

"The Statue"

By Eden Phillpotts and
Arnold Bennett

CHAPTER IV.—(Continued.)

Emile submissively hurried off. It was a remarkable sight to see this middle-aged and luxuriously-tended woman, whose every daily habit was slothful, bland, and changeless regular, hastening across the grounds over wet grass at five o'clock in the morning. Emile wondered what strange complication had happened within the house to arouse her at such an hour from the amiable torpor in which she passed her existence.

She did not give him time to speak first. "Emile," she called out, while they were yet thirty yards apart, "have you seen my husband?" With one plump hand she was holding up the folds of a beautiful but fragile negligee. Despite her years she made an extraordinarily graceful picture of pathos as she halted, in an attitude of helpless, childlike appeal, waiting for Emile's reply.

"Madame," he said, in just the right tone, "that is precisely what I was going to ask you. When did you see Mr. Courlander? Why are you here so early?"

"Oh!" she cried, "I heard such a flying word and down stairs. It woke me. I got out of bed to tell my husband. You know I always get up and tell him when I can't sleep." (In that naive confession was a hint of all that Carl had been to her.) "And he was in his room. Then I looked out of the window and I saw you and Maurice running down the garden. I rang my bell, but no one answered. I was so frightened I came after you. What are you doing out here? I do wish—"

"Pardon me, madame, when did you last see Mr. Courlander?" "He used to use the somewhat formal manner which he invariably adopted to his house, and which, indeed, she somehow inspired in most persons.

"I saw him asleep in bed at half-past one this morning," said Lady Mary. "Asleep in bed?"

"Yes." "Undressed?"

"Why, yes! He had evidently told Curtis not to stay up for him, because his clothes were all over the room."

"What clothes, madame?" "His dress-clothes, of course."

"You are sure, madame, that this was last night? Was it not the night before last?"

"You know perfectly well, Emile, that the night before last my poor Carl spent in town. I tell you I saw him in bed last night—I mean this morning. Emile, what is it? What has happened?"

"Something must have happened," Emile temporized.

"She sank to the ground without the slightest warning, and hid her face. 'I know he's dead!' she exclaimed, patting her face with a little handkerchief. 'I know he's lying dead up at the statue. Why doesn't Maurice come to me?'"

"But, madame—" "Yes, mother," said a low voice behind them. "He is dead." It was Maurice. He raised her gently and supported her; and they exchanged glances.

"He's been murdered," she whispered. Maurice drew back. "How did you know?" he queried in a brief gust of excitement.

"I didn't know, I guessed." "But you must have had some—"

She shook her head. "I just guessed." She was gently weeping. "Nothing that your father could do or that could happen to him would ever surprise me. I finished being surprised twenty years ago. I must go to him."

"No, mother," he said in a trembling voice. "You must go back to the house to Millicent."

"Maurice!" she protested. "Yes, please," he said authoritatively. "Emile, will you go up there and keep watch?"

Emile went instantly. "I won't let you leave me!" Lady Mary sobbed.

"I'm not going to leave you," said Maurice. "I will take you. Come!" He led her in the direction of the house.

As they walked side by side, she told him, in little patches of rapid speech, interrupted by tears, what she had told Emile. He made no comment.

"I thought I heard that new bell of your father's about two o'clock," she said.

"What new bell?" Maurice questioned. "I don't know. A bell he has been having fixed in his bedroom."

"We shall want men from Scotland Yard, I suppose," he muttered.

Arrived at the house, which was still absolutely silent in sleep, he said brusquely to his mother—

"Go yourself to Millicent and tell her."

"And you? What are you going to do?"

In the poignant atmosphere of the room, the one being who could dissipate it lay dead under the statue itself. The air was full of problems and queries. Carl Courlander had done everything, attended to everything. No one else had any real duties. The vast organism of Tudor Hundreds had been kept in proper activity by Carl alone. All things were referred to him, who bore the burden so lightly. And the same applied to the house in Hamilton Place, and of course in the greater degree, to the business of the firm of Courlander. One single brain there had been. And now that brain was eternally quiet.

And the laborer of that brain's functions and immense responsibilities stood in the bedroom looking at the bed, mysterious, inactive, moody, intensifying by his demeanor the enigma of the situation.

A few hours since, the son had been holding an argument with his father—his father who was so vivacious, and so calm in his vivacity. And now the son was in the room in contention before the bed which the father had quit, with such strangeness and in such silence, to meet death at the foot of the statue.

Every object in the room seemed to demand: Why at the foot of the statue? The door communicating with Lady Mary's bedroom opened, and Millicent came in. Her face was extremely pale; her eyes were not yet fully awake. But her brain was aroused, and she was entirely collected. She spoke very quietly, very gently.

"What mother says?" "He nodded."

As he answered her questions, he could not but admire her profoundly; she was so mistress of herself, so equal to the occasion, so touching in her restrained anguish. But he answered dreamily.

"What shall you do first, Maurice?" she asked him. "I must look after mother. I told her not to come in here."

Her tone now expressed a serene confidence in him, an immense reliance on him as the natural head of the family. He pushed the door open, and he seemed to draw him magically from his dream.

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controlled, tragically-eyed sister! He was a changed man. He had become the sort of person whom acquaintances would discuss in a whisper when his back is turned.

His secretive and brooding demeanor had offered no shadow of a surmise as to the identity of the criminal. The bright, benign, that imposed itself on Tudor Hundreds like a heavy cloud through which all objects were seen distorted and terrifying, seemed not to exist for him. Apparently he was too absorbed in the immediate consequences of the crime to trouble himself with its causes.

The immediate consequences had commenced with the arrival of the police, followed by a local doctor on horseback, and the coroner's officer, about seven o'clock. At eight o'clock so rapid was the march of things, an order for a post-mortem had been obtained, the inquest arranged for the next day, and the coroner's inquest had been taken a note from Maurice at breakfast. It was during that breakfast that the first telegram came, the scattered flakes prelude of a snow-storm, descended on the house.

The case from Scotland Yard, from the Chamberlain of the Bank of England, and from two newspapers. Already the news was afloat in London. By eleven o'clock the storm had burst in full fury, and Maurice had installed himself in his father's study to deal with the matter. He had a clerk from the household accounts office constituted his staff.

The butler, gifted with a slow and distinct manner of speech, was telephonically seated in a chair at the telephone.

At noon half the special reporters of Fleet street were assaulting the portals of Tudor Hundreds. At half-past two the police came, and the coroner's inquest, exterminated by administrative order of Maurice.

At one o'clock a stream of other callers set in, direct by train from London, and principals from the city, envoys from politicians, a special messenger from a royal palace. Then came the first inquisitive cables from the chancelleries and the bureaux of the continent. Carl Courlander was dead!

Maurice battled with the storm of telegrams and the ever-rising flood of callers until three o'clock, when, returning to the study after an interview with two stockbroking friends of his father in the drawing-room, he impatiently exclaimed to Emile—

"I'm going to stop this."

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cepting and delivering every manner of communication. Occasionally he paced meditatively to and fro in the corridor. At dusk he switched on the light.

It was shortly after this that an officious and splendid young man, accompanied by one of the Courlander servants in a state of agitation, appeared at the end of the corridor and rapidly approached Curtis. This youth had the air of a nincompoop, but as had proved that he was not exactly a nincompoop by getting past the lodge-keepers' sentries, the Yard was alarmed.

He personally extended a card to Curtis, and Curtis perused on the card the words: "The Earl of Fenton."

"I must see Mr. Courlander," said the visitor, commandingly.

"No, sir," Curtis gravely replied. There was a pause.

"But I must," said the visitor, persistently.

"No, sir," Curtis gravely repeated. Another pause, in which the visitor glanced as if for moral aid at the other servant who stood by him.

"But don't you know I'm private?" said the visitor, firmly.

"I must see Mr. Courlander," said the visitor, firmly.

"I've come specially. It's of the highest importance," said the visitor, firmly.

"No, sir," Curtis gravely repeated. The Earl rapidly considered within himself what was the most precious thing in the world, and decided that it was his dignity.

He therefore departed, too proud to ask that a note should be sent in to Maurice.

Maurice was unaware of such episodes. He sat now, as he had sat during the major part of the day, calm and absorbed, at the broad desk in the vast study. Except Curtis, there was not a soul in the house who did not know of the tragedy.

Two hundred and thirty telegrams, cables and letters lay in piles to his left; a hundred and seventy missives still unanswered lay to his right. Emile and the clerk were writing at a table in a corner of the study.

Another lamp, similarly shaded, threw a circle of illumination on Maurice's blotting-paper. The rest of the apartment was in gloom. Outside, the silver of twilight had not faded from the sky. Here in this room was a little centre of human life; another existed in Lady Mary's bedroom, where the chateleine, under rose-tinted clouds, was looking over by her daughter and maid; still other centres were in the servants' hall, and at the great north door, where footmen foregathered, and in the lodges. And within the dim lighted bedroom of the late master, shut in a shell on the striped bed, reposed still the body of the late Carl.

And over all still hung the heavy cloud of the enigma, made heavier by the passage of time and by the unexplained and inexplicable absence of the body which ought not to have been absent. Maurice had had no visitors since the late Carl's death. He had not even received a letter from London. Yet they had not arrived, and surely either Norah or Maurice should at least have sent a message. Yet there was no sign from them. Even the Dunstable police, Maurice was informed, had left. All these phenomena were extremely curious and mysterious.

A phenomenon still more curious and still more disconcerting occurred a little later. The door of the study opened, and Curtis floated into the room, and the clerk followed him. He was in the right hand of a tall, burly, and cheerful individual.

"Curtis had been defeated," said the individual.

"What do you mean?" "I want to see you," said the individual, puffing, and depositing an unmoved Curtis on the ground.

"Who are you?" "I will tell you that when we are alone."

"Then you will not tell me at all," said Maurice, icily.

"Stay a moment," said the individual.

He advanced to the desk. Maurice jumped up. Emile also rose, as if to shield the one or to attack the other.

"I merely wish to show you my card," said the individual, emphasising the individual. "I have no reasons for showing it to you alone."

Maurice inspected the card. There was a dramatic silence.

"No one knows who you are?" "Very well."

"No one," said the individual.

Maurice glanced at Berger. Berger and the clerk, gathered up their papers, and went out.

With the forenoon of the Oriental, had preceded them.

CHAPTER VI. The Two Detectives.

"So you are Mr. Solomon Sibthorpe," said the man, eyeing the stranger who had carried in Curtis by the neck.

"At your service," replied Solomon Sibthorpe, still puffing slightly after the exertion.

And he replied in a bland, cheerful tone such as might have been employed by a West End shopman of superior manners to a customer in search of pink ribbon.

The showing out of the directorial visitor was a historic scene (not, however, recorded in the visitor's published memoirs "Town and City Notes").

"Yes, sir," said Curtis, returning.

"Order all the lodge-gates to be closed to everybody except the people I mentioned and the telegraph boys."

"Yes, sir."

a great wine that was offered only to the finest connoisseurs.

The reality differed somewhat from this vision.