

He was standing before her now, and he took one of her hands.

"I love you, dear; I love you with all my heart. Do you love me?"

Then she looked up and rose to her feet, and placed both hands upon his shoulders.

"As you love me, so I love you, Mark."

After that, conversation languished till Mrs. Cunningham came into the room, five minutes later.

"We have come to the conclusion, Mrs. Cunningham," he said, "that there will be no necessity for the visit to Bath. Millicent is otherwise provided for; she has promised to be my wife."

"I am glad, Mark, glad indeed!" and she took Millicent in her arms and kissed her tenderly. "I have all along hoped for it, but I began to be afraid that you were both such obstinate young people that it would never come about. I know that your father wished it, Mark, and he told me that his brother had said that it would be a good arrangement if some day you should come to like each other. I have guessed for the last year, and, indeed, before then, that Millicent would not say 'No' if you ever asked her; but this stupid estate seemed to stand in the way. Of late, I have even come to hope that the obstinate girl would keep to her intention, and that if, as I knew would be the case, you refused to take the estate, she would give it away to some charity. In that case, there could be nothing to prevent your speaking; and even then you would have been between you very fairly equipped with this world's goods. However, the present is a far better solution, and the discovery of the treasure has saved you from three years' waiting before things were straightened out. I feel as if I were her mother, Mark, having had her in my charge since she was a baby; and as she grew up it became my fondest hope to see you united some day, and I think that I am almost as pleased that my hope has been fulfilled as you are yourselves."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER thinking over the best way in which to set about the work of carrying the diamonds to Amsterdam, Mark decided upon asking the advice of his late chief. The latter said, as Mark entered his room:

"I did not expect to see you here again, Mr. Thorn-dyke."

"Well, sir, I have come to ask your advice about another matter altogether."

"What is it now?"

"I have to convey a diamond bracelet of very great value across to Amsterdam. I have reasons to believe that there is a plot to seize it on the way, and that the men engaged will hesitate at nothing to achieve their object. Under these circumstances I should be very much obliged if you will tell me what would be the best course to pursue. I must say that the bracelet is, with many other jewels, in a strong teak box of about a foot square, at present in the possession of our bankers; they were brought from India by my uncle. I imagine that the rest of the jewels are of comparatively little importance in the eyes of these men, though doubtless they would take them also if they lay their hands on them. The bracelet, however, is of special interest to them, not so much for its intrinsic value, as because it was stolen from one of their sacred idols."

"This was about twenty years ago; but I have reason to believe that the search for it on the part of some Hindoos connected with the temple has never ceased. The soldier who took it was murdered; his comrade, into whose hands they next passed, was also murdered. They next came to my uncle, who forwarded it at once to England. His bungalows were searched again and again, until probably the fellows came to the conclusion that he must have either buried it or sent it away. Nevertheless, to the day of his death he was firmly convinced that

he was closely followed, and every movement watched. He warned my father solemnly that he too would be watched, but as far as we know it was not so; at any rate, we had no reason to suppose that the house was ever entered. On the other hand, I am convinced I have been watched more or less closely ever since I came up to town, and as I came out from the bank yesterday I saw a man—a colored fellow, I believe—on the watch.

"My uncle said that my life would not be worth an hour's purchase so long as I had the bracelet in my possession, and advised that it should be taken straight over to Amsterdam, broken up, and the diamonds sold singly to the merchants there."

"It is a curious story, Mr. Thorndyke. I own to ignorance of these Indian thieves and their ways, but it certainly seems extraordinary that so hopeless a quest should be kept up for so long a time. You are sure that it is not fancy on your part that you have been watched? I know you are not the sort of man to take fancies in your head, but as you have had the matter so strongly impressed upon you, you might naturally have been inclined to think this would be the case when it was not so."

"No, I don't think there is any chance of my being mistaken. It is only of late that I have thought about it, but when I did so and thought over what had passed since I came to London, I recalled the fact that I had very often come across foreign seamen; sometimes they were Lascars, at others they might have been Italian or Spanish seamen; and you see, sir, it was, as I told you at the time, some foreign sailor who came and informed Gibbons that I had fallen into the hands of a gang of criminals, and that I should certainly be killed if I was not rescued immediately. Gibbons at once got together half a dozen fighting men, and, as you know, rescued me just in time. It was extraordinary that the man never came forward to obtain any reward."

"That was a friendly act, Mr. Thorndyke."

"Yes, I have no reason to suppose that these men would be hostile to me personally; I was not the thief. I was simply the person who happened to be in possession, or, rather, might come into possession of the bracelet.

From the close watch they had kept, they were, I imagine, well aware that I had not got it, but may have thought, and doubtless did think, that I had some clew to its hiding-place, and should sooner or later get it. With my death the clew might be finally lost, and my life was consequently of extreme importance to them, and therefore they took steps to have me rescued, and the fact that they learned this and knew how friendly I was with Gibbons shows how close was the watch kept over me. No doubt, had Gibbons refused to help them, they would have come here at once."

"Certainly, after what you say it would seem that your conjecture is right, and in this case, if I were you, I should take the bracelet out of the case and conceal it about me. I would not fetch it myself from the bank."

"I don't think I should be much safer so," Mark said thoughtfully. "In the first place, I must go to the bank to get them, and I might be murdered merely on the supposition that I had brought the bracelet away. In the next place, even if I got to Amsterdam safely and got rid of the bracelet and returned unnoticed by them, a fresh danger would arise when I got the other gems into my possession, for they could not be certain whether the diamonds were still among them or not."

"I should hardly think that would be the case if they watch you as strictly as you believe. Even if none of them accompanied you, they would soon find out what diamond merchants you went to, and the leader might call upon these men, stating that he was commissioned to purchase some diamonds of exceptional value for an Eastern Prince, in which case he would be sure to obtain sight of them."

"If I had your business to perform, I would not go near the bank again, but would send some friend I could trust to go and open the box, and take out the bracelet, and make it into a small parcel. He should hand it to you privately, as you are on your way to embark for Amsterdam. Then I would take with me one or two of my men, and, say, a couple of your prizefighters, and with such a guard you ought to be fairly safe."

"It is about his time, sir, when he has nothing in particular to see about. Like a turn with the mauleys this morning?"

"Not this morning, Ingleston. I have got some engagements for the next day or two where I could not very well show myself with a black eye or a swelled nose; you have given me a good many of both."

"Well, Mr. Thorndyke, when one stands up against a man who is as strong as one's self, and a mighty quick and hard hitter, you have got to hit sharp and quick too. You know my opinion, that there aint half a dozen men in the country could lick you if you had a proper training."

"I suppose you couldn't get away for a week, or maybe two?" he said.

"Lor' bless you, no, sir. Who would there be to keep order here at night? When I first came here I had not given up the ring, and I fought once or twice afterwards. But, Lor' bless you, I soon found that I had got either to give up the pub or the ring, and as I was doing a tidy business here, I thought it best to retire; since then business has grown. You see, boxing is more fashionable than it used to be, and there are very few nights when one don't have a dozen Corinthians in here—sometimes there are twice as many—either to see some of the new hands put on the mauleys, and judge for themselves how they are going to turn out, or maybe to arrange for a bout between some novice they fancy and one of the west countrymen. No, sir, I could not do it anyhow; I should not like to be away even for one night, though I know Gibbons would look after things for me; as for being away for a week, I could not do it for any money. No, sir, my fight with Jackson last year was the last time I shall ever go into the ring. I was a fool to go in for that, but I got taunted into it. I never thought that I should lick him, though, as you know, sir, I have licked a good many good men in my time, but Jackson is an out-and-out man, and he has got a lot more science than I ever had; my only chance was that I could knock him out of time or wear him down; but he was too quick on his pins for me to do the former. Ah, Gibbons, here is

Mr. Thorndyke. He wants to see you; you had best go into my room behind the bar."

"Want to get hold of a fresh hand, Mr. Thorndyke?" Gibbons asked when they had sat down by the fire.

"No, Gibbons, it is another business altogether. Have you got anything particular to keep you in town for the next fortnight? It may not be over a week, but it may be over a fortnight."

"No, sir," the man said, after taking three or four draws at his long pipe. "No, sir; they won't want the ropes and stakes for another three weeks, so I am your man if you want me. What is it for, sir?"

"Well, it is rather a curious affair, Gibbons. I have to take a very valuable bracelet over to Amsterdam, to sell there, and I have very strong reasons for believing that if some fellows get an inkling of it they will try to put me out of the way, and get hold of the diamonds. I want a couple of good men to go with me."

"Well, sir, I should say you and me could lick a dozen ordinary chaps, without thinking anything of it."

"I dare say we could, Gibbons, in a stand-up fight without weapons, but I fancy these fellows will not try that. They are foreigners, and the first thing they would try would be to put a dagger between my shoulders as I walked up and down on deck at night, or, more likely still, creep into my cabin and stab me while I was asleep. If the voyage were only to last one night I might sit up, pistol in hand, but if the wind is foul we might be a week. We are a pretty strong party. Mr. Chetwynd—you know him—is going with me; there will also be two runners from Bow Street, and I want you to take another good man with you. Of course, on board we shall separate. The Bow Street men will watch the passengers, and you and your mate will smoke your pipes and keep yourselves ready to join in if you see there is going to be a row. But I rather think that the passage will be a quiet one. At Amsterdam, until I have got rid of the diamonds I certainly should not care about going out into the street after nightfall without having you close behind me."

"All right, sir. I should say Tom Tring would be as

gool a man as one could get at the job. What is the money to be, Mr. Thorndyke?"

"Well, what do you think yourself, Gibbons?"

"I take it you pay all expenses, sir?"

"Yes, everything."

"Would five-and-twenty guineas a head be too much?"

"No; I will do better than that. I will give you five-and-twenty guineas each when we get to Amsterdam, and I will give you another twenty-five each if I come back here safe and sound."

"Well, I call that handsome. One could not want more, and you can rely on it that Tring will jump at the offer. He has not been able to get a fight on lately, and he is rather in low water."

"Well, you will both get up as quiet traders. I don't know what other passengers there may be, but I don't want them to know that you belong to the fancy."

"I twig, sir. We will get up quiet like."

"Then I want you to-morrow morning, Gibbons, to go down to Holmes & Moore, No. 67 Tower Street, and take two first-class tickets to Amsterdam on board the *Essex*, which sails on Saturday. I don't know what the passage-money will be, but this is sure to be enough; and we can settle accounts afterwards. You will find out what time of day she will start."

"All right, governor. I suppose you will be here again before that?"

"No, I don't suppose I shall, unless there is some change in the arrangements. If for any reasons Tring cannot go with you, you will get somebody else instead. You are sure that you quite understand your instructions? Here is the name and address of the people in Tower Street."

"All right, sir. You may make sure that when you go down to the ship you will see the two of us on board."

It needed but a few minutes at Bow Street to inform the chief of the arrangements that had been made.

"I have told off Chester and Malcolm; one of them shall go down and take their tickets. Of course, they will take their passages in the fore cabin, as the danger, if there is danger, may come from there, and you will have

your other two men with you aft. I fancy myself that there is hardly any chance of your being in any way troubled while on board. It will be considered that there will be a vastly greater chance of carrying out any plan they may have formed at Amsterdam than there would be on board a ship; you see, if there were any struggle whatever on board there would be no escape for them.

"For myself, of course I cannot give any opinion worth having in a matter so different from anything we have to do with here, and I should have unhesitatingly scoffed at the idea of anyone watching the movements of people for a long number of years in order to obtain the possession of jewels, however valuable. However, your uncle was well acquainted with the habits of Hindoos, and was not a man to be lightly alarmed; you yourself, after your year with us, should not be deceived in such a matter as being yourself followed; under these circumstances you are quite right to take every precaution, and as you pay well for the services of our two men, even if I had no belief whatever in the existence of danger to you, I should not feel justified in refusing to let you have them."

Having arranged these matters, Mark spent the rest of his time that day and the next at Islington.

"I am going across to Amsterdam on Saturday with a diamond bracelet to sell there."

Millicent looked at him in reproachful surprise.

"Why, surely, Mark, there can be no hurry about that. I think you might have stayed a little longer before running away."

"I should do so, you may be quite sure, Millicent, if I consulted my own inclinations, but I am bearing out your father's wishes. This bracelet is the most valuable of all the things he had, and I believe that it has some sort of history attached to it. He told my father that he had sent all the gems home principally to get these diamonds out of his possession; he said that as soon as my father got hold of the things, he was to take the diamonds straight over to Amsterdam and sell them there, for he considered that they were much too valuable to be kept in the house, and that it was possible that some of the Hindoos might endeavor to get possession of them.

At the time he spoke he believed that my father would, at his death, go to the bank and get the jewels, as of course he would have done if he had known where to find them. My father promised him that they should be taken to Amsterdam at once; and although so many years have passed since his death, I think I am bound to carry out that promise."

"I have never been able to understand, Mark, how it was that my father, when he gave all these instructions about me and these jewels and so on, did not at the same time tell uncle where to find them."

"It was a fancy of his; he was in very bad health, and he thought so much over these diamonds that it had become almost a sort of mania with him that not only was there danger in their possession, but that he was watched night and day wherever he went. He thought, even, if he whispered where the hiding-place was to be discovered it might be heard; therefore he deferred telling it until too late. Of course all this was but a fancy on his part, although it is probable enough that the possession of the diamonds was a source of danger in India, and might have been a source of danger here had any thieves known that such valuable gems were kept in a private house or carried about. At any rate, I shall be glad to be free of the responsibility; and although, naturally, I don't like leaving you at the present time, I think it best to carry out your father's instructions at once, and to get them off my mind altogether. Dick Chetwynd is going with me, so it will be a pleasant little trip."

"Well, I am glad he is going with you, Mark; for although I know well enough that they could never be watching for those diamonds to turn up all these years, I feel sure I should fidget and worry if you were alone. You are not going to take the others with you?"

"No, only this particular bracelet. None of the others are exceptionally valuable, so far as I know. At any rate, your father did not specially allude to them. I have no doubt that there are some really valuable jewels among them, for my uncle prided himself on being a judge of precious stones, and as he invested a large amount of money in them, they are, no doubt, worth a great deal.

Still, I don't suppose there will be any difficulty in selling them here, and, at any rate, I don't want to be delayed at Amsterdam by having to sell perhaps fifty or a hundred pieces of jewelry; any time will do for that. I fancy that I ought to be able to dispose of the bracelet in three or four days at the outside. I have got from Bow Street a list of all the principal diamond merchants in Amsterdam. That is a matter of great interest to the force, as almost all precious stones stolen in this country are sent across there, and if there is any special jewel robbery we send over a list of all the articles taken to the merchants there. As a rule, that would not prevent their dealing in them, but there are some who will not touch things that have been dishonestly come by, and we occasionally get hints that enable us to lay hands upon thieves over there."

"I hate to hear you say 'the force,' Mark, just as if you were still a detective; it is bad enough that you should have belonged to it, even for the purpose you did; but you have done with it now."

"Yes; but, you see, it is rather difficult to get out of the habit when one has been for over a year constantly at work at a thing. This will be my last absence on business, Millicent; henceforward I shall be able to be always with you."

"Well, now, that I know what you have been doing all this time, Mark, I must admit that you have been very good to have been with us as much as you have. I often used to wonder how you passed your time. Of course I knew that you were trying to find that man out, but it did not seem to me that you could be always at that, and I never dreamt that you had become a regular detective. I am very glad I did not know it till a short time before you gave it up. In the first place, I should have been horrified, and, in the second place, I should have been constantly uneasy about you. However, as this is to be the last time, I will let you go without grumbling."

"By the way, Millicent, what do you wish me to say about our engagement? I don't see that there is the slightest occasion for us to keep up the farce of your being Miss Conyers any longer. You cannot be married

under a false name, you know, and now that you have escaped what your father was so afraid of, and are going to be married for love and not for money, I don't see why there should be any more mystery about it."

"But how would you account for my having been called Conyers all this time?"

"I should simply tell the truth; that your father, having a great fear that you might be married for money, left the estate to my father, to be held by him until you came of age, and that it was at his particular request that you were brought up simply as his ward, and dropped the family name and passed by your two Christian names. I should say that we have all been aware for a long time of the facts of the case, and I should also say that your father had left a very large fortune in addition to the estate between us, and had expressed a hope that we should, when the time came, marry each other."

"Then people will think that we have only married to keep the fortune together, Mark."

"Well, my dear, I don't suppose there are a great many people who will be interested in the matter, and those who get to know you will see at once that as far as I am concerned, there was no great difficulty in falling in with your father's ideas, while, on the other hand, they may consider that you made a noble sacrifice of yourself in agreeing to the plan."

"Nonsense, sir. I am not going to flatter you, as no doubt you expect; but, at any rate, I am perfectly content with my share of the bargain."

"Well, there is one thing, Millicent; all who knew us down at Reigate will say that it is a very sensible arrangement, and will be glad to know that I shall retain the estate they have hitherto considered to be mine. Well, then, you agree to my mentioning to my intimate friends that you are my cousin, and that we are engaged?"

"Yes, I suppose it is the best thing, Mark, and, as you say, I must marry under my proper name, and it is just as well to get the talk over down at Reigate now, as for it all to come as a wonder when we are married."

"When is that going to be, Millicent?"

"Oh, I don't know; of course it will be a long time before we even think of that."

"I beg your pardon, I am thinking of it now, and I can see no reason whatever why it should be delayed. We know each other well enough, I should think, and there is no probability of our changing our minds on discovering all sorts of faults, that we never dreamt, in each other. I may be away for a fortnight, and I would suggest that you had better make your preparations at once, so that we can be married a fortnight after I come back."

"You say that there is no fear of our discovering faults in each other. I can assure you that I have just discovered a very serious fault, namely, that you are altogether too masterful, too bent upon having your own way. I know you always were so when you were a boy, but I hoped you had grown out of it; now I see that I was altogether mistaken. Seriously, Mark, your proposal is absurd."

"Where does the absurdity come in, Millicent?"

"Well, everywhere," she said gravely.

"Which in the present case means nowhere," he said.

"Do you mean to tell me, Millicent, that in this town there are not a hundred dressmakers, each of whom could turn you out a wedding-dress and as many other garments as you can possibly require in the course of a month, or even if that effort were too stupendous, that you could not divide the work among a dozen of them?"

"Well, I don't say that could not be done," Millicent admitted reluctantly.

"Well, what other objection is there?"

"Well, you see, one does not like to be hustled in such a matter as this, Mark. One likes to think it all over and to realize it to one's self."

"Well, dear, you will have a fortnight while I am away to think and to realize as much as you like. I can see no advantage myself in waiting a single day longer than there is a necessity for; I have been for the last year coming here merely as a visitor, and I want to take possession of you and have you all to myself. I suppose

Mrs. Cunningham will be coming in presently, and I will put the matter to her. If she says you cannot be ready in a month I must give you another week, but I don't think that she will say so. By the way, how about her?"

"I was thinking of that last night, Mark. It would be very lonely for her to live by herself now, and you see she has always been as a mother to me."

"Quite so, dear; and I am sure that I should have no objection to her coming back to Crowswood, and living there as a friend, and helping you in the housekeeping."

"Thank you very much, Mark; I should like that in every way. You see, I know nothing whatever about housekeeping; and besides, when you are out, it would be a great thing to have her with me, for it would be very lonely by myself in that big house."

"Well, we will have her there, by all means, dear, if she likes to come; you had better talk it over with her. Ah! here she is. We were just talking over the time it will take Millicent to get ready," he said, "and I shall be glad of your opinion. I have been telling her that I am going away for a fortnight, and have proposed that the marriage should come off a fortnight later. I cannot see any use in delay, and she does not either; at least, I suppose not, for the only objection she has advanced is that there will be but a short time in which to get her things ready. That strikes me as being all nonsense. I could get things ready for ten weddings in that time. What do you think?"

"I see no reason for delay," Mrs. Cunningham said; "and assuredly a month ought to be sufficient to get everything made."

"Thank you, Mrs. Cunningham; then we can consider that settled, Millicent!"

"I call this tyranny, Mrs. Cunningham," Millicent protested. "He says he proposes that we shall be married in a month; it is not a proposal at all, it is an order. If he had wanted me in such a hurry he might have said so a year ago, and now that he has made up his mind at last, he wants everything done in a hurry."

"It is the nature of men, my dear; they are all alike in that respect. I think you had better make up your

mind to it, especially as I have no doubt in this case the order is not a very unpleasant one."

"You are too bad, Mrs. Cunningham," Millicent said. "I made sure that I should find you on my side, and it seems you have gone over altogether to the enemy."

"Where are you going to?" asked Mrs. Cunningham of Mark.

"I am going across to Amsterdam to sell that bracelet. My uncle expressed a particular wish to my father that he should do so immediately it came into his possession. Dick Chetwynd is going over with me, and if the weather is fair it will be a pleasant trip."

"Where are you thinking of going after the marriage?"

"We have not talked it over yet. My own idea is that, as neither of us has been abroad, we might as well take this opportunity for seeing something of the Continent. Of course we cannot go to France, things are in too disturbed a state there; but we might go to Brussels, and then into Germany, and perhaps as far as Vienna, and then down into Italy; but of course, if Millicent prefers it, we will simply take a tour through England and Scotland."

"Oh, I am glad that I am to have some voice in the matter," Millicent said. "However, I should like the tour you propose very much, Mark. I have often thought that I should like to see Italy above all places."

"Well, then, we will consider that settled. And now, what are you going to do for to-day?"