



Said the little brown leaf, as it hung in the air,
To the little brown leaf below,
"What a summer we've had
To rejoice and be glad,
But to-day there's a feeling of snow."
—Margaret E. Sangster.

THE LEAVENWORTH CASE

By A. K. Green.

CHAPTER VI.—Continued.

When my glance first fell upon her, she was standing by the side of a small table with her face turned toward her cousin, and her two hands resting, the one upon her breast, the other on the table in an attitude of antagonism. But before the sudden pang which shot through me at the sight of her beauty had subsided, her head had turned, her gaze had encountered mine; all the horror of the situation had burst upon her, and instead of a haughty woman drawn up to receive and trample upon the insinuations of another, I beheld, alas! a trembling, panting human creature, conscious that a sword hung above her head, and without a word to say why it should not fall and slay her.

It was a pitiable change; a heartrending revelation. I turned from it as from a confession. But just then her cousin, who had regained her self-possession, stepped forward, and holding out her hand, enquired:

"Is not this Mr. Raymond? How kind of you, sir. And you?" turning to Mr. Gryce; "you have come to tell us we are wanted below, is it not so?"

It was the voice I heard through the door, but modulated to a sweet, winning, almost caressing tone.

Glancing hastily at Mr. Gryce, I looked to see how he was affected by it. Evidently much, for the bow with which he greeted her words was lower than ordinary, and the smile with which he met her earnest look, both deprecatory and reassuring. He did not look toward her cousin, though her deathly conscious eyes were fixed upon his face with an inquiry in their depths more agonizing than the utterance of any cry would have been. Knowing Mr. Gryce as I did, I felt that nothing could promise worse or be more significant than this same transparent disregard of one who seemed to fill the room with her terror. And struck with pity, I forgot that Mary Leavenworth had spoken, forgot her very presence in fact, and turning hastily away, took one step toward her cousin, when Mr. Gryce's hand falling on my arm, stopped me.

"Miss Leavenworth speaks," said he. Recalled to myself, I turned my back upon what had so interested me even while it repelled, and forcing myself to make some sort of reply to the fair creature before me, offered my arm and led her toward the door.

Immediately the pale, proud countenance of Mary Leavenworth softened almost to the point of smiling—and here let me say, there never was a woman who could smile and not smile like Mary Leavenworth. Looking in my face with a frank and sweet appeal in her eyes, she murmured:

"You are very good. I do feel the need of support, the occasion is so horrible, and my cousin there"—here a little gleam of alarm flickered into her eyes—"is so very strange to-day."

"Humph!" thought I to myself, "where is the grand, indignant pythoness, with the unspeakable wrath and menace in her countenance, whom I saw

when I first entered the room?" Could it be that she was trying to beguile us from our conjectures, by making light of her former expressions? Or was it possible that she had deceived herself so far as to believe us unimpressed by the weighty accusation overheard by us at a moment so critical.

But Eleanore Leavenworth, leaning on the arm of the detective, soon absorbed all my attention. She had regained her self-possession, but not so entirely as her cousin. Her step faltered as she endeavored to walk, and the hand which rested on his arm trembled like a leaf. "Would to God I had never entered this house!" said I to myself. And yet, before the exclamation was half uttered, I became conscious of a secret rebellion against the thought, an emotion, shall I say, of thankfulness, that I, and not another, was the one to break in upon their privacy, overhear that significant remark, and follow Mr. Gryce and the trembling, swaying figure of Eleanore Leavenworth downstairs. Not that I felt the least relenting in my soul toward guilt. Crime had never looked so black; revenge, selfishness, hatred, cupidity never seemed more loathsome, and yet—but why enter into the consideration of my feelings at that time. Enough that, supporting upon my arm the clinging, half-fainting form of one woman; but with my attention and interest with another, I descended the stairs of the Leavenworth mansion, and entered again the dreaded presence of those inquisitors of the law who had been so impatiently awaiting us.

CHAPTER VII.

Mary Leavenworth.

Making haste to seat my now trembling companion in the most retired spot I could find, I looked around for her cousin. But Eleanore Leavenworth, weak as she had appeared in the interview above, showed at this moment neither hesitation nor embarrassment. Advancing upon the arm of the detective, whose suddenly assumed air of persuasion in the presence of the jury was anything but reassuring, she stood for an instant gazing calmly upon the scene before her. Then bowing to the coroner with a grace and condescension that seemed at once to place him on the footing of a politely endured intruder in this home of elegance, she took the seat which her own servants hastened to procure for her, with an ease and dignity that rather recalled the triumphs of the drawingroom than the self-consciousness of a scene such as that in which we were. Palpable acting though this was, it was not without its effect. Instantly the murmurs ceased, the obtrusive glances fell, and something like a forced respect made itself visible upon the countenances of all present. Even I, impressed as I had been by her very different demeanor in the room above, experienced a sensation of relief; and was more than startled when, upon turning to the lady at my side, I beheld her eyes rivetted upon her cousin with an inquiry in their depths that was anything but encouraging. Fearful of the effect this look might have upon those about us, I hastily seized her hand, which, clenched and unconscious, hung over the edge of her chair, and was about to beseech her to have care, when her name, called by the coroner, roused her from her abstraction. Hurriedly withdrawing her gaze from her cousin, she lifted her face to the jury, and I saw a gleam pass over it that brought back my early fancy of the pythoness. But it passed, and it was with an expression of great modesty that she settled herself to respond to the demand of the coroner.

But what can express the anxiety of the moment to me? Was she going to reiterate her suspicions here? Did she hate as well as mistrust her cousin? Would she dare assert in this presence, and before the world, what she found it so easy to utter in the privacy of her own room and the hearing of the one person concerned? Did she wish to? Her own countenance gave me no clue to her intentions, and in my anxiety I turned once more to look at Eleanore. But she, in a dread and apprehension I could easily understand, had recoiled at the first intimation that her cousin was to speak, and now sat with her face covered from sight by hands that were blanched to an almost deathly whiteness.

The testimony of Mary Leavenworth was short. After some few questions mostly referring to her position in the house and her connection with the deceased master, she was asked to relate what she knew of the murder itself, and of its discovery by her cousin and the servants.

Lifting up a brow that seemed never to have known till now the shadow of care or trouble, and a voice that, whilst low and womanly, rang like a bell through the room, she replied:

"You ask me, gentlemen, a question which I cannot answer of my own personal knowledge. I know nothing of this murder or of its discovery, save what has come to me through the lips of others."

My heart gave a bound of relief, and I saw Eleanore Leavenworth's hands drop from her brow like stone, while a flickering gleam as of hope fled over her face, and then died away like sunlight leaving marble.

"For strange as it may seem to you," Mary earnestly continued, the shadow of a past horror revisiting her countenance, "I did not enter the room where my uncle lay. I did not even think of doing so; my only impulse was to fly from what was so horrible and heartrending. But Eleanore went in, and she can tell you—"

"We will question Miss Eleanore Leavenworth later," interrupted the coroner, but very gently for him. Evidently the grace and elegance of this sweet woman were making their impression. "What we want to know is what you saw. You say, then, that you cannot tell us anything that passed in the room at the time of the discovery?"

"No, sir."

"Only what occurred in the hall?"

"Nothing occurred in the hall," she remarked innocently.

"Did not the servants pass in from the hall, and your cousin come out there after her revival from the fainting-fit that overcame her at the first sight of her uncle?"

Mary Leavenworth's violet eyes opened wonderingly.

"Yes, sir; but that was nothing."

"You remember, however, that she did come out into the hall?"

"Yes, sir."

"With a paper in her hand?"

"Paper?" and she wheeled suddenly and looked at her cousin. "Did you have a paper, Eleanore?"

The moment was intense. Eleanore Leavenworth, who at the first mention of the word paper had started perceptibly, rose to her feet at this naive appeal, and opening her lips, seemed about to speak, when the coroner, with a strict sense of what was regular, lifted his hand with decision and said:

"You need not ask your cousin; but let us hear what you have to say yourself."

Immediately Eleanore Leavenworth sank back, a pink spot breaking out on either cheek.

The coroner repeated his question.

"Tell us, if you please, if you saw any such thing in her hand."

"I? Oh, no, no; I saw nothing."

Being now questioned in relation to the events of the previous night, she had no new light to throw upon the subject. She acknowledged that her uncle was perhaps a little reserved at dinner, but no more so than anyone might be who had any ordinary care or anxiety upon his mind.

Asked if she had seen her uncle again that evening, she said no, that she had been detained in her room. That the sight of him sitting in his seat at the head of the table was the very last remembrance she had of him.

There was something so touching, so forlorn, and yet so unobtrusive in this simple recollection of hers, that a look of sympathy passed slowly round the room. I even detected Mr. Gryce softening toward the inksand. But Eleanore Leavenworth sat unmoved.

"Was your uncle on ill terms with anyone?" was now asked. "Had he valuable papers or secret sums of money in his possession?"

To all these inquiries she returned an equal negative.

"Has your uncle met any stranger lately, or received any important letter during the last few weeks, that might seem in any way to throw a light upon this mystery?"

There was the slightest perceptible hesitation in her voice as she replied: "No, not to my knowledge; I don't know of any such." But here stealing a side glance at Eleanore, she evidently saw something that reassured her, for she hastened to add:

"I believe I may go further than that, and say positively no. My uncle was in the habit of confiding in me, and I should have known if anything of importance to him occurred."

Questioned in regard to Hannah, she gave that person the best of domestic characters; knew of nothing that could have led either to her strange disappearance or to her connection with crime. Could not say whether she kept any company or had any visitors, only knew that no one with any such pretensions came to the house. Finally, when asked when she had last seen the pistol which Mr. Leavenworth always kept in his stand drawer, she replied, not since the day he bought it; Eleanore, and not herself, having the charge of her uncle's apartments.

It was the only thing she had said which, even to a mind freighted like mine, would seem to point to any private doubt or secret suspicion, and this, uttered in the careless manner in which it was, would have passed without comment, if Eleanore herself had not directed at that moment a very much aroused and inquiring look upon the speaker.

But it was time for the inquisitive juror to make himself heard again. Edging to the brink of his chair, he asked if she had properly considered what she had just said.

"I hope, sir, I consider all that I say at such a time as this," was her earnest reply.

The little juror drew back, and I looked to see her examination terminate, when suddenly his ponderous colleague of the watch chain, catching the young lady's eye, enquired:

(To be continued.)