



HOME MAGAZINE



"For years and seasons as they run,
For wintry cold and summer sun,
For seedtime and the autumn store
In due succession evermore,
For flowers and fruit, for herb and tree,
Lord, we are thankful unto thee!"

THE LEAVENWORTH CASE

By A. K. Green.

CHAPTER X.

Mr. Gryce Receives New Impetus.

This astounding discovery, thus made, was dreadful to me. It was true then. Eleanore, the beautiful, the lovesome, was—I did not, could not finish the sentence, even in the silence of my own mind.

"You look surprised," said Mr. Gryce, glancing curiously toward the key. "Now, I ain't. A woman does not thrill and blush and equivocate and faint for nothing; especially such a woman as Miss Leavenworth."

"A woman who could do such a deed would be the last to thrill, equivocate and faint," retorted I. "Give me the key; let me see it."

He complacently put it in my hand. "It is the one we want," said he. "No getting out of that."

I returned it. "If she declares she is innocent, I will believe her."

"You have strong faith in the women," laughed he. "I hope you will live to find them worthy of it. There is but one thing left to do. Fobbs, you will have to request Miss Leavenworth to come down. Do not alarm her, only see that she comes. To the reception room."

No sooner were we left alone than I made a move to return to Mary, but he stopped me.

"Come and see it out," whispered he. "She will be down in a moment; see it out, you had best."

Glancing back, I hesitated; but the prospect of beholding Eleanore again drew me in spite of myself. Telling him to wait, I returned to Mary's side to make my excuses.

"What is the matter—what has occurred?" said she breathlessly.

"Nothing as yet to disturb you much. Do not be alarmed." But my face betrayed me.

"There is something," said she.

"Your cousin is coming down."

"Down here?" and she shrank visibly.

"No, to the reception room."

"I do not understand. It is all dreadful, and no one tells me anything."

"Miss Leavenworth," I essayed, "I pray God there may be nothing to tell. Judging from your present faith in your cousin, there will not be. Take comfort, then, and believe that I will inform you if anything occurs which you ought to know."

Giving her a look of reassurance, I left her crushed against the crimson pillows of the sofa on which she sat, and rejoined Mr. Gryce. We had scarcely entered the reception room, when Eleanore Leavenworth came in.

More languid than she was an hour before, but haughty still, she slowly advanced, and, meeting my eye, gently bent her head.

"I have been summoned here," said she, directing herself exclusively to Mr. Gryce, "by an individual whom I take to be in your employ."

"Miss Leavenworth," returned Mr. Gryce, staring in quite a fatherly manner at the door-knob, "I am very sorry to trouble you, but the fact is, I wish to ask you—"

But here she stopped him. "Anything

in regard to the key which that man has doubtless told you he saw me drop into the ashes?"

"Yes."

"Then I must refuse to answer any questions concerning it. I have nothing to say on the subject, unless it is this"—giving him a look full of suffering, but full of a certain sort of a courage too—"that he was right if he told you I had the key in hiding about my person, and that I attempted to conceal it in the ashes of the grate."

"Still, miss—"

"I pray you to excuse me," said she.

"No argument you could advance would make any difference in my determination. And with a fitting glance in my direction, that was not without its appeal, she quietly left the room."

For a moment Mr. Gryce stood gazing after her with a look of great interest, then, bowing almost to the ground in his homage, he hastily followed her out.

I had scarcely recovered from the surprise occasioned by this unexpected movement, when a quick step was heard in the hall, and Mary, flushed and anxious, appeared at my side.

"What is it?" said she. "What has Eleanore been saying?"

"Alas!" I answered, "she has not said anything. That is the trouble, Miss Leavenworth. Your cousin preserves a reticence upon certain points that is very painful to witness. She ought to understand that if she persists in doing this, that—"

"That what?" There was no mistaking the fearful anxiety that prompted this question.

"That she cannot avoid the trouble that will ensue."

For a moment she stood gazing at me with great horror-stricken incredulous eyes; then, sinking back into a chair, flung her hands over her face with a cry:

"Oh, why were we ever born! Why were we allowed to live! Why did we not perish with those who gave us birth!"

"Dear Miss Leavenworth," I essayed, "There is no cause for such despair as this. The future looks dark, but not impenetrable. Your cousin will listen to reason, and in explaining—"

But she, deaf to my words, had again risen to her feet and stood before me in an attitude almost appalling.

"Some women in my position would go mad!" she whispered; mad, mad!

I looked at her with growing wonder. I thought I knew what she meant. She conceived that she had given us the clue which had led to this suspicion of her cousin, and that in this way the trouble which hung over their heads was of her own making. Absorbed in her own anguish, she paid but little attention to me. Satisfied at last that I could do nothing more for her, I turned to go; the movement seemed to arouse her.

"I am sorry to leave," said I, "without having afforded you any comfort. Believe me that I am very anxious to assist you. Is there no one I can send to your side; no woman friend or relative? It is sad to leave you alone in this house at such a time."

"And do you suppose," said she, "that I intend remaining here? Why, I should die. Here to-night!" and her long shudders shook her very frame.

"It is not at all necessary," broke in a bland voice over our shoulders, "that you should do so, Miss Leavenworth."

I turned with a start. Mr. Gryce was not only at our back, but had evidently been there for some moments. Seated in an easy-chair near the door, he met our gaze with a sidelong smile that seemed at once to beg pardon for the

intrusion, and to assure us that it was made with no unworthy motive. "Everything will be properly looked after; you can leave with perfect safety."

I expected to see her resent this interference, but, instead of that, she manifested a certain satisfaction in beholding him there.

Drawing me to one side she whispered: "You think this Mr. Gryce very clever, do you not?"

"Well," replied I cautiously, "he ought to be to hold the position he does. The authorities evidently repose great confidence in him."

Stepping from my side as suddenly as she approached it, she crossed the room and stood before Mr. Gryce.

"Sir," said she, gazing at him with a glance of entreaty, "I hear that you have great talents; that you can ferret out the real criminal from a score of doubtful characters, and that nothing can escape the penetration of your eye. If this is so, have pity on two orphan girls suddenly bereft of their guardian and protector, and use your acknowledged skill in finding out who has committed this crime. It would be folly in me to endeavor to hide from you that my cousin in her testimony has given cause for suspicion; but I here declare that I believe her to be as innocent of wrong as I am myself, and I am only endeavoring to turn the eye of justice from the guiltless to the guilty, when I entreat you to look elsewhere for the culprit who committed this deed. It must have been some common burglar or desperado; can you not bring him, then, to justice?"

Her attitude was so touching, her whole appearance so earnest and appealing, that I saw Mr. Gryce's countenance brim with suppressed emotion, though his eye never left the coffee-urn upon which it had fixed itself at her first approach.

"You must find out, you can," she went on,—"Hannah, the girl who has gone, must know all about it. Search for her, ransack the world, do anything; my property is at your disposal. I will offer a large reward for the detection of the burglar who did this deed."

Mr. Gryce slowly rose. "Miss Leavenworth," said he, and then stopped; the man was actually agitated. "Miss Leavenworth, I did not need your very touching appeal to incite me to my utmost duty in this case. Personal and professional pride were in themselves sufficient. But since you have honored me with this expression of your wishes, I will not conceal from you that I shall feel a certain increased interest in the affair from this hour. What mortal man can, I will do, and if in one month from this day I do not come to you for my reward, Ebenezer Gryce if not the individual I have always taken him to be."

A few minutes later I left the house with Miss Leavenworth, she having testified her wish that I would accompany her to the home of her friend, Mrs. Gilbert, with whom she had decided to take refuge. As we rolled away in the carriage Mr. Gryce had been kind enough to provide for us, I noticed my companion cast a look of regret behind her, as if she could not help feeling some compunction at this desertion of her cousin. But this expression soon changed for the alert look of one who dreads to see a certain face start up from some unknown quarter. Glancing up and down the street, peering furtively into doorways as we passed, starting and trembling if a sudden figure appeared on the curb-stone, she did not seem to breathe with perfect ease till we had left the avenue behind us and entered upon Thirty-seventh St. Then all at once her natural color returned, and, leaning gently toward me,

she asked if I had a pencil and piece of paper. I fortunately possessed both. Handing them to her, I watched her with some little curiosity, while she wrote two or three lines.

"A little note I wish to send," she remarked, glancing at the almost illegible scrawl with an expression of doubt. "Couldn't you stop the carriage a moment while I direct it?"

I did so, and in another instant the leaf which I had torn from my notebook was folded, directed, and sealed with a stamp which she had taken from her own pocketbook.

"That is a crazy-looking epistle," she murmured, as she laid it, direction downward, in her lap.

"Why not wait, then," I suggested, "till you arrive at your destination, where you can seal it properly, and direct it at your leisure?"

"Because I am in haste. I wish to mail it now. Look, there is a box on the corner; please ask the driver to stop once more."

"Shall I not post it for you?" I asked, holding out my hand.

But she shook her head, and without waiting for my assistance, opened the door on her own side of the carriage and leaped to the ground. Even then she paused to glance up and down the street before venturing to drop it into the box. But when it was done she looked brighter and more hopeful than I had yet seen her. And when in a few moments later she turned to bid me good-bye in front of her friend's house, it was with almost a cheerful air.

I shall not attempt to disguise from you the fact that I spent all that long evening in going over the testimony given at the inquest, endeavoring to reconcile what I had heard with any other theory than that of Eleanore's guilt. Taking a piece of paper, I jotted down the leading causes of suspicion, as follows:

1. Her late disagreement with her uncle, and evident estrangement from him, as testified to by Mr. Harwell.
2. The mysterious disappearance of one of the servants of the house.
3. The forcible accusation of her cousin—overheard, however, only by Mr. Gryce and myself.
4. Her equivocation in regard to that handkerchief of hers, found stained with pistol smut on the scene of the tragedy.
5. Her refusal to speak in regard to the paper which she was supposed to have taken from Mr. Leavenworth's table immediately upon the removal of the body.
6. The finding of the library key in her possession.

"A dark record," I voluntarily cried as I looked it over, but even in doing so began jotting down on the other side of the sheet the following explanatory notes:

1. Disagreements and even estrangements between relatives are common. Cases where such disagreements and estrangements have led to crime, rare.
2. The disappearance of Hannah pointed no more in one direction than another.
3. If Mary's private accusation of her cousin was forcible and convincing, her public declaration that she neither knew nor suspected who might be the author of this crime, was equally so. To be sure the former possessed the advantage of being uttered spontaneously, but it was likewise true that it was spoken under momentary excitement, without foresight of the consequences, and possibly without due consideration of the facts.
- 4, 5. An innocent man or woman under the influence of terror, will often equivocate in regard to matters that seem to criminate them.

(To be continued.)