

A PIECE OF CLOTH.

WHEN I was on the detective force—by the way, my name is Jack Hindson, at your service—I had a case on my hands that baffled me. I wanted to get on, for I was at that time engaged to Kitty Pease, and she had said that though she was very fond of me, she did not mean to marry me until I had enough to marry on, which I should have as soon as I had found out the party who committed a certain murder.

Mrs. Jeffries, a rich, miserly sort of old lady, had been found dead in her bed, murdered by some one. No one knew who it was.

Everybody was under suspicion. A man-servant, who had been dismissed weeks before; a dissipated nephew, who had quarrelled with her; a peddler; a man who had mended the roof. But it seemed likely that no one would be actually proved guilty. To be sure, the nephew would come in for her property, being her only relative; but though he had been to the door that evening, he had been seen to go away again and no doors were found unlocked, and the servant had to call for help before the bedroom door could be broken in.

The only clue I had was a bit of black cloth, clutched tight in the dead woman's hand—a fine bit of old black broad-cloth torn in quite a singular shape. We hid the fact that this had been found from the newspaper men, and I was looking for the coat it had been pulled out of. That would be my chance.

The dismissed servant was a waiter, but I bribed myself into a chance of seeing his black coat off duty, and it had not been torn or patched. I hunted up the nephew's boarding house, and got into his room under pretence of having been sent from the telegraph office to see the wires, but his clothes were all of thick, coarse cloth. I talked these things all over to Kitty, and she set her wits to work to help me. She asked me to let her go to the old lady's home, and show her the room she had slept in; and she went out on the roof, as I had done many a time, and went along first in one direction and then in another, looking at all the scuttle doors, until I thought she would go off into the street; but she stopped at the last of the row and beckoned me. I hurried up.

Close to the scuttle door lay a little black button.

"This belongs to the garment the bit of cloth came from," she said, "There are blacks and blacks. This is a button that matches that black. Not a blue-black, nor a brownish black, nor a foxy black, but a black that is almost invisible green. Do you know No. 100?"

"It's a very respectable first-class boarding house," said I.

"Will they take ladies?" she asked.

"If they are well introduced."

"I shall go there to board."

Next day I got a card from her—she hadn't been in the habit of having cards—with that address on it. I called. She came down to see me in her best black silk, with her bonnet and mantilla on.

There was an old lady in the room. She introduced me to her and then said she was ready. I took the hint. We went out together.

"Of course, you know why I came here," she said. "I'm spending all my salary, and wearing my best clothes; but I've found something out already. Mrs. Jeffries' nephew calls here sometimes. He calls on a young widow, who has the upper front room. He has been engaged to her for some time."

She paused a long time and then said:

"He was here the night of the murder."

"Well!" I said. "Has she let him out upon the roof?"

"I wished you wouldn't ask me any questions," said Kitty. "I shall know before long. When I send for you, come at once. Will you let me have that bit of cloth?"

"It's more precious than diamonds," I said.

Her answer was:

"Yes, I know it." She put it into her pocket-book. "I have changed my room," she remarked. "I am next to her. There is a locked door between us. That is all. And I have made a peep hole."

"You are a born detective; but as this widow is respectable, you can't watch young Jeffries that way."

"Yesterday," she said, without answering me, "Jeffries called. I saw him coming up the street, and hid behind a screen in the parlor. I should have pretended to be asleep in a chair there had I been seen, but no one found me out. She came to him, and he talked like an innocent man."

"The poor old woman has done me another injury by getting herself murdered," he said. "I believe I'm suspected, because I shall profit by her death. Why, what do they take me for? I wonder who killed her? They say nothing was gone."

"Whoever it was, you ought to be thankful that the crabbed creature is dead," she said. "Some common burglar; of course. She'd scream and shriek if she saw one at her jewel-case, and get herself killed."

"Well, poor old woman, I'd have been his death if I had been near," Jeffries said. "She wasn't half bad. She never made a will and left things away from me, as she might, after I told her I'd never cringe to her for her favor."

Hang it, I wish I wasn't her heir. People will suspect me, secretly, perhaps. I can prove I wasn't inside the house that night; but you know how the papers talked. Poor Bitzner, the roofer, came to me and cried over what they said about him. Kill Aunt Jessy! Why—good Lord—"

"You used to call her Aunt Jezebel," said the widow; Mrs. Mull is her name.

"Yes, I'm sorry I did; but she had a temper," said Mr. Jeffries. "I've a mind not to take the money."

"Then I shan't take you," said Mrs. Mull. "Such an idiot; and I should be ashamed of you."

"See here!" Kitty handed me an address on a piece of paper. It was Mrs. Preston Mull, at a certain number, Chestnut street. "It is her mother-in-law. Can you send our Mrs. Mull—Eliza Mull—a telegram, saying: 'Come at once to this address?' she asked."

"I can," said I.

"Do it," said she. "No don't ask me. I am helping you. I have my thoughts. Now take me home."

I took her home, and telegraphed to a brother detective to telegraph to the widow, and I waited and watched. I saw her get into a carriage and go away. I followed and saw her take the train. If Kitty wanted her out of the way, she was safe.

A few hours afterwards I received a note:

"Disguise yourself as an old woman, and come here at once. Come in a cab. Wear a thick black veil. Send up word that you are my aunt Agnes. Lose no time."

I lost none. As I went slowly up the stairs, with my black veil down, I could hear my heart beat. Kitty opened the door, called out, "Why aunty, dear!" and shut it.

"I have opened the door between my room and Mrs. Mull's," she said. "I have found something. I can't appear in this matter. You must see for yourself."

She led me into the handsome room, and went to a wardrobe. There from beneath other dresses, she drew a plainly cut coat, or redingote, of thin black cloth, with many buttons down the front, and spread it on a chair. About the height of the knees a piece was torn away and a button gone.

"Hush?" she said; we don't know who may be listening. Make no sound."

Then she took the bit of cloth from her pocket, fitted it to the rent, and laid the button on it.

"The piece of cloth found in dead Mrs. Jeffries' hand came from this garment," was her remark.

"Yes," I said; "she must have disguised him in it. But—why—"

"Goosey!" said Kitty. "Mr. Jeffries

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