

Levison's Victim

MARY ELIZABETH BRADDON

'Have you seen Horace Wynward?'

'No. You don't mean to say that he is here?'

'He is indeed. I saw him last night; and I think I never saw a man so much changed in so short a time.'

'For the worse?'

'Infinitely for the worse. I should scarcely have recognized him but for that peculiar look in his eyes, which I daresay you remember.'

'Yes; deep-set grey eyes, with an earnest penetrating look that seems to read a man up as he talks to him. I'm very sorry to hear of this change in him. We were at Oxford together, you know; and his place is near my father's in Buckinghamshire. We have been fast friends for a long time; but I lost sight of him about two years ago, before I went on my Spanish rambles, and I've heard nothing of him since. Do you think he has been leading a dissipated life—going the pace a little too violently?'

'I don't know what he has been doing; but I fancy he must have been travelling during the last year or two, for I've never come across him in London.'

'Did you speak to him last night?'

'No; I wanted very much to get hold of him for a few minutes' chat, but couldn't manage it. It was in one of the gambling-rooms I saw him, on the opposite side of the table. The room was crowded. He was standing looking on at the game over the heads of the players. You know how tall he is, and what a conspicuous figure anywhere. I saw him one minute, and in the next he had disappeared. I left the rooms in search of him, but he was not to be seen anywhere about.'

'I shall try and hunt him up tomorrow. He must be stopping at one of the hotels. There can't be much difficulty in finding him.'

The speakers were two young Englishmen; the scene a little lamplit grove of trees outside the Kursaal of a German spa. The

elder, George Theobald, was a barrister of the Inner Temple; the younger, Francis Lorrimore, son and heir of a Buckinghamshire squire, and gentleman at large.

'What was the change that struck you so painfully, George?' Lorrimore asked between the puffs of his cigar; 'you couldn't have seen much of Wynward in that look across the gaming-table.'

'I saw quite enough. His face has a worn haggard expression—he looks like a man who never sleeps; and there's a fierceness about the eyes—a contraction of the brows, a kind of restless searching look—as if he were on the watch for some one or some thing. In short, the poor fellow seemed to me altogether queer—the sort of man one would expect to hear of in a madhouse, or committing suicide, or something bad of that kind.'

'I shall certainly hunt him out, George.'

'It would be only a kindness to do so, old fellow, as you and he have been intimate. Stay!' exclaimed Mr Theobald, pointing suddenly to a figure in the distance. 'Do you see that tall man under the trees yonder? I've a notion it's the very man we're talking of.'

They rose from the bench on which they had been sitting smoking their cigars for the last half-hour, and walked in the direction of the tall figure pacing slowly under the pine-trees. There was no mistaking that muscular frame—six feet two, if an inch—and the peculiar carriage of the head. Frank Lorrimore touched his friend lightly on the shoulder, and he turned round suddenly and faced the two young men, staring at them blankly without a sign of recognition.

Yes, it was indeed a haggard face, with a latent fierceness in the deep-set grey eyes overshadowed by strongly marked black brows, but a face which, seen at its best, must needs have been very handsome.

'Wynward,' said Frank, 'don't you know me?'

He held out both his hands. The other took one of them slowly, looking at him like a man suddenly awakened from sleep.

'Yes,' he said, 'I know you well enough now, Frank; but you startled me just this moment. I was thinking. How well you're looking, old fellow!—What, you here too, Theobald!'

'Yes; I saw you in the rooms last night,' answered George Theobald as they shook hands; 'but you were gone before I could get a chance of speaking to you. Where are you staying?'

'At the Hotel des Etrangers. I shall be off tomorrow.'

'Don't run away in such a hurry, Horace,' said Frank; 'it looks as if you wanted to cut us.'

'I'm not very good company just now; you'd scarcely care to see much of me.'

'You are not looking very well, Horace, certainly. Have you been ill?'

'No, I am never ill; I am made of iron, you know.'

'But there's something wrong, I'm afraid.'

'There is something wrong, but nothing that talk or friendship can mend.'

'Don't say that, Horace. Come to breakfast with me tomorrow, and tell me your troubles.'

'It's a common story enough; I shall only bore you.'

'I think you ought to know me better than that.'

'Well, I'll come, if you like,' Horace Wynward answered in a softer tone; 'I'm not very much given to confide in friendship, but you were once a kind of younger brother of mine, Frank. Yes, I'll come. How long have you been here?'

'I only came yesterday. I am at the Couronne d'Or, where I discovered my friend Theobald, happily for me, at the table d'hôte. I am going back to Buckinghamshire next week. Have you been at Crofton lately?'

'No; Crofton has been shut up for the last two years. The old housekeeper is there, of course, and there are men to keep the gardens in order. I shouldn't like the idea of my mother's flower-gardens being neglected; but I doubt if I shall ever live at Crofton.'

'Not when you marry, Horace?'

'Marry? Yes, when that event occurs, I may change my mind,' he answered with a scornful laugh.

'Ah, Horace, I see there is a woman at the bottom of your trouble!'

He did not answer this, but began to talk of indifferent subjects.

The three young men walked for some time under the pines, smoking and talking in a fragmentary manner. Horace Wynward had an absent-minded way, which was not calculated to promote a lively style of conversation; but the others indulged his humour, and did not demand much from him. It was late when they shook hands and separated.

'At ten o'clock tomorrow, Horace?' said Frank.

'I shall be with you at ten. Good-night.'

Mr Lorrimore ordered an excellent breakfast, and a little before ten o'clock awaited his friend in a pretty sitting-room overlooking the gardens of the hotel. He had been dreaming of Horace all night, and was thinking of him as he walked up and down the room waiting his arrival. As the little clock on the mantelpiece struck the hour, Mr Wynward was announced. His dress was dusty, and he had a tired look even at that early hour. Frank welcomed him heartily.

'You look as if you had been walking, Horace,' he said, as they sat down to breakfast.

'I have been on the hills since five o'clock this morning.'

'So early?'

'Yes; I am a bad sleeper. It is better to walk than to lie tossing about hour after hour, thinking the same thoughts with maddening repetition.'

'My dear boy, you will make yourself ill with this kind of life.'

'Don't I tell you that I am never ill? I never had a day's illness in my life. I suppose when I die, I shall go down at a shot—apoplexy or heart-disease. Men of my build generally do.'

'I hope you may have a long life.'

'Yes, a long life of emptiness.'

'Why shouldn't it be a useful happy life, Horace?'

'Because it was shipwrecked two years ago. I set sail for a given port, Frank, with a fair wind in my favour; and my ship went down in sight of land, on a summer's day, without a moment's warning. I can't rig another boat, and make for another harbour, as some men can. All my world's wealth was adventured in this one argosy. That sounds tall talk, doesn't it? but you see there is such a thing as passion in the world, and I've so much faith in your sympathy, that I'm not ashamed to tell you what a fool I have been, and still am. You were such a romantic fellow five years ago, Frank; and I used to laugh at your sentimental notions.'

'Yes, I was obliged to stand a good deal of ridicule from you.'

'Let those laugh who win. It was in the last long vacation before I left Oxford that I went to read, at a quiet little village on the Sussex coast, with a retired tutor, an eccentric old fellow, but a miracle of learning. He had three daughters, the eldest of them, to my mind, the loveliest girl that ever the sun shone upon. I'm not going to make a long story of it. I think it was a case of love at sight. I know that before I had been a week in the humdrum sea-coast village, I was

over head and ears in love with Laura Daventry; and at the end of a month was happy in the belief that my love was returned. She was the dearest, brightest of girls, with a happy disposition that won her friends in every direction; and a man must have had a dull unimpressible nature who could have withstood her charm. I was free to make my own choice, rich enough to marry a penniless girl; and before I went back to Oxford I made her an offer. It was accepted; and I returned to the University the happiest of men.'

He drank a cup of coffee, and rose from the table to walk up and down the room.

'Well, Frank, you would imagine that nothing could arise to interfere with our happiness after this. In worldly circumstances I was what would be considered an excellent match for Miss Daventry, and I had every reason to believe that she loved me. She was very young, not quite eighteen; and I was the first man who had ever proposed to her. I left her, with the most entire confidence in her good faith; and to this hour I believe in her.'

There was a pause, and then he went on again.

'We corresponded, of course. Laura's letters were charming; and I had no greater delight than in receiving and replying to them. I had promised her to work hard for my degree, and for her sake I kept my promise, and won it. My first thought was to carry her the news of my success; and directly the examinations were over, I ran down to Sussex. I found the cottage empty. Mr Daventry was in London; the two younger girls had gone to Devonshire, to an aunt who kept a school there. About Miss Daventry the neighbours could give me no positive information. She had left a few days before her father, but no one knew where she had gone. When I pressed them more closely, they told me that it was rumoured in the village that she had gone away to be married. A gentleman from the Spanish colonies, a Mr Levison, had been staying at the cottage for some weeks, and had disappeared about the same time as Miss Laura.'

'And you believe that she had eloped with him?'

'To this day I am ignorant as to the manner of her leaving. Her last letters were only a week old. She had told me of this Mr Levison's residence in their household. He was a prosperous merchant, a distant relation of her father's, and was staying in Sussex for his health. This was all she had said of him. Of their approaching departure she had not given me the least hint. No one in the vil-

lage could tell me Mr Daventry's London address. The cottage, a furnished one, had been given up to the landlord, and every debt paid. I went to the post office; but the people there had received no directions as to the forwarding of letters, nor had any come as yet for Mr Daventry.'

'The girls in Devonshire—you applied to them, I suppose?'

'I did; but they could tell me nothing. I wrote to Emily, the eldest girl, begging her to send me her sister's address. She answered my letter immediately. Laura had left home with her father's full knowledge and consent, she said, but had not told her sisters where she was going. She had seemed very unhappy. The whole affair had been sudden, and her father had also appeared much distressed in mind. This was all I could ascertain. I put an advertisement in *The Times*, addressed to Mr Daventry, begging him to let me know his whereabouts; but nothing came of it. I employed a man to hunt London for him, and hunted myself; but without avail. I wasted months in this futile search, now on one false track, now on another.'

'And you have long ago given up all hope, I suppose?' I said, as he paused, walking up and down the room with a moody face.

'Given up all hope of seeing Laura Levison alive? Yes; but not of tracking her destroyer.'

'Laura Levison! Then you think she married the Spanish merchant?'

'I am sure of it. I had been more than six months on the look-out for Mr Daventry, and had begun to despair of finding him, when the man I employed came to me and told me that he had found the registry of a marriage between Micheal Levison and Laura Daventry, at an obscure church in the City, where he had occasion to make researches for another client. The date of the marriage was within a few days of Laura's departure from Sussex.'

'Strange!'

'Yes, strange that a woman could be so fickle, you would say. I felt convinced that there had been something more than girlish inconstancy at work in this business—some motive-power strong enough to induce this girl to sacrifice herself in a loveless marriage. I was confirmed in this belief, when, within a very short time of the discovery of the registry, I came suddenly upon old Daventry in the street. He would fain have avoided me; but I insisted on a conversation with him, and he reluctantly allowed me to accompany him to his

lodging, a wretched place in Southwark. He was very ill, with the stamp of death upon his face, and had a craven look that convinced me it was to him I was indebted for my sorrow. I told him that I knew of his daughter's marriage, when and where it had taken place, and boldly accused him of having brought it about.'

'How did he take your accusation?'

'Like a beaten hound. He whimpered piteously, and told me that the marriage had been no wish of his. But Levison had possession of secrets which made him the veriest slave. Little by little I wrung from him the nature of these secrets. They related to forged bills of exchange, in which the old man had made free with his kinsman's name. It was a transaction of many years ago; but Levison had used this power in order to induce Laura to marry him; and the girl, to save her father from utter ruin, as she believed, had consented to become his wife. Levison had promised to do great things for the old man, but had left England immediately after his marriage, without settling a shilling on his father-in-law. It was altogether a most wretched business: the girl had been sacrificed to her father's weakness and folly. I asked him why he had not appealed to me, who could no doubt have extricated him from his difficulty; but he could give me no clear answer. He evidently had an overpowering dread of Michael Levison. I left him, utterly disgusted with his imbecility and selfishness; but for Laura's sake I took care that he wanted for nothing during the remainder of his life. He did not trouble me long.'

'And Mrs Levison?'

'The old man told me that the Levisons had gone to Switzerland. I followed post-haste, and traced them from place to place, closely questioning the people at all the hotels. The accounts I heard were by no means encouraging. The lady did not seem happy. The gentleman looked old enough to be her father, and was peevish and fretful in his manner, never letting his wife out of his sight, and evidently suffering torments of jealousy on account of the admiration which her beauty won for her from every one they met. I traced them stage by stage, through Switzerland into Italy, and then suddenly lost the track. I concluded that they had returned to England by some other route; but all my attempts to discover traces of their return were useless. Neither by land nor by sea passage could I hear of the yellow-faced trader and his beautiful young wife. They were not a couple to be overlooked easily; and this puzzled me. Disheartened

and dispirited, I halted in Paris, where I spent a couple of months in hopeless idleness—a state of utter stagnation, from which I was aroused abruptly by a communication from my agent, a private detective—a very clever fellow in his way, and well in with the police of civilized Europe. He sent me a cutting from a German newspaper, which described the discovery of a corpse in the Tyrol. It was supposed, from the style of the dress, to be the body of an Englishwoman; but no indication of a name or address had been found, to give a clue to identity. Whether the dead woman had been the victim of foul play, or whether she had met her death from an accidental fall, no one had been able to decide. The body had been found at the bottom of a mountain gorge, the face disfigured by the fall from the height above. Had the victim been a native of the district, it might have been easily supposed that she had lost her footing on the mountain-path; but that a stranger should have travelled alone by so unfrequented a route seemed highly improbable. The spot at which the body was found lay within a mile of a small village; but it was a place rarely visited by travellers of any description.'

'Had your agent any reason to identify this woman with Mrs Levison?'

'None; except the fact that Mrs Levison was missing, and his natural habit of suspicion. The paragraph was nearly a month old when it reached me. I set off at once for the place named; saw the village authorities, and visited the Englishwoman's grave. They showed me the dress she had worn; a black silk, very simply made. Her face had been too much disfigured by the fall, and the passage of time that had occurred before the finding of the body, for them to give me any minute description of her appearance. They could only tell me that her hair was dark auburn, the colour of Laura's, thick and long; and that her figure was that of a young woman.

'After exhausting every possible enquiry, I pushed on to the next village, and there received confirmation of my worst fears. A gentleman and his wife—the man of foreign appearance, but talking English; the woman young and beautiful—had stopped for a night at the chief inn of the place, and had left the next morning without a guide. The gentleman, who talked German perfectly, told the landlady that his travelling-carriage and servants were to meet him at the nearest stage on the home journey. He knew every inch of the country, and wished to walk across the mountain, in order to show

his wife a prospect which had struck him particularly upon his last expedition a few years before. The landlady remembered that, just before setting out, he asked his wife some question about her watch, took it from her to regulate it, and then, after some peevish exclamation about her carelessness, put it into his waistcoat pocket. The lady was very pale and quiet, and seemed unhappy. The description which the woman gave me was only too like the woman I was looking for.'

'And you believe there had been foul play?'

'As certainly as I believe in my own existence. This man Levison had grown tired of a wife whose affection had never been his; nay more, I have reason to know that his unresting jealousy had intensified into a kind of hatred of her some time before the end. From the village in the Tyrol, which they left together on the bright October morning, I tracked their footsteps stage by stage back to the point at which I had lost them on the Italian frontier. In the course of my wanderings I met with a young Austrian officer who had seen them at Milan, and had ventured to pay the lady some frivolous harmless attentions. He told me that he had never seen anything so appalling as Levison's jealousy; not an open fury, but a concentrated silent rage, which gave an almost devilish expression to the man's parchment face. He watched his wife like a lynx, and did not allow her a moment's freedom from his presence. Every one who met them pitied the beautiful girlish wife, whose misery was so evident; every one loathed her tyrant. I found that the story of the servants and the travelling-carriage was a lie. The Levisons had been attended by no servants at any of the hotels where I heard of them, and had travelled always in public or in hired vehicles. The ultimate result of my enquiries left me little doubt that the dead woman was Laura Levison; and from that hour to this I have been employed more or less in the endeavour to find the man who murdered her.'

'And you have not been able to discover his whereabouts?' asked Frank Lorrimore.

'Not yet. I am looking for him.'

'A useless quest, Horace. What would be the result of your finding him? you have no proof to offer of his guilt. You would not take the law into your own hands?'

'By the heaven above me, I would!' answered the other fiercely. 'I would shoot that man down with as little compunction as I would kill a mad dog.'

'I hope you may never meet him,' said Frank solemnly.

Horace Wynward gave a short impatient sigh, and paced the room for some time in silence. His share in the breakfast had been a mere pretence. He had emptied his coffee-cup, but had eaten nothing.

'I am going back to London this afternoon, Frank.'

'On the hunt for this man?'

'Yes. My agent sent me a description of a man calling himself Lewis, a bill-discounter, who has lately set up an office in the City, and whom I believe to be Michael Levison.'

The office occupied by Mr Lewis, the bill-discounter, was a dismal place enough, consisting of a second-floor in a narrow alley called St Guinevere's Lane. Horace Wynward presented himself at this office about a week after his arrival in London, in the character of a gentleman in difficulties.

He found Mr Lewis exactly the kind of man he expected to see; a man of about fifty, with small crafty black eyes shining out of a sallow visage that was as dull and lifeless as a parchment mask, thin lips with a cruel expression, and a heavy jaw and bony chin that betokened no small amount of power for evil.

Mr Wynward presented himself under his own name; on hearing which the bill-discounter looked up at him suddenly with an exclamation of surprise.

'You know my name?' said Horace.

'Yes; I have heard your name before. I thought you were a rich man.'

'I have a good estate, but I have been rather imprudent, and am short of ready-money. Where and when did you hear my name, Mr Lewis?'

'I don't remember that. The name sounds familiar to me, that is all.'

'But you have heard of me as a rich man, you say?'

'I had an impression to that effect. But the circumstances under which I heard the name have quite escaped my memory.'

Horace pushed the question no further. He played his cards very carefully, leading the usurer to believe that he had secured a profitable prey. The preliminaries of a loan were discussed, but nothing fully settled; and before leaving, Horace Wynward invited Mr Lewis to dine with him at his lodgings, in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly,

on the following evening. After a few minutes' reflection Lewis accepted the invitation.

He made his appearance at the appointed hour, dressed in a suit of shabby black, in which his sallow complexion looked more than usually parchment-like and ghastly. The door was opened by Horace Wynward in person, and the money-lender was surprised to find himself in an almost empty house. In the hall and on the staircase there were no signs of occupation whatever; but in the dining-room, to which Horace immediately ushered his guest, there was a table ready laid for dinner, a couple of chairs, and a dumb-waiter loaded with the appliances of the meal. The room was dimly lighted by four wax candles in a tarnished candelabrum.

Mr Lewis, the money-lender, looked round him with a shudder; there was something sinister in the aspect of the room.

'It's rather a dreary-looking place, I'm afraid,' said Horace Wynward. 'I've only just taken the house, you see, and have had in a few sticks of hired furniture to keep me going till I make arrangements with an upholsterer. But you'll excuse all shortcomings, I'm sure—bachelor fare, you know.'

'I thought you said you were in lodgings, Mr Wynward.'

'Did I?' asked the other absently; 'a mere slip of the tongue. I took this house on lease a week ago, and am going to furnish it as soon as I am in funds.'

'And are you positively alone here?' enquired Mr Lewis rather suspiciously.

'Well, very nearly so. There is a charwoman somewhere in the depths below, as deaf as a post and almost as useless. But you needn't be frightened about your dinner; I had it in from a confectioner in Piccadilly.'

He lifted the cover of the soup tureen as he spoke. The visitor seated himself at the table with rather a nervous air, and glanced more than once in the direction of the shutters closely fastened with heavy bars. He began to think there was something alarmingly eccentric in the conduct and manner of his host, and was inclined to repent having accepted the invitation, profitable as his new client promised to be.

The dinner was excellent, the wines of the first quality; and after drinking somewhat freely, Mr Lewis began to be better reconciled to his position. He was a little disconcerted, however, in perceiving that

his host scarcely touched either the viands or the wine, and that those deep-set grey eyes were lifted every now and then to his face with a strangely observant look. When dinner was over, Mr Wynward heaped the dishes on the dumb-waiter, wheeled it into the next room with his own hands, and came back to his seat at the table opposite the bill-discounter, who sat meditatively sipping his claret.

Horace filled his glass, but remained for some time silent, without once lifting it to his lips. His companion watched him nervously, every moment more impressed with the belief that there was something wrong in his new client's mind, and bent on making a speedy escape. He finished his claret, looked at his watch, and rose hastily.

'I think I must wish you good-night, Mr Wynward. I am a man of early habits, and have some distance to go. My lodging is at Brompton, more than an hour's ride from here.'

'Stay,' said Horace, 'we have not begun business yet. It's only nine o'clock. I want an hour's quiet talk with you—Mr Levison.'

The bill-discounter's face changed. It was almost impossible for that pallid mask of parchment to grow paler, but a sudden ghastliness came over the man's evil countenance.

'My name is Lewis,' he said, with an artificial grin.

'Lewis, or Levison. Men of your trade have as many names as they please. When you were travelling in Switzerland two years ago, your name was Levison; when you married Laura Daventry, your name was Lewison.'

'You are under some absurd mistake, sir. The name of Levison is strange to me.'

'Is the name of Daventry strange to you too? You recognized my name yesterday. When you first heard it, I was a happy man, Michael Levison. The blight upon me is your work. O, I know you well enough, and am provided with ample means for your identification. I have followed you step by step upon your travels—tracked you to the inn from which you set out one October morning, nearly a year ago, with a companion who was never seen alive by mortal eyes after that date. You are a good German scholar, Mr Levison; read that.'

Horace Wynward took out of his pocket-book the paragraph cut from the German paper, and laid it before his visitor. The bill-discounter pushed it away after a hasty glance at its contents.

'What has this to do with me?' he asked.

'A great deal, Mr Levison. The hapless woman described in that

paragraph was once your wife: Laura Daventry, the girl I loved, and who returned my love; the girl whom you basely stole from me by trading on her natural affection for a weak unworthy father, and whose life you made wretched, until it was foully ended by your cruel hand. If I had stood behind you upon that lonely mountain pathway in the Tyrol, and had seen you hurl your victim to destruction, I could not be more convinced than I am that your arm did the deed; but such crimes as these are difficult—in this case perhaps impossible—to prove, and I fear you will escape the gallows. There are other circumstances in your life, however, more easily brought to light; and by the aid of a clever detective I have made myself master of some curious secrets in your past existence. I know the name you bore some fifteen years ago, before you settled in Trinidad as a merchant. You were at that time called Michael Lucas, and you fled from this country with a large sum of money, embezzled from your employers, Messrs Harwell and Oliphant, sugar-brokers in St Nicholas Lane. You have been “wanted” a long time, Mr Levison; but you would most likely have gone scot-free to the end, had I not set my man to hunt you and your antecedents.’

Michael Levison rose from his seat hastily, trembling in every limb. Horace rose at the same moment, and the two men stood face to face—one the very image of craven fear, the other cool and self-possessed.

‘This is a tissue of lies!’ gasped Levison, wiping his lips nervously with a handkerchief that fluttered in his tremulous fingers. ‘Have you brought me here to insult me with this madman’s talk?’

‘I have brought you here to your doom. There was a time when I thought that if you and I ever stood face to face, I should shoot you down like a dog; but I have changed my mind. Such carrion as you are not worth the stain of guilt upon an honest man’s hand. It is useless to tell you how I loved the girl you murdered. Your savage nature would not comprehend any but the basest and most selfish passion. Don’t stir another step—I have a loaded revolver within reach, and shall make an end of you if you attempt to leave this room. The police are on the watch for you outside, and you will leave this place for a gaol. Hark! what is that?’

It was a footstep on the stairs outside, a woman’s footstep, and the rustling of a silk dress. The dining-room door was ajar, and the sounds were very audible in the bare empty house. Michael Levison

made for the door, availing himself of this momentary diversion, with some vague hope of escape, but within a few paces of the door he recoiled suddenly with a hoarse gasping cry.

The door was pushed wide open by a light hand, and a figure stood upon the threshold—a girlish figure dressed in black silk, a pale sad face framed by dark-auburn hair.

‘The dead returned to life!’ cried Levison. ‘Hide her, hide her! I can’t face her! Let me go!’

He made for the other door, leading into the inner room, but found it locked, and then sank cowering down into his chair, covering his eyes with his skinny hands. The girl came softly into the room, and stood by Horace Wynward.

‘You have forgotten me, Mr Levison,’ she said; ‘and you take me for my sister’s ghost. I was always like her, and they say I have grown more so within the last two years. We had a letter from you a month ago, posted from Trinidad, telling us that my sister Laura was well and happy there with you—yet you mistake me for the shadow of the dead!’

The frightened wretch did not look up. He had not yet recovered from the shock produced by his sister-in-law’s sudden appearance. The handkerchief which he held to his lips was stained with blood. Horace Wynward went quietly to the outer door and opened it, returning presently with two men, who came softly into the room and approached Levison. He made no attempt to resist them as they slipped a pair of handcuffs on his bony wrists, and led him away. There was a cab standing outside ready to convey him to prison.

Emily Daventry sank into a chair as he was taken from the room.

‘O Mr Wynward,’ she said, ‘I think there can be little doubt of my sister’s wretched fate. The experiment which you proposed has succeeded only too well.’

Horace had been down to Devonshire to question the two girls about their sister. He had been struck by Emily’s likeness to his lost love, and had brought her up to London with him, in order to identify Levison by her means, and to test the effect which her appearance might produce upon the nerves of the suspected assassin.

The police were furnished with a complicated mass of evidence against Levison in his character of clerk, merchant, and bill-discounter; but the business was of a nature that entailed much delay, and after several adjourned examinations the prisoner fell desperately

ill of a heart-disease from which he had suffered for years, but which grew much worse during his imprisonment. Finding his death certain, he sent for Horace Wynward, and to him confessed his crime, boasting of his wife's death with a fiendish delight in the deed, which he called an act of vengeance against his rival.

'I knew you well enough when you came home, Horace Wynward,' he said, 'and I thought it would be my happy lot to compass your ruin. You trapped me, but to the last you have the worst of it. The girl you loved is dead. She dared to tell me that she loved you; defied my anger; told me that she had sold herself to me to save her father from disgrace, and confessed that she hated, and had always hated me. From that hour she was doomed. Her white face was a constant reproach to me. I was goaded to madness by her tears. She used to say your name in her sleep. I wonder I did not cut her throat as she lay there with the name upon her lips. But I must have swung for that. So I was patient, and waited till I could have her alone with me upon the mountains. It was only a push, and she was gone. I came home alone, free from the worry and fever of her presence: except in my dreams. She has haunted them with her pale face and the one long shriek that went up to the sky as she fell.'

He died within a few days of this interview; and before his final trial could take place. Time, that heals almost all griefs, brought peace by and by to Horace Wynward. He furnished the house in Mayfair, and for some time led a misanthropical life there; but on paying a second visit to Devonshire, where the two Daventry girls lived their simple industrious life in their aunt's school, he discovered that Emily's likeness to her sister made her very dear to him, and in the following year he brought a mistress to Crofton in the person of that young lady. Together they paid a mournful visit to that lonely spot in the Tyrol where Laura Levison had perished, and stayed there while a white marble cross was erected above her grave.