

# ELIZABETH KENT

THE HOUSE  
OPPOSITE: A  
MYSTERY

**Elizabeth Kent**  
**The House Opposite: A Mystery**

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*The House Opposite: A Mystery:*

# Содержание

CHAPTER I	4
CHAPTER II	9
CHAPTER III	25
CHAPTER IV	35
CHAPTER V	47
CHAPTER VI	62
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	68

# **Elizabeth Kent**

## **The House**

### **Opposite: A Mystery**

#### **CHAPTER I**

#### **THROUGH MY**

#### **NEIGHBOUR'S WINDOWS**

WHAT I am about to relate occurred but a few years ago—in the summer of '99, in fact. You may remember that the heat that year was something fearful. Even old New Yorkers, inured by the sufferings of many summers, were overcome by it, and everyone who could, fled from the city. On the particular August day when this story begins, the temperature had been even more unbearable than usual, and approaching night brought no perceptible relief. After dining with Burton (a young doctor like myself), we spent the evening wandering about town trying to discover a cool spot.

At last, thoroughly exhausted by our vain search, I decided to turn in, hoping to sleep from sheer fatigue; but one glance at my stuffy little bedroom discouraged me. Dragging a divan before the window of the front room, I composed myself for the night

with what resignation I could muster.

I found, however, that the light and noise from the street kept me awake; so, giving up sleep as a bad job, I decided to try my luck on the roof. Arming myself with a rug and a pipe, I stole softly upstairs. It was a beautiful starlight night, and after spreading my rug against a chimney and lighting my pipe I concluded that things really might be worse.

Across the street loomed the great Rosemere apartment-house, and I noted with surprise that, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour and of the season, several lights were still burning there. From two windows directly opposite, and on a level with me, light filtered dimly through lowered shades, and I wondered what possible motive people could have for shutting out the little air there was on such a night. My neighbours must be uncommonly suspicious, I thought, to fear observation from so unlikely a place as my roof; and yet that was the only spot from which they could by any chance be overlooked.

The only other light in the building shone clear and unobstructed through the open windows of the corresponding room two floors higher up. I was too far below to be able to look into this room, but I caught a suggestion of sumptuous satin hangings and could distinguish the tops of heavy gilt frames and of some flowering plants and palms.

As I sat idly looking upwards at these latter windows, my attention was suddenly arrested by the violent movement of one of the lace curtains. It was rolled into a cord by some unseen

person who was presumably on the floor, and then dragged across the window. A dark object, which I took to be a human head, moved up and down among the palms, one of which fell with an audible crash. At the same moment I heard a woman's voice raised in a cry of terror. I leaped to my feet in great excitement, but nothing further occurred.

After a minute or so the curtain fell back into its accustomed folds, and I distinctly saw a man moving swiftly away from the window supporting on his shoulder a fair-haired woman. Soon afterwards the lights in this room were extinguished, to be followed almost immediately by the illumination of the floor above.

What I had just seen and heard would not have surprised me in a tenement, but that such scenes could take place in a respectable house like the Rosemere, inhabited largely by fashionable people, was indeed startling. Who could the couple be? And what could have happened? Had the man, coming home drunk, proceeded to beat the woman and been partially sobered by her cry; or was the woman subject to hysteria, or even insane? I remembered that the apartments were what are commonly known as double-deckers. That is to say: each one contained two floors, connected by a private staircase—the living rooms below, the bedrooms above. So I concluded, from seeing a light in what was in all probability a bedroom, that the struggle, or whatever the commotion had been, was over, and that the victim and her assailant, or perhaps the patient and her nurse, had gone quietly, and I trusted amicably,

to bed.

Still ruminating over these different conjectures, I heard a neighbouring clock strike two. I now noticed for the first time signs of life in the lower apartment which I first mentioned; shadows, reflected on the blinds, moved swiftly to and fro, and, growing gigantic, vanished.

But not for long. Soon they reappeared, and the shades were at last drawn up. I had now an unobstructed view of the room, which proved to be a drawing-room, as I had already surmised. It was dismantled for the summer, and the pictures and furniture were hidden under brown holland. A man leant against the window with his head bowed down, in an attitude expressive of complete exhaustion or of great grief. It was too dark for me to distinguish his features; but I noticed that he was tall and dark, with a youthful, athletic figure.

After standing there a few minutes, he turned away. His actions now struck me as most singular. He crawled on the floor, disappeared under sofas, and finally moved even the heavy pieces of furniture from their places. However valuable the thing which he had evidently lost might be, yet 2 A.M. seemed hardly the hour in which to undertake a search for it.

Meanwhile, my attention had been a good deal distracted from the man by observing a woman in one of the bedrooms of the floor immediately above, and consequently belonging to the same suite. When I first caught sight of her, the room was already ablaze with light and she was standing by the window, gazing out

into the darkness. At last, as if overcome by her emotions, she threw up her hands in a gesture of despair, and, kneeling down with her elbows on the window sill, buried her head in her arms. Her hair was so dark that, as she knelt there against the light, it was undistinguishable from her black dress.

I don't know how long she stayed in this position, but the man below had given up his search and turned out the lights long before she moved. Finally, she rose slowly up, a tall black-robed figure, and disappeared into the back of the room. I waited for some time hoping to see her again, but as she remained invisible and nothing further happened, and the approaching dawn held out hopes of a more bearable temperature below, I decided to return to my divan; but the last thing I saw before descending was that solitary light, keeping its silent vigil in the great black building.

## CHAPTER II

# I AM INVOLVED IN THE CASE

IT seemed to me that I had only just got to sleep on my divan when I was awakened by a heavy truck lumbering by. The sun was already high in the heavens, but on consulting my watch I found that it was only ten minutes past six. Annoyed at having waked up so early I was just dozing off again when my sleepy eyes saw the side door leading to the back stairs of the Rosemere slowly open and a young man come out.

Now I do not doubt that, except for what I had seen and heard the night before, I should not have given the fellow a thought; but the house opposite had now become for me a very hotbed of mystery, and everything connected with it aroused my curiosity. So I watched the young man keenly, although he appeared to be nothing but a grocer's or baker's boy going on his morning rounds. But looking at him again I thought him rather old for an errand boy, for they are seldom over eighteen, while this young fellow was twenty-five at the very least. He was tall, dark, and clean-shaven, although not very recently so. He wore no collar, and had on a short, black coat over which was tied a not immaculate white apron. On his arm hung a covered basket, which, from the way he carried it, I judged to be empty, or nearly so.

It may have been my imagination,—in fact, I am inclined to think it was,—but it certainly seemed to me that he stole furtively from the house and glanced apprehensively up and down the street, casting a look in my direction. I thought that he started on encountering my eyes. Be that as it may, he certainly drew his battered hat farther over his face, and, with both hands in his pockets, and chewing a straw with real or assumed carelessness, walked rapidly up town.

I now found my position by the window too noisy, so sought the quiet and darkness of my bedroom, where I fell immediately into such a heavy sleep that it was some time before I realised that the alarm-bell that had been clanging intermittently through my dreams was in reality my office-bell. Hurriedly throwing on a few clothes, I hastened to open the door.

A negro lad stood there, literally grey with terror. His great eyes rolled alarmingly in their sockets, and it was several minutes before I could make out that somebody had been killed, and that my services were required immediately.

Hastily completing my dressing, and snatching up my instrument case, I was ready to follow him in a few moments. What was my astonishment and horror when he led me to the Rosemere!

For a moment my heart stood still. My thoughts flew back to last night. So this was the explanation of that scream, and I had remained silent! Dolt, imbecile that I was! I felt positively guilty.

The large entrance hall through which I hurried was crowded

with excited people, and, as I flew up in the elevator, I tried to prepare myself for the sight of a fair-haired girl weltering in her blood. On the landing at which we stopped were several workmen, huddled together in a small knot, with white, scared faces. One of the two doors which now confronted me stood open, and I was surprised to notice that it led, not to either of the apartments I had watched the night before, but to one of those on the farther side of the building. Yet here, evidently, was the corpse.

Passing through the small hall, filled with rolls of paper and pots of paints, I entered a room immediately on my right. Here several men stood together, gazing down at some object on the floor; but at my approach they moved aside and disclosed—not a golden-haired woman, as I had feared, but the body of a large man stretched out in a corner.

I was so astonished that I could not help giving vent to an exclamation of surprise.

“Do you know the gentleman?” inquired a man, whom I afterwards discovered to be the foreman of the workmen, with quick suspicion.

“No, indeed,” I answered, as I knelt down beside the body.

A policeman stepped forward.

“Please, sir, don’t disturb the corpse; the Coroner and the gen’l man from headquarters must see him just as he is.”

I nodded assent. One glance was sufficient to show me that life had been extinct for some time. The eyes were half open, staring

stupidly before them. The mouth had fallen apart, disclosing even, white teeth. As he lay there on his back, with arms spread out, and his hands unclenched, his whole attitude suggested nothing so much as a drunken stupor. He appeared to be twenty-five or thirty years old. No wound or mark of violence was visible. He wore a short, pointed beard, and was dressed in a white linen shirt, a pair of evening trousers, a black satin tie, silk socks, and patent-leather pumps. By his side lay a Tuxedo coat and a low waistcoat. All his clothes were of fine texture, but somewhat the worse for wear. On the other hand, the pearl studs in his shirt-bosom were very handsome, and on his gold sleeve-links a crest was engraved.

As I said before, a glance had been enough to tell me that the man was dead; but I was astonished to discover, on examining him more closely, that he had been dead at least twenty-four hours; mortification had already set in.

As I arose to my feet, I noticed a small, red-haired man, in the most comical deshabille, regarding me with breathless anxiety.

“Well, Doc, what is it?”

“Of course, I can give no definite opinion without making a further examination,” I said, “but I am inclined to believe that our friend succumbed to alcoholism or apoplexy; he has been dead twenty-four hours, and probably somewhat longer.”

“There, now,” exclaimed the foreman; “I knew he hadn’t died last night; no, nor yistidy, neither.”

“But it can’t be, I tell you!” almost shrieked the little Irishman.

“Where could he have come from? Oh, Lord,” he wailed, “to think that sich a thing should have happened in this building! We only take the most iligant people; yes, sir, and now they’ll lave shure, see if they don’t. It’ll give the house a bad name; and me as worked so hard to keep it genteel.”

A commotion on the landing announced the arrival of a stout, florid individual, who turned out to be the Coroner, and a quiet, middle-aged man in plain clothes, whom I inferred, from the respect with which he was treated, to be no other than the “gen’l’mán” from headquarters. After looking at the corpse for some moments, the Coroner turned to us and demanded:

“Who is this man?”

The little Irishman stepped forward. “We don’t none of us know, sor.”

“How came he here then?”

“The Lord only knows!”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, sor, it’s this way. This apartment is being re-fixed, and five men were working here till six o’clock yistidy evening, and when they left they locks the door, and it has a Yale lock; and they brought me the key and I locks it away at once; and this morning at seven they come while I was still half asleep, having slept bad on account of the heat, and I gets up and opens the safe myself and takes out the key and gives it to this gintleman,” pointing to the foreman; “and he come up here, and a few minutes afterwards I hear a great hue and cry and the workmen and elevaytor-boy

come ashrieking that a body's murdered upstairs. How the fellow got in here, unless the Divil brought him, I can't think; and now here's the doctor that says he's been dead twenty-four hours!"

At my mention the Coroner turned towards me with a slight bow. "You are a doctor?"

"Yes, I am Dr. Charles Fortescue, of Madison Avenue. My office is exactly opposite; I was summoned this morning to see the corpse; I find that the man has been dead at least twenty-four hours. I have not yet made an examination of the body, as I did not wish to disturb it till you"—with a bow which included his companion—"had seen it; but I am inclined to think he died of alcoholism or apoplexy."

"Let me make you acquainted with Mr. Merritt, Dr. Fortescue," said the Coroner, waving his hand in the direction of the gentleman referred to. I was surprised to learn that this insignificant-looking person was really the famous detective.

"Now, gentlemen," said Mr. Merritt, "I must request you all to leave the room while Dr. Fortescue and I take a look round."

As soon as we were alone, the detective knelt down and proceeded to examine the body with astonishing quickness and dexterity. Nothing escaped him; even the darns in the socks appeared worthy of his interest. When he had finished, he beckoned me to approach, and together we turned the body over. As I had discovered no sign of violence, I was about to tell him that, unless the autopsy disclosed poison, the man had certainly died from natural causes, when Mr. Merritt pointed to a small

drop of blood at the side of his shirt front immediately above the heart, which had escaped my observation. In the middle of this tiny spot a puncture was visible.

We now partially disrobed the corpse, and I was stupified to find that the deceased had indeed been assassinated, and by an instrument no larger than a knitting-needle. In the meantime, the detective had been carefully inspecting the clothing. There were no marks on anything except those with which laundries insist on disfiguring our linen. In the waistcoat pocket he found six dollars in bills and seventy-five cents in change; also a knife; but no watch, card, or letter.

Mr. Merritt now whipped out a magnifying glass and searched everything anew; but if he discovered any clue he kept the knowledge of it discreetly to himself. After going over every inch of the floor and examining the window he peered out.

“So you live there, Doctor,” he remarked, with a glance opposite.

“No,” I replied, “my house is further north; my office faces the other set of apartments.”

Being curious to see if we were anywhere near either of the apartments I had watched during the night, I, too, leaned out and looked hastily in the direction of my roof. We were exactly on a level with it, and consequently the adjoining suite must be the one in which I had noticed the dark-haired woman and the man whose ill-timed hunt had puzzled me so much. Their behavior had certainly been very peculiar. Had they anything to do with

this murder, I wondered. I was startled by a soft voice at my elbow, remarking quietly: "You seem struck by something." As I was not anxious, at least not yet, to tell him of my experiences of the night before, I tried to say in the most natural tone in the world: "Oh, I was only noticing that we are exactly on a level with my roof." "I had already observed that," he said. After a slight pause, he continued: "We must now find out who saw the deceased enter the building, for in a place so guarded by bell-boys, elevator-boys and night-watchmen as this is, it seems hardly possible that he could have come in unperceived."

On entering the next room we found the Coroner deep in conversation with the foreman. He turned abruptly to me:

"This man tells me that you uttered an exclamation of surprise on seeing the corpse. What made you do so?"

That unlucky ejaculation! I hesitated a moment, rather at a loss to know what to reply. Every one turned towards me, and I felt myself actually blushing. "I was at first struck by a fancied resemblance," I at last managed to stammer, "but on looking closer I saw I had been completely mistaken."

"Humph," grunted the Coroner, and I was aware that every one in the room eyed me with suspicion. "Well," he continued, still looking at me severely, "can you tell us what the man died of?" "Yes," I answered; "he met his death by being stabbed to the heart by a very small weapon, possibly a stiletto, but a sharp knitting-needle, or even a hat pin, could have caused the wound. The crime was committed while he was unconscious, or at least

semi-conscious, either from some drug or alcohol; or he may have been asleep. He made no resistance, and in all probability never knew he had been hurt.”

There was profound silence.

“It is, then, impossible that this wound was self-inflicted,” inquired the Coroner.

“Quite impossible,” I rejoined.

“So that he was presumably murdered the night before last and smuggled into this apartment some time between six o’clock last evening and seven o’clock this morning?” continued the Coroner. Then, turning to the little red-headed manager, he asked:

“Now, Mr. McGorry, how is it possible for this corpse to have been brought here? The foreman testifies that he himself locked the door in the presence of several workmen; you tell me that the key remained in your safe all night. Now, please explain how this body got here?”

“Lord-a-mercy, sor, you don’t think as I did it!” shrieked McGorry. “Why, sor, I never saw the man before in my life; besides, I have got a alibi, sor; yes, sor, a alibi.”

“Stop, Mr. McGorry; don’t get so excited; nobody is accusing you of anything. But if this place was locked up last night, how came the body here this morning? The lock has not been tampered with. Was there a duplicate key?”

“Yis, sor; but the other key was also in my safe,” replied McGorry.

“Have either of these keys ever been missing?”

“Shure and they haven’t been out of my keeping since the apartment was vacated last May, until three days ago when the painters begun work here. Since then they have had one of the keys during the day, but have always returned it before leaving.”

“Now, tell me,” continued the Coroner, turning to the foreman, “has the key been missing since you had it?”

“Not that I know of; we leave it sticking in the door all day, and only take it out when we leave.”

“So that it is possible that a person might have come to the door, taken the key, and kept it for some hours without your noticing it?”

“Yes, sir, it’s possible, but it aint likely; I haven’t seen anyone pass since I’ve been working here.”

“Could the corpse have been brought in here any other way than through the front door?”

“No, Mr. Coroner,” a quiet voice at my side replied; “I have just examined the fire-escape and all the windows. The fastenings have not been tampered with, and the dust on the fire-escape shows no signs of recent disturbance.” Mr. Merritt had gone on his search so unobtrusively that I had not noticed his absence till he reappeared, a good deal less immaculate than before.

“Is it possible to enter this building unperceived?” the Coroner resumed.

“I should have said not,” replied McGorry; “but now everything seems possible.” Even the Coroner had to smile at his

despondent tone.

“The front door is opened at seven o’clock and closed at eleven, unless there’s something special going on,” McGorry continued, “and during those hours there are always one or two boys in the hall, and often three. After eleven the watchman opens the front door and takes the people up in the elevaytor. No one but meself has the key to this outside door.”

“Does the watchman never leave the front hall except to take people up in the elevator?”

“Well, I don’t say niver, sor, but he’s niver far off.”

“Then I gather that it would be just possible for a person to get out of this house unperceived between eleven P.M. and seven A.M., but impossible, or nearly so, for him to enter?”

“Yes, that’s so, that’s what I think, sor.”

“Well, what about the back door?” I asked.

“Well, the back door is opened at six and closed at tin,” replied McGorry.

“The back door is not guarded during the day, is it?” I went on, forgetting the Coroner in my eagerness.

“Doctor,” broke in the latter, “allow me to conduct this inquiry. Yes, McGorry, who watches over that?”

“Well, sor, at present no one; there’s a back elevaytor, but it don’t run in summer, as the house is almost empty.”

“Then, as I understand it, any one can enter or leave the building by the back stairs, at any time during the day, unseen, or at any rate unnoticed; but after ten o’clock they would require

the assistance of some one in the house to let them in?"

"That's so, sor."

"Now, you are sure that the deceased was not a temporary inmate of this building; that he wasn't staying with any of the parties who are still here?"

"Certain, sor."

"And no one has the slightest clue to his identity?"

"No one has seen him except these gen'l'men and Jim. He's the elevaytor boy who went for you, Doc, and he didn't say nothing about knowing him."

The Coroner paused a moment.

"What families have you at present in the building?"

"Well, sor, most of our people are out of town, having houses at Newport, or Lenox, and thereabouts," McGorry answered, with a vague sweep of his hand, which seemed to include all those favored regions which lie so close together in fashionable geography. "Just now there are only two parties in the house."

"Yes, and who are they?"

"Well, sor, there's Mr. C. H. Stuart, who occupies the ground floor right; and Mr. and Mrs. Atkins, who have the apartments above this, only at the other end of the building." I pricked up my ears. Atkins, then, must be the name of the golden-haired lady and her assailant.

"Have these people been here long?"

"Mr. Stuart has been with us seven years. He is a bachelor. Mr. and Mrs. Atkins have only been here since May; they are a newly-

married couple, I am told.” And not a word of the mysterious pair I had seen in the adjoining apartment! Was McGorry holding something back, or was he really ignorant of their presence in the building?

“Are you sure, Mr. McGorry, that there is no one else in the house?” I interrupted again.

“Yes, sor.” Then a light broke over his face: “No, sor; you are quite right” (I hadn’t said anything). “Miss Derwent has been two nights here, but she’s off again this morning.” Mr. Merritt here whispered something to the Coroner, whereupon the latter turned to McGorry and said: “Please see that no one leaves this building till I have seen them. I don’t wish them to be told that a murder has been committed, unless they have heard it already, which is most probable. Just inform them that there has been an accident, do you hear?”

“Oh, Mr. Coroner,” exclaimed McGorry, turning almost as red as his hair in his excitement; “shure and you wouldn’t mix Miss Derwent up in this! Lord, she ain’t used to such scenes; she’d faint, and then her mother would never forgive me!”

“Every one, Miss Derwent included, must view the corpse,” he replied, sternly.

“Oh, sor, but—”

“Silence!” thundered the Coroner; “the law must be obeyed.”

So the manager went reluctantly out to give the desired order. On his return, the Coroner resumed:

“Who is Miss Derwent?”

“Why Miss May Derwent,” exclaimed McGorry; “she’s just Miss May Derwent.” So it was the fashionable beauty I had been watching so far into the night. Strange, and stranger!

“Miss May Derwent,” McGorry continued, taking pity on our ignorance, “is the only daughter of Mrs. Mortimer Derwent. She arrived here unexpectedly on Tuesday. She had missed her train, she said, and came here to pass the night.”

“Did she come alone?”

“Yis, sor.”

“Without even a maid?”

“Yis, sor.”

“Surely that is an unusual thing for a rich young lady to do?”

“Yis, sor,” replied McGorry, apologetically; “she has never done it before. Maybe the maid was taken on by the train.”

“Did Miss Derwent bring any luggage?”

“Nothing but a hand-bag, sor.”

“And yet she stayed two nights! Do you know any reason for her staying here so long?”

“No, sor, unless it was she had some shopping to do. A good many parcels come for her yistidy afternoon.”

“Have you a key to her apartment?”

“Yis, sor; when families goes away for the summer they leaves one key with me and takes the other with them.”

“Did you let Miss Derwent into her apartment, or did she have the key?”

“I let her in.”

“Did anyone wait on the young lady while she was here?”

“What do you mean by that?” inquired McGorry, cautiously.

“Why, did anyone go into her place to get her meals and tidy up, etc?”

“No, sor, not that I know of.”

“Doesn’t it strike you as peculiar that a young lady, reared in the lap of luxury and unaccustomed to doing the least thing for herself should go to an apartment in which dust and dirt had been accumulating for several months and voluntarily spend two nights there, without even a servant to perform the necessary chores for her, mind you?”

“She went out for her meals,” McGorry put in, anxiously, “and young ladies, especially the rich ones, think roughing it a lark.”

There was a slight pause.

“What servants are there in the building besides your employees, Mr. McGorry?”

“Mr. Stuart, he keeps a man and his wife—French people they are; and Mrs. Atkins, she keeps two girls.”

The Coroner now rose, and, followed by Mr. Merritt, proceeded towards the room where the dead man lay.

“Send up your employees, one by one, McGorry.”

“Yis, sor.”

On the threshold the detective paused a moment, and to my astonishment and delight requested me to accompany them. The Coroner frowned, evidently considering me a very unnecessary addition to the party, but his displeasure made no difference to

me; I was only too happy to be given this opportunity of watching the drama unfold itself.

## CHAPTER III

# A CORONER'S INQUEST

WE took our places at the foot of the corpse, with our backs to the light and silently awaited developments. In a few minutes McGorry returned, followed by the electrician, and during the rest of the time remained in the room checking off the men as they came in. It is needless for me to repeat all the testimony, as a great deal of it was perfectly irrelevant; suffice it to say that the electrician, engineer, and janitress all passed the ordeal without adding an iota to our information. The watchman when called persisted, after the severest cross-questioning, in his first assertion that neither on Wednesday night nor last night had he seen or heard anything suspicious. The only person he had admitted on either night was Mr. Atkins, who had returned at about half-past one that very morning; he was sure that he had seen no stranger leave the building.

At last Jim, the elevator boy, was called in. He appeared still very much frightened, and only looked at the corpse with the greatest reluctance.

“Have you ever seen this man before?” demanded the Coroner.

“No, sah,” answered Jim, in a shaking voice.

“Now, my lad, take another look at him. Are you still so sure

that you have never seen him before,” gently insisted Mr. Merritt; “for, you see, we have reason to believe that you have.” Jim began to tremble violently, as he cast another glance at the dead man.

“Lord-a-massy, sah; p’raps I did, p’raps I did; I dunno, he looks some like—not ’zactly—”

“Do you know his name?”

“No, sah.”

“When did you see him last?”

“Tuesday ebenin’, sah.” Here the boy glanced apprehensively at McGorry.

“Come, come, my lad,” the Coroner exclaimed, impatiently; “tell us all you know about the man. The truth, now, and the whole truth, mind you; and don’t you look at any one to see how they are going to like what you say, either.”

“No, sah.” Jim hesitated a moment, then burst out: “I do think as he’s the same gem’man as come to see Miss Derwent last winter, and he come to call on her about half-past six on Tuesday.”

“Miss Derwent—” exclaimed McGorry, taking a step forward.

“McGorry,” said the Coroner, severely, “don’t try to interfere with justice and intimidate witnesses. Now, my boy, tell us how long did the gentleman stay with Miss Derwent.”

“Dey went out togedder ’most immedjutely, and den dey come back togedder.”

“At what time did they return?”

“Must have been ’bout eight, sah.”

“Did he go upstairs with the young lady?”

“Yes, sah.”

“When did he leave?”

“I can’t say, sah; I didn’t see him leave.”

“How was that?”

“Well, you see, sah, in de summer, when de house is mos’ empty, we’s not so partic’lar as we are in de winter, and we takes turn and turn about oftener, ’specially in de ebenin’.”

“I see,” said the Coroner.

“An’ so dat ebenin I goes off at half-past eight and Joe he run de elevator till ebenen.”

“Did any one call on Miss Derwent yesterday?”

“I see nobody, sah.”

“Did the young lady go out during the day?”

“Yes, sah.”

“Tell us all you know of her movements.”

Jim rubbed his woolly pate in some perplexity: “Well, sah, yesterday de young lady she went out mighty early, little before eight, maybe, and den she come back about ten; but she don’t stay long; goes out again mos’ right away.”

Here Jim paused, evidently searching his memory.

“Pears to me she come in ’bout half-past twelve; at any rate ’twasn’t no later, and she goes out again immedjutely. Yes, sah, and den I seed her come in ’bout seven, and I aint seen her again,” he ended up with a sigh of relief.

“And you are sure that she was alone each time you saw her?”

“Yes, sah. A good many parcels come for her in de afternoon,” he added.

“Well, Jim,” said the Coroner, “you may go now; but mind you, don’t say a word about this business to any one; do you hear? If I find out you have been gossiping I’ll know how to deal with you,” and he looked so threatening that I’m sure the unfortunate boy expected capital punishment to follow any incautious remark.

“Pardon me,” said Mr. Merritt, with a slight bow towards the Coroner, “but I should like to ask Jim how this man was dressed when he saw him last.”

“Just so ’s he is now, sah,” replied Jim, pointing to the Tuxedo coat, which had been thrown over the body.

The negro lad who next appeared, bowing and scraping, was not at all intimidated by the scene before him, and seemed to think himself quite the hero of the occasion.

“Your name is Joe Burr, I believe,” began the Coroner, consulting a small paper he held in his hand, “and you run the elevator here?”

“Yes, sah.”

“Now look carefully at this body and tell me if you recognize it as that of anyone you know.”

The boy looked at the dead man attentively for some moments and then answered: “Yes, sah.”

“Who is he?”

“I dunno his name, sah; he wouldn’t send up his card.”

“Have you seen him often?”

“No, sah; just dat once.”

“When was that?”

“Tuesday ebenin’, sah.”

“At what time?”

“It was a quarter to ten, ’zactly.”

“How are you so sure of the exact time?” the Coroner asked, in some surprise.

“Cause I thought it mighty late to call on a lady, and so I looked at de clock when I come down.”

“Do you remember his ever calling on Miss Derwent before?”

“Why, sah, ’twasn’t Miss Derwent he was calling on; ’twas Mrs. Atkins.” This was a surprise; even the detective seemed interested.

“So it was Mrs. Atkins he had been calling on,” exclaimed the Coroner.

“No, sah; it were Mrs. Atkins he gwine ter call on. He only come at a quarter to ten. He wouldn’t send up his card; said he’s ’spected.”

“And did Mrs. Atkins receive him?”

“Yes, sah.”

“Do you remember at what time he left?”

“No, sah; I didn’t see him go out.”

“Now, Joe, there was another gentleman calling in the building on that evening. When did he leave?”

Joe seemed bewildered. "I didn't see no other gem'man, sah."

"Now, my lad, try and remember!"

"No, sah; I dun saw no one else. Mr. Stuart, he come in at ten—"

"No, no; it is a tall, dark gentleman, slightly resembling the corpse, that we want to hear about."

"I see no such party, sah."

"Didn't a gentleman answering to this description call here at about half-past six and ask for a lady?"

"I couldn't say, sah; I wa'n't in de building at dat time."

"Did you see Miss Derwent on Tuesday?"

"Yes, sah; I seen her arrive."

"Didn't you see her go out again?"

"No, sah."

"How long were you out?"

"I went out at six, sah, and stayed till eight, or maybe later."

"So you persist in saying that the only stranger you saw enter or leave the building on Tuesday evening, was the deceased?"

"Yes, sah."

"And you are quite sure that you are not mistaken in your identification?"

"Yes, sah; I noticed him partic'lar."

"What made you notice him particularly?"

The lad hesitated. "Out with it," said the Coroner.

"Well, sah, he seemed like he been drinking."

"How did he show it?"

“He talked loud and angry, sah.”

“Do you know what he was angry about?”

“You see, sah, we have orders to ask visitors to send deir names, or deir cards up, and to wait in de reception room till we find out if de parties are at home, or will see dem. Well, he comes in and says very loud, gettin’ into de elevator, ‘Take me up to de fifth floor,’ and I says, says I, ‘Do you mean Mrs. Atkins?’ and he says, ‘Yes, fellow, and be quick ’bout it.’ And den I asks him to wait, and send up his card, and he roars: ‘Min’ your own business, fellow; I’m ’spected.’ So I gwine take him up, and rings de bell, and he says: ‘Dat’s all.’ But I waited till de door opened, and there were Mrs. Atkins herself, and she didn’t say not’in’, and he jus’ went in.”

Joe paused for breath.

“Is Mrs. Atkins in the habit of answering the door-bell herself?”

“No, sah; I neber see her do so befo’.”

“Was Mr. Atkins in the house at the time?”

“No, sah; de gem’man was out of town.” Another sensation!

“When did he return?”

“Some time las’ night.”

“Now,” inquired the Coroner, “what can you tell us about Miss Derwent’s movements during the last two days?”

Joe’s answers coincided, as far as they went, with Jim’s statements.

“And Mrs. Atkins,—what did she do yesterday,” the Coroner

asked.

“Well, sah, she went out mighty early and stayed till late in de arternoon, and when she come in she had her veil all pulled down, but ’peared to me she had been crying.”

“Did she say anything?”

“No, sah.”

“Now, Joe, would it have been possible on Tuesday evening for a man to walk downstairs, and go out, without your seeing him, while you were running the elevator?”

“Yes, sah, p’raps,” the lad answered, dubiously; “but Tony, he’s de hall boy, he would ’a seen him.”

“Have you told us all you know of the deceased?”

“Yes, sah.”

“And you have not noticed any strangers hanging around the building during the last few days?”

“No, sah.”

“Very well, then; you may go. Send in Tony.”

“Yes, sah; t’ank you, sah,” and Joe bowed himself out.

A few minutes later a small darky appeared.

“Now, Tony,” began the Coroner, solemnly, “look at this man carefully; did you ever see him before?” The boy looked at the body attentively for some time, then said: “No, sah.”

“Do you mean to say that you saw no one resembling the deceased come to this building on Tuesday evening?”

“No, sah.”

“Where were you on that evening? Now, be careful what you

answer.”

“Well, sah, I went out ’bout half-past six to do some errands for Mr. McGorry.” McGorry nodded assent to this.

“And when did you return?”

“Guess it must have been mos’ eight, sah, but I disremember, ’zactly.”

“Did you see Miss Derwent either come in or go out on Tuesday evening?”

“Yes, sah, I seen her come; she had a satchel.”

“But did you see her again after that?”

“No, sah.”

“Mrs. Atkins—what did she do on Tuesday?”

“Dunno, sah; didn’t see her go out all day.”

“And yesterday, what did she do then?”

“Mrs. Atkins? She went out in de mornin’ and come in in de ebenin’.”

“Did you notice anything unusual about her?”

“Well, ’peared to us she’d been crying.”

“Can you remember who went in or out of the building on Tuesday evening?” the Coroner asked.

“Well, sah, near’s I can say only two gem’men come in—Mr. Stuart, and a gem’men who called on Mrs. Atkins.”

“Does the corpse at all resemble that gentleman?”

“I couldn’t rightly say, sah.”

“Why not?”

“Well, sah, I was a-sittin’ in de office when he come, an’ I jus’

see a big man go past and heard him talkin' loud in de elevator.”

“While Joe was upstairs what did you do?”

“I sat in de front hall, sah.”

“Did you see anyone go out?”

“No, sah.”

After being severely admonished not to speak of this affair to anyone, Tony was allowed to depart.

“Now we have got through with the employees of the building,” said the Coroner, “and must begin on the families and their servants.”

“Yes, Mr. Coroner, and I think I had better step up-stairs myself and tell Mr. and Mrs. Atkins that you want to see them,” said Mr. Merritt, “and, in case the lady should be overcome by the sad news, perhaps it would be as well for Dr. Fortescue to come along also.”

I was only too delighted, of course.

## CHAPTER IV

# UNWILLING WITNESSES

NOT waiting for the elevator, we walked up the intervening flight and rang a bell on our right. The door was opened by a neat-looking maid, who showed some surprise at our early call.

“Is Mr. Atkins at home?” inquired the detective.

“Yes, sir; but he is having his breakfast.”

“Ah, indeed; I am sorry to disturb him,” replied Mr. Merritt.

“However, it can’t be helped. Will you please tell your master that two gentlemen must see him for a few moments on important business.”

“Yes, sir,” and showing us into a gaudily furnished room on our left, the girl vanished. I saw at once that this was not the scene of last night’s drama, but a smaller room adjoining the other. My observations were almost immediately interrupted by the entrance of a young man, whose handsome face was at that moment disfigured by a scowl.

“Mr. Atkins, I believe,” said Mr. Merritt, advancing towards him with his most conciliatory smile. Mr. Atkins nodded curtly. “It is my painful duty,” continued the detective, “to inform you that a very serious accident has occurred in the building.”

The frown slowly faded from the young man’s forehead, giving place to a look of concern. “Oh, I’m so sorry!” he exclaimed,

in the most natural manner; “what has happened? Can I do anything?”

“Well, Mr. Atkins,” replied Mr. Merritt, slowly, “to tell you the truth, a man has been killed, and as we haven’t been able to find any one so far who can identify him we are going through the formality of asking every one in the building to take a look at the corpse, hoping to discover somebody who knew the dead man, or at any rate can give us some clue to his identity. Will you and Mrs. Atkins and your two servants, therefore, kindly step down-stairs? The body is lying in the unoccupied apartment on the next floor.”

“Killed!” exclaimed young Atkins. “How dreadful! how did it happen?” But without waiting for an answer he pulled out his watch, which he consulted anxiously. “Pardon me, gentlemen, but I have a most important engagement down town which it is impossible for me to postpone. My wife is not up yet, and I really can’t wait for her to get ready; but I can go with you now, and take a look at the poor fellow on my way out. In the meantime, Mrs. Atkins will dress as quickly as possible, and follow with the two girls as soon as she is ready.”

“All right,” said Mr. Merritt; “that will do nicely. Dr. Fortescue,” with a wave of his hand in my direction, “will stay here, and escort Mrs. Atkins down-stairs. Ladies sometimes are overcome by the sight of death.”

“Yes, yes; and my wife is very excitable,” rejoined the young man. “I am glad Dr. Fortescue will wait and go down with her—

if it isn't troubling you too much," he added, turning towards me.

"Not at all," I replied, politely but firmly, with my eyes on Mr. Merritt. "I shall be delighted to *return* for Mrs. Atkins in a quarter of an hour and escort her down-stairs."

I watched the detective keenly to see how he would take this disregarding of his orders, but he only smiled amiably, almost triumphantly, I thought. Mr. Atkins now left us, and I could hear him dashing up-stairs several steps at a time. How I longed to pierce the ceiling, and hear how he broke the news to his wife, and above all to observe how she took it. He returned in a few minutes, and, snatching his hat from the hall-table, prepared to follow us. On the way down he inquired with great interest about the accident, but Merritt put him off with evasive replies. When confronted with the dead body, he gazed at it calmly, but with a good deal of curiosity.

"Did you know the deceased?" the Coroner asked him.

The young man shook his head. "Never saw him before." Then, looking at the corpse more closely he exclaimed: "Why, he is a gentleman; can't you find out who he is?"

"We haven't been able to, so far," replied the Coroner.

"How did the accident occur?"

"He was murdered."

The young man started back in horror.—"Murdered, and in this house—How, when?"

"Presumably the night before last."

Was it my imagination, or did Mr. Atkins turn slightly pale?

“Tuesday night,” he muttered. After a brief silence he turned to us, and withdrawing his eyes from the corpse with obvious difficulty, said, in a hearty, matter-of-fact voice: “Gentlemen, I regret that I have to leave you. I should like to hear some more of this affair, but I suppose if you do discover anything you will keep it pretty close?”

“You bet we’ll try to,” the Coroner assured him. After shaking us all most cordially by the hand, Mr. Atkins departed, and was escorted down-stairs by the detective, whose excessive politeness seemed to me very suspicious. “Was he going to put a sleuth on the young man’s tracks?” I wondered.

The air in the room was heavy with the odour of death, so I stepped out on the landing. The workmen were all talking in low tones. “I know that Frenchman did it; I know it,” I overheard one of them say. Much excited by these words, I was just going to ask who the Frenchman was, and why he should be suspected, when Mr. Merritt stepped out of the elevator and rang the bell of the opposite apartment. Miss Derwent had evidently not been far off, for the door was opened almost immediately, and a tall, slight young figure stood on the threshold. She was dressed in a quiet travelling suit, and a thick brown veil pulled down over her face rendered her features, in the dim light of the landing, completely invisible.

“Miss Derwent?” inquired Mr. Merritt. She bowed. “You have no doubt been told,” he continued, “that a very serious accident has occurred in the building.” She inclined her head slowly. “As

we have been unable to identify the corpse”—here the detective paused, but she gave no sign and he went on—“we are asking every one in the house to take a look at it.”

Instead of answering, the girl went back into the apartment, but returned in a minute, carrying a handbag. Stepping out on to the landing she shut and locked the door behind her with apparent composure. As she turned to follow the detective she asked, in a low but distinct voice: “How did this accident occur?”

“That, we have not yet been able to ascertain,” he replied, leading her to the room where the dead lay. I hastily stepped back and resumed my former position at the foot of the corpse. As the girl crossed the threshold she hesitated a moment, then walked steadily in.

“Miss May Derwent, I believe?” the Coroner inquired, in his suavest tones. Again she bowed assent.

“Please look at this man and tell me if you have ever seen him before.” Before replying, the girl slowly lifted her veil and revealed to my astonished eyes, not only a face of very unusual beauty, but—and this is what I found inexplicable—coils of golden hair! Where were the raven locks I had seen only a few hours before? Had I dreamed them? But no, my memory was too clear on this point. My surprise was so great that I am afraid I showed it, for I caught Mr. Merritt looking at me with one of his enigmatical smiles. Miss Derwent was excessively pale, with heavy black rings under her eyes, but otherwise she seemed perfectly composed. She looked at the corpse a moment, then

turning towards the Coroner, said, in a clear, steady voice: "I do not know the man."

"Have you ever seen him before?"

"No," she answered, quietly.

"Miss Derwent, pardon my questioning you still further, but I have been told that a gentleman closely resembling the deceased called on you on Tuesday evening. Now, do you see any resemblance between the two?"

A burning blush overspread the girl's face, and then she grew so ghastly pale that I moved to her side, fearing she would fall.

"Mr. Coroner, can't the rest of the questions you have to ask Miss Derwent be put to her somewhere else?" I suggested. "The atmosphere here is intolerable."

"Certainly," he replied, with unexpected mildness.

I drew the young lady's unresisting hand through my arm and supported her into the next room. She was trembling so violently that she would have fallen if I had not done so, and I could see that it was only by the greatest self-control that she kept any semblance of composure.

"Now," resumed the Coroner, "if you feel well enough, will you kindly answer my last question?"

"The gentleman who called on me on Tuesday does not resemble the dead man, except in so far that they both have black, pointed beards."

"At what time did your friend leave you on Tuesday evening?" was the next question asked.

"I cannot see why the private affairs of my visitors or myself should be pried into," she replied, haughtily. "I decline to answer."

"My dear young lady," here interposed Mr. Merritt, "you have, of course, every right not to answer any question that you think likely to incriminate you, but," he continued with a smile, "it is hardly possible that anything could do that. On the other hand, it is our duty to try and sift this matter to the bottom. You certainly will agree with the necessity of it when I tell you that this man has been murdered!"

"Murdered!" the girl repeated, as if dazed. "Oh, no!"

"I regret to say that there is absolutely no doubt of it. Now, one of the elevator boys has identified the corpse as that of the gentleman who called on you the day before yesterday. I do not doubt that he was mistaken,—in fact, I am sure of it; but as no one saw your friend leave the building, it becomes incumbent on us to make sure that he did so. It will save a great deal of trouble to us, and perhaps to yourself, if you will tell us the gentleman's name and at what hour he left here."

She had covered her face with her hands, but now dropped them, and lifting her head, faced us with an air of sudden resolution.

"Gentlemen," she began, then hesitated and looked at us each in turn, "you can readily imagine that it will be a terrible thing for me if my name should in any way, however indirectly, be connected with this tragedy. But I see that it is useless to refuse to

answer your questions. It will only make you believe that I have something to conceal. I can but ask you, you on whom I have no claim, to shield from publicity a girl who has put herself in a terribly false position.”

“Miss Derwent, I think I can assure you that we will do everything in our power to help you. Nothing you say here shall be heard beyond these walls unless the cause of justice demands it.” The Coroner spoke with considerable warmth. Evidently, Miss May’s charms had not been without their effect on him.

“Very well, then,” said the girl, “I will answer your questions. What do you want to know?”

“In the first place, please tell us how you came to spend two nights in an unoccupied apartment?”

“I suppose you already know,” she answered, a trifle bitterly, “that I arrived here unexpectedly on Tuesday afternoon?” The Coroner made a motion of assent.

“I had reached the city earlier in the day, and had meant to catch the five o’clock train to Bar Harbor. As I had several errands to do, I sent my maid ahead to the Grand Central Depot with orders to engage a stateroom and check my luggage. I forgot to notice how the time was passing till I caught sight of a clock in Madison Square pointing to eight minutes to five. I jumped into a hansom, but got to the station just in time to see the train steam away, with my maid hanging distractedly out of a window.” She paused a moment. “A gentleman happened to be with me,” she continued with downcast eyes, “so we consulted

together as to what I had better do. On looking up the trains I found that I could not get back to my mother's country place till nine o'clock that evening, and then should have to leave home again at a frightfully early hour so as to catch the morning train to Bar Harbor. Otherwise I should be obliged to wait over till the following afternoon and take a long night journey by myself, which I knew my mother would not wish me to do. Altogether, it seemed so much simpler to remain in town if I could only find a place to go to. Suddenly, our apartment occurred to me. Of course, I knew that the world would not approve of my staying here alone; nevertheless, I decided to do so."

"You went out again very soon after your arrival, did you not?" asked the Coroner.

"Yes," she answered, "as there was no way of getting any food here, my friend" (she hesitated slightly over the last word) "had little difficulty in persuading me to dine with him at a quiet restaurant in the neighbourhood."

"Did the gentleman return to the Rosemere after dinner?"

"Yes."

"And did he leave you then?"

Miss Derwent hesitated a moment, then, throwing her head back she answered proudly: "No!" But a deep crimson again suffused her cheek, and she added almost apologetically: "It was all so unconventional that I did not see why I should draw the line at his spending the evening with me. He was a very intimate friend."

“Why do you use the past tense?” asked Mr. Merritt. She cast a little frightened glance in his direction, evidently startled at being caught up so quickly: “We—we had a very serious disagreement,” she murmured.

“Was the disagreement so serious as to put an end to your friendship?” inquired the detective.

“Yes,” she replied curtly, while an angry light came into her eyes.

“At what time did the gentleman leave you?” resumed the Coroner.

“It was very late;—after eleven, I think.”

“And you have not seen him again since then?”

“Certainly not,” she replied.

“Why did you not carry out your first intention of leaving the city on the following morning?”

The girl appeared slightly embarrassed as she answered: “I did not feel like paying visits just at the moment, and besides I had not enough money to carry me as far as Bar Harbor. My maid had most of my money, and I was no longer willing to borrow from my visitor, as I had intended doing.”

“Excuse my questioning you still further,” said the Coroner, with a glance of admiration at the beautiful girl, who was fretting under the examination, “but, why, then, didn’t you return to your home?”

“I did not wish to do so.” Then, catching Mr. Merritt’s eye, she added: “I had been a good deal upset by—by what had occurred

the night before and felt the need of a day to myself. Besides, I had some shopping to do, and thought this a good opportunity to do it. I am going home this morning.”

“Thank you, Miss Derwent,” exclaimed the Coroner, heartily; “your explanations are perfectly satisfactory. Only you have forgotten to tell us the gentleman’s name.”

“Why need you know his name?” she demanded, passionately, “you will soon find out who this unknown man is. There must be hundreds of people in this city who knew him. Why should I tell you the name of my visitor? I refuse to do so.”

“Miss Derwent is quite right,” interposed the detective, with unexpected decision; “once convinced that the dead man and her friend are not identical, and the latter’s name ceases to be of any importance to us.”

“Quite so, quite so,” the Coroner rather grudgingly assented.

“Can I go now?” she inquired.

“Certainly,” said the Coroner, cordially. “Good-day, Miss.”

I was just going to offer myself as an escort when Mr. Merritt stepped quietly forward, and possessed himself of the young lady’s bag. With a distant bow, that included impartially the Coroner and myself, Miss Derwent left the room.

“Remember Mrs. Atkins,” the detective murmured as he prepared to follow her. I nodded a curt assent. My brain was in a whirl. What was I to believe? This beautiful, queenlike creature seemed incapable of deceit, and yet—who were the two people I had so lately seen in her apartment? Why had no mention been

made of them? No matter; I felt my belief in the young girl's innocence and goodness rise superior to mere facts, and then and there vowed to become her champion should she ever need one, which I very much feared she might. I was vaguely annoyed that the detective should have insisted on escorting her. Had he a motive for this, I wondered, or had he simply succumbed to her fascination, like the rest of us? At any rate, I didn't like it, and I rang Mrs. Atkins's bell in considerable ill humour.

# CHAPTER V

## MRS. ATKINS HOLDS SOMETHING BACK

“IS Mrs. Atkins ready?” I inquired of the pretty maid. Before she had time to answer, I heard the frou-frou of silk skirts advancing rapidly towards me. The perfume I had already noticed grew still more overpowering, and the lady herself appeared. And an exceedingly pretty little woman she proved to be, too, with golden hair and cheeks that rivalled the roses. Her large blue eyes were as innocent and, it would be hypercritical to add, as expressionless as her sisters’ of the toy-shop. A white muslin garment, slashed in every direction to admit of bands and frills of lace, enveloped her small person, and yards of blue ribbon floated around her. Her tiny, dimpled fingers were covered with glittering rings, which, however, scarcely outshone her small pink nails. She beamed coquettishly at me, showing some very pretty, sharp little teeth as she did so, and I found myself smiling back at her, completely forgetting the tragic errand I had come on.

“Oh, Doctor,” she cried, in a high treble voice, “isn’t it dreadful! They tell me that a poor man has been killed in the building, and I am so terrified at having to look at him! Must I really do so?” She wrung her hands in graceful distress.

"I'm afraid you must," I replied, smiling down at her.

"But you will go with me, won't you?" she begged.

"Certainly, dear Madam, and if your servants are also ready we had better get it over immediately."

As the lady crossed the threshold of her apartment she tucked her hand confidently into my arm, as if the support of the nearest man were her indisputable right, and, followed by the two servants, we proceeded in this fashion down-stairs. Mr. Merritt met us on the landing, and, signing to the two girls to wait outside, ushered us into the room where the body lay.

As Mrs. Atkins caught sight of the dead man a great shudder shook her whole body, and I felt the hand on my arm grow suddenly rigid. She neither screamed nor fainted, but stood strangely still, as if turned to stone, her eyes riveted on the corpse in a horrified stare.

"Mrs. Atkins?" inquired the Coroner.

She seemed incapable of answering him.

"Mrs. Atkins," he repeated, a little louder, "do you recognise the deceased?"

This time she moved slightly and tried to moisten her grey lips. At last, with a visible effort, she slowly raised her eyes and glanced about her with fear.

"No, no," she murmured, in a hollow voice.

"Mrs. Atkins, I must request you to look at the dead man again," the detective said, fixing his eyes on her. "One of the elevator boys has identified the body as that of a gentleman who

called on you on Tuesday evening.”

She raised her arm as if to ward off a blow, and moved slightly away from me.

“I don’t know the man,” she said.

“You deny that he called on you on Tuesday evening?”

“I do,” she answered, in a steady voice.

I saw that she was rapidly recovering her self-control, and I made up my mind that I had misjudged the little woman. Under that soft, childish exterior must lie an indomitable will.

“Do you deny that you received a man on that evening?” She glanced hastily at each of us before answering: “No.”

“Oh, you did see a gentleman? Who was he?”

She hesitated a moment: “An old friend.”

“Will you kindly tell us his name?”

“No! I won’t have him mixed up in this.”

“Madam,” said the detective, “the deceased has been murdered, and—” A shriek interrupted him.

“Murdered! Oh, no, no,” she gasped, her eyes wide with terror.

“I regret to say that there is no doubt of it.”

“But when,—how?” she demanded, in a trembling voice.

“On Tuesday night.”

She drew a deep breath. The horror faded slowly from her face, and she repeated with great composure, “Oh, Tuesday night,” with a slight emphasis on the Tuesday.

The change in her was perfectly startling. She seemed calm,

—almost indifferent.

“Have you discovered how he was murdered?” she inquired.

“Yes; he was stabbed through the heart by an instrument no larger than a knitting-needle.”

“How strange,” she exclaimed; “do you know who committed the crime?”

“Not yet,” said the Coroner; “and now, Mrs. Atkins, I ask you again if you are quite sure that you have never seen the deceased before?”

“Yes,” she answered, firmly.

“And you are willing to testify to this effect?”

“Yes.”

“You are aware that the elevator boy has positively identified the body as that of your visitor?”

“I guess my word’s as good as a nigger’s,” she said, with a defiant toss of her head.

“No doubt,” replied the Coroner, politely; “but if you would tell us the name and address of your friend we could look him up and be able to assure the police of his safety, and so save you the disagreeable necessity of appearing in court.”

“In court,” she repeated, with a horrified expression. Evidently this possibility had not occurred to her, and she glanced hurriedly around as if contemplating immediate flight.

“Mrs. Atkins,” said the detective, earnestly, “I do not think that you realise certain facts. A man has been murdered who has been identified, rightly or wrongly, with your visitor. Now, no

one saw your friend leave the building, and it is our business to ascertain that he did so. Can you tell us what became of him?"

A hunted expression came into her eyes, but she answered in a steady voice: "My friend left me at a little after eleven; he was going to take the midnight train to Boston." She paused. "His name is Allan Brown—there, now!"

"Thank you, madam, and what is Mr. Brown's address in Boston?"

"I don't know."

"What was his address in New York?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Was he in any business?"

"I don't know," she answered, sullenly, with a glance at the door.

"Mrs. Atkins, you seem singularly ignorant about your friend,—your old friend."

"Well, I hadn't seen him for some years. He's a stranger in the city."

"Where is his home?"

"I don't know," she answered, impatiently.

"Are you a New Yorker, Mrs. Atkins?" inquired the detective.

"No."

"Ah, I thought not! And where do you come from?"

"Chicago."

"Chicago? Indeed! I've been there some myself," Mr. Merritt continued, in a conversational tone. "Nice place. How long is it

since you left there?"

"Six months," she answered, curtly.

"So it was in Chicago you knew your friend?"

"Yes," she admitted, with a slight start.

"And you are sure he didn't belong there?"

"Yes; but look here: why are you asking such a lot of questions about him? I've told you his name and where he's gone to, and if you can't find him that's your lookout."

"The consequences of our not being able to find him would be much more serious for you than for me," remarked Mr. Merritt, quietly.

"Now, Mrs. Atkins," resumed the Coroner, "can you say in what particular Mr. Brown differs from this dead man?"

"Oh, they're a good deal alike," she replied, fluently,—but I noticed that she did not look in the direction of the corpse,—"only Mr. Brown's younger, and not so heavy, and his nose is different. Still, the man does resemble Mr. Brown surprisingly. It gave me quite a shock when I first saw him." It certainly had, only I wondered if that were the true explanation.

"Please tell us what you did yesterday."

"I went out in the morning and I came home at about half-past five."

"What were you doing during all that time?"

"Oh, several things; I called on some friends and did some errands."

"Your husband has been out of town, I hear?"

“Yes.”

“When did he leave the city?”

“On Tuesday morning.”

“When did he return?”

“Last night.”

“At what time?”

“Half-past one.”

“Where did he come from?”

“Boston.”

“But surely the Boston train gets in a good deal earlier than that!” the Coroner exclaimed.

“Yes, there had been a delay owing to a slight accident on the line,” she reluctantly explained.

“Is Mr. Atkins often away?”

“Yes; he’s out of town every week or so, on business.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Atkins, that is all,” the Coroner concluded, politely. But the lady was not so easily appeased, and flounced out of the room without deigning to glance at any of us.

The detective slipped out after her—to call the maids, as he explained, but it was five or six minutes before he returned with the waitress.

After answering several unimportant questions, the girl was asked whether she had ever seen the deceased before. “No, sir,” she replied, promptly.

“Did anyone call on your mistress on Tuesday evening?”

“I can’t say, sir; I was out.”

“At what time did you go out?”

“At about a quarter to eight, sir.”

“Where did you go to?”

“We went to a party at me sister’s.”

“Who do you mean by ‘we’?”

“The cook and me, sir.”

“Ah, the cook went out, too?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you usually go out together?”

“No, sir.”

“How did it happen that you did so on Tuesday?”

“Mr. Atkins, he was away, so Mrs. Atkins she said we might both go out.”

“Mr. Atkins is often away from home, isn’t he?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How often?”

“About once a fortnight, sir.”

“Has Mrs. Atkins ever allowed you both to go out together before?”

“No, sir.”

“Where does your sister live, and what is her name?”

“Mrs. Moriarty, 300 Third Avenue.”

The Coroner paused to scribble down the address, then resumed:

“At what time did you get back from the party?”

The girl tugged at her dress in some embarrassment. “It might

have been after eleven,” she reluctantly admitted.

“How much after—quarter past, half-past?” he suggested, as she still hesitated.

“It was almost half-past, sir.”

“And when you returned, did you see your mistress?”

“Oh, yes, sir.”

“Was she alone?”

“Yes, sir,” the girl answered, with some surprise.

“Did you notice anything unusual about her?”

“Well, sir, she’d been crying, and I never see her cry before.”

“What did Mrs. Atkins say to you?”

“She scolded us for being so late,” the girl answered shamefacedly.

“Was that all she said?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Where was your mistress when you saw her?”

“She was lying on the sofy in her bed-room, tired like.”

“What did Mrs. Atkins do yesterday?”

“She went out after breakfast and didn’t come back till nearly six.”

“How did she seem when she returned?”

“She’d been crying awful, and she just lay quiet and wouldn’t eat no dinner.”

“Do Mr. and Mrs. Atkins get along well together?”

“Oh, sir, they’re that loving,” she answered with a blush and a smile.

Again my curiosity got the better of my discretion, and I asked: "Did you hear any strange noises during the night?"

The Coroner glared at me, but said nothing this time.

"Well," replied the girl, "me and Jane did think as we'd heard a scream."

Ha, ha, thought I, and I saw Mr. Merritt indulge in one of his quiet smiles.

"So you heard a scream," said the Coroner.

"I don't know for sure; I thought so."

"At what time did you hear it?"

"I don't know, sir; some time in the night."

"What did you do when you heard it?"

"Nothing, sir."

This was all that could be got out of her, so she made way for the cook, who, after being cross-questioned at some length, did no more than corroborate the waitress's statement, only she was more positive of having heard the "screech" as she called it.

"Could you tell whether it was a man or woman who screamed?" inquired the Coroner.

"It was a woman's voice, sir."

Mr. Stuart, who was next admitted, proved to be a small, middle-aged man, extremely well groomed, and whom I recognized as one of the members of my Club, whose name I had never known. On being asked if he had ever seen the dead man before, he solemnly inserted a single eye-glass into his right eye, and contemplated the corpse with the greatest imperturbability.

“So far as I can remember, I have never seen the man before,” he answered at last. After replying satisfactorily to a few more questions, he was allowed to retire, and his cook took his place. She was a large, stout woman about thirty years old, with a good deal of that coarse Southern beauty, which consists chiefly in snapping black eyes, masses of dark hair, and good teeth. On catching sight of the corpse, she threw up her hands and uttered a succession of squeals, which she seemed to consider due to the horror of the occasion, and then turned serenely towards the Coroner, and with a slight courtesy stood smilingly awaiting his questions.

“What is your name?” he inquired.

“Jeanne Alexandrine Argot,” she replied.

“You are in the employ of Mr. Stuart?”

“Yes, sar. I ’ave been with Mr. Stuah, six a years, and he tell you—”

“Please look at the deceased, and tell me if you have ever seen him before?” the Coroner hastily interrupted.

“No, sar.”

After answering a few more questions with overpowering volubility, she withdrew, and her husband entered. He was a tall, vigorous man, with large hawk-like eyes, apparently a good deal older than his wife. He bowed to us all on entering, and stood respectfully near the door, waiting to be spoken to.

“What is your name?” inquired the Coroner.

“Celestin Marie Argot.”

“You work for Mr. Stuart?”

“Yes, sar; I am Meester Stuah’s butlair.”

“Look at this corpse, and tell me if you can identify it as that of any one you know, or have ever seen?”

He now glanced for the first time at the body, and I thought I saw his face contract slightly. But the expression was so fleeting that I could not be sure of it, and when he raised his head a few moments later he seemed perfectly composed and answered calmly: “I do not know ze man.”

Apparently the Coroner was not completely satisfied, for he went on: “You know that this man has been murdered, and that it is your duty to give us any information that might lead to his identification. Have you seen any suspicious persons about the building during the last few days?”

“No, sar; nobody,”—but I thought he had hesitated an instant before answering.

“You must see a good many people pass up and down the back stairs,” the detective remarked; “especially in this hot weather, when you must be obliged to leave the kitchen door open a good deal so as to get a draught.”

The man cast a hurried, and I thought an apprehensive, glance at Mr. Merritt, and replied quickly: “Yes, sar; ze door is open almos’ all ze time, but I ’ave seen nobody.”

“Nobody?” repeated the detective.

“Yes, sar,” Argot asserted, still more emphatically. “No vone, excep’ ze butchair, ze bakair, and ze ozer tradesmen, of course.”

“How early are you likely to open the kitchen door? To leave it open, I mean?”

“Oh, not till eight o’clock, perhap—Madame Argot, she stay in déshabille till zen.”

“What time do you go to bed?”

“At ten o’clock generally, but some time eleven o’clock—even midnight—it depens.”

“What time did you go to bed on Tuesday?”

“At eleven, sar.”

“What had you been doing during the evening?”

“I had been at a restaurant wiz some friends.”

“And when did you return?”

“At about half-pas’ ten.”

“Did you come in the back way?”

“Yes, sar.”

“How did you get in?”

“My wife, she open ze door.”

“And you saw nobody as you came in?”

He paused almost imperceptibly. “No, sar,” he answered. But I was now convinced that he was holding something back.

“Very well; you can go,” said the Coroner. The fellow bowed himself out with a good deal of quiet dignity.

“I kinder fancy that man knows something he won’t tell,” said the Coroner. “Now, we’ve seen every one but the workmen,” he continued, wearily, mopping his forehead. “I don’t believe one of them knows a thing; still, I’ve got to go through with it, I

suppose,” and going to the door he beckoned them all in.

There were five of them, including the foreman, and they appeared to be quiet, respectable young men. After looking at the dead man intently for some minutes, they all asserted that they had never laid eyes on him before.

“Now have any of you noticed during the three days you have been working here anybody who might have taken the key, kept it for some hours, and returned it without your noticing it?” inquired the Coroner.

“We’ve seen no strangers,” the foreman replied, cautiously.

“Who have you seen?” The foreman was evidently prepared for this question.

“Well, sir, we’ve seen altogether six people: Jim, and Joe, and Tony, Mr. McGorry, Miss Derwent, and the Frinchman,” he replied, checking them off on his fingers.

“When did the Frenchman come up here?”

“Yistidy morning, sir; he said he come to see the decorations, and he come again about three; but he didn’t stay long. I warn’t a-going to have him hanging round here interfering!”

“Did any of his actions at the time strike you as suspicious?”

“No, sir,” acknowledged the foreman.

“And Miss Derwent; when did you see her?”

“I didn’t see her myself in the morning, but he”—with a nod towards one of the men,—“he saw her look in as she was waiting for the elevator, and in the afternoon she come right in.”

“Did she say anything?”

“Yes, sir; she said the paint and papers were mighty pretty.”

“When you saw Miss Derwent,” said the Coroner, addressing the man whom the foreman had pointed out, “what was she doing?”

“She was standing just inside the hall.”

“Was her hand on the door knob?”

“I didn’t notice, sir.”

“Did the young lady say anything?”

“When she saw me a-looking at her, she just said: ‘How pretty!’ and went away.”

“Have any of you seen Mr. or Mrs. Atkins, or either of their girls, since you have been working here?” They all replied in the negative.

The Coroner’s physician turned up at this juncture, with many apologies for his late arrival, so, having no further excuse for remaining, I took my leave. The lower hall swarmed with innumerable reporters, trying to force their way upstairs, and who were only prevented from doing so by the infuriated McGorry and two or three stalwart policemen. On catching sight of me they all fell upon me with one accord, and I only managed to escape by giving them the most detailed description of the corpse and professing complete ignorance as to everything else.

# CHAPTER VI

## A LETTER AND ITS ANSWER

WHEN I got back to my diggings I was astonished to find that it was only ten o'clock. How little time it takes to change the whole world for one! All day long I forced myself to go about my usual work, but the thought of May Derwent never left me.

It was the greatest relief to find that in none of the evening papers did her name appear. How McGorry managed to conceal from the reporters the fact that she had been in the building remains a mystery to this day—but how thankful I was that he was able to do so! Already my greatest preoccupation was to preserve her fair name from the least breath of scandal. Not for an instant did I believe her to be connected with the murder;—on the other hand, I felt equally sure that she was in some great trouble, the nature of which I could not even guess. I longed to protect and help her, but how was I to do so, ignorant as I was of everything concerning her. I didn't even know where she was at that moment. At her mother's, perhaps. But where was that? Suddenly I remembered that my great friend, Fred Cowper, had mentioned in one of his recent letters that Mrs. Derwent and his mother were near neighbours in the country. To think that that lucky dog had been spending the last month within a stone's throw, perhaps, of her house—had seen her

every day probably, and had been allowed these inestimable privileges simply because he had broken an old leg! And I, who would gladly have sacrificed both legs to have been in his place, was forced to remain in New York because—forsooth!—of an apoplectic old patient—who refused either to live or die! Well, as I couldn't go to her, it was at any rate a comfort to be able to get news of her so easily—so seizing a pen, I hastily scratched off the following note:

*New York,*

*August 10, 1898.*

Dear Fred:

You know me pretty well and know therefore that I'm not a prying sort of fellow—don't you? So that when I ask you to tell me all you know about Miss May Derwent—I hope you will believe that I am animated by no idle curiosity. A doctor is often forced to carry more secrets than a family solicitor, and is as much in honor bound. Through no fault of my own, I have come into the possession of certain facts relating to Miss Derwent which lead me to believe that she is in great trouble. Furthermore, I am convinced that I could help her, were I not handicapped by my very slight personal acquaintance with her, but more than that by my entire ignorance regarding certain details of her life. I might as well acknowledge that I am interested in the young lady, and am anxious to serve her if I can. But if I am to do so, I must first find out a few particulars of her life, and these I hope you can give me.

In the first place I want to know whether she has any young male relative who is tall, with good figure? I remember hearing that she is an only child, but has she no cousin with whom she is on terms of brotherly intimacy?

Secondly, Is she engaged, or reported to be engaged, and if so, to whom?

Thirdly, What are the names of her most favored suitors?

Fourthly, What lady does she know intimately who has very dark hair, and is also slight and tall?

I don't need to tell you to treat this letter as absolutely confidential, nor to assure you again that only the deepest interest in Miss Derwent, and the conviction that she is in need of help, induce me to pry into her affairs.

More than this I cannot tell you, so don't ask me.

Good-night, old chap! Hope your leg is getting on all right.

*Affectionately yours,  
Charles K. Fortescue.*

*Hope Farm, Beverley, L. I.,  
Friday, August 11.*

Dear Charley,—You may imagine how exciting I found your letter when I tell you that I have known May Derwent since she was a tiny tot, and that their country place is not half a mile from here. She is exactly my sister Alice's age, and I have never known her very well till she came out last winter, for eight years make a big barrier between children. I like and admire May extremely, for not only is

she a very beautiful girl, but an extremely nice one, as well. Difficult as it may be to explain certain things, I am sure that, whatever the trouble she is in, if you knew the whole truth, you would find it only redounded to her credit. She is an impulsive, warm-hearted and rather tempestuous child—generous, loyal, and truthful to a fault. I have just been discreetly sounding Alice about her, and asked why I had not seen May since I had been down here this time, as on former occasions she used always to be running in and out of the house. And Alice tells me that for the last three months May has been a changed being. From a happy, thoughtless girl, overflowing with health and spirits, she has become a listless, self-contained, almost morose woman. She refuses to go anywhere, and spends most of her time either in her own room or taking long solitary walks or rides. The doctor talks of nervous prostration, but do you think it likely that a vigorous, athletic young girl would develop nerves solely in consequence of a few months' gaiety during the winter? It seems to me incredible, and so I am forced to believe that May has something on her mind which is reacting on her body, causing her to shun all the things she used to delight in. Now, when a young, rich, beautiful, and sought-after girl suddenly takes to avoiding her species, and becomes pale and melancholy, the usual explanation is—an unhappy love affair. And, of course, that may still turn out to be the truth in this case; but in the meantime I have another hypothesis to suggest, that seems to me to fit in with the known facts even better than the other.

May Derwent is not an only child, but has, or at any

rate had, a brother about ten years older than herself who, I confess, was one of the heroes of my childhood. Only a little older than the rest of us boys, he was much bigger and stronger. He was the leader of all our games, and the instigator of our most outrageous exploits. He was the horror of all parents and the delight of all children. Cruel, vindictive, untruthful, leaving others to pay the penalty for his faults whenever it was possible, he was not a nice boy even in those early days, but then he was so handsome, so bold and unscrupulous, so inspired in devising new crimes for us to commit, that it is hardly to be wondered at that he was at the same time our terror and our idol. His school record was bad; his college record was worse, till one fine day he suddenly and mysteriously disappeared from Harvard, and has never been heard of since. What had occurred I never could find out; that it was something very disgraceful I am sure, for his mother, whose pride and hope he had been, never again mentioned his name.

Now, don't you think it quite possible that he may have returned and been bothering his sister in some way? She may be either trying to shield him from still greater disgrace, or be endeavouring to spare her mother the further knowledge of his misdeeds. Mind you, these are all merely the wildest conjectures.

As for May's lovers, their name is simply legion, including young Norman, the millionaire, Sir Arthur Trevor, Guy Weatherby and a painter chap—Greywood, I think his name is. Mère Derwent, I believe, favors Norman's suit, having (sensible woman!) a great faith in

American husbands, but there is a rumour that May, with the perversity of her sex, is inclined to smile on the young artist, who, I am told is an affected chap, just back from Paris, without either money or talent. But no doubt he strikes her as a more romantic lover than good old Norman, who is the best of fellows, and absolutely eligible in every way.

Alice tells me that May has appeared quite eager for her Bar Harbor visit, notwithstanding that she has refused all other invitations, and Mrs. Derwent has had great hopes that the change would do her good.

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