



# The Mystery of the Tower

By Andrew Loring

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JENNIE, who admired her patient very much, smiled, and said that she hoped she was not. Anyhow, she knew he was not, so there were two exceptions already.

The spire! Margaret saw and recognised it from the window as the train flashed past towards Dover. Chance dictated an unusual stop, while she was still agitated. She obeyed a sudden impulse, and found herself on Shortlands Station. Almost immediately came a returning train. She sprang in.

She glanced idly at the two men and the lady who shared the carriage with her—prosperous business men they seemed, the lady evidently the wife of one; then she watched eagerly for the first appearance of the spire. The conversation of the three came casually to her ears.

"Yes, in the churchyard, dark as pitch," the lady said. "That's how I heard it. She walked right in, found him helpless, and had him taken to her house. Catch me doing that."

"Awfully kind," said one of the men.

"Quixotic, I call it. They say he is a good looking person, though, quite the gentleman."

Margaret turned and looked again at the speakers. She was curious, but when she gathered that the young man had been found drunk she lost interest. She listened mechanically while they spoke of a certain Dr. Jennings.

"He doesn't care," cried the lady.

"Why, Fan," answered one of the men, "he's awfully cut up."

"I don't believe," she said with a laugh, "that he'll miss Conan half as much as I shall."

"How's that, Mrs. Blake?" asked the other man.

"Why, the music class. Mr. Conan was our best tenor."

"He was a conceited ass," growled No. 1; "but his disappearance is a bit rum, I must say. Why don't you think Jennings'll miss him, Fannie?"

"Ah," answered Fannie, "there are reasons—a woman's reasons, sure to be good ones. In the first place, Tom, you know people got to preferring Mr. Conan."

"That's so," cried Tom. "I've noticed that, haven't you, Rogers?"

"Jennings is such a rough chap," answered Rogers.

"Quite so," cried Fannie; "that's what I mean. The other was simply a dear as a doctor. All the ladies liked him best. I've seen Dr. Jennings get as angry as anything when people praised Dr. Conan. He was jealous, I'm sure of it."

Here Margaret saw, as she looked into the window, which reflected these people behind her, that the talkative Fannie glanced in her direction; then she heard her say in a low voice, full of the delightful excitement of mysterious gossip, "And he was jealous of other things besides."

"What are you driving at, Fannie?" asked her husband, leaning forward.

"Why, my dear Tom, of course I have got you fairly well trained; haven't I, Mr. Rogers? But even you dare not pretend that you have never noticed how pretty Mrs. Jennings is."

"That's so; she is fetching," cried Mr. Rogers, enthusiastically.

"That she is," was Tom's hearty endorsement.

"Well, I'm sure," cried Mrs. Fannie, "I don't see quite so much to get excited over. She has a nose that turns up at the end. To my mind it quite spoils her face."

Margaret could see in the improvised glass that was so faithfully doing its work that Mrs. Fannie's nose was rather Roman in its contour.

"Of course," said Tom, diplomatically, "that did

spoil her looks a trifle; but she is certainly the sort to attract a man like Conan. I shouldn't wonder if there wasn't something in what you say."

"I can't make out his going like that, though," said Mr. Rogers. "I never heard of his betting or squandering money."

"I don't think it's money," said Tom. "He's the sort, you know—those tenors with brown hair and blue eyes are all alike—to catch a girl's fancy; some scrape of that sort, I should fancy."

"He is very good looking," was Mrs. Fannie's interruption.

"Oh, I shouldn't say that, you know, Fannie," remonstrated Tom. "He was a sort of milk-sop, after all—one of the effeminate stamp."

"I quite agree," said Mr. Rogers, decidedly.

Margaret could see that the two men were large and broad-shouldered, and that they straightened up as they spoke, and unconsciously inflated their chests.

"Well, he's gone, and there's an end of him," said the lady, "and nobody to take his parts in the singing class and in the choir. What we shall do I don't know. Do you know, Tom," she continued, with a lowered voice, "I went over to see Mrs. Jennings just to—well—to—"

"To condole," said Tom, with a grin.

"No, of course not, but just to see how she was, and the servant said she wasn't at home. I saw Margie last night, and she'd been, too; but Mrs. Jennings wouldn't see her either, and Margie told me that Mrs. Green had called, and Alice Towers—and nobody had seen her; and she hasn't been out of the house, not even to the butcher's, and she always chooses her own joints—a thing I could never learn to do, but she understands it; and I believe, you know, that she's awfully cut up. Of course, I don't mean to say—"

"Of course not," interrupted Tom. "She was—well—interested. She likes to do good, you know."

"She was rather religious," said Fannie.

"Was?" echoed Mr. Rogers.

"Is, I mean," Mrs. Fannie corrected herself.

"And, of course, it is a blow when you've been good to a young medical student and given him a chance as soon as he was qualified, and he's been running in and out like one of the family for a year, to have him suddenly go off like that, and never say 'By your leave' or 'Thank you.' I wonder where he's gone."

"I wonder why," said Mr. Tom.

"I suppose," said Mr. Rogers, quietly, as though he had been thinking out something very intently, "that she is at home."

Mrs. Fannie started so violently at the appalling meaning hidden behind his simple sentence, that Margaret could feel the seat shake.

"Do you think—" cried Mrs. Fannie.

"Do you suppose—" asked her husband, eagerly.

"Dear me," sighed Mrs. Fannie, reflectively.

"I wonder," said Mr. Tom, with a long, lingering hold on the word.

In the presence of such deep possibilities there was utter silence for a whole minute.

"Let me see," whispered Mrs. Fannie, after this time of profound silence, "he went away on Monday night."

"Yes, immediately after the concert, they say," answered her husband.

"Well," she said, after another pause, "I must say Dr. Jennings carries it off very well. He wasn't good to her, but of course that's no excuse."

"She may not have gone," suggested Mr. Rogers; but Mrs. Fannie would not now hear of the possibility of a doubt. She was surprised the men had not seen it before. As for her, she had felt it, but

wouldn't hint it, not for worlds, until Mr. Rogers had, then she felt at liberty to speak.

"A woman's intuition," she said, mysteriously and triumphantly, and her husband smiled in recognition of that great power, and winked covertly at Rogers; and now the train was slowing down, and the tower shot skyward some mile or so away.

The three got out, thus showing that they spoke of this neighbourhood.

Margaret followed, their words buzzing in her ears.

"A young man found in a churchyard; a man missing; perhaps a woman too."

She hurried towards the looming spire.

## CHAPTER XIII.

MARGARET stood in the front of the church looking up at the tower. It loomed overhead in a decorative beauty, which had for her only a sinister meaning. She shivered in the warm August sunshine as she saw high overhead the open arch—it seemed a mere slit from where she stood—in which she had caught, by the lightning's flash, the sudden sight of tragedy.

She walked across the road, passed through the lych-gate, and tried to appear as a mere casual wanderer about the churchyard.

"A good-looking person, quite the gentleman"—the exact words of the lady on the train were stamped on her memory. Did they refer to Percy Marshall? If so, how account for the letter which she had received from him, the letter in which he told her that he washed his hands of her affairs. A sudden thought flashed to her mind as she walked slowly, with bent head, round the church. Could that letter have been a forgery? Why not? She had been so surrounded by mystery and treachery and deceit that nothing seemed impossible. She tried to think who could have sent it, who could have had an interest in sending it, but she had no clue. Where was this "good-looking person" who had been found helpless in the dark, probably in this churchyard? In some house in the neighbourhood, of course. She looked all about her as she came once again to the front of the church. No houses were very near, but a high wall close by evidently enclosed the grounds of an estate. Was it there that the kind, quixotic lady lived who had so charitably taken in this "good-looking person"? If so, was he still there? Was there any mystery, any treachery about his having been taken in? Margaret had not forgotten for an instant the words which had been penned by her father on the photograph: "A curse on this church and on her who built it."

"If it should be Mr. Marshall," she said to herself, "he came here through me, to help me—for that alone. I must find out. He may need me."

She turned and entered the open door of the church, shivering in the cool shaded interior. For its ornate attractions she had no eye. It was to her a place of mystery, over which hung the black shadow of crime. She was relieved to find that she was not alone. A woman, ruddy of cheek, bright faced, cleanly, was dusting the pews. Here at least was human company, and somebody who could answer her questions.

Margaret walked slowly towards the woman, affecting to be greatly interested in the fluted columns on each side of the nave, and in the springing arches which spanned the roof.

"Good-morning," she said, with her most winning smile. "This church is very beautiful."

"Yes, miss. They say it has only one fault, it is too new."

"Time will cure that," answered Margaret, glad to find that this woman was much more intelligent than the usual church cleaner. "Would there be any objection to my making a sketch of the capital of that column?" she said, seating herself in the pew, and taking a tiny note-book from her hand-bag.

"Not the least, miss. A good many people have drawn pictures. They like the east window and the choir screen most."

"I will look at those afterwards, thank you," said Margaret, as her hand moved almost mechanically, and she glanced up from time to time at the top of the column. She had a natural talent for drawing, which had been carefully cultivated. She knew the interest that caretakers of buildings have in drawings. She was certain that the woman would hover about her.

"A lonely place for so large a church," she said.

"Yes, miss; but Lady Yatton owns most of the ground here about, and some time I suppose they will build houses all over it. The church is only a little ahead of the neighbourhood, that's all."

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