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—OR—

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CHAPTER XXX.

"I—I don't know, sir," said Jane, with a terrified sob. "He—he hasn't been home all night."

"How do you know that?" demanded the detective, quietly.

The girl looked round with a bewildered air.

"He hasn't—so far as I know."

The detective nodded. His sharp eyes had caught the shattered portrait frame where Jane, all unsuspiciously—she thought that it had been knocked off the mantel-piece—had placed it on the table. He took it up.

"Portrait of the deceased. Whose is it?"

"Mr.—Mr. Deane's, sir," sobbed Jane. "He—he put it on the mantelshelf the other day."

It all seemed so plain to the shrewd detective. The woman had come to threaten or cajole this Mr. Deane, a quarrel had ensued, the broken portrait, the dagger—it was all quite plain.

"Give me a description of Mr. Deane, will you?" he said.

Thorpe, with his hand to his heart, tried to describe Bobby, and the detective took notes.

"You can go into the kitchen," he said to the servants, "but don't leave the place, please. It's quite evident who's to blame here," he said to the army doctor, who stood grave and attentive. "I'll get a warrant for this Mr. Deane."

Thorpe overheard, and looked up with a bewildered expression.

"Deane—Deance did not do it," he said, feebly. "He—he isn't capable of it. Oh, my God, why did I let her come? It isn't Deane?"

But the detective smiled, a superior smile. His experience had convinced him that, as a rule, there was very little mystery about a murder. It was only in novels that there was any doubt as to the criminal who had committed the deed.

He went to the door of the inner room and tried it.

"Locked," he said to one of the constables. "Go round and see if the key's inside."

The man went round and unlocked the door, and the detective passed through the suite of rooms, noting everything with his sharp eyes, and re-entered the drawing-room by the passage.

"He got off through those rooms," he said to the doctor.

"The—the scoundrel?" he gasped in response. "You—you will be able to get him?"

The detective smiled confidently.

"Oh, yes; crime's too recent for him to escape. I'll have him under the hue and cry in half an hour."

Leaving the policemen in charge, he went back to Scotland Yard, and in a few minutes a fairly accurate description of Bobby was being flashed over the country.

Then the detective, with other officials, returned to the Mansions two hours later. Morgan Thorpe was still there, seated in a chair, his head in his hands. He had finished the decanter of brandy and was looking half stupefied.

As they entered, he looked up in a bewildered fashion.

"Have—have you found him?" he demanded hoarsely.

"No," said the detective; "but we shall have him presently, without a daubt. He can't have got far."

At this moment the door was flung open, and Bobby and an elderly man entered in hot haste.

Morgan Thorpe sprung to his feet.

"Deane!" he exclaimed.

The detective stepped behind Bobby and shut the door.

"Mr. Deane, I think?" he said, politely. "I arrest you."

But Bobby had sprung to the sofa, and stood, white and shuddering, before the white sheet with which they had reverently covered the dead woman.

'It—it is not true!" he cried. "Oh, it can't—it can't be! Thorpe"—he flung his hands out in appeal—"tell me it isn't true!"

Thorpe stared at him.

"She's dead—murdered!" he gasped, with hanging underlip. "Murdered here—last night—in your rooms!"

"My God!" cried Bobby.

The detective laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Mr. Deane, I arrest you on a charge of wilful murder."

Bobby turned his eyes upon him, too stunned to speak; but the elderly gentleman beside him said, with agitation:

"There is some mistake. If the poor creature was murdered last night, Mr. Deane is certainly not the criminal, for he spent all last evening at my house at Putney. He came to dine with two other gentlemen—also pupils of mine—and remained the night. I—the other guests, the servants—can prove this."

The detective was staggered.

"She came to see him. She was found covered by your coat."

He indicated the fur coat.

'Mine? No!" said Bobby.

The detective looked round sharply at the servants.

"Whose coat is this?" he asked, sternly.

Jane gasped for breath.

"My master's—Lord—Lord Gaunt's," she said at last.

The detective frowned.

"When did you see Lord Gaunt last?" he asked, quickly.

"Last night—about ten—he passed me in the corridor."

"He was here, then?"

She nodded spasmodically.

"Yes; I let him in."

"Did he wear that coat?"

She nodded, and fell to sobbing.

"Yes; he came in it. He left without it; but—but if you think that his lordship did it, you're wrong—wrong! He couldn't!"

The detective turned swiftly upon Morgan Thorpe.

"Did your sister know Lord Gaunt?" he asked.

Morgan Thorpe got up and steadied himself by the back of the chair.

"My God! it's no use keeping it back!" he said, as if to himself. "Gentlemen, my poor sister was—was Lord Gaunt's wife!"

"His wife? You described her as Mrs. Dalton!"

"She was his wife!" said Morgan Thorpe, with a kind of dogged sullenness. "They—they were separated. He left her. They must have met by accident here last night."

One of the Scotland Yard officials drew the detective aside.

"You've made a mistake this time," he said in a low voice. "The man you want is this Lord Gaunt. Hurry up! You've lost a lot of time as it is!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

The detective was staggered, and looked round rather sullenly. His professional reputation was a high one, and he felt his mistake acutely.

"What hotel does Lord Gaunt use?" he asked of the servant.

"He always goes to Morlet's, when the rooms are being done up or he can't sleep here for any reason," said Jane, weeping. "But it isn't his lordship."

The detective left the room and got into a cab.

"Lord Gaunt in?" he inquired carelessly of Wilkins.

"His lordship left us early this morning, sir," was the reply.

The detective had quite expected this answer.

"Do you know where I can find him?" he inquired as carelessly.

Wilkins looked surprised.

"His lordship sailed for Africa this morning," he said. "The vessel must have started by this time—we sent his lordship's luggage on yesterday—to the "Pevensey Castle."

The detective nodded and bit his lip. Then he stood for a moment pondering. Surely Lord Gaunt would not have been such a fool as to shut himself up in a vessel which could be stopped by cable at Madeira!

"Went in a cab, I suppose?" he said.

"Yes, sir—a hansom. His lordship only had a bag."

"Just so. Did you happen to hear what directions he gave the cabman? I've got important business with his lordship and want to catch him before he starts, if I can."

"He said Charing Cross Station," said Wilkins. "I happened to hear him."

The detective's face cleared. Of course, Gaunt would leave his luggage to go by the Cape vessel, and make for the Continent. The detective thought he saw the move in an instant.

"Thanks," he said; and he jumped into his cab and was driven to Charing Cross. There he wired a description of Lord Gaunt to the police at Southampton and Dover, and instructed them to stop him. A continental train happened to be due, and the detective, pretty well assured that he was on the track of the fugitive, went down to Dover by it.

The Southampton telegram arrived exactly one hour after the "Pevensey Castle" had sailed.

Meanwhile, the police of the Mansions were gathering information from the servants and other persons, and very soon the fact of Decima's visit on the previous evening came out.

Bobby was amazed and horrified.

"Yes, she is my sister," he said. "She must have come to see me, as Jane says. She could not have come to meet Lord Gaunt," for the inspector had ventured to suggest this.

Where should we be likely to find Miss Deane?" he asked, significantly.

Bobby shook his head. He was confused and bewildered.

"She may be with her aunt, Lady Lascelles, or she may have gone back home. I can not understand. I will go round to Lady Pauline's."

The inspector nodded.

"One of my men will go round with you," he said, gravely.

Bobby started.

"You—you don't think—you don't dare to suspect my sister?" he began; and the inspector responded, quietly:

"Well, the young lady was here last night, Mr. Deane. I will ask you to see that she does not leave London just yet. She will be sure to be wanted, you see."

Bobby went round to Berkeley Square, accompanied by a detective, and Lady Pauline came down to the drawing-room to them.

"A terrible thing has happened, Lady Pauline," said Bobby, whose white face and quivering lips had startled her. "A—a lady has been found dead—murdered—in my—that is, Lord Gaunt's—rooms, and—and—is Decima here?"

"Yes, she is here," said Lady Pauline, gravely. "She is very ill with brain fever."

Bobby uttered an exclamation.

"I must see her, Lady Pauline, I must! They say—it is said that she was at my rooms last night, and—and—"

Lady Pauline's strength of mind came to her aid.

"In the rooms where this poor lady has been found?" she said. "Yes, I know that she went to your rooms; the woman in charge of the house told me so. But—" She stopped, struck silent by the expression of Bobby's face. "Tell me all you know," she said, gravely and calmly.

Bobby, in hurried and agitated accents, told all that he knew.

(to be continued.)

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A man of colour was getting married and when the clergyman came to "love, honour, and obey," the bridegroom interrupted with, "Pardon me, sah, but would you mind reading dem words again? Dem's very important words; I should like de lady to take special note of dem words; dis darky's been married [illegible]."

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