

The gentleman asked in a low tone:

"Do you know if he lived here?"

"I ain't sure, sir; but I fancy so. Anyone comin'?" He stooped to listen. "Lor, sir, how some people do sleep!"

Again he knocked, more loudly, a window in a house near was opened, but shut down almost immediately; the next moment the two men who stood on Mr. Frost's doorstep heard a door shut somewhere within, then shuffling foot-steps on the oil-cloth, next the street door was opened—it was on the latch—and there appeared a figure, which, even amid the horror of the situation, struck the policeman's companion as intensely ludicrous.

Full fifty years of age, short, and rotund, was worthy Mrs. Frost. Her present apparel was a flannel petticoat, nastily thrown over her *robe de nuit*, a blue flannel dressing-gown, and slippers, into which her feet were thrust. Her "front-hair" was in curl-papers; and, to crown all, her plump-featured countenance expressed the liveliest alarm. The bedroom candle she carried shook in her hand.

"My goodness!" she began; "is the house on fire?"

The policeman took her up:

"No, ma'am. There's one of your lodgers been found by this gentleman lying yonder, in your front garden."

"What?"

The candle would have fallen, but the gentleman snatched it from the woman's hand, and seeing there was a gas-lamp in the passage, stepped past her and lighted it. She collapsed into a chair, panting and helpless.

"One of my lodgers, sir?" she gasped, looking up at the tall intruder. "Not dead—you don't mean?"

"I am afraid so," he said, gently.

"Mr. Mansfield's in," she said; "it must be Mr. Berningham, in the parlour."

The policeman had opened the parlour door and lighted the gas there, and then he and his companion went out into the garden, leaving Mrs. Frost gasping and wringing her hands.

While she was thus engaged, a door opened on the floor above, and a querulous female voice called out.

"What is the matter? What was that knocking?"

"Oh, ma'am!" cried Mrs. Frost, hysterically, "they're bringing it in! Oh! I can't see it—I can't!"

"Bringing what in?" repeated the voice, and there was a rustle of feminine apparel.

"U—him—!! the body!—poor Mr. Berningham. He must 'ave fell down in a fit, or disease of the 'eart!"

There was a dim vision of some one leaning over the banisters, as the gentleman and the policeman bore into the house the body of the murdered man, and laid it reverently on the sofa in the parlour.

CHAPTER II.

A SCRAP OF WRITING.

THE stranger had gone for the doctor, and the second door lodger, a young solicitor named Mansfield, had run for the inspector of police, and in the house reigned general consternation. Mrs. Frost, who remained on the stairs, was joined by her maidservant, Jessie, also *en déshabille*, and in semi-hysterics. Miss Murray, the old maid who lodged in the drawing-room, had indulged in a few little screams on the landing; but being gruffly admonished by the policeman from below that two screaming women were enough, retired to her apartment, and was heard no more.

And by and-by came doctor and inspector, almost together, with the discoverer of the murder and young Mansfield respectively.

"This is a terrible thing!" said the surgeon, as he shook the snow from his coat.

"It'll be the death of me," sobbed Mrs. Frost, from the stairs. "A nice quiet gentleman as ever was—who could bear him a grudge?—and it'll be the ruin of me, it will!"

To do the good woman justice, her thoughts were in the order of their utterance, but human nature is human nature, and already she beheld her lodgers leaving, knew her house as marked with an indelible brand, and saw ruin in the near future.

The doctor made his examination, and his verdict was conclusive.

"The blow has been struck obliquely," he said, with a very sharp

"knife. It must have caused instant death."

"The murderer came behind," said the soft, clear voice of the

stranger, "and struck over the shoulder!"

The inspector glanced keenly at the speaker, and proceeded to take down all particulars.

"Yes, that was it! Well, there is nothing more I can do. Has this unfortunate man any relations or friends who can be sent for?"

Mr. Mansfield went out to Mrs. Frost—who had grown calmer—and questioned her on this point, but she declared she knew absolutely nothing about her lodger.

It seemed strange that a man, evidently a gentleman, should be so friendless.

The apartment was searched by one policeman, while the other

went to search the garden for any possible weapon, the doctor having departed, but young Mansfield and the stranger remained.

Nothing of the slightest importance was found, unless importance could attach to a scrap of note-paper on which were a dozen lines of small cramped writing, part of a passage from one of George Eliot's novels; this was found in the dead man's pocket, but there was nothing to show whether it was his writing or some one else's.

"May I look at it?" the stranger asked, quietly.

The inspector gave it into his hand, watching the handsome face, but could not make anything out of it.

The stranger looked at the writing keenly and steadily for a few minutes, then returned it to the policeman.

"That is graven on my mind now," he said. "If ever I should meet with that writing again I should know it."

"Even after years had passed?" asked Mansfield.

"Even after years had passed. You keep that, of course?" to the inspector.

"Yes, sir; it goes to Scotland Yard."

The search in the garden proved fruitless; the constable returned, having found nothing.

They all went out of the parlour, the inspector locking the door and taking out the key, he also locked up the back parlour, which Mr. Berningham had used as a bed-room.

The stranger drew out a card, and handed it to the inspector.

"That is my name and address," he said.

"Thank you, sir!"

He read the card aloud:

"Eugène Albert Eriksen, Adelphi Terrace."

The name conveyed no news to him, but Mansfield turned to its owner.

"Mr. Eriksen, the dramatist?" he said, involuntarily.

"This distinguished-looking person was some one famous and important, after all," said Robert, inwardly; he had not been mistaken when he thought so.

"Yes," Eriksen said, and held out a slender white hand. "Good morning, Mr. Mansfield—good morning, policeman."

"Good morning, sir."

"The tall figure went out into the snow and the darkness, and the dead man was left alone in his awful sleep."

CHAPTER III.

THE INQUEST.

BEFORE ten o'clock that morning Norwood was all excitement, and crowds gathered outside No. 23 Belinda Road, where, of course, there was nothing to see, save lowered blinds, until the undertaker's men were seen approaching with a shell, with which they entered the house; and after that sensation the crowd watched in vain for another, and were at length dispersed by the police, for they became noisy and troublesome, as is the manner of such idlers.

The evening papers came out with "Mysterious Affair at Norwood," "Suspected Murder," "Terrible Murder," and so on, to which startling head-lines were appended accounts more or less correct.

But there seemed no hope of any elucidation of the mystery until the inquest, though the police were hard at work during the intervening days making inquiries.

In certain circles in London an interest not due to the actual circumstances of the crime attached to it from the collateral connection with it of a man famous and a favourite, and so it came to pass that when the inquest was opened a number of literary and theatrical celebrities might have been seen among the crowd which thronged the large room.

Whatever the interest was that Eugène Eriksen felt in this case, he kept his own counsel—perhaps he best knew why—but not even to intimate friends did he speak of the fact that when he beheld the dead face of James Berningham he did not look upon it for the first time.

The newspapers had spread from Land's End to John O'Groat's the news of the murder, but no letter or telegram had been received from any friend or relation of the dead man, nor had anyone appeared to claim or identify him.

Never was wayside tramp more friendless than this apparently well-bred and certainly competent gentleman—for his clothes were all of fine quality, and there was gold in his pocket; his watch also—a foreign watch—was an expensive one. Yet, if he had no friends he must have had at least one enemy—unless—as was possible—he had been murdered in mistake for someone else.

Eugène Eriksen was the first witness called. He had been spending the evening of the —th with some friends at Norwood, and was on his way to the Queen's Hotel between four and five a.m., when passing along Belinda Road he noticed something that looked like a human form lying in one of the gardens. He went in and saw the deceased lying on his back quite dead, and partially covered with snow. He cleared some of the snow from the man's breast to feel his heart, and then saw a blood-stain on the shirt-front close above the heart. He