

THE LADY OF THE TOWER

A Continued Story of Romantic Adventure

CHAPTER X.

A Conundrum For Mr. Grylls.

By HEADON HILL

SUPERINTENDENT Grylls of the County Constabulary was a jovial soul, who by reason of his joviality would have made his mark in any walk of life suited to his class—say as a commercial traveller or an agent for an insurance company. But fate had made of him a policeman, and as a policeman he had turned to account the natural astuteness veiled by good nature, which would have achieved success in less responsible but possibly more lucrative callings.

In person he was bulky, with a great smooth face and genial eyes that shed an artificial sunshine on the gloom of local petty sessions, and even brightened the deeper gloom of the Assize Court, when more serious business took him to Bodmin, where young barristers on circuit used to caricature him on the backs of briefs as "the rising sun." The more serious business had hitherto been confined to vulgar manslaughters arising from drunken frays between sailors of the port or miners in the inland section of his district. But it was a notable fact that whenever the Superintendent applied for a warrant a conviction always followed.

The murder of the prosperous ship-owner was the first really big thing that had come his way. Here was no foregone conclusion, requiring only the raking together and sorting of evidence with a view to a pounce on the undoubted culprit. The death of Jacob Polgleaze was an undoubted mystery, in the solution of which Mr. Grylls had made no appreciable headway by the afternoon of Saturday—the day after the crime. But he was in no way daunted, confident that the clue which had so far eluded him would sooner or later fall into his capable fingers. It should be sooner, if wiliness and untiring effort could compass that end.

The inquest was fixed for Monday, so that there was plenty of time to collect some interesting material to lay before the coroner's jury.

In the earlier hours of Saturday Mr. Grylls showed his kindly consideration by leaving the bereaved son to his grief and to the ordering of his mourning. But as a painstaking officer he was familiar with the characteristics of his fellow townsmen, and he made a shrewd guess that by six o'clock Mr. Wilson Polgleaze would have found means of consolation and would be fair game for the purpose of his inquiry.

On reaching the inn where the young man lodged the Superintendent was able in the main to congratulate himself on the correctness of his forecast. The now sole partner in the firm of Polgleaze and Son was in the bar-parlour, surrounded by a group of bibulous and condoling cronies, all proffering suggestions in return for the drinks that had been stood them. But Mr. Grylls was quick to note one important flaw in his calculations. Mr. Wilson Polgleaze was most uncompromisingly sober. On the entrance of the police-officer he at once detached himself from his boon companions.

"You want to see me, Grylls," he said. "Let's go up to my room and have our jabber there. These chaps are very kind, but they are a bit excited, and you will prefer to see me in private, I know."

The Superintendent was busy nodding to the flushed gentlemen at the bar, and did not answer immediately. He made it his business to be hail-fellow-well-met with his flock, and these convivial souls were quite good citizens. On none of them had his grip ever fallen.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Polgleaze," he replied at last. "I haven't much to say unfortunately, but we'll be better by ourselves. Your room, by all means."

"Have a drink before you go up, old man?"

PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.
JACOB POLGLEAZE, ship-owner, holds a mortgage on St. Runan's Tower, the home of Hilda Carlyon. His son Wilson proposes marriage to her, but is met with refusal, and swears revenge. At this time Lance Pengarvan, a ship-captain, arrives home from a voyage with his friend, Antonio Diaz, who is on a secret mission. The two men conceal a load of iron-bound boxes in a room in the tower, with the help of Nathan Craze, an old fisherman. Diaz meets and falls in love with the old man's daughter, Marigold. Just before Pengarvan sets sail with the mysterious boxes, Wilson Polgleaze arrives at the tower. They suspect him of knowing their plans, but leave at once. In the morning news is brought of the murder of old Jacob Polgleaze.

"I'll do that with pleasure. But no, on second thoughts I'll take just a thimble-full with you while we talk, if you don't mind. I haven't much time. This sad affair has about filled me up with work."

WILSON gave the necessary orders at the bar, and then conducted his visitor up to the frowsy sitting-room which he occupied on the first floor.

"I suppose you'll be shifting your quarters now," said Mr. Grylls as he bestowed his large proportions in a cane chair, and leisurely surveyed his surroundings, while his host busied himself with the drinks which had followed them up.

"Later on perhaps, but not yet awhile."

"Ah, naturally it would be painful for you to reside in your respected father's house," hazarded Mr. Grylls sympathetically, as he sipped the glass handed to him.

"I shouldn't want to live there anyhow—no style about it," replied Wilson, intending to convey an impression of his new importance.

The Superintendent must have been duly impressed, for he accepted that view in his most genial way. "Of course not," he agreed. "We shall have you moving into a mansion worthy of your position, and getting married, eh? But I didn't come here to chatter like this. Seriously now, Mr. Polgleaze—you have had a day to consider. Can you give me no hint that will put me on the track? Cannot you think of anyone who had a special grudge against your honoured parent, or of anyone who feared him in the way of business?"

Wilson pondered the question, appealing to his glass for the refreshment of his memory. "It is an open secret that the governor lent money on mortgage. A man who does that is sure to have enemies," he replied.

"Ah, I shall have to get from you a list of his mortgage debtors," said Mr. Grylls, making a note in his pocket-book. Restoring the book to his pocket, he glanced across at the young man lolling in the opposite chair, as though about to put a fresh question. Instead of doing so he suddenly and with an air of surprised concern, made the assertion:

"I see you've been in the wars yourself, sir. By Jingo, that's a nasty smack someone has given you between the eyes. An ugly, purple bump, but no—I don't think the skin's broken. You didn't have it last night, Mr. Polgleaze, did you, when you came back from that long ride? If so I was too busy to notice it."

Which was a polite fiction on the part of Mr. Grylls, since the principal

object of his visit was, as he put it to himself, "to get to the bottom of that bump."

Wilson Polgleaze, whether or no he suspected the fiction, took the question with ill grace. "Are you getting at me?" he scowled. "If so, you'd better clear out. You ain't a bad sort, Grylls, when off duty, but I reckon you're like all policemen on the job—ready to suspect your own pals."

"Getting at you? Suspect my own pals?" murmured Mr. Grylls, astonishment and perplexity clouding his benevolent eyes. "I should be obliged if you would make your meaning clearer, Polgleaze—I beg your pardon—I should say sir."

A deft touch that, and it told.

"Why, ain't you insinuating that I killed the old man, and that he gave me this in self-defence," rejoined Wilson sullenly, fingering the excrescence which Lance Pengarvan's fist had raised, and then half rising from his chair as though to show active resentment.

But the Superintendent, in spite of his bulk, was on his feet first and with a burst of laughter pushed his host down again.

"My dear good Mr. Polgleaze," he soothed the outbreak, "forgive my laughing, but you ought to know my ways better than that. If I had held any such absurd notion you are the last person I should have approached. I should have pretended not to notice your forehead, and set to work on the clue by very different methods. No, I'll own up at once that I am curious about your injury, and take you into confidence and tell you why. If the firm of Polgleaze and Son had an enemy bitter enough to kill the senior partner, the same person might have worked off some of his spleen on the junior. See what I mean?"

A crafty look came into the mean eyes of the younger man. "I never thought of that!" he exclaimed. "It takes a chap of your great gifts and trained skill to read such riddles, Grylls. I had almost forgotten this little tap on the boko, in all this pother over the poor old Dad. But I see now that it may be—relevant's the word, isn't it?"

"It's a word that we police officers set a lot of store by, Mr. Polgleaze," the Superintendent encouraged the budding confidence.

"Well, it was Captain Pengarvan, of our 'Lodestar,' gave me this ugly bruise last night."

MR. GRYLLS flashed out his note-book. "Yesterday afternoon, you mean?" he said, poised his pencil. "The 'Lodestar' sailed at sundown."

"I said last night and I mean last night," rejoined Wilson, enjoying the other's mystification. "You would call ten o'clock night, I suppose."

"But the steamer—"

"Left harbour at six or thereabouts, and two hours later anchored off St. Runan's Cove without orders from the firm. There she took in a supplementary cargo of some stuff that was on no bill-of-lading we had ever seen," continued the narrator with vindictive eagerness. "I had an idea that there was some sort of hanky-panky afoot, and I rode out to the Tower. They weren't going to let me in, but I ain't an easy one to stop, and I got inside—as far as the dining-room, where Captain Lance Pengarvan, without a word spoken, hit me square between the eyes and knocked me silly."

"But the secret cargo—?"

"Before I was bowled over I saw that they had rigged up a derrick at the window that overhangs the beach. There were two or three men round it, but our noble captain didn't give me time to recognize them. Probably I couldn't have. He's been taking a lot of pains with the signing on of his crew this voyage. A good few of them were strangers from other ports."

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G. J. DESBARATS,
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