Dallas, at this moment, “pray tell me what you wish me to say.”

“I wish to know the truth concerning your connection with Mazzucata.”

“That is easily told. I met Madame Mazzucata in Italy some eighteen months back, and asked her to marry me. She refused, and then I went to the East, from whence I returned to England some time ago.”

“With the idea of again asking Madame Mazzucata to become your wife.”

“Pardon me, I had no such intention.”

“You told a different story to me on the first night of the opera,” said I, quickly.

“Possibly,” retorted Dallas, with supreme indifference, “I spoke hurriedly, without thinking.”

“You certainly did when you said you would rather kill Mazzucata than see her married to another.”

“Did I say that,” he replied, changing color, “I talked at random.”

“It was a very dangerous speech to make,” said Tancred, pointedly, “however, we will pass over that for the present. When did you arrive in London?”

“On the sixteenth of May.”

“Think again, Mr. Dallas. Was it not on the eighth of May?”

Dallas winced, but still stuck to his assertion with the utmost effrontery.

“Of course, if you know more than I do, it is useless for me to reply to your questions. But in spite of your contradiction, I assert that I was not in London until the sixteenth of May.”

“And on my part, Mr. Dallas, I do not assert,

but know that you were in London on the eighth of May."

"It's a lie."

"Gently, Mr. Dallas. There is no need for you to lose your temper over this matter."

"I do not like my word to be doubted."

"That's very probable. Still, in this instance, I must beg leave to hold to my own opinion and deny your assertion."

Dallas bit his nether lip in a transport of fury, and afraid to again repeat his falsehood, contented himself with being insolent.

"As you know so much of my movements," he said, contemptuously, "perhaps you can tell me what I did with myself during these seven days you assert I spent in England."

"Willingly," replied Tancred, taking him up promptly, much to his astonishment and dismay, "you left your valet in Paris with the luggage, and told him you were going to see some friends at Amiens. Instead of stopping there, however, you came straight on to London, in order to find out the true position of affairs between Mazzucata and Sir Gilbert Tressinger. Ilma Celinski, whom you pretended to love, told you all you wished to know, and in order to frighten Madame Mazzucata

into breaking off the match, you determined to send her a Black Carnation, of which flower you knew she was superstitiously afraid. Not knowing where to get one, you asked Ilma Celinski, who informed you about Maxwell being the father of Mazzucata, and possessor of the Black Carnation. Thereupon, you went to Lippinton and stole a bud from the plant when you were in the greenhouse with Maxwell. On returning to town, you were afraid to send it direct to Mazzucata, lest she should guess the sender was in London, so you forwarded it to Paris enclosed in an envelope, which you directed your valet to post in Paris, which he did. Then you left a letter at Amiens, which the station-master was requested to post on the fifteenth, directed to your servant in Paris, telling him to come on. He did so, and you, pretending that you went on from Amiens on the fifteenth, met him in London, so to all appearances you arrived from the East on the sixteenth of May. Now, what do you say, Mr. Dallas. Is your time sufficiently accounted for?"

Dallas tried to answer, but his throat was so dry that he could not utter a word, but sat there looking deadly pale, with an expression of horror on his face as though he saw in his mind's eye the

abyss which lay before him. Evidently, he was thinking that if Tancred knew this much, the chances were that he knew more, and the very idea of such a thing caused him to shudder at the consequence of such unforeseen knowledge.

“Well, Mr. Dallas,” said Tancred, for the second time, “and what do you say now?”

“I say that all this is false.”

“Impossible. I have evidence to the contrary.”

“You have had me watched.”

“By no means. All this evidence can be verified by your valet Dabsworth, and by Ilma Celinski.”

“Ilma Celinski,” repeated Dallas, with a gesture of despair, “then that woman has betrayed me.”

“If you like to call it so, yes, but she did not play you false until you betrayed her. You said that you loved her, when you worshipped Madame Mazzucata.”

“Yes, that is true, but now——”

“Now,” interrupted Tancred, boldly, “you love Miss Maxwell.”

“What? that blind woman,” said Dallas derisively; “there you are quite wrong. I do not care two straws about her.”

“Then you still care about Ilma Celinski.”

“I hate her,” said Dallas, between his clenched

teeth, "the traitress—she has behaved shamefully."

"Not more shamefully than you, Mr. Dallas," cried I, indignantly, "seeing that you suggested that evidence which was intended to hang Sir Gilbert Tressinger."

"Who says I did such a thing?"

"Ilma Celinski."

"I am being betrayed on all sides. I congratulate you on your craft, gentlemen. But whither does all this tend?"

"To the exculpation of Sir Gilbert Tressinger."

"I hate him! I hate him!" cried Dallas, vindictively, "he stole from me the heart of the woman I loved."

"Yes," I replied, with irony, "the woman you loved so much that you murdered her."

Dallas sprang to his feet with a cry of rage.

"It is false! false, Major Granby! I acknowledge that all your evidence about Paris, about the Black Carnation, about my visit to Lippinton is true, but I do not acknowledge that I killed Mazzucata. I swear by all that I hold most sacred that I am innocent of this crime."

"Then why did you change the bouquets, at the Hôtel Europa?"

“Ilma again,” said Dallas, bitterly; “the little fiend. Yes. I did change the bouquets, at the Hôtel Europa and why? because I thought that Sir Gilbert would personally give the flowers to Mazzucata, and that I would have the happiness of seeing her appear on the stage with my bouquet, instead of his own. He defeated my object by throwing his flowers, as I did, from the stalls; but I swear that it was for that reason I changed the bouquets. Do you not believe me?”

“We can only judge your present conduct by your past,” returned Tancred, diplomatically, “and how can you expect us to believe you, after all the falsehoods you have told.”

The young man flushed red with anger, at being thus so contemptuously spoken to, and, angry as I was at his behavior, I could not but feel sorry for the position in which he was placed, knowing he could not resent Tancred’s plain speaking, however he might wish to do so. At first, I thought he would leave the room, but he now seemed to recognize the extremity of his danger, and swallowing his pride, spoke calmly and to the point.

“I admit to you, Mr. Tancred, that I have not hitherto confined myself strictly to the truth,

but that was simply because I resented your interference in my private affairs."

"When your actions become dangerous to the life and liberty of another man, they are no longer private. You have acted in a scoundrelly fashion, Mr. Dallas, quite unworthy of a man who calls himself a gentleman. However, I think that you are now coming to your senses, and, if so, I will expect you to give us a full history of all your disgraceful conduct before leaving this room."

"And if I refuse?" muttered Dallas, savagely, dropping back into his seat.

"If you refuse, I will apply for a warrant for your arrest."

"You have no evidence."

"Pardon me, the evidence of Ilma Celinski implicating you in the affair will be quite enough for a magistrate to grant a warrant. Your proposed victim, Sir Gilbert Tressinger, was arrested on far slighter grounds."

I saw, plainly, that Tancred was trying a game of bluff, for as we were doubtful of the attitude taken up by Ilma Celinski, it would have been a difficult matter to have got a warrant issued. Still the only way to deal with Dallas was to put him in deadly fear—if not of his life, at least of a

lic exposure—and that this course was a good one was proved by the way in which he surrendered to Tancred. From defiant he became meek, from excited he became quiet, and throwing off his air of injured dignity, which he now found was quite useless, he assumed a bold, brazen, manner, which was absolutely appalling. Up to this time, in spite of his questionable behavior, I certainly supposed Dallas to be a gentleman, but now, really I cannot trust myself to speak on the subject, and the sooner I set down the end of this disgraceful scene the better.

“If you think that you will release Tressinger by putting me in his place you are very much mistaken,” he said, with brazen assurance. “I see you have the whip-hand of me, so I may as well tell you all I know, but such a confession will in no way help you, for, in spite of your kind suspicion, I know no more than you do who killed Mazzucata.”

“We will judge of that for ourselves when we hear your confession.”

“Very good. I merely warn you not to be too sanguine. As I admitted before, I met Mazzucata in Milan and asked her to marry me, but she refused. I then went away to the East, thinking

travel would cure me of my love, but found my mistake; for when I returned to Paris on the seventh of May I was more in love than ever. I had hoped to find Mazzucata in Paris, but she had left a few days before with Tressinger. Then I heard all the gossip about them, and being jealous, determined to go to England secretly, and see for myself how matters stood. I told my servant that I was going to Amiens, as I did not wish him to know London was my destination."

"But your reason for such secrecy?"

"Because I am an exception to most people, and like to be a hero to my valet. Dabsworth knew that I was in love with Mazzucata, and I did not wish him to know I was going to England on her account. Oh! I know you will think it a weak reason—still it was my only reason, for I hate servants' gossip, and besides, did not want Dabsworth to gossip with Tressinger's valet, whom he knew, about my infatuation."

"Well, sir, for the sake of argument, we will grant that this was your reason for secrecy, though I think it but a slight one."

"You can think what you please," retorted Dallas, in a sulky tone. "I am now telling you the truth. When I left Paris I came straight to

London, and had no difficulty in finding out all I wished to know. Mazzucata was engaged to marry Sir Gilbert, and I, who loved her so dearly, was left out in the cold."

"You are well known in town, Mr. Dallas," I said, at this moment, "so how was it that you gathered all this information without being seen?"

"Because I never showed myself," he replied, cunningly. "I stayed at a third-rate hotel in the Strand, and sent for Ilma Celinski, who I knew was in love with me. She came to my hotel, and did all I wished; told me of Sir Gilbert's infatuation, of Mazzucata's love. I was enraged, and knowing Mazzucata's superstition about the Black Carnation, I thought if I could send her one, it would frighten her into giving up any idea of marriage."

"Dog in the manger. You could not marry her yourself, and did not want anyone else to have her."

"Exactly," replied Dallas, coolly. "You have hit it, my dear major. Well, I did not know where a Black Carnation was to be found until Ilma told me. She also informed me that Mazzucata was the daughter of Maxwell, a gardener at Lippinton. So down there I went——"

“And stole the Black Carnation.”

“Pardon me, I did not steal it. Maxwell gave me the flower of his own free will.”

“He denies that.”

“Then he is speaking falsely. No one could steal a bud from that plant without his knowledge, so closely is it guarded—no—he gave me the flower himself.”

“How did you induce him to do such a thing?” asked Tancred, rather puzzled.

“I can't tell you his reason. All I know is, that I asked him for a Black Carnation, to send to a lady, and he refused. When he heard the lady was Madame Mazzucata, he consented to give me a flower, and I came away with a blossom.”

“Strange,” murmured Tancred, to himself, “he would not give the flower until he heard it was for his daughter. What does it mean? Mr. Dallas,” he added, aloud, “did Maxwell know that you were informed Mazzucata was his daughter?”

“No, at least, I never told him so. I mentioned the name of Mazzucata. He gave me the flower, and I left Lippinton. In order to make things safer for myself, I decided to post the flower from Paris.”

“Yes, and sent it in an envelope with an English

stamp and postmark, thus showing your hand to Dabsworth."

"That was an oversight, I admit, but as I am not used to such intrigue, the mistake is excusable. At all events, I sent it to Paris, and it duly came back to Mazzucata in England. Then I wrote, as you know, from Amiens, for my servant, and, as you say, ostensibly arrived in London on the sixteenth of May. That is all I have to say about the matter."

"But is Ilma Celinski's story of the changing of the bouquets true?"

"Perfectly true. But my bouquet was made up exactly the same as that of Sir Gilbert's—white flowers and black rose. I had no second Black Carnation."

"But in Ilma's evidence she says the Black Carnation was on the table, so, suppose we substitute the name of Dallas for Tressinger, and say that the flower was placed in the bouquet by that gentleman."

"I tell you, Mr. Tancred, I did not do anything save change the bouquets, and my reason you already know. There was no Carnation on the table, and, so far as I know, Gilbert's bouquet was as innocent as mine."

“Do you swear that your bouquet had no cartridge concealed in it?”

“Yes, I swear it. Where could I get a dynamite cartridge, and arrange it to explode at a set time. I know nothing of such things; and when the explosion took place, I was as thunderstruck as anyone in the theatre.”

“If, then, you knew the bouquet thrown by Tressinger, which was your own, was perfectly innocuous, why did you tell Ilma Celinski to make those false statements in court?”

“Because I hated Tressinger, and still hate him.”

“So much so that you wish to see him die on the gallows?”

“No,” said Dallas, vehemently; “much as I hate him, I would not have let the matter go so far. I merely wished to punish him by imprisonment, but at the trial I intended to let the real story be known.”

“A pretty position you would occupy then.”

“It would not matter to me,” retorted Dallas, with great coolness; “as I merely intended to send you, Mr. Tancred, a confession of all I have told to-day, and then leave England before you could lay hands on me. As it is, I am going to leave England shortly.”

“Not until Tressinger is free, and this mystery solved,” said I, hastily.

“Oh, certainly, I will wait till Tressinger is free, as, now that he has been punished, I wish him no further harm; but, as to the solving of the mystery—that is impossible. I can’t wait in England all my life.”

“Then you don’t think we will discover who killed Mazzucata,” said Tancred, after a pause.

Dallas shrugged his shoulders.

“Not unless chance reveals the secret. I have told you all I know, and you see it does not help you in the least. Neither my bouquet, nor that of Tressinger’s, contained any explosive, so you must search for a third bouquet, to discover the culprit. Well, gentlemen, have I your permission to go?”

“For the present, yes,” replied Tancred, as Dallas took up his hat and stick; “but don’t you try and go away, for I will have you watched.”

“As you please,” he retorted, with the utmost indifference; “I am afraid I have disappointed you, by not confessing to the murder, but I can’t help that; of one thing you may be certain, that, had I been guilty, I would have cleared out of England at once, as soon as I knew Major Granby had been to Lippinton.”

“I have my doubts of you yet,” said I, as he moved towards the door.

“Have you, indeed! I am much obliged; but your ideas are all wrong. Good-bye, Mr. Tancred; and you, major, won't you shake hands?”

“Sir!” I said, drawing myself up to my full height. “I only shake hands with gentlemen, and you have forfeited all right to that title.”

It was a hard thing to say, I admit, but he deserved it thoroughly; and the shot went home, for he blushed crimson, and without another word, turned on his heel and left the room.

“Well,” said I, to Tancred, when the scoundrel had departed; “what is to be done now?”

“Nothing,” he replied, with a sigh, “except, wait for the report of Melchizedek.”

CHAPTER XVI.

ALONE I DID IT.

AFTER this eminently unsatisfactory interview with Dallas, I made up my mind to have nothing more to do with this case and to go abroad in search of forgetfulness. It was, no doubt, a rather selfish resolution; but just think how my health was suffering under this constant strain of unsatisfied curiosity. Besides, I had done my best to find out the truth, yet, was as far from such a discovery as ever. I had interviewed Dallas, Tressinger, Ivan, Ilma Celinski, Maxwell, Dabsworth, and Phillis & Co., yet had obtained no satisfactory clue from any of them, which was extremely discouraging. The best thing for me to do was to throw up the case, and let others solve the mystery; therefore, having come to this conclusion, as before stated, I determined to go abroad.

So firmly was my mind made up, that I had ac-

tually glanced through *Bradshaw* in search of some pleasant continental watering-place—I had even given Pointer orders to pack up for instant departure,—when I suddenly changed my mind, on account of Gilbert. I really could not leave him in the lurch, for I was, at this time, his only true friend; and it was not a pleasant idea to think that he was in prison while I was free. My conscience smote me as I thought how prone I was to consider my own comfort; therefore, I threw *Bradshaw* aside, I countermanded my orders to Pointer, and decided to remain on the spot, in order to make one final effort to help my poor friend.

Two or three days had now elapsed since Dallas had confessed his sins, and, during that time, I had frequently conversed with Tancred on the aspect of affairs, with which he was anything but satisfied. We saw Gilbert and told him all we had learned; but Tressinger could not help us in any way, and from the tangled mass of conflicting evidence, the three of us were unable to deduce any reasonable theory. I have already set forth five theories, but one upset the other; and in the end, as all proved useless, I was in a state of despair. Tancred also confessed to me that he was unable to see his way to a satisfactory con-

clusion ; so we were both at a standstill, when Fate intervened, and solved the problem with the utmost ease and dispatch.

All this time Melchizedek made no sign, and we were much puzzled as to what could be his reason for this persistent silence. However, notwithstanding his apparent inaction, Tancred had every confidence in his judgment, and declared that he kept silent for some good reason. I had my doubts on the subject, as I considered that he should have made a daily report of how things progressed at Lippinton ; and would have gone down there myself, but that Tancred entreated me not to do so.

“Leave Melchizedek to his own devices, major,” he said, when I urged the necessity of making inquiries. “If there is anything to be discovered, he is the man to make such discovery, and, in his own good time, he will tell us all that he thinks necessary.”

“Yes ; but you forget, that all this time Tresinger is in prison ; that the time of his trial is drawing near, and there is not yet any provision made for a proper defence.”

“Melchizedek knows the date of the trial, and will report to me all that he has seen before then.

What with one thing and another, we will be able to prove Tressinger's innocence."

"I trust so, Tancred; but I confess I am not sanguine. Besides, our most important witnesses are Dallas and Ilma Celinski, who may leave the country before the trial comes off."

"Have no fear on that score, major. They cannot move a step without my knowing it."

"You are having them watched?"

"Yes. Ivan, Dallas, and Ilma Celinski are all being watched, while Melchizedek, at Lippinton, keeps his eye on the Maxwells."

"I have no faith in Melchizedek."

"You are wrong. Melchizedek will find out more than you or I put together."

"What, at Lippinton?"

"Major Granby, a word in your ear. The solution of this mystery will be found at Lippinton."

"I don't believe that."

"Don't you? I do, and in a few days, events will prove that my belief is well founded."

This is only a sample of the many conversations which we had of this unsatisfactory nature—all talk, talk, talk, which led to nothing. Yet, in the end, Tancred proved to be right, for the solution of the secret was discovered at Lippinton, though

it was revealed to myself and Tancred in London.

It was on Tuesday that we had interviewed Dallas, and, as three days had elapsed since then, it was now Saturday, when, somewhere about three o'clock, I was seated in the writing-room of the Old Friends' Club, thinking of melancholy things. This arose, not from indigestion, but because I had that day been to see Tressinger, and the sight of one's dearest friend in a prison cell is enough to render sad the most unemotional man. I am not an unemotional man, therefore, you may guess how very dismal I felt, so much so, indeed, that I was just in the mood to call on Tancred and talk over the case. In fact, I had all but made up my mind to do so, when Pointer entered the room with a letter for me.

"It came a quarter of an hour ago, sir," said this admirable servant, "and, as it was marked 'immediate' I brought it on here at once."

"Quite right, Pointer," I answered, tearing open the envelope, "I see it is from Mr. Tancred."

That gentleman writes an uncommonly bad hand, but by the aid of my eyeglass, and a little patience, I gathered that he wished to see me at once on important business, the latter two words being underlined.

“I wonder what’s up now,” said I to myself, as I went out to get my hat. “Call me a hansom, Pointer, with a good horse. Queer, I should get this just as I was thinking of going to see him,” I continued, when Pointer went out to execute his commission. “I wonder if he has solved the mystery.”

On my way to the Temple I was a good deal exercised in my mind as to the reason of this sudden call, and at length came to the conclusion that Melchizedek had come up from Lippinton to make his report. Evidently, he had discovered something extraordinary, else Tancred, who is generally a very cool fellow, would never have sent for me post-haste in this manner. I detest surprises, as they make me feel nervous, so I determined to give Tancred a bit of my mind in the event of the journey proving not worth the trouble.

Cool did I call him? He looked anything but cool when I arrived at the door of his room, for there he was waiting for me, having heard my footsteps as I ascended the stairs, and his first action was to seize me by the hand in order to the more conveniently whisper in my ear.

“Major,” he said, hurriedly, “I have discovered the truth.”

“Oh, indeed. Has Melchizedek come up from Lippinton?”

“Melchizedek! no; but someone else has arrived from the same place.”

“Maxwell?”

“His daughter.”

“What, that blind girl,” I said, in astonishment; “what has she come up for?”

“To tell us who killed Mazzucata.”

“The deuce! And who is the culprit?”

Tancred reflected for a moment, and made up his mind.

“No! I will not tell you myself,” he said, leading me towards the door of his rooms; “I will let Miss Maxwell tell her own story.”

“But, Tancred——”

“Hush, major! not a word. Here is Miss Maxwell.”

When we entered, she was seated at the far end of the room with her head bent, and her two hands clasped tightly together on her lap. She arose to her feet on hearing our footsteps, and asked the following strange question:—

“Is that a police officer?”

“A police officer,” I repeated, hurrying forward to shake her by the hand, “good heavens, no, Miss

Maxwell. I am Major Granby, who called to see your father at Lippinton."

"Major Granby!" she cried, disengaging her hand from mine, "and can you greet me like this, knowing what you do."

"I don't understand," I began, in a puzzled tone, when Tancred interrupted me to address Miss Maxwell, in what I thought was a rather stern voice.

"At present, Miss Maxwell, nothing is known to Major Granby."

"Must I tell him also?" she whispered, clasping her hands together. "Oh, surely I need not repeat that shameful story! Mr. Tancred, have mercy, and send for a policeman at once to arrest me."

"Arrest you," I cried, more in the dark than ever, "and for what?"

"For the murder of my sister."

"Great heavens! Did you murder Mazzucata?"

"Yes; I alone committed the crime."

Thunderstruck with amazement, I turned towards Tancred, who was looking at both of us in silence, and touched my forehead significantly with my hand.

“Mad.”

“No, I am not mad,” cried Miss Maxwell, sinking into her chair. “I am a miserable, wicked woman, who killed my twin sister out of jealousy.”

“Tancred, this is absurd.”

“Unfortunately, it is the truth,” he replied sadly, motioning to me to seat myself, “I have heard the story, and there is no doubt that it is as she says.”

“Miss Maxwell,” I said, addressing her directly, “I have not heard your story, but I cannot, and will not believe that you committed this crime.”

A faint color flushed her cheeks, and she half involuntarily held out her hand, but withdrew it immediately with a sigh.

“You are very good to speak so kindly, Major Granby, but you will change your opinion when I tell you all.”

“Well, Miss Maxwell, it will take a lot to convince me of the truth of this statement, but I am ready to hear what you have to say.”

“Must I tell the story again?” she said, in an appealing manner to Tancred.

“I am afraid it will be necessary, Miss Maxwell,” he replied, coldly, upon which, sensitive to

the marked sternness of his tone, she shuddered slightly.

“It is part of my punishment,” she said, faintly, “but it is only what I deserve. Yes, Major Granby, I will tell you all, and then you will see how wicked I have been.”

“I am all attention, Miss Maxwell,” I replied, a doubt beginning to creep into my heart, in spite of my desire to believe in her innocence.

“Myself and Marietta Mazzucata were twins,” she began, in a firm tone, “but ever since I can remember, there existed no sisterly affection between us in any way. We were physically very much alike, but our natures were quite dissimilar, as she had a soft, sweet disposition, while mine was hard, proud, unyielding, and jealous. She had a beautiful voice, she was a brilliant musician, and attracted much attention, while I, possessing no accomplishments, was also blind from my birth. She, adorned with beauty, talent and ambition, was attractive in the highest degree; but I was neglected on all sides while she was present. My father is a hard, self-contained man, very bigoted in matters of religion, but even he yielded to the fascinations of my sister and treated her kindly, far more kindly than he ever treated me. Seeing,

then, that she possessed all, and I nothing, I began to grow madly jealous of her in every way, and at last hated her so much that I refused to speak to her."

"An unwomanly feeling," I murmured, astonished at this unexpected revelation.

"Yes, it was unwomanly, I own," she answered, quickly, "but you don't know what it is, Major Granby, to sit on one side, despised and neglected, while another is praised and loved. Yes, I hated my sister. I would gladly have seen her dead, and all her perfections buried in the grave."

"You are mad to talk like this."

"Yes, I was mad; I am mad. Mad with neglect and scorn. Who was she, to gain all, while I was lower than the dust? Oh, how I despised and hated her! As I said, we never spoke to one another, nor did she tell me any of her secrets, therefore, I was much astonished to hear one morning from my father that she had left the house with the intention of going on the stage as a singer. He is an eminently religious man, who is narrow in his views, a follower of Calvin, and one who looks upon the theatre as a pit of iniquity. Many times have I heard him say that he would rather see his daughter dead than on the

stage; therefore, when I heard, that in direct opposition to his wishes, she had gone away to appear as a singer, I was not astonished when he forbade her name to be mentioned, and cursed her as an undutiful daughter. I was glad she departed, as it relieved me from the hatefulness of enduring her presence, and I encouraged my father in his detestation of what she had done."

"Spare us these remarks, Miss Maxwell," said Tancred, in a tone of disgust; "remember she is dead."

"Dead!" repeated the woman in a melancholy tone, "yes, she is dead, and I would I were also."

"Pray continue your story, Miss Maxwell."

"For many months we heard nothing of my sister," she resumed quietly, "but at length the news came that she had appeared on the stage with great success, under the name of Marietta Mazzucata. As I told you, my father forbade her name to be mentioned to him, but notwithstanding that, I managed to hear all about my sister and of her many triumphs. It is true I am blind, and therefore unable to read the papers, but an old servant, who has to-day come up with me to town, used to procure from the railway book-stall all the newspapers containing notices of the celebrated Mazzu-

cata, and read them to me. Many sisters would have been pleased at her success, but I was not, for it only made me feel the more acutely how thoroughly my infirmity cut me off from the world. I hated to hear of her triumphs, yet could not resist desiring to know all about them; consequently, when my sister came back to England to appear at Covent Garden, I was thoroughly enraged, and cast about in my own mind as to some means of preventing her appearance."

"What a horrible nature!" I said, in a low tone.

"Yes, very horrible, but I could not help myself," she replied, with unnecessary vehemence. "I heard of her rich, famous and courted; I, her twin sister, was poor, unknown, and neglected, and I hated her for it—oh, how I hated her. In some way or another, I determined to harm her, and, when Mr. Dallas came to Lippinton in search of the Black Carnation, I determined to punish her, if I could, for her success."

"Did Mr. Dallas steal the Black Carnation?"

"Yes, he did, and I also, unknown to my father, plucked a bud."

"But your reason?"

"Because I wished my sister to know that I was the cause of her punishment."

“Of her death, you mean.”

“No!” replied the wretched woman, vehemently; “I did not wish to kill her, but only to harm her, in some way; to disfigure her beauty, not to take her life.”

“You are a fiend,” I cried, indignantly.

“I am what I am,” she answered, stolidly; “let me go on with my tale of revenge.”

“Mr. Dallas, I presume, sent the flower, as I knew he did, from the mouth of Signor Ivan, who came to Lippinton to ask my father about the Black Carnation. After he had conversed with my father, I saw him, and he spoke about Mazzucata, when I told him she was my sister. During our conversation, he pulled out his pocket-handkerchief, and with it a dynamite cartridge,—one which I afterwards learned would explode when the spring was touched. It fell into my lap, and I picked it up, when he snatched it from me with a cry of alarm, and explained how dangerous it was. Then the idea came into my head, that, if I could only obtain possession of that cartridge, and, placing it in the handle of a bouquet, give it to my sister, she would, unwittingly, touch the spring and the explosion would take place.”

“A devilish idea.”

“I did not wish to kill her. I swear I did not wish to kill her,” cried the woman, clasping her hands; “I only wished to disfigure her—to end her career on the stage, but I did not desire her death.”

She was now sobbing bitterly, but, despite a naturally generous nature, I could not find it in my heart to pity this woman, so desirous of the death of her sister—that sister, whose only fault was success.

“How did you get this bouquet sent to Mazzucata?” I said, repressing my disgust.

“I generally make up bouquets myself,” she replied, drying her eyes; “and, in order to let my sister know that this special bouquet came from me, I made it of white flowers, with a Black Carnation in the center. The handle, as I have told you before, was made of the cartridge of Signor Ivan.”

“But how did you get the cartridge? I thought you said Signor Ivan had taken it from you.”

“So he did, and placed it for safety in his overcoat pocket. Then my father saw him again for a few minutes, and while his back was turned I picked his pocket.”

“Thief as well as murderess.”

“Oh! have pity, pity,” she murmured, stretching out her hands. But I felt no pity, for this woman

was vile in the extreme, and quite undeserving of any kindness.

“Go on, Miss Maxwell,” said Tancred, stolidly. “Let us finish this painful business as soon as possible.”

“When the bouquet was finished,” she said, recovering herself with a powerful effort, “I did not know how to give it to my sister, and determined to go to town in order to do so. My father was sending some flowers up to Phillis & Co., so, with our old servant Jane, I went up to town with them. On arriving at Phillis & Co. I showed them my bouquet, when one of the girls asked me if I would give it to them for Sir Gilbert Tressinger, who had ordered one similar to it for Mazzucata that night. I saw at once a chance of getting it given to Mazzucata without any danger, therefore I left it. The rest you know. Sir Gilbert took the bouquet, which was thrown to my sister, and when the explosion took place it killed her.”

“Yes, I know that, Miss Maxwell. But you are wrong in thinking Sir Gilbert threw the bouquet, for he went to the Hôtel Europa when the bouquets were changed.”

“What bouquets?”

“Mr. Dallas also ordered a bouquet for Mazzucata,

similar to that of Sir Gilbert, and with the desire of his own being given first to Mazzucata, he changed the bouquets, therefore, as he took Sir Gilbert's, which was the one you prepared, it was Mr. Dallas who threw the fatal bouquet."

"Then Sir Gilbert will now be released."

"Assuredly, and you will be arrested."

"I am willing to be arrested at once," she cried, rising to her feet. "Call in a policeman and give me in charge."

"I don't wish to give you in charge just yet," said Tancred, awkwardly, for, basely as she had acted, the woman was blind, and deserving of pity.

"Why not? I swear, if you do not give me in charge, I will go and do so myself. Why will you not have me arrested?"

"Because I don't know if your story is true."

"It is true," she said, earnestly. "I swear it is true."

"I have my doubts of that," said Tancred, quietly. "People who commit crimes, don't, as a rule, give themselves up."

"I did so because I would have been arrested sooner or later. That Jew you sent down to Lippinton knows all. He overheard my confession to my father, and would have arrested me at once ;

but I thought it best to come up and see you, Mr. Tancred, to say that I was guilty, and ask you to release Sir Gilbert."

"What do you think, major?"

"Her story seems likely enough," said I, with a sigh. "There is no doubt she committed the crime."

"Then I am afraid I must call a policeman, and give you in charge."

"Yes; do! do!" she cried, anxiously.

Tancred looked doubtfully at her.

"Miss Maxwell," he said, at length, "you have told a vile story, and accused yourself of a vile crime; but I will not give you in charge."

"But, why?" she murmured, faintly. "What is your reason?"

"The best of all possible reasons—I don't believe you murdered Mazzucata."

MAJOR GRANBY'S THEORY.

NUMBER SIX.

I AM inclined to agree with Tancred, and believe that Miss Maxwell is innocent of the crime, my reasons for such belief being as follows:—

The whole story is extremely unlikely.

Miss Maxwell does not account for the superstition believed in by her sister—that the warning of the Black Carnation would be the forerunner of her death.

Miss Maxwell says she placed a Black Carnation in the fatal bouquet; and, if this was the case, two buds would be missing from the tree, whereas, to all showing, there is but one lost.

If there had been a Black Carnation in the bouquet, Phillis & Co. would have noticed it; and, after the evidence of Ilma Celinski being made public, would have given notice to the police.

Phillis & Co. said nothing about her visit to them; whereas, her striking resemblance to Mazucata would surely have been commented upon.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TRUTH.

BEFORE I left Tancred's chamber, it was arranged that Miss Maxwell and her servant should go, for the present, to an hotel in Fleet Street, close to the Temple, where she could be watched. Tancred, after due consideration, refused to believe her extraordinary story, and decided to take no step until he had communicated with Melchizedek. Neither of us could understand why Miss Maxwell should accuse herself of this crime, unless, as I surmised, it was because Ilma Celinski's idea was true and she was in love with Dallas. This being the case, all would be easily accounted for, seeing that the evidence against Dallas was so strong; and presuming him to be guilty of the crime, her love for him would be a sufficient excuse for her accusing herself wrongfully in order to shield him.

Tancred, however, scouted this theory as ridiculous, though I, the author of it, thought it a very feasible one, but what his own ideas were on the subject, I was quite unable to learn, owing to the obstinate silence he preserved.

“I have made quite enough mistakes, major,” he said, as I took my leave, “and I am not going to make any more by suspecting the wrong people. There is only one man who will find out the truth, and that is our friend Melchizedek.”

“Who is still at Lippinton?”

“Yes; but when he finds Miss Maxwell has come up to town he’ll follow her at once. In fact, I would not be surprised if he came up by to-night’s train.”

As a matter of fact, Tancred proved to be a true prophet, for the next morning, which was Sunday, just as I was finishing breakfast, somewhere about ten o’clock, Melchizedek made his appearance at my rooms.

“Mornin’, sir,” he said, with a satisfied smile, “I’m back again, sir.”

“When did you arrive?”

“By the night train, sir; but it was too late to look up either you or Mr. Tancred, so I waited till now. I’m just on my way to the Temple, sir, and

thinking you'd like to hear how I've got on, I called in here, sir, to ask you to come with me."

"Have you been successful?"

"Yes, sir. I've found out everything."

"But how, Melchizedek, how?" I cried, quickly putting on my coat, which Pointer brought to me. I may mention that I was not sitting in my shirt sleeves, but had on a smoking-jacket.

"How, sir?" said Melchizedek, calmly, "why, sir, by playing a game of bluff."

"Wait a moment. Now, there, I'm ready; Pointer, a cab."

Pointer went off at once to get a hansom, and I followed slowly with Melchizedek.

"Who is guilty?"

Melchizedek smoothed his hat, put it on his head, and winked his eye in a most vulgar manner.

"I'll tell you that, sir, when I see Mr. Tancred."

"What about Miss Maxwell?"

"Oh, she did her best, sir, but it was no go with him."

"What do you mean, Melchizedek?"

"I'll tell the story to both gents at once," replied this dreadful person, obstinately; and with this promise I was fain to be content, for though

I questioned Melchizedek during our drive to the Temple, I could extract no information regarding his doings at Lippinton.

When we arrived, Tancred was also at breakfast, but when he saw us, ran forward to greet, not me, but Melchizedek, whom he welcomed with effusive joy. Really, this little man was a most offensive person, and put me in mind of a bailiff, but as he was the only individual who could cure my detective fever, I was obliged to put up with his odious familiarity. Still, he had brains, this disreputable Hebrew, else he would never have played such a bold game at Lippinton and won as he did.

“I am glad to see you, Melchizedek,” cried Tancred, forcing the little Jew into a chair. “Have you anything to tell me?”

“Lots, sir.”

“And the major?”

“I know nothing.”

“No, sir, he knows nothing,” replied Melchizedek, with a grin, “I said I’d tell you two gents together, and that’s what I’m going to do.”

“Good. Put us out of this misery of suspense at once. Have you discovered who killed Mazzucata?”

“ I have, sir.”

“ You are certain ? ”

“ Got his confession here.”

“ His confession,” we both cried, at once ; “ then it wasn’t Miss Maxwell who killed her sister ? ”

“ No, sir, it wasn’t ; ” replied Melchizedek, slowly, “ but it was Mr. Maxwell who killed his daughter.”

“ Impossible,” we said, in chorus.

“ Not a bit of it. I’ve got it here in black and white.”

“ This, then, is why Miss Maxwell confessed,” said Tancred.

“ To save her father,” ended I, with a gesture of admiration.

“ Well, it didn’t save him,” retorted the little Jew, producing a roll of paper, “ for I’ve got the whole truth here.”

“ Sufficient to hang him ? ”

“ Twice over, but it won’t hang him, gents both.”

“ Why ? ”

“ Because he’s hanged himself.”

“ Suicide ? ”

“ That’s so, gents both.”

“ So Mazzucata’s assassin has escaped the clutches

of the law," said Tancred, after a pause, "a strange ending to a strange case. Well, I'm not sorry, for his daughter's sake."

"She came up to split on him, didn't she, gents?" said Melchizedek.

We both indignantly repudiated the insinuation.

"No! she came up here to take the burden of her father's crime on her own shoulders."

"I'm glad he didn't know that, or I wouldn't have got this," observed Melchizedek, patting the confession affectionately. "Well, it don't matter now. Have you got a drink, Mr. Tancred, sir?"

Tancred brought out a bottle of cognac and a glass, and after Melchizedek had refreshed himself with what he vulgarly called "a drain," he wiped his mouth and began to talk.

"I suppose you want to know all about it, gents both?"

"From the beginning," said Tancred, emphatically.

Melchizedek slapped his knees with delight.

"Oh! what a game, sir, what a game! All bluff, every bit; and nothing behind it. But I played low, gents both; and I won—won, sirs—hands down."

He was so pleased with himself, that he chuckled for at least two minutes over his own cleverness, much to the annoyance of Tancred and myself, who were impatient to hear all the particulars of this affair. Formerly, I had been under the impression that he was a somewhat reticent individual, who knew the value of words, and was, therefore, sparing of his speech ; but now, that conception of his character was quite destroyed, as he talked loudly and incessantly about his famous discovery at Lippinton.

“ When I heard all that you gents had to say,” he began, as soon as his risible faculties were under control, “ I saw, at once, I did, that the truth was to be found at Lippinton, so to Lippinton I went.”

I may here mention, that I give Melchizedek’s story in my own way, as his language was far too vulgar to set down here ; and my readers owe me a debt of gratitude for thus editing his conversation, which was singularly rude and unpolished.

“ What I thought was this,” resumed Melchizedek, thoughtfully : “ that Maxwell was a liar ; for he first said that Signor Ivan stole the bud, and then laid the blame on Mr. Dallas. Now, I didn’t believe that anyone could have stolen a

Black Carnation from such a carefully guarded plant unless he knew it; and if he gave away a bud to some person, he must know who it was. My idea was, that either himself or the other person committed the crime, and I went down to Lippinton with the intention of getting the truth out of him. I need not tell you, gents, how much in the dark I was, or how difficult it was to find out the truth; for, as day after day went by, I could discover nothing, until I began to think all my time was wasted."

"And what put you on the right track?"

"That Miss Celinski, who gave evidence in court. Yes. She came down a couple of days ago, and 'went' for Miss Maxwell like a fiend. This occurred in the garden, where I, also, was waiting to buy flowers. I bought flowers nearly every day, gents both. Oh! I was a good customer there, sirs. Well, gents both, this Miss Celinski and Miss Maxwell were in love with Mr. Dallas, and made all sorts of statements, at which I pricked up my ears. Miss Maxwell denied everything, so Miss Celinski 'flung' out of the garden in a rage, and I went after her. I saw she was jealous, and, by working on her jealousy, I managed to get everything out of her. She told me——"

“Oh, we know all that,” interrupted Tancred, quickly; “go on.”

“I am going on, sir,” said Melchizedek, a trifle offended. “I say, I found out that Mazzucata was the old man’s daughter; and one day, in the garden, when he thought I wasn’t listening, I heard him ‘cussing’ her like a pickpocket. Oh, then, I thought, to myself, ‘You hate your daughter, because she went on the stage; you own the Black Carnation; she expected one to be the signal of her death, so I wouldn’t be surprised, if you had killed her.’ Well, gents both, I thought, and I thought hard, and then I came to the conclusion that, as Mazzucata was the old man’s daughter, he’d have gone up, and seen her on that first night. So, off I goes to the station, and makes a ‘pal’ of one of the porters; and there I found that old Maxwell had been up to town on that night—the sixteenth of May,—and had come down to Lippinton by the night mail—in evening dress!”

“But why in evening dress. A man in his position wouldn’t own an evening dress.”

“Oh, but he did, though,” replied Melchizedek. “He was a bit of a swell, was old Maxwell, and a deacon of the church, too. Anyhow, he had an evening dress, and put it on to go to the opera.”

“But his reason?”

“Well, sir, he couldn't have got into the stalls of the theatre unless he'd been in evening dress.”

“He had no business in the stalls,” I said, angrily; “a gardener.”

“Of course not, sir,” said Melchizedek with a wink, “but he wanted to throw that bouquet, d'ye see.”

“Then those bouquets of Sir Gilbert and Mr. Dallas——”

“Were quite innocent. Yes, gents. There wasn't any cartridge about them. The old gent was in the front row of the stalls with his bouquet, and threw it himself. After he saw his daughter killed he walked out of the theatre and came home again.”

“How did you find all this out?”

“By bluffing him. I went to see him early the other morning, and says to him, ‘Look here, I'm a detective, and I've got a warrant for your arrest, for the murder of your daughter, Mazzucata.’ He began to bluster and say he had no daughter of that name and that he knew nothing. So I told him what I've told you, that he'd gone up in evening dress on the first night, and killed her with the bouquet.”

“What did he say, then?”

“Began talking about Mr. Dallas stealing the Black Carnation, so I said that he had given the Carnation, and that there was no stealing about it. Well, gents, I had a long tussle with him, but at last I got him on his knees, and he confessed everything. When he was at this, I heard a noise at the window, and saw Miss Maxwell disappear, so I knew she had heard everything.”

“Brave woman,” I said, with admiration, “and at once came up to town to try and save that old villain, by taking the blame on her own shoulders.”

“I guessed as much,” said Melchizedek, quietly, “but I didn’t tell him so. When I found her gone, I said, ‘Your daughter has gone up to town to denounce you, so you’d better make a clean breast of it.’ Well he raged at me, and I bluffed him with the warrant, which, of course, was all stuff, and then he tried to kill me, but though I’m not strong, I’m pretty tough, and I licked him. In the end, I made him write out this confession, and sign it, so here it is.”

“And Maxwell?”

“I was going to wire to you to send down a warrant, and keep my eye on him till then. After I’d

got his confession, he saw he was 'up a tree,' and as I wouldn't let him out of my sight, he asked me to let him destroy the Black Carnation. I didn't care if he did so or not, and thinking he couldn't hurt himself in the greenhouse, let him go in, while I kept guard near the door. Then I heard him smashing away at the Carnation, and after a bit, getting tired, went in to see him. Lord, sirs, he'd hanged himself, and the Black Carnation was all in bits under his feet. I cut him down, but he was as 'dead as a door-nail;' so I called in the police, told them all, and came up last night by the late train. And now, gents both, I will read you the confession of the 'dead 'un.'"

"By no means," said Tancred, annoyed by the man's vulgar familiarity, "I will look over it myself, and Major Granby can peruse it afterwards."

Melchizedek, rather crushed, held his peace; and Tancred proceeded to skim the document, while I sat still, waiting until he had finished. After a time, however, I grew somewhat tired of this, and, as it did not interrupt Tancred, conversed in a low tone with the Jew.

"How did Maxwell get the dynamite cartridge?"

"There was a singer called Ivan, sir, who went down to Lippinton, and had the cartridge in his

pocket. While he was talking to Miss Maxwell it rolled out and she picked it up. Signor Ivan took it from her, and described how dangerous it was, as, if she touched the spring, it would set the clock-work in motion and explode. Then he put it for safety into his overcoat pocket.”

“And Miss Maxwell stole it?”

“No, she didn’t sir, but I dare say she says that to shield her father. Signor Ivan’s overcoat was lying on the back of a chair some little distance away, and while he was talking to Miss Maxwell, the old man, who had overheard the conversation, picked it out of the pocket and kept it himself.”

“Did he intend to use it in killing his daughter?”

“Yes, sir. He came up to town on the sixteenth, and intended to just set the clock-work in motion, and throw it on the stage, at Mazzucata. But business took him to Phillis & Co., where he saw those two bouquets being made up for Mazzucata. He had a Black Carnation with him, which he intended to throw on the stage, along with the cartridge; so that his daughter would know he had thrown it. The bouquets gave him an idea, so he went off to another shop, bought some white flowers, and placing the Black Carnation in the centre for a sign,

completed the bouquet by making the dynamite cartridge into the handle."

"By the way, Melchizedek," interrupted Tanced, at this moment, "you have made one mistake, for I see Maxwell did not possess a dress suit."

"I thought he did."

"No. He confesses that he came up, as you state, to kill his daughter; and, wanting to get as close to the stage as possible, went to buy a stall. As it was the night of the performance, all the stalls were sold; but as one or two had come back, he purchased one in the front row, by giving a long price. The clerk at the box-office, seeing that he was a shabby old man, told him evening dress was indispensable, so he went to a shop in Oxford Street and hired an evening dress for the night. Then he made up the bouquet, as you have described, went to the theatre, and killed his daughter."

"Does he give any reason for so doing?" I asked, with much interest.

"Well, I think he was mad. In your investigations, Melchizedek, did you ever hear people say that Maxwell was out of his mind?"

"I heard something about him having fallen down from a ladder on to his feet, and that the shock had unsettled his brain."

“It’s very likely,” said Tancred, tapping the confession; “this is the work of a religious maniac. It appears he thought his daughter was doomed to perdition, because she went on the stage, and thought by killing her in the midst of her iniquity he would save her soul. When he heard that she had made a successful *début* in Italy, he wrote and told her that, at the earliest opportunity, he would kill her, on the principle of the Roman Catholic Church of the middle ages, which burned bodies to save souls. In order, however, to give her time to repent, he said he would send her a Black Carnation, and as Mazzucata knew that no one but her father possessed such a flower, she would know the call to repentance came from him.”

“So that was the reason she said a Black Carnation would be a sign she would die a violent death.”

“Precisely. You can see what a madman her father was. Of course he gave the Black Carnation willingly to Dallas, in order that his erring daughter might receive it and repent.”

“Do you think he intended to kill her on the stage, Tancred?”

“I’m sure I don’t know what he intended to do,” replied Tancred, thoughtfully, “but there was no doubt, that the incident of the dynamite cartridge,

gave him the idea of killing his daughter without harm to himself."

"But if he was mad, he would not care about harm to himself so long as he succeeded in killing Mazzucata."

"Not at all, major," said Tancred, smiling; "madmen are very cunning, and always contrive to save their own skins."

"Do you think he was mad?"

"Mad as a March hare—as a hatter. Read that manuscript, major, and you will see his mania, which was to save his daughter's soul by slaying her body."

"It was rather quixotic of Miss Maxwell to accuse herself of the crime simply to save her father—especially as he is a madman."

"Yes, but perhaps she does not think him mad. Besides, I don't think she quite understood the risk she ran of thus accusing herself. She did not love her father particularly, either."

"Nor her sister. At least, she spoke badly enough about her."

"That was the very reason I refused to believe her story," said Tancred, quickly; "she overdid the matter. No, she loved her sister dearly, and all that feigned hate was but to render her story

of the murder more likely to be true. But, as I have said before, she overdid it ; therefore, I guessed that it was all a false story.”

“ And did you suspect it was told to shield her father ? ”

“ Well, to tell you the truth, I did,” answered Tancred, candidly, putting the confession away in his drawer, “ but I had made so many mistakes before, that I did not care about revealing my suspicions until I was certain. Now, of course—thanks to Melchizedek—I see they are correct.”

“ I bluffed him fine, did I not, gents both,” said Melchizedek, making preparations for his departure, a thing I was not sorry to see.

“ Well, you will be rewarded for your trouble,” answered the lawyer, coldly. “ I will tell Sir Gilbert he owes his freedom to you.”

“ And what about Dallas, Tancred ? ”

“ Oh, he will leave England, as, after his disgraceful behavior, I don't think he will dare to face Tressinger ; but Nemesis is on his track in the person of Ilma Celinski.”

“ I'm glad the case is over,” I said, yawning ; “ my detective fever is cured, but never will I run the risk of getting another. No matter how care-

fully one's plans are laid, the truth is generally revealed by chance."

"Or Melchizedek," said Tancred, with a laugh; "but after all, I think the whole discovery is due to the Black Carnation."

EPILOGUE.

BY SIR GILBERT TRESSINGER, BART.

As one of the principal actors, in the strange drama of the Black Carnation, I claim my right to be heard. Tancred has written the prologue, Major Granby has set forth the story, and I therefore, must be permitted to finish with the epilogue. I am the more anxious to do this, as there is still a little matter to be revealed in connection with the affair, of which the general public are ignorant.

After my release from prison, I made a point of seeing Miss Maxwell; that noble woman, who, out of filial affection, took her father's guilt upon her own shoulders. Her appearance was so much like that of my poor Marietta, that I own I was much moved; for the twins resembled one another in every way, save that Miss Maxwell was, unhappily, blind.

So fascinated was I with this charming woman, that I called on her again and again; for I pitied

her greatly for her terrible affliction. It is Shakespeare, I think, who says that pity is akin to love, and certainly in this instance the remark proved true. At first, I merely pitied Miss Maxwell, but that feeling rapidly changed to love; for, besides having the beauty of her dead sister, she was quite as charming in every way. I loved Madame Mazzucata with my whole soul; and, now that she was dead, found that she still survived, in the person of her blind sister. One thing led to another, and in the end, I married this noble being, who had suffered so much, and whose afflictions were so many.

Many people, including Major Granby, tried to dissuade me from this course, as, from inquiries made, it was proved that her father, Simon Maxwell, was insane. Had his insanity been of an hereditary nature, I perhaps might have hesitated, but I discovered that it was caused by an accident. During his early life, he had fallen from a high ladder on to his feet, a distance of some twenty feet, and the shock, though breaking no bones, unsettled his brain. Afterwards, he recovered, though ill for many months; but, for the rest of his life, he was more or less insane, which, in the end, caused him to commit that purposeless crime. On

making this discovery, I saw that there was no bar to my marriage with the daughter, for the insanity, being caused by an accident, was not hereditary. I, therefore, married her, blind as she was, and have had no reason to regret the choice, which has given me such a charming wife.

Regarding Dallas, I heard of him the other day, as having been seen at Monte Carlo, in company with a lady, whom, I have no doubt, is Ilma Celinski. Dallas acted in a cruel fashion towards me ; but he is now being punished, for his Nemesis, in the person of that Polish fiend, is constantly at his heels. As the story of his actions towards me is more or less known, he dare not return to England, at the risk of being ostracized ; and while he remains abroad, Ilma Celinski will never leave him. She holds him fast in her toils ; and though, I am sure, he loaths his bondage, yet he has not the power to break away ; for, until he dies, Ilma Celinski will remain by his side. She loves him dearly ; he hates her fiercely ; but she is his visible punishment, and, therefore, I pity him.

As to my dear old friend, Major Granby, he is now abroad, recruiting, after the arduous task of writing his version of the case ; but I expect, when this book is published, he will hasten back to town,

in order to hear what his friends have to say. I trust the book will be successful ; though, I am afraid the major will be dreadfully chaffed about his six theories, which he builds up and dismisses in such a lordly fashion. It is true all the names are changed, so, perhaps, no one will suspect Major Granby of being an author ; but, I am afraid that our dear major cannot keep a secret, and that the fact that he is an author will leak out in the course of a day or two.

At all events, in spite of the major's peculiarities of style, and allusions to Pointer and his own belief, the story is truly set forth, as I know to my cost. Lady Tressinger is, unfortunately, blind, and so cannot read the major's masterpiece for herself, so I will have to read it to her, which will be a good thing in one way, inasmuch as I can soften all reference to her unhappy father. He committed a great crime, it is true, but being insane, he was not morally responsible for his actions. My only wonder is that he did not try and kill his other daughter also, in the hope of saving her soul ; but, thank heaven, such a contingency was stayed by the discovery of his crime, his insanity, and his subsequent death.

And the famous Black Carnation no longer exists.

In a short time people will deny that it ever did exist ; but, however Maxwell managed to produce such an extraordinary flower, there is no doubt, that such will never be seen again, for he is dead, and into the next world has carried with him the secret of the Black Carnation.

THE END.

THE
BLACK CARNATION

A RIDDLE

BY
FERGUS HUME

AUTHOR OF

"THE MYSTERY OF A HANSOM CAB," "MONSIEUR INDAS,"
"MADAM MIDAS," "A CREATURE OF THE NIGHT."

Deep in the night,
Hides terror ;
And the day's light ;
Shows error ;
But that which is last,
Shall reveal the first ;
And the net be cast,
O'er the head accurst.

NEW YORK
UNITED STATES BOOK COMPANY
5 AND 7 EAST SIXTEENTH STREET

CHICAGO : 266 & 268 WABASH AVE.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00022035721

