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**Agents Wanted**

## Happiness At Last, Loyalty Recompensed.

"I'll go with you," said Mershon. He accompanied Bright, and ordered the carriage to follow them to The Woodhams.

They found Mr. Deane in the laboratory, and broke the news. He was startled, but by no means overwhelmed, though distressed in a confused and bewildered way at the fact that Decima was concerned in the matter, and was ill.

"I am thankful she is with Lady Pauline," he said. "It would be of little use my going up to her."

He glanced wistfully at the ridiculous model he was at work upon.

"No, no," said Mershon, gnawing at his cigar. "I'm going; you'd better leave it to me. The old fool doesn't realize it," he said to Bright as they passed out. "He doesn't see that this will bring a lot of scandal upon my head."

The following morning, while Bright was going to and from the Mansions and Scotland Yard, trying to master the details, Morton presented himself at Lady Pauline's.

Her first thought, as she looked at him, was: "How does it happen that Decima—my Decima—is engaged to this man?" For Mr. Mershon, pale and sullen with anxiety and resentment at the state of things, was not prepossessing, and Lady Pauline's cold and stately manner of receiving him did not tend to put him at his ease.

"My niece is very ill, Mr. Mershon," she said, as she motioned him to a chair. "Very ill, indeed. But you have no doubt been informed?"

"Is she too ill to see me?" he broke in.

"Much too ill," replied Lady Pauline; "and—I think it best to be quite candid, Mr. Mershon—even if she were well enough, I do not think the interview would be desirable."

"Not—not desirable?" he repeated, staring at her. "Why—why, she's engaged to me!"

"She was, so she has informed me," said Lady Pauline.

"Was?" echoed Mershon. "What do you mean? I don't understand."

"I am glad you have come to see me so soon," she said. "It is only right that you should know, at the earliest possible moment, that my niece desires to withdraw from her engagement to you, Mr. Mershon."

Mershon started from his chair, and reddened.

"Wants to—to break it off!" he said, huskily. "Why? Why should she want to break it off?"

With her usual directness and strict regard for truth, Lady Pauline answered gravely:

"My niece does not love you."

Mershon's pallor was startling. Then he laughed uneasily.

"I think I understand," he said. "She—she thinks this scandal—that I shall be angry and cut up about it. Well, so I am; but it won't make any difference to me. Of course, I don't like it; no man would like to have his future wife mixed up with such an awful business as this, and—some fellows would want to draw back; but I'm not that kind of a man. Tell Decima that I stand by my word; yes, that I say that even now, when I don't know why she went to Gaunt's rooms, or whether she expected to see him or not. Just tell her that, Lady Pauline."

Lady Pauline rose. The man's vulgarity and meanness simply amazed her. Why, why had Decima promised to marry a person who was not even a gentleman?

"I will tell my niece what you say, certainly," she said; "but it may be some time before she is well enough

many years had so sensational and "interesting" a murder been committed, and the world was watching the development of events, and waiting for every detail with an eagerness which even the most enterprising of the newspapers could not satisfy. And some of them, it must be admitted, had done their best. Short and charmingly inaccurate biographies of Lord Gaunt had appeared, together with portraits hideously unlike him.

Some of the sketches of his life represented him as a man who had spent most of his days in the society of savages, and was therefore just the man to commit a peculiarly ferocious murder.

Bobby and Bright had almost to fight their way into the room, and it was some minutes before they could reach the solicitor's table, where Mr. Belford, the head of the firm of Gaunt's lawyers, was sitting beside the famous counsel, Sir James Leaton, whom Belford & Lang had retained.

Mr. Belford nodded to Bright.

"We've got Sir James, you see, Mr. Bright," he said in a hurried undertone, "and everything will be done that can be done for Lord Gaunt; but—he shook his head gravely—"the case looks very bad. Do you see that Mr. Boskett is here?" and he glanced toward that eminent gentleman. "He appears for Miss Deane."

Bobby started.

"I—I did not engage him," he said. "He is instructed by Mr. Gilsby," said Mr. Belford in rather a dry voice. "He is Mr. Mershon's solicitor. Mr. Mershon is just behind that partition. You can not see him from here. Yes, the case looks serious, but—well, Sir James will do all that can be done, rest assured."

After the usual formal preliminaries, the police began to call their witnesses; and as one after the other appeared and told his or her story, Mr. Bright's anxious face grew more anxious and care-worn. Eric by brick, as it were, the solicitor for the Treasury was building up the case against Lord Gaunt.

First came the page, who told how he had let in Miss Deane. Then Jane, who had admitted Lord Gaunt and the deceased.

"Is Miss Deane here?" asked the coroner.

Mr. Boskett rose with the leisurely air which marked his terrible keenness.

"I appear for Miss Deane, sir," he said.

"I doubt your locus standi," interrupted the coroner. "But go on."

"Thank you, sir," said Mr. Boskett. "I have at present only to state that Miss Deane is very ill and quite unable to be here. She is, in fact, unconscious, and I produce the doctor's certificate."

He handed it in and sat down. The coroner read it, and nodded gravely for the witness to proceed.

Jane told her story very well. She had taken tea in for Miss Deane, and she had not seen her since.

She was there, in the room, when Lord Gaunt had entered, and Jane had heard their voices talking together. Then the deceased had arrived. No, she did not usher her into the drawing-room. The lady inquired for Mr. Deane, and on being told that he was not in she had said she would go and sit down and wait for him, and as she knew the way, and need not trouble, she had seen the deceased and Lord Gaunt together; but she had heard them talking, and once—here she hesitated, but only for a moment—they were speaking so loudly there was a kind of cry—that she knocked at the door thinking she was called.

She had not entered. A little later, it might be half an hour, Lord Gaunt had come down the corridor from one of the other rooms, and passed her on his way out. She was talking to the porter in the lift. Lord Gaunt had never overheard. She had felt ashamed at being caught gossiping, and had run away into the kitchen. No one else came that night. They waited for Mr. Deane until past eleven; then went to bed. She had looked into the room to see to the fire, but had not noticed any one there, or seen anything unusual. In the morning she found the deceased lying on the couch as the doctor had described. She was dead; there was a wound right above her heart, and the dagger, which the policeman showed her now, was lying on the floor. The portrait was lying smashed in the fire-place. The deceased was covered by a fur coat. Yes, it was the master's, Lord Gaunt's; but she was certain, quite certain, that he could not have done it.

The coroner stopped her with up-lifted hand. The solicitor for the Treasury asked a few questions of small details, and then Sir James rose.

"You heard no cry for help, no screaming or shrieking?"

"No, sir. Only loud talking; the deceased's voice, not Lord Gaunt's."

The deceased asked for Mr. Deane?

"Yes."

"Have you ever seen the deceased before?"

"Oh, yes," said Jane. "She had dined with Mr. Deane at a dinner-party with Mr. Thorpe and Mr. Trevor. No, she had never before seen Lord Gaunt with the deceased. Did not know that he was married; didn't quite believe it even now."

(to be continued.)

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