

GREEN ANNA KATHARINE

THE LEAVENWORTH CASE

Anna Green

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Anna Katharine Green

The Leavenworth Case

BOOK I. THE PROBLEM

I. "A GREAT CASE"

"A deed of dreadful note."

—Macbeth.

I had been a junior partner in the firm of Veeley, Carr & Raymond, attorneys and counsellors at law, for about a year, when one morning, in the temporary absence of both Mr. Veeley and Mr. Carr, there came into our office a young man whose whole appearance was so indicative of haste and agitation that I involuntarily rose at his approach and impetuously inquired:

"What is the matter? You have no bad news to tell, I hope."

"I have come to see Mr. Veeley; is he in?"

"No," I replied; "he was unexpectedly called away this morning to Washington; cannot be home before to-morrow; but if you will make your business known to me—"

"To you, sir?" he repeated, turning a very cold but steady eye on mine; then, seeming to be satisfied with his scrutiny, continued, "There is no reason why I shouldn't; my business is no secret. I came to inform him that Mr. Leavenworth is dead."

"Mr. Leavenworth!" I exclaimed, falling back a step. Mr. Leavenworth was an old client of our firm, to say nothing of his being the particular friend of Mr. Veeley.

"Yes, murdered; shot through the head by some unknown person while sitting at his library table."

"Shot! murdered!" I could scarcely believe my ears.

"How? when?" I gasped.

"Last night. At least, so we suppose. He was not found till this morning. I am Mr. Leavenworth's private secretary," he explained, "and live in the family. It was a dreadful shock," he went on, "especially to the ladies."

"Dreadful!" I repeated. "Mr. Veeley will be overwhelmed by it."

"They are all alone," he continued in a low businesslike way I afterwards found to be inseparable from the man; "the Misses Leavenworth, I mean—Mr. Leavenworth's nieces; and as an inquest is to be held there to-day it is deemed proper for them to have some one present capable of advising them. As Mr. Veeley was their uncle's best friend, they naturally sent me for him; but he being absent I am at a loss what to do or where to go."

"I am a stranger to the ladies," was my hesitating reply, "but if I can be of any assistance to them, my respect for their uncle is such—"

The expression of the secretary's eye stopped me. Without seeming to wander from my face, its pupil had suddenly dilated till it appeared to embrace my whole person with its scope.

"I don't know," he finally remarked, a slight frown, testifying to the fact that he was not altogether pleased with the turn affairs were taking. "Perhaps it would be best. The ladies must not be left alone—"

“Say no more; I will go.” And, sitting down, I despatched a hurried message to Mr. Veeley, after which, and the few other preparations necessary, I accompanied the secretary to the street.

“Now,” said I, “tell me all you know of this frightful affair.”

“All I know? A few words will do that. I left him last night sitting as usual at his library table, and found him this morning, seated in the same place, almost in the same position, but with a bullet-hole in his head as large as the end of my little finger.”

“Dead?”

“Stone-dead.”

“Horrible!” I exclaimed. Then, after a moment, “Could it have been a suicide?”

“No. The pistol with which the deed was committed is not to be found.”

“But if it was a murder, there must have been some motive. Mr. Leavenworth was too benevolent a man to have enemies, and if robbery was intended—”

“There was no robbery. There is nothing missing,” he again interrupted. “The whole affair is a mystery.”

“A mystery?”

“An utter mystery.”

Turning, I looked at my informant curiously. The inmate of a house in which a mysterious murder had occurred was rather an interesting object. But the good-featured and yet totally unimpressive countenance of the man beside me offered but little basis for even the wildest imagination to work upon, and, glancing almost immediately away, I asked:

“Are the ladies very much overcome?”

He took at least a half-dozen steps before replying.

“It would be unnatural if they were not.” And whether it was the expression of his face at the time, or the nature of the reply itself, I felt that in speaking of these ladies to this uninteresting, self-possessed secretary of the late Mr. Leavenworth, I was somehow treading upon dangerous ground. As I had heard they were very accomplished women, I was not altogether pleased at this discovery. It was, therefore, with a certain consciousness of relief I saw a Fifth Avenue stage approach.

“We will defer our conversation,” said I. “Here’s the stage.”

But, once seated within it, we soon discovered that all intercourse upon such a subject was impossible. Employing the time, therefore, in running over in my mind what I knew of Mr. Leavenworth, I found that my knowledge was limited to the bare fact of his being a retired merchant of great wealth and fine social position who, in default of possessing children of his own, had taken into his home two nieces, one of whom had already been declared his heiress. To be sure, I had heard Mr. Veeley speak of his eccentricities, giving as an instance this very fact of his making a will in favor of one niece to the utter exclusion of the other; but of his habits of life and connection with the world at large, I knew little or nothing.

There was a great crowd in front of the house when we arrived there, and I had barely time to observe that it was a corner dwelling of unusual depth when I was seized by the throng and carried quite to the foot of the broad stone steps. Extricating myself, though with some difficulty, owing to the importunities of a bootblack and butcher-boy, who seemed to think that by clinging to my arms they might succeed in smuggling themselves into the house, I mounted the steps and, finding the secretary, by some unaccountable good fortune, close to my side, hurriedly rang the bell. Immediately the door opened, and a face I recognized as that of one of our city detectives appeared in the gap.

“Mr. Gryce!” I exclaimed.

“The same,” he replied. “Come in, Mr. Raymond.” And drawing us quietly into the house, he shut the door with a grim smile on the disappointed crowd without. “I trust you are not surprised to see me here,” said he, holding out his hand, with a side glance at my companion.

“No,” I returned. Then, with a vague idea that I ought to introduce the young man at my side, continued: “This is Mr. —, Mr. —, —excuse me, but I do not know your name,” I said inquiringly to my companion. “The private secretary of the late Mr. Leavenworth,” I hastened to add.

“Oh,” he returned, “the secretary! The coroner has been asking for you, sir.”

“The coroner is here, then?”

“Yes; the jury have just gone up-stairs to view the body; would you like to follow them?”

“No, it is not necessary. I have merely come in the hope of being of some assistance to the young ladies. Mr. Veeley is away.”

“And you thought the opportunity too good to be lost,” he went on; “just so. Still, now that you are here, and as the case promises to be a marked one, I should think that, as a rising young lawyer, you would wish to make yourself acquainted with it in all its details. But follow your own judgment.”

I made an effort and overcame my repugnance. “I will go,” said I.

“Very well, then, follow me.”

But just as I set foot on the stairs I heard the jury descending, so, drawing back with Mr. Gryce into a recess between the reception room and the parlor, I had time to remark:

“The young man says it could not have been the work of a burglar.”

“Indeed!” fixing his eye on a door-knob near by.

“That nothing has been found missing—”

“And that the fastenings to the house were all found secure this morning; just so.”

“He did not tell me that. In that case”—and I shuddered—“the murderer must have been in the house all night.”

Mr. Gryce smiled darkly at the door-knob.

“It has a dreadful look!” I exclaimed.

Mr. Gryce immediately frowned at the door-knob.

And here let me say that Mr. Gryce, the detective, was not the thin, wiry individual with the piercing eye you are doubtless expecting to see. On the contrary, Mr. Gryce was a portly, comfortable personage with an eye that never pierced, that did not even rest on *you*. If it rested anywhere, it was always on some insignificant object in the vicinity, some vase, inkstand, book, or button. These things he would seem to take into his confidence, make the repositories of his conclusions; but as for you—you might as well be the steeple on Trinity Church, for all connection you ever appeared to have with him or his thoughts. At present, then, Mr. Gryce was, as I have already suggested, on intimate terms with the door-knob.

“A dreadful look,” I repeated.

His eye shifted to the button on my sleeve.

“Come,” he said, “the coast is clear at last.”

Leading the way, he mounted the stairs, but stopped on the upper landing. “Mr. Raymond,” said he, “I am not in the habit of talking much about the secrets of my profession, but in this case everything depends upon getting the right clue at the start. We have no common villainy to deal with here; genius has been at work. Now sometimes an absolutely uninitiated mind will intuitively catch at something which the most highly trained intellect will miss. If such a thing should occur, remember that I am your man. Don’t go round talking, but come to me. For this is going to be a great case, mind you, a great case. Now, come on.”

“But the ladies?”

“They are in the rooms above; in grief, of course, but tolerably composed for all that, I hear.” And advancing to a door, he pushed it open and beckoned me in.

All was dark for a moment, but presently, my eyes becoming accustomed to the place, I saw that we were in the library.

“It was here he was found,” said he; “in this room and upon this very spot.” And advancing, he laid his hand on the end of a large baize-covered table that, together with its attendant chairs,

occupied the centre of the room. "You see for yourself that it is directly opposite this door," and, crossing the floor, he paused in front of the threshold of a narrow passageway, opening into a room beyond. "As the murdered man was discovered sitting in this chair, and consequently with his back towards the passageway, the assassin must have advanced through the doorway to deliver his shot, pausing, let us say, about here." And Mr. Gryce planted his feet firmly upon a certain spot in the carpet, about a foot from the threshold before mentioned.

"But—" I hastened to interpose.

"There is no room for 'but,'" he cried. "We have studied the situation." And without deigning to dilate upon the subject, he turned immediately about and, stepping swiftly before me, led the way into the passage named. "Wine closet, clothes closet, washing apparatus, towel-rack," he explained, waving his hand from side to side as we hurried through, finishing with "Mr. Leavenworth's private apartment," as that room of comfortable aspect opened upon us.

Mr. Leavenworth's private apartment! It was here then that *it* ought to be, the horrible, blood-curdling *it* that yesterday was a living, breathing man. Advancing to the bed that was hung with heavy curtains, I raised my hand to put them back, when Mr. Gryce, drawing them from my clasp, disclosed lying upon the pillow a cold, calm face looking so natural I involuntarily started.

"His death was too sudden to distort the features," he remarked, turning the head to one side in a way to make visible a ghastly wound in the back of the cranium. "Such a hole as that sends a man out of the world without much notice. The surgeon will convince you it could never have been inflicted by himself. It is a case of deliberate murder."

Horried, I drew hastily back, when my glance fell upon a door situated directly opposite me in the side of the wall towards the hall. It appeared to be the only outlet from the room, with the exception of the passage through which we had entered, and I could not help wondering if it was through this door the assassin had entered on his roundabout course to the library. But Mr. Gryce, seemingly observant of my glance, though his own was fixed upon the chandelier, made haste to remark, as if in reply to the inquiry in my face:

"Found locked on the inside; may have come that way and may not; we don't pretend to say."

Observing now that the bed was undisturbed in its arrangement, I remarked, "He had not retired, then?"

"No; the tragedy must be ten hours old. Time for the murderer to have studied the situation and provided for all contingencies."

"The murderer? Whom do you suspect?" I whispered.

He looked impassively at the ring on my finger.

"Every one and nobody. It is not for me to suspect, but to detect." And dropping the curtain into its former position he led me from the room.

The coroner's inquest being now in session, I felt a strong desire to be present, so, requesting Mr. Gryce to inform the ladies that Mr. Veeley was absent from town, and that I had come as his substitute, to render them any assistance they might require on so melancholy an occasion, I proceeded to the large parlor below, and took my seat among the various persons there assembled.

II. THE CORONER'S INQUEST

*"The baby figure of the giant mass
Of things to come."*

—Troilus and Cressida.

FOR a few minutes I sat dazed by the sudden flood of light greeting me from the many open windows; then, as the strongly contrasting features of the scene before me began to impress themselves upon my consciousness, I found myself experiencing something of the same sensation of double personality which years before had followed an enforced use of ether. As at that time, I appeared to be living two lives at once: in two distinct places, with two separate sets of incidents going on; so now I seemed to be divided between two irreconcilable trains of thought; the gorgeous house, its elaborate furnishing, the little glimpses of yesterday's life, as seen in the open piano, with its sheet of music held in place by a lady's fan, occupying my attention fully as much as the aspect of the throng of incongruous and impatient people huddled about me.

Perhaps one reason of this lay in the extraordinary splendor of the room I was in; the glow of satin, glitter of bronze, and glimmer of marble meeting the eye at every turn. But I am rather inclined to think it was mainly due to the force and eloquence of a certain picture which confronted me from the opposite wall. A sweet picture—sweet enough and poetic enough to have been conceived by the most idealistic of artists: simple, too—the vision of a young flaxen-haired, blue-eyed coquette, dressed in the costume of the First Empire, standing in a wood-path, looking back over her shoulder at some one following—yet with such a dash of something not altogether saint-like in the corners of her meek eyes and baby-like lips, that it impressed me with the individuality of life. Had it not been for the open dress, with its waist almost beneath the armpits, the hair cut short on the forehead, and the perfection of the neck and shoulders, I should have taken it for a literal portrait of one of the ladies of the house. As it was, I could not rid myself of the idea that one, if not both, of Mr. Leavenworth's nieces looked down upon me from the eyes of this entrancing blonde with the beckoning glance and forbidding hand. So vividly did this fancy impress me that I half shuddered as I looked, wondering if this sweet creature did not know what had occurred in this house since the happy yesterday; and if so, how she could stand there smiling so invitingly,—when suddenly I became aware that I had been watching the little crowd of men about me with as complete an absorption as if nothing else in the room had attracted my attention; that the face of the coroner, sternly intelligent and attentive, was as distinctly imprinted upon my mind as that of this lovely picture, or the clearer-cut and more noble features of the sculptured Psyche, shining in mellow beauty from the crimson-hung window at his right; yes, even that the various countenances of the jurymen clustered before me, commonplace and insignificant as most of them were; the trembling forms of the excited servants crowded into a far corner; and the still more disagreeable aspect of the pale-faced, seedy reporter, seated at a small table and writing with a ghoul-like avidity that made my flesh creep, were each and all as fixed an element in the remarkable scene before me as the splendor of the surroundings which made their presence such a nightmare of discord and unreality.

I have spoken of the coroner. As fortune would have it, he was no stranger to me. I had not only seen him before, but had held frequent conversation with him; in fact, knew him. His name was Hammond, and he was universally regarded as a man of more than ordinary acuteness, fully capable of conducting an important examination, with the necessary skill and address. Interested as I was, or rather was likely to be, in this particular inquiry, I could not but congratulate myself upon our good fortune in having so intelligent a coroner.

As for his jurymen, they were, as I have intimated, very much like all other bodies of a similar character. Picked up at random from the streets, but from such streets as the Fifth and Sixth Avenues, they presented much the same appearance of average intelligence and refinement as might be seen in the chance occupants of one of our city stages. Indeed, I marked but one amongst them all who seemed to take any interest in the inquiry as an inquiry; all the rest appearing to be actuated in the fulfilment of their duty by the commoner instincts of pity and indignation.

Dr. Maynard, the well-known surgeon of Thirty-sixth Street, was the first witness called. His testimony concerned the nature of the wound found in the murdered man's head. As some of the facts presented by him are likely to prove of importance to us in our narrative, I will proceed to give a synopsis of what he said.

Prefacing his remarks with some account of himself, and the manner in which he had been summoned to the house by one of the servants, he went on to state that, upon his arrival, he found the deceased lying on a bed in the second-story front room, with the blood clotted about a pistol-wound in the back of the head; having evidently been carried there from the adjoining apartment some hours after death. It was the only wound discovered on the body, and having probed it, he had found and extracted the bullet which he now handed to the jury. It was lying in the brain, having entered at the base of the skull, passed obliquely upward, and at once struck the *medulla oblongata*, causing instant death. The fact of the ball having entered the brain in this peculiar manner he deemed worthy of note, since it would produce not only instantaneous death, but an utterly motionless one. Further, from the position of the bullet-hole and the direction taken by the bullet, it was manifestly impossible that the shot should have been fired by the man himself, even if the condition of the hair about the wound did not completely demonstrate the fact that the shot was fired from a point some three or four feet distant. Still further, considering the angle at which the bullet had entered the skull, it was evident that the deceased must not only have been seated at the time, a fact about which there could be no dispute, but he must also have been engaged in some occupation which drew his head forward. For, in order that a ball should enter the head of a man sitting erect at the angle seen here, of 45 degrees, it would be necessary, not only for the pistol to be held very low down, but in a peculiar position; while if the head had been bent forward, as in the act of writing, a man holding a pistol naturally with the elbow bent, might very easily fire a ball into the brain at the angle observed.

Upon being questioned in regard to the bodily health of Mr. Leavenworth, he replied that the deceased appeared to have been in good condition at the time of his death, but that, not being his attendant physician, he could not speak conclusively upon the subject without further examination; and, to the remark of a jurymen, observed that he had not seen pistol or weapon lying upon the floor, or, indeed, anywhere else in either of the above-mentioned rooms.

I might as well add here what he afterwards stated, that from the position of the table, the chair, and the door behind it, the murderer, in order to satisfy all the conditions imposed by the situation, must have stood upon, or just within, the threshold of the passageway leading into the room beyond. Also, that as the ball was small, and from a rifled barrel, and thus especially liable to deflections while passing through bones and integuments, it seemed to him evident that the victim had made no effort to raise or turn his head when advanced upon by his destroyer; the fearful conclusion being that the footstep was an accustomed one, and the presence of its possessor in the room either known or expected.

The physician's testimony being ended, the coroner picked up the bullet which had been laid on the table before him, and for a moment rolled it contemplatively between his fingers; then, drawing a pencil from his pocket, hastily scrawled a line or two on a piece of paper and, calling an officer to his side, delivered some command in a low tone. The officer, taking up the slip, looked at it for an instant knowingly, then catching up his hat left the room. Another moment, and the front door closed on him, and a wild halloo from the crowd of urchins without told of his appearance in the street.

Sitting where I did, I had a full view of the corner. Looking out, I saw the officer stop there, hail a cab, hastily enter it, and disappear in the direction of Broadway.

III. FACTS AND DEDUCTIONS

*"Confusion now hath made his master-piece;
Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
The Lord's anointed temple, and stolen thence
The life of the building."*

—*Macbeth.*

TURNING my attention back into the room where I was, I found the coroner consulting a memorandum through a very impressive pair of gold eye-glasses.

"Is the butler here?" he asked.

Immediately there was a stir among the group of servants in the corner, and an intelligent-looking, though somewhat pompous, Irishman stepped out from their midst and confronted the jury. "Ah," thought I to myself, as my glance encountered his precise whiskers, steady eye, and respectfully attentive, though by no means humble, expression, "here is a model servant, who is likely to prove a model witness." And I was not mistaken; Thomas, the butler, was in all respects one in a thousand—and he knew it.

The coroner, upon whom, as upon all others in the room, he seemed to have made the like favorable impression, proceeded without hesitation to interrogate him.

"Your name, I am told, is Thomas Dougherty?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Thomas, how long have you been employed in your present situation?"

"It must be a matter of two years now, sir."

"You are the person who first discovered the body of Mr. Leavenworth?"

"Yes, sir; I and Mr. Harwell."

"And who is Mr. Harwell?"

"Mr. Harwell is Mr. Leavenworth's private secretary, sir; the one who did his writing."

"Very good. Now at what time of the day or night did you make this discovery?"

"It was early, sir; early this morning, about eight."

"And where?"

"In the library, sir, off Mr. Leavenworth's bedroom. We had forced our way in, feeling anxious about his not coming to breakfast."

"You forced your way in; the door was locked, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"On the inside?"

"That I cannot tell; there was no key in the door."

"Where was Mr. Leavenworth lying when you first found him?"

"He was not lying, sir. He was seated at the large table in the centre of his room, his back to the bedroom door, leaning forward, his head on his hands."

"How was he dressed?"

"In his dinner suit, sir, just as he came from the table last night."

"Were there any evidences in the room that a struggle had taken place?"

"No, sir."

"Any pistol on the floor or table?"

"No, sir?"

"Any reason to suppose that robbery had been attempted?"

"No, sir. Mr. Leavenworth's watch and purse were both in his pockets."

Being asked to mention who were in the house at the time of the discovery, he replied, "The young ladies, Miss Mary Leavenworth and Miss Eleanore, Mr. Harwell, Kate the cook, Molly the upstairs girl, and myself."

"The usual members of the household?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now tell me whose duty it is to close up the house at night."

"Mine, sir."

"Did you secure it as usual, last night?"

"I did, sir."

"Who unfastened it this morning?"

"I, sir."

"How did you find it?"

"Just as I left it."

"What, not a window open nor a door unlocked?"

"No, sir."

By this time you could have heard a pin drop. The certainty that the murderer, whoever he was, had not left the house, at least till after it was opened in the morning, seemed to weigh upon all minds. Forewarned as I had been of the fact, I could not but feel a certain degree of emotion at having it thus brought before me; and, moving so as to bring the butler's face within view, searched it for some secret token that he had spoken thus emphatically in order to cover up some failure of duty on his own part. But it was unmoved in its candor, and sustained the concentrated gaze of all in the room like a rock.

Being now asked when he had last seen Mr. Leavenworth alive, he replied, "At dinner last night."

"He was, however, seen later by some of you?"

"Yes, sir; Mr. Harwell says he saw him as late as half-past ten in the evening."

"What room do you occupy in this house?"

"A little one on the basement floor."

"And where do the other members of the household sleep?"

"Mostly on the third floor, sir; the ladies in the large back rooms, and Mr. Harwell in the little one in front. The girls sleep above."

"There was no one on the same floor with Mr. Leavenworth?"

"No, sir."

"At what hour did you go to bed?"

"Well, I should say about eleven."

"Did you hear any noise in the house either before or after that time, that you remember?"

"No, sir."

"So that the discovery you made this morning was a surprise to you?"

"Yes, sir."

Requested now to give a more detailed account of that discovery, he went on to say it was not till Mr. Leavenworth failed to come to his breakfast at the call of the bell that any suspicion arose in the house that all was not right. Even then they waited some little time before doing anything, but as minute after minute went by and he did not come, Miss Eleanore grew anxious, and finally left the room saying she would go and see what was the matter, but soon returned looking very much frightened, saying she had knocked at her uncle's door, and had even called to him, but could get no answer. At which Mr. Harwell and himself had gone up and together tried both doors, and, finding them locked, burst open that of the library, when they came upon Mr. Leavenworth, as he had already said, sitting at the table, dead.

"And the ladies?"

“Oh, they followed us up and came into the room and Miss Eleanore fainted away.”

“And the other one,—Miss Mary, I believe they call her?”

“I don’t remember anything about her; I was so busy fetching water to restore Miss Eleanore, I didn’t notice.”

“Well, how long was it before Mr. Leavenworth was carried into the next room?”

“Almost immediate, as soon as Miss Eleanore recovered, and that was as soon as ever the water touched her lips.”

“Who proposed that the body should be carried from the spot?”

“She, sir. As soon as ever she stood up she went over to it and looked at it and shuddered, and then calling Mr. Harwell and me, bade us carry him in and lay him on the bed and go for the doctor, which we did.”

“Wait a moment; did she go with you when you went into the other room?”

“No, sir.”

“What did she do?”

“She stayed by the library table.”

“What doing?”

“I couldn’t see; her back was to me.”

“How long did she stay there?”

“She was gone when we came back.”

“Gone from the table?”

“Gone from the room.”

“Humph! when did you see her again?”

“In a minute. She came in at the library door as we went out.”

“Anything in her hand?”

“Not as I see.”

“Did you miss anything from the table?”

“I never thought to look, sir. The table was nothing to me. I was only thinking of going for the doctor, though I knew it was of no use.”

“Whom did you leave in the room when you went out?”

“The cook, sir, and Molly, sir, and Miss Eleanore.”

“Not Miss Mary?”

“No, sir.”

“Very well. Have the jury any questions to put to this man?”

A movement at once took place in that profound body.

“I should like to ask a few,” exclaimed a weazen-faced, excitable little man whom I had before noticed shifting in his seat in a restless manner strongly suggestive of an intense but hitherto repressed desire to interrupt the proceedings.

“Very well, sir,” returned Thomas.

But the juryman stopping to draw a deep breath, a large and decidedly pompous man who sat at his right hand seized the opportunity to inquire in a round, listen-to-me sort of voice:

“You say you have been in the family for two years. Was it what you might call a united family?”

“United?”

“Affectionate, you know,—on good terms with each other.” And the juryman lifted the very long and heavy watch-chain that hung across his vest as if that as well as himself had a right to a suitable and well-considered reply.

The butler, impressed perhaps by his manner, glanced uneasily around. “Yes, sir, so far as I know.”

“The young ladies were attached to their uncle?”

“O yes, sir.”

“And to each other?”

“Well, yes, I suppose so; it’s not for me to say.”

“You suppose so. Have you any reason to think otherwise?” And he doubled the watch-chain about his fingers as if he would double its attention as well as his own.

Thomas hesitated a moment. But just as his interlocutor was about to repeat his question, he drew himself up into a rather stiff and formal attitude and replied:

“Well, sir, no.”

The jurymen, for all his self-assertion, seemed to respect the reticence of a servant who declined to give his opinion in regard to such a matter, and drawing complacently back, signified with a wave of his hand that he had no more to say.

Immediately the excitable little man, before mentioned, slipped forward to the edge of his chair and asked, this time without hesitation: “At what time did you unfasten the house this morning?”

“About six, sir.”

“Now, could any one leave the house after that time without your knowledge?”

Thomas glanced a trifle uneasily at his fellow-servants, but answered up promptly and as if without reserve;

“I don’t think it would be possible for anybody to leave this house after six in the morning without either myself or the cook’s knowing of it. Folks don’t jump from second-story windows in broad daylight, and as to leaving by the doors, the front door closes with such a slam all the house can hear it from top to bottom, and as for the back-door, no one that goes out of that can get clear of the yard without going by the kitchen window, and no one can go by our kitchen window without the cook’s a-seeing of them, that I can just swear to.” And he cast a half-quizzing, half-malicious look at the round, red-faced individual in question, strongly suggestive of late and unforgotten bickerings over the kitchen coffee-urn and castor.

This reply, which was of a nature calculated to deepen the forebodings which had already settled upon the minds of those present, produced a visible effect. The house found locked, and no one seen to leave it! Evidently, then, we had not far to look for the assassin.

Shifting on his chair with increased fervor, if I may so speak, the jurymen glanced sharply around. But perceiving the renewed interest in the faces about him, declined to weaken the effect of the last admission, by any further questions. Settling, therefore, comfortably back, he left the field open for any other juror who might choose to press the inquiry. But no one seeming to be ready to do this, Thomas in his turn evinced impatience, and at last, looking respectfully around, inquired:

“Would any other gentleman like to ask me anything?”

No one replying, he threw a hurried glance of relief towards the servants at his side, then, while each one marvelled at the sudden change that had taken place in his countenance, withdrew with an eager alacrity and evident satisfaction for which I could not at the moment account.

But the next witness proving to be none other than my acquaintance of the morning, Mr. Harwell, I soon forgot both Thomas and the doubts his last movement had awakened, in the interest which the examination of so important a person as the secretary and right-hand man of Mr. Leavenworth was likely to create.

Advancing with the calm and determined air of one who realized that life and death itself might hang upon his words, Mr. Harwell took his stand before the jury with a degree of dignity not only highly prepossessing in itself, but to me, who had not been over and above pleased with him in our first interview, admirable and surprising. Lacking, as I have said, any distinctive quality of face or form agreeable or otherwise—being what you might call in appearance a negative sort of person, his pale, regular features, dark, well-smoothed hair and simple whiskers, all belonging to a recognized type and very commonplace—there was still visible, on this occasion at least, a certain self-possession in his carriage, which went far towards making up for the want of impressiveness in his countenance and expression. Not that even this was in any way remarkable. Indeed, there was

nothing remarkable about the man, any more than there is about a thousand others you meet every day on Broadway, unless you except the look of concentration and solemnity which pervaded his whole person; a solemnity which at this time would not have been noticeable, perhaps, if it had not appeared to be the habitual expression of one who in his short life had seen more of sorrow than joy, less of pleasure than care and anxiety.

The coroner, to whom his appearance one way or the other seemed to be a matter of no moment, addressed him immediately and without reserve:

“Your name?”

“James Trueman Harwell.”

“Your business?”

“I have occupied the position of private secretary and amanuensis to Mr. Leavenworth for the past eight months.”

“You are the person who last saw Mr. Leavenworth alive, are you not?”

The young man raised his head with a haughty gesture which well-nigh transfigured it.

“Certainly not, as I am not the man who killed him.”

This answer, which seemed to introduce something akin to levity or badinage into an examination the seriousness of which we were all beginning to realize, produced an immediate revulsion of feeling toward the man who, in face of facts revealed and to be revealed, could so lightly make use of it. A hum of disapproval swept through the room, and in that one remark, James Harwell lost all that he had previously won by the self-possession of his bearing and the unflinching regard of his eye. He seemed himself to realize this, for he lifted his head still higher, though his general aspect remained unchanged.

“I mean,” the coroner exclaimed, evidently nettled that the young man had been able to draw such a conclusion from his words, “that you were the last one to see him previous to his assassination by some unknown individual?”

The secretary folded his arms, whether to hide a certain tremble which had seized him, or by that simple action to gain time for a moment’s further thought, I could not then determine. “Sir,” he replied at length, “I cannot answer yes or no to that question. In all probability I was the last to see him in good health and spirits, but in a house as large as this I cannot be sure of even so simple a fact as that.” Then, observing the unsatisfied look on the faces around, added slowly, “It is my business to see him late.”

“Your business? Oh, as his secretary, I suppose?”

He gravely nodded.

“Mr. Harwell,” the coroner went on, “the office of private secretary in this country is not a common one. Will you explain to us what your duties were in that capacity; in short, what use Mr. Leavenworth had for such an assistant and how he employed you?”

“Certainly. Mr. Leavenworth was, as you perhaps know, a man of great wealth. Connected with various societies, clubs, institutions, etc., besides being known far and near as a giving man, he was accustomed every day of his life to receive numerous letters, begging and otherwise, which it was my business to open and answer, his private correspondence always bearing a mark upon it which distinguished it from the rest. But this was not all I was expected to do. Having in his early life been engaged in the tea-trade, he had made more than one voyage to China, and was consequently much interested in the question of international communication between that country and our own. Thinking that in his various visits there, he had learned much which, if known to the American people, would conduce to our better understanding of the nation, its peculiarities, and the best manner of dealing with it, he has been engaged for some time in writing a book on the subject, which same it has been my business for the last eight months to assist him in preparing, by writing at his dictation three hours out of the twenty-four, the last hour being commonly taken from the evening, say from

half-past nine to half-past ten, Mr. Leavenworth being a very methodical man and accustomed to regulate his own life and that of those about him with almost mathematical precision.”

“You say you were accustomed to write at his dictation evenings? Did you do this as usual last evening?”

“I did, sir.”

“What can you tell us of his manner and appearance at the time? Were they in any way unusual?”

A frown crossed the secretary’s brow.

“As he probably had no premonition of his doom, why should there have been any change in his manner?”

This giving the coroner an opportunity to revenge himself for his discomfiture of a moment before, he said somewhat severely:

“It is the business of a witness to answer questions, not to put them.”

The secretary flushed and the account stood even.

“Very well, then, sir; if Mr. Leavenworth felt any forebodings of his end, he did not reveal them to me. On the contrary, he seemed to be more absorbed in his work than usual. One of the last words he said to me was, ‘In a month we will have this book in press, eh, Trueman?’ I remember this particularly, as he was filling his wine-glass at the time. He always drank one glass of wine before retiring, it being my duty to bring the decanter of sherry from the closet the last thing before leaving him. I was standing with my hand on the knob of the hall-door, but advanced as he said this and replied, ‘I hope so, indeed, Mr. Leavenworth.’ ‘Then join me in drinking a glass of sherry,’ said he, motioning me to procure another glass from the closet. I did so, and he poured me out the wine with his own hand. I am not especially fond of sherry, but the occasion was a pleasant one and I drained my glass. I remember being slightly ashamed of doing so, for Mr. Leavenworth set his down half full. It was half full when we found him this morning.”

Do what he would, and being a reserved man he appeared anxious to control his emotion, the horror of his first shock seemed to overwhelm him here. Pulling his handkerchief from his pocket, he wiped his forehead. “Gentlemen, that is the last action of Mr. Leavenworth I ever saw. As he set the glass down on the table, I said good-night to him and left the room.”

The coroner, with a characteristic imperviousness to all expressions of emotion, leaned back and surveyed the young man with a scrutinizing glance. “And where did you go then?” he asked.

“To my own room.”

“Did you meet anybody on the way?”

“No, sir.”

“Hear any thing or see anything unusual?”

The secretary’s voice fell a trifle. “No, sir.”

“Mr. Harwell, think again. Are you ready to swear that you neither met anybody, heard anybody, nor saw anything which lingers yet in your memory as unusual?”

His face grew quite distressed. Twice he opened his lips to speak, and as often closed them without doing so. At last, with an effort, he replied:

“I saw one thing, a little thing, too slight to mention, but it was unusual, and I could not help thinking of it when you spoke.”

“What was it?”

“Only a door half open.”

“Whose door?”

“Miss Eleanore Leavenworth’s.” His voice was almost a whisper now.

“Where were you when you observed this fact?”

“I cannot say exactly. Probably at my own door, as I did not stop on the way. If this frightful occurrence had not taken place I should never have thought of it again.”

“When you went into your room did you close your door?”

"I did, sir."

"How soon did you retire?"

"Immediately."

"Did you hear nothing before you fell asleep?"

Again that indefinable hesitation.

"Barely nothing."

"Not a footstep in the hall?"

"I might have heard a footstep."

"Did you?"

"I cannot swear I did."

"Do you think you did?"

"Yes, I think I did. To tell the whole: I remember hearing, just as I was falling into a doze, a rustle and a footstep in the hall; but it made no impression upon me, and I dropped asleep."

"Well?"

"Some time later I woke, woke suddenly, as if something had startled me, but what, a noise or move, I cannot say. I remember rising up in my bed and looking around, but hearing nothing further, soon yielded to the drowsiness which possessed me and fell into a deep sleep. I did not wake again till morning."

Here requested to relate how and when he became acquainted with the fact of the murder, he substantiated, in all particulars, the account of the matter already given by the butler; which subject being exhausted, the coroner went on to ask if he had noted the condition of the library table after the body had been removed.

"Somewhat; yes, sir."

"What was on it?"

"The usual properties, sir, books, paper, a pen with the ink dried on it, besides the decanter and the wineglass from which he drank the night before."

"Nothing more?"

"I remember nothing more."

"In regard to that decanter and glass," broke in the juryman of the watch and chain, "did you not say that the latter was found in the same condition in which you saw it at the time you left Mr. Leavenworth sitting in his library?"

"Yes, sir, very much."

"Yet he was in the habit of drinking a full glass?"

"Yes, sir."

"An interruption must then have ensued very close upon your departure, Mr. Harwell."

A cold bluish pallor suddenly broke out upon the young man's face. He started, and for a moment looked as if struck by some horrible thought. "That does not follow, sir," he articulated with some difficulty. "Mr. Leavenworth might—" but suddenly stopped, as if too much distressed to proceed.

"Go on, Mr. Harwell, let us hear what you have to say."

"There is nothing," he returned faintly, as if battling with some strong emotion.

As he had not been answering a question, only volunteering an explanation, the coroner let it pass; but I saw more than one pair of eyes roll suspiciously from side to side, as if many there felt that some sort of clue had been offered them in this man's emotion. The coroner, ignoring in his easy way both the emotion and the universal excitement it had produced, now proceeded to ask: "Do you know whether the key to the library was in its place when you left the room last night?"

"No, sir; I did not notice."

"The presumption is, it was?"

"I suppose so."

“At all events, the door was locked in the morning, and the key gone?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then whoever committed this murder locked the door on passing out, and took away the key?”

“It would seem so.”

The coroner turning, faced the jury with an earnest look. “Gentlemen,” said he, “there seems to be a mystery in regard to this key which must be looked into.”

Immediately a universal murmur swept through the room, testifying to the acquiescence of all present. The little jurymen hastily rising proposed that an instant search should be made for it; but the coroner, turning upon him with what I should denominate as a quelling look, decided that the inquest should proceed in the usual manner, till the verbal testimony was all in.

“Then allow me to ask a question,” again volunteered the irrepressible. “Mr. Harwell, we are told that upon the breaking in of the library door this morning, Mr. Leavenworth’s two nieces followed you into the room.”

“One of them, sir, Miss Eleanore.”

“Is Miss Eleanore the one who is said to be Mr. Leavenworth’s sole heiress?” the coroner here interposed.

“No, sir, that is Miss Mary.”

“That she gave orders,” pursued the jurymen, “for the removal of the body into the further room?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And that you obeyed her by helping to carry it in?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Now, in thus passing through the rooms, did you observe anything to lead you to form a suspicion of the murderer?”

The secretary shook his head. “I have no suspicion,” he emphatically said.

Somehow, I did not believe him. Whether it was the tone of his voice, the clutch of his hand on his sleeve—and the hand will often reveal more than the countenance—I felt that this man was not to be relied upon in making this assertion.

“I should like to ask Mr. Harwell a question,” said a jurymen who had not yet spoken. “We have had a detailed account of what looks like the discovery of a murdered man. Now, murder is never committed without some motive. Does the secretary know whether Mr. Leavenworth had any secret enemy?”

“I do not.”

“Every one in the house seemed to be on good terms with him?”

“Yes, sir,” with a little quaver of dissent in the assertion, however.

“Not a shadow lay between him and any other member of his household, so far as you know?”

“I am not ready to say that,” he returned, quite distressed. “A shadow is a very slight thing. There might have been a shadow—”

“Between him and whom?”

A long hesitation. “One of his nieces, sir.”

“Which one?”

Again that defiant lift of the head. “Miss Eleanore.”

“How long has this shadow been observable?”

“I cannot say.”

“You do not know the cause?”

“I do not.”

“Nor the extent of the feeling?”

“No, sir.”

“You open Mr. Leavenworth’s letters?”

“I do.”

“Has there been anything in his correspondence of late calculated to throw any light upon this deed?”

It actually seemed as if he never would answer. Was he simply pondering over his reply, or was the man turned to stone?

“Mr. Harwell, did you hear the juryman?” inquired the coroner.

“Yes, sir; I was thinking.”

“Very well, now answer.”

“Sir,” he replied, turning and looking the juryman full in the face, and in that way revealing his unguarded left hand to my gaze, “I have opened Mr. Leavenworth’s letters as usual for the last two weeks, and I can think of nothing in them bearing in the least upon this tragedy.”

The man lied; I knew it instantly. The clenched hand pausing irresolute, then making up its mind to go through with the lie firmly, was enough for me.

“Mr. Harwell, this is undoubtedly true according to your judgment,” said the coroner; “but Mr. Leavenworth’s correspondence will have to be searched for all that.”

“Of course,” he replied carelessly; “that is only right.”

This remark ended Mr. Harwell’s examination for the time. As he sat down I made note of four things.

That Mr. Harwell himself, for some reason not given, was conscious of a suspicion which he was anxious to suppress even from his own mind.

That a woman was in some way connected with it, a rustle as well as a footstep having been heard by him on the stairs.

That a letter had arrived at the house, which if found would be likely to throw some light upon this subject.

That Eleanore Leavenworth’s name came with difficulty from his lips; this evidently unimpressible man, manifesting more or less emotion whenever he was called upon to utter it.

IV. A CLUE

"Something is rotten in the State of Denmark."

Hamlet.

THE cook of the establishment being now called, that portly, ruddy-faced individual stepped forward with alacrity, displaying upon her good-humored countenance such an expression of mingled eagerness and anxiety that more than one person present found it difficult to restrain a smile at her appearance. Observing this and taking it as a compliment, being a woman as well as a cook, she immediately dropped a curtsy, and opening her lips was about to speak, when the coroner, rising impatiently in his seat, took the word from her mouth by saying sternly:

"Your name?"

"Katherine Malone, sir."

"Well, Katherine, how long have you been in Mr. Leavenworth's service?"

"Shure, it is a good twelvemonth now, sir, since I came, on Mrs. Wilson's ricommindation, to that very front door, and—"

"Never mind the front door, but tell us why you left this Mrs. Wilson?"

"Shure, and it was she as left me, being as she went sailing to the ould country the same day when on her recommendation I came to this very front door—"

"Well, well; no matter about that. You have been in Mr. Leavenworth's family a year?"

"Yes, sir."

"And liked it? found him a good master?"

"Och, sir, niver have I found a better, worse luck to the villain as killed him. He was that free and ginerous, sir, that many's the time I killed him. He was that free and ginerous, sir, that many's the time I have said to Hannah—" She stopped, with a sudden comical gasp of terror, looking at her fellow-servants like one who had incautiously made a slip. The coroner, observing this, inquired hastily,

"Hannah? Who is Hannah?"

The cook, drawing her roly-poly figure up into some sort of shape in her efforts to appear unconcerned, exclaimed boldly: "She? Oh, only the ladies' maid, sir."

"But I don't see any one here answering to that description. You didn't speak of any one by the name of Hannah, as belonging to the house," said he, turning to Thomas.

"No, sir," the latter replied, with a bow and a sidelong look at the red-cheeked girl at his side. "You asked me who were in the house at the time the murder was discovered, and I told you."

"Oh," cried the coroner, satirically; "used to police courts, I see." Then, turning back to the cook, who had all this while been rolling her eyes in a vague fright about the room, inquired, "And where is this Hannah?"

"Shure, sir, she's gone."

"How long since?"

The cook caught her breath hysterically. "Since last night."

"What time last night?"

"Troth, sir, and I don't know. I don't know anything about it."

"Was she dismissed?"

"Not as I knows on; her clothes is here."

"Oh, her clothes are here. At what hour did you miss her?"

"I didn't miss her. She was here last night, and she isn't here this morning, and so I says she 's gone."

“Humph!” cried the coroner, casting a slow glance down the room, while every one present looked as if a door had suddenly opened in a closed wall.

“Where did this girl sleep?”

The cook, who had been fumbling uneasily with her apron, looked up.

“Shure, we all sleeps at the top of the house, sir.”

“In one room?”

Slowly. “Yes, sir.”

“Did she come up to the room last night?”

“Yes, sir.”

“At what hour?”

“Shure, it was ten when we all came up. I heard the clock a-striking.”

“Did you observe anything unusual in her appearance?”

“She had a toothache, sir.”

“Oh, a toothache; what, then? Tell me all she did.”

But at this the cook broke into tears and wails.

“Shure, she didn’t do nothing, sir. It wasn’t her, sir, as did anything; don’t you believe it. Hannah is a good girl, and honest, sir, as ever you see. I am ready to swear on the Book as how she never put her hand to the lock of his door. What should she for? She only went down to Miss Eleanore for some toothache-drops, her face was paining her that awful; and oh, sir—”

“There, there,” interrupted the coroner, “I am not accusing Hannah of anything. I only asked you what she did after she reached your room. She went downstairs, you say. How long after you went up?”

“Troth, sir, I couldn’t tell; but Molly says—”

“Never mind what Molly says. *You* didn’t see her go down?”

“No, sir.”

“Nor see her come back?”

“No, sir.”

“Nor see her this morning?”

“No, sir; how could I when she ‘s gone?”

“But you did see, last night, that she seemed to be suffering with toothache?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Very well; now tell me how and when you first became acquainted with the fact of Mr. Leavenworth’s death.”

But her replies to this question, while over-garrulous, contained but little information; and seeing this, the coroner was on the point of dismissing her, when the little juror, remembering an admission she had made, of having seen Miss Eleanore Leavenworth coming out of the library door a few minutes after Mr. Leavenworth’s body had been carried into the next room, asked if her mistress had anything in her hand at the time.

“I don’t know, sir. Faith!” she suddenly exclaimed, “I believe she did have a piece of paper. I recollect, now, seeing her put it in her pocket.”

The next witness was Molly, the upstairs girl.

Molly O’Flanagan, as she called herself, was a rosy-cheeked, black-haired, pert girl of about eighteen, who under ordinary circumstances would have found herself able to answer, with a due degree of smartness, any question which might have been addressed to her. But fright will sometimes cower the stoutest heart, and Molly, standing before the coroner at this juncture, presented anything but a reckless appearance, her naturally rosy cheeks blanching at the first word addressed to her, and her head falling forward on her breast in a confusion too genuine to be dissembled and too transparent to be misunderstood.

As her testimony related mostly to Hannah, and what she knew of her, and her remarkable disappearance, I shall confine myself to a mere synopsis of it.

As far as she, Molly, knew, Hannah was what she had given herself out to be, an uneducated girl of Irish extraction, who had come from the country to act as lady's-maid and seamstress to the two Misses Leavenworth. She had been in the family for some time; before Molly herself, in fact; and though by nature remarkably reticent, refusing to tell anything about herself or her past life, she had managed to become a great favorite with all in the house. But she was of a melancholy nature and fond of brooding, often getting up nights to sit and think in the dark: "as if she was a lady!" exclaimed Molly.

This habit being a singular one for a girl in her station, an attempt was made to win from the witness further particulars in regard to it. But Molly, with a toss of her head, confined herself to the one statement. She used to get up nights and sit in the window, and that was all she knew about it.

Drawn away from this topic, during the consideration of which, a little of the sharpness of Molly's disposition had asserted itself, she went on to state, in connection with the events of the past night, that Hannah had been ill for two days or more with a swelled face; that it grew so bad after they had gone upstairs, the night before, that she got out of bed, and dressing herself—Molly was closely questioned here, but insisted upon the fact that Hannah had fully dressed herself, even to arranging her collar and ribbon—lighted a candle, and made known her intention of going down to Miss Eleanore for aid.

"Why Miss Eleanore?" a juryman here asked.

"Oh, she is the one who always gives out medicines and such like to the servants."

Urged to proceed, she went on to state that she had already told all she knew about it. Hannah did not come back, nor was she to be found in the house at breakfast time.

"You say she took a candle with her," said the coroner. "Was it in a candlestick?"

"No, sir; loose like."

"Why did she take a candle? Does not Mr. Leavenworth burn gas in his halls?"

"Yes, sir; but we put the gas out as we go up, and Hannah is afraid of the dark."

"If she took a candle, it must be lying somewhere about the house. Now, has anybody seen a stray candle?"

"Not as I knows on, sir."

"Is *this* it?" exclaimed a voice over my shoulder.

It was Mr. Gryce, and he was holding up into view a half-burned paraffine candle.

"Yes, sir; lor', where did you find it?"

"In the grass of the carriage yard, half-way from the kitchen door to the street," he quietly returned.

Sensation. A clue, then, at last! Something had been found which seemed to connect this mysterious murder with the outside world. Instantly the backdoor assumed the chief position of interest. The candle found lying in the yard seemed to prove, not only that Hannah had left the house shortly after descending from her room, but had left it by the backdoor, which we now remembered was only a few steps from the iron gate opening into the side street. But Thomas, being recalled, repeated his assertion that not only the back-door, but all the lower windows of the house, had been found by him securely locked and bolted at six o'clock that morning. Inevitable conclusion—some one had locked and bolted them after the girl. Who? Alas, that had now become the very serious and momentous question.

V. EXPERT TESTIMONY

*“And often-times, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths;
Win us with honest trifles, to betray us
In deepest consequence.”*

Macbeth.

IN the midst of the universal gloom thus awakened there came a sharp ring at the bell. Instantly all eyes turned toward the parlor door, just as it slowly opened, and the officer who had been sent off so mysteriously by the coroner an hour before entered, in company with a young man, whose sleek appearance, intelligent eye, and general air of trustworthiness, seemed to proclaim him to be, what in fact he was, the confidential clerk of a responsible mercantile house.

Advancing without apparent embarrassment, though each and every eye in the room was fixed upon him with lively curiosity, he made a slight bow to the coroner.

“You have sent for a man from Bohn & Co.,” he said.

Strong and immediate excitement. Bohn & Co. was the well-known pistol and ammunition store of – Broadway.

“Yes, sir,” returned the coroner. “We have here a bullet, which we must ask you to examine, You are fully acquainted with all matters connected with your business?”

The young man, merely elevating an expressive eyebrow, took the bullet carelessly in his hand.

“Can you tell us from what make of pistol that was delivered?”

The young man rolled it slowly round between his thumb and forefinger, and then laid it down. “It is a No. 32 ball, usually sold with the small pistol made by Smith & Wesson.”

“A small pistol!” exclaimed the butler, jumping up from his seat. “Master used to keep a little pistol in his stand drawer. I have often seen it. We all knew about it.”

Great and irrepressible excitement, especially among the servants. “That’s so!” I heard a heavy voice exclaim. “I saw it once myself—master was cleaning it.” It was the cook who spoke.

“In his stand drawer?” the coroner inquired.

“Yes, sir; at the head of his bed.”

An officer was sent to examine the stand drawer. In a few moments he returned, bringing a small pistol which he laid down on the coroner’s table, saying, “Here it is.”

Immediately, every one sprang to his feet, but the coroner, handing it over to the clerk from Bonn’s, inquired if that was the make before mentioned. Without hesitation he replied, “Yes, Smith & Wesson; you can see for yourself,” and he proceeded to examine it.

“Where did you find this pistol?” asked the coroner of the officer.

“In the top drawer of a shaving table standing near the head of Mr. Leavenworth’s bed. It was lying in a velvet case together with a box of cartridges, one of which I bring as a sample,” and he laid it down beside the bullet.

“Was the drawer locked?”

“Yes, sir; but the key was not taken out.”

Interest had now reached its climax. A universal cry swept through the room, “Is it loaded?”

The coroner, frowning on the assembly, with a look of great dignity, remarked:

“I was about to ask that question myself, but first I must request order.”

An immediate calm followed. Every one was too much interested to interpose any obstacle in the way of gratifying his curiosity.

“Now, sir!” exclaimed the coroner.

The clerk from Bonn's, taking out the cylinder, held it up. "There are seven chambers here, and they are all loaded."

A murmur of disappointment followed this assertion.

"But," he quietly added after a momentary examination of the face of the cylinder, "they have not all been loaded long. A bullet has been recently shot from one of these chambers."

"How do you know?" cried one of the jury.

"How do I know? Sir," said he, turning to the coroner, "will you be kind enough to examine the condition of this pistol?" and he handed it over to that gentleman. "Look first at the barrel; it is clean and bright, and shows no evidence of a bullet having passed out of it very lately; that is because it has been cleaned. But now, observe the face of the cylinder: what do you see there?"

"I see a faint line of smut near one of the chambers."

"Just so; show it to the gentlemen."

It was immediately handed down.

"That faint line of smut, on the edge of one of the chambers, is the telltale, sirs. A bullet passing out always leaves smut behind. The man who fired this, remembering the fact, cleaned the barrel, but forgot the cylinder." And stepping aside he folded his arms.

"Jerusalem!" spoke out a rough, hearty voice, "isn't that wonderful!" This exclamation came from a countryman who had stepped in from the street, and now stood agape in the doorway.

It was a rude but not altogether unwelcome interruption. A smile passed round the room, and both men and women breathed more easily. Order being at last restored, the officer was requested to describe the position of the stand, and its distance from the library table.

"The library table is in one room, and the stand in another. To reach the former from the latter, one would be obliged to cross Mr. Leavenworth's bedroom in a diagonal direction, pass through the passageway separating that one apartment from the other, and—"

"Wait a moment; how does this table stand in regard to the door which leads from the bedroom into the hall?"

"One might enter that door, pass directly round the foot of the bed to the stand, procure the pistol, and cross half-way over to the passage-way, without being seen by any one sitting or standing in the library beyond."

"Holy Virgin!" exclaimed the horrified cook, throwing her apron over her head as if to shut out some dreadful vision. "Hannah niver would have the pluck for that; niver, niver!" But Mr. Gryce, laying a heavy hand on the woman, forced her back into her seat, reproving and calming her at the same time, with a dexterity marvellous to behold. "I beg your pardons," she cried deprecatingly to those around; "but it niver was Hannah, niver!"

The clerk from Bonn's here being dismissed, those assembled took the opportunity of making some change in their position, after which, the name of Mr. Harwell was again called. That person rose with manifest reluctance. Evidently the preceding testimony had either upset some theory of his, or indubitably strengthened some unwelcome suspicion.

"Mr. Harwell," the coroner began, "we are told of the existence of a pistol belonging to Mr. Leavenworth, and upon searching, we discover it in his room. Did you know of his possessing such an instrument?"

"I did."

"Was it a fact generally known in the house?"

"So it would seem."

"How was that? Was he in the habit of leaving it around where any one could see it?"

"I cannot say; I can only acquaint you with the manner in which I myself became aware of its existence."

"Very well, do so."

“We were once talking about firearms. I have some taste that way, and have always been anxious to possess a pocket-pistol. Saying something of the kind to him one day, he rose from his seat and, fetching me this, showed it to me.”

“How long ago was this?”

“Some few months since.”

“He has owned this pistol, then, for some time?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Is that the only occasion upon which you have ever seen it?”

“No, sir,”—the secretary blushed—“I have seen it once since.”

“When?”

“About three weeks ago.”

“Under what circumstances?”

The secretary dropped his head, a certain drawn look making itself suddenly visible on his countenance.

“Will you not excuse me, gentlemen?” he asked, after a moment’s hesitation.

“It is impossible,” returned the coroner.

His face grew even more pallid and deprecatory. “I am obliged to introduce the name of a lady,” he hesitatingly declared.

“We are very sorry,” remarked the coroner.

The young man turned fiercely upon him, and I could not help wondering that I had ever thought him commonplace. “Of Miss Eleanore Leavenworth!” he cried.

At that name, so uttered, every one started but Mr. Gryce; he was engaged in holding a close and confidential confab with his finger-tips, and did not appear to notice.

“Surely it is contrary to the rules of decorum and the respect we all feel for the lady herself to introduce her name into this discussion,” continued Mr. Harwell. But the coroner still insisting upon an answer, he refolded his arms (a movement indicative of resolution with him), and began in a low, forced tone to say:

“It is only this, gentlemen. One afternoon, about three weeks since, I had occasion to go to the library at an unusual hour. Crossing over to the mantel-piece for the purpose of procuring a penknife which I had carelessly left there in the morning, I heard a noise in the adjoining room. Knowing that Mr. Leavenworth was out, and supposing the ladies to be out also, I took the liberty of ascertaining who the intruder was; when what was my astonishment to come upon Miss Eleanore Leavenworth, standing at the side of her uncle’s bed, with his pistol in her hand. Confused at my indiscretion, I attempted to escape without being observed; but in vain, for just as I was crossing the threshold, she turned and, calling me by name, requested me to explain the pistol to her. Gentlemen, in order to do so, I was obliged to take it in my hand; and that, sirs, is the only other occasion upon which I ever saw or handled the pistol of Mr. Leavenworth.” Drooping his head, he waited in indescribable agitation for the next question.

“She asked you to explain the pistol to her; what do you mean by that?”

“I mean,” he faintly continued, catching his breath in a vain effort to appear calm, “how to load, aim, and fire it.”

A flash of awakened feeling shot across the faces of all present. Even the coroner showed sudden signs of emotion, and sat staring at the bowed form and pale countenance of the man before him, with a peculiar look of surprised compassion, which could not fail of producing its effect, not only upon the young man himself, but upon all who saw him.

“Mr. Harwell,” he at length inquired, “have you anything to add to the statement you have just made?”

The secretary sadly shook his head.

“Mr. Gryce,” I here whispered, clutching that person by the arm and dragging him down to my side; “assure me, I entreat you—” but he would not let me finish.

“The coroner is about to ask for the young ladies,” he quickly interposed. “If you desire to fulfil your duty towards them, be ready, that’s all.”

Fulfil my duty! The simple words recalled me to myself. What had I been thinking of; was I mad? With nothing more terrible in mind than a tender picture of the lovely cousins bowed in anguish over the remains of one who had been as dear as a father to them, I slowly rose, and upon demand being made for Miss Mary and Miss Eleanore Leavenworth, advanced and said that, as a friend of the family—a petty lie, which I hope will not be laid up against me—I begged the privilege of going for the ladies and escorting them down.

Instantly a dozen eyes flashed upon me, and I experienced the embarrassment of one who, by some unexpected word or action, has drawn upon himself the concentrated attention of a whole room.

But the permission sought being almost immediately accorded, I was speedily enabled to withdraw from my rather trying position, finding myself, almost before I knew it, in the hall, my face aflame, my heart beating with excitement, and these words of Mr. Gryce ringing in my ears: “Third floor, rear room, first door at the head of the stairs. You will find the young ladies expecting you.”

VI. SIDE-LIGHTS

*"Oh! she has beauty might ensnare
A conqueror's soul, and make him leave his crown
At random, to be scuffled for by slaves."*

OTWAY.

THIRD floor, rear room, first door at the head of the stairs! What was I about to encounter there?

Mounting the lower flight, and shuddering by the library wall, which to my troubled fancy seemed written all over with horrible suggestions, I took my way slowly up-stairs, revolving in my mind many things, among which an admonition uttered long ago by my mother occupied a prominent place.

"My son, remember that a woman with a secret may be a fascinating study, but she can never be a safe, nor even satisfactory, companion."

A wise saw, no doubt, but totally inapplicable to the present situation; yet it continued to haunt me till the sight of the door to which I had been directed put every other thought to flight save that I was about to meet the stricken nieces of a brutally murdered man.

Pausing only long enough on the threshold to compose myself for the interview, I lifted my hand to knock, when a rich, clear voice rose from within, and I heard distinctly uttered these astounding words: "I do not accuse your hand, though I know of none other which would or could have done this deed; but your heart, your head, your will, these I do and must accuse, in my secret mind at least; and it is well that you should know it!"

Struck with horror, I staggered back, my hands to my ears, when a touch fell on my arm, and turning, I saw Mr. Gryce standing close beside me, with his finger on his lip, and the last flickering shadow of a flying emotion fading from his steady, almost compassionate countenance.

"Come, come," he exclaimed; "I see you don't begin to know what kind of a world you are living in. Rouse yourself; remember they are waiting down below."

"But who is it? Who was it that spoke?"

"That we shall soon see." And without waiting to meet, much less answer, my appealing look, he struck his hand against the door, and flung it wide open.

Instantly a flush of lovely color burst upon us. Blue curtains, blue carpets, blue walls. It was like a glimpse of heavenly azure in a spot where only darkness and gloom were to be expected. Fascinated by the sight, I stepped impetuously forward, but instantly paused again, overcome and impressed by the exquisite picture I saw before me.

Seated in an easy chair of embroidered satin, but rousing from her half-recumbent position, like one who was in the act of launching a powerful invective, I beheld a glorious woman. Fair, frail, proud, delicate; looking like a lily in the thick creamy-tinted wrapper that alternately clung to and swayed from her finely moulded figure; with her forehead, crowned with the palest of pale tresses, lifted and flashing with power; one quivering hand clasping the arm of her chair, the other outstretched and pointing toward some distant object in the room,—her whole appearance was so startling, so extraordinary, that I held my breath in surprise, actually for the moment doubting if it were a living woman I beheld, or some famous pythoness conjured up from ancient story, to express in one tremendous gesture the supreme indignation of outraged womanhood.

"Miss Mary Leavenworth," whispered that ever present voice over my shoulder.

Ah! Mary Leavenworth! What a relief came with this name. This beautiful creature, then, was not the Eleanore who could load, aim, and fire a pistol. Turning my head, I followed the guiding

of that uplifted hand, now frozen into its place by a new emotion: the emotion of being interrupted in the midst of a direful and pregnant revelation, and saw—but, no, here description fails me! Eleanore Leavenworth must be painted by other hands than mine. I could sit half the day and dilate upon the subtle grace, the pale magnificence, the perfection of form and feature which make Mary Leavenworth the wonder of all who behold her; but Eleanore—I could as soon paint the beatings of my own heart. Beguiling, terrible, grand, pathetic, that face of faces flashed upon my gaze, and instantly the moonlight loveliness of her cousin faded from my memory, and I saw only Eleanore—only Eleanore from that moment on forever.

When my glance first fell upon her, she was standing by the side of a small table, with her face turned toward her cousin, and her two hands resting, the one upon her breast, the other on the table, in an attitude of antagonism. But before the sudden pang which shot through me at the sight of her beauty had subsided, her head had turned, her gaze had encountered mine; all the horror of the situation had burst upon her, and, instead of a haughty woman, drawn up to receive and trample upon the insinuations of another, I beheld, alas! a trembling, panting human creature, conscious that a sword hung above her head, and without a word to say why it should not fall and slay her.

It was a pitiable change; a heart-rending revelation! I turned from it as from a confession. But just then, her cousin, who had apparently regained her self-possession at the first betrayal of emotion on the part of the other, stepped forward and, holding out her hand, inquired:

“Is not this Mr. Raymond? How kind of you, sir. And you?” turning to Mr. Gryce; “you have come to tell us we are wanted below, is it not so?”

It was the voice I had heard through the door, but modulated to a sweet, winning, almost caressing tone.

Glancing hastily at Mr. Gryce, I looked to see how he was affected by it. Evidently much, for the bow with which he greeted her words was lower than ordinary, and the smile with which he met her earnest look both deprecatory and reassuring. His glance did not embrace her cousin, though her eyes were fixed upon his face with an inquiry in their depths more agonizing than the utterance of any cry would have been. Knowing Mr. Gryce as I did, I felt that nothing could promise worse, or be more significant, than this transparent disregard of one who seemed to fill the room with her terror. And, struck with pity, I forgot that Mary Leavenworth had spoken, forgot her very presence in fact, and, turning hastily away, took one step toward her cousin, when Mr. Gryce’s hand falling on my arm stopped me.

“Miss Leavenworth speaks,” said he.

Recalled to myself, I turned my back upon what had so interested me even while it repelled, and forcing myself to make some sort of reply to the fair creature before me, offered my arm and led her toward the door.

Immediately the pale, proud countenance of Mary Leavenworth softened almost to the point of smiling;—and here let me say, there never was a woman who could smile and not smile like Mary Leavenworth. Looking in my face, with a frank and sweet appeal in her eyes, she murmured:

“You are very good. I do feel the need of support; the occasion is so horrible, and my cousin there,”—here a little gleam of alarm nickered into her eyes—“is so very strange to-day.”

“Humph!” thought I to myself; “where is the grand indignant pythoness, with the unspeakable wrath and menace in her countenance, whom I saw when I first entered the room?” Could it be that she was trying to beguile us from our conjectures, by making light of her former expressions? Or was it possible she deceived herself so far as to believe us unimpressed by the weighty accusation overheard by us at a moment so critical?

But Eleanore Leavenworth, leaning on the arm of the detective, soon absorbed all my attention. She had regained by this time her self-possession, also, but not so entirely as her cousin. Her step faltered as she endeavored to walk, and the hand which rested on his arm trembled like a leaf. “Would to God I had never entered this house,” said I to myself. And yet, before the exclamation was half

uttered, I became conscious of a secret rebellion against the thought; an emotion, shall I say, of thankfulness that it had been myself rather than another who had been allowed to break in upon their privacy, overhear that significant remark, and, shall I acknowledge it, follow Mr. Gryce and the trembling, swaying figure of Eleanore Leavenworth down-stairs. Not that I felt the least relenting in my soul towards guilt. Crime had never looked so black; revenge, selfishness, hatred, cupidity, never seemed more loathsome; and yet—but why enter into the consideration of my feelings at that time. They cannot be of interest; besides, who can fathom the depths of his own soul, or untangle for others the secret cords of revulsion and attraction which are, and ever have been, a mystery and wonder to himself? Enough that, supporting upon my arm the half-fainting form of one woman, but with my attention, and interest devoted to another, I descended the stairs of the Leavenworth mansion, and re-entered the dreaded presence of those inquisitors of the law who had been so impatiently awaiting us.

As I once more crossed that threshold, and faced the eager countenances of those I had left so short a time before, I felt as if ages had elapsed in the interval; so much can be experienced by the human soul in the short space of a few over-weighted moments.

VII. MARY LEAVENWORTH

“For this relief much thanks.”

Hamlet.

HAVE you ever observed the effect of the sunlight bursting suddenly upon the earth from behind a mass of heavily surcharged clouds? If so, you can have some idea of the sensation produced in that room by the entrance of these two beautiful ladies. Possessed of a loveliness which would have been conspicuous in all places and under all circumstances, Mary, at least, if not her less striking, though by no means less interesting cousin, could never have entered any assemblage without drawing to herself the wondering attention of all present. But, heralded as here, by the most fearful of tragedies, what could you expect from a collection of men such as I have already described, but overmastering wonder and incredulous admiration? Nothing, perhaps, and yet at the first murmuring sound of amazement and satisfaction, I felt my soul recoil in disgust.

Making haste to seat my now trembling companion in the most retired spot I could find, I looked around for her cousin. But Eleanore Leavenworth, weak as she had appeared in the interview above, showed at this moment neither hesitation nor embarrassment. Advancing upon the arm of the detective, whose suddenly assumed air of persuasion in the presence of the jury was anything but reassuring, she stood for an instant gazing calmly upon the scene before her. Then bowing to the coroner with a grace and condescension which seemed at once to place him on the footing of a politely endured intruder in this home of elegance, she took the seat which her own servants hastened to procure for her, with an ease and dignity that rather recalled the triumphs of the drawing-room than the self-consciousness of a scene such as that in which we found ourselves. Palpable acting, though this was, it was not without its effect. Instantly the murmurs ceased, the obtrusive glances fell, and something like a forced respect made itself visible upon the countenances of all present. Even I, impressed as I had been by her very different demeanor in the room above, experienced a sensation of relief; and was more than startled when, upon turning to the lady at my side, I beheld her eyes riveted upon her cousin with an inquiry in their depths that was anything but encouraging. Fearful of the effect this look might have upon those about us, I hastily seized her hand which, clenched and unconscious, hung over the edge of her chair, and was about to beseech her to have care, when her name, called in a slow, impressive way by the coroner, roused her from her abstraction. Hurriedly withdrawing her gaze from her cousin, she lifted her face to the jury, and I saw a gleam pass over it which brought back my early fancy of the pythoness. But it passed, and it was with an expression of great modesty she settled herself to respond to the demand of the coroner and answer the first few opening inquiries.

But what can express the anxiety of that moment to me? Gentle as she now appeared, she was capable of great wrath, as I knew. Was she going to reiterate her suspicions here? Did she hate as well as mistrust her cousin? Would she dare assert in this presence, and before the world, what she found it so easy to utter in the privacy of her own room and the hearing of the one person concerned? Did she wish to? Her own countenance gave me no clue to her intentions, and, in my anxiety, I turned once more to look at Eleanore. But she, in a dread and apprehension I could easily understand, had recoiled at the first intimation that her cousin was to speak, and now sat with her face covered from sight, by hands blanched to an almost deathly whiteness.

The testimony of Mary Leavenworth was short. After some few questions, mostly referring to her position in the house and her connection with its deceased master, she was asked to relate what she knew of the murder itself, and of its discovery by her cousin and the servants.

Lifting up a brow that seemed never to have known till now the shadow of care or trouble, and a voice that, whilst low and womanly, rang like a bell through the room, she replied:

“You ask me, gentlemen, a question which I cannot answer of my own personal knowledge. I know nothing of this murder, nor of its discovery, save what has come to me through the lips of others.”

My heart gave a bound of relief, and I saw Eleanore Leavenworth’s hands drop from her brow like stone, while a flickering gleam as of hope fled over her face, and then died away like sunlight leaving marble.

“For, strange as it may seem to you,” Mary earnestly continued, the shadow of a past horror revisiting her countenance, “I did not enter the room where my uncle lay. I did not even think of doing so; my only impulse was to fly from what was so horrible and heartrending. But Eleanore went in, and she can tell you—”

“We will question Miss Eleanore Leavenworth later,” interrupted the coroner, but very gently for him. Evidently the grace and elegance of this beautiful woman were making their impression. “What we want to know is what *you* saw. You say you cannot tell us of anything that passed in the room at the time of the discovery?”

“No, sir.”

“Only what occurred in the hall?”

“Nothing occurred in the hall,” she innocently remarked.

“Did not the servants pass in from the hall, and your cousin come out there after her revival from her fainting fit?”

Mary Leavenworth’s violet eyes opened wonderingly.

“Yes, sir; but that was nothing.”

“You remember, however, her coming into the hall?”

“Yes, sir.”

“With a paper in her hand?”

“Paper?” and she wheeled suddenly and looked at her cousin. “Did you have a paper, Eleanore?”

The moment was intense. Eleanore Leavenworth, who at the first mention of the word paper had started perceptibly, rose to her feet at this naive appeal, and opening her lips, seemed about to speak, when the coroner, with a strict sense of what was regular, lifted his hand with decision, and said:

“You need not ask your cousin, Miss; but let us hear what you have to say yourself.”

Immediately, Eleanore Leavenworth sank back, a pink spot breaking out on either cheek; while a slight murmur testified to the disappointment of those in the room, who were more anxious to have their curiosity gratified than the forms of law adhered to.

Satisfied with having done his duty, and disposed to be easy with so charming a witness, the coroner repeated his question. “Tell us, if you please, if you saw any such thing in her hand?”

“I? Oh, no, no; I saw nothing.”

Being now questioned in relation to the events of the previous night, she had no new light to throw upon the subject. She acknowledged her uncle to have been a little reserved at dinner, but no more so than at previous times when annoyed by some business anxiety.

Asked if she had seen her uncle again that evening, she said no, that she had been detained in her room. That the sight of him, sitting in his seat at the head of the table, was the very last remembrance she had of him.

There was something so touching, so forlorn, and yet so unobtrusive, in this simple recollection of hers, that a look of sympathy passed slowly around the room.

I even detected Mr. Gryce softening towards the inkstand. But Eleanore Leavenworth sat unmoved.

“Was your uncle on ill terms with any one?” was now asked. “Had he valuable papers or secret sums of money in his possession?”

To all these inquiries she returned an equal negative.

“Has your uncle met any stranger lately, or received any important letter during the last few weeks, which might seem in any way to throw light upon this mystery?”

There was the slightest perceptible hesitation in her voice, as she replied: “No, not to my knowledge; I don’t know of any such.” But here, stealing a side glance at Eleanore, she evidently saw something that reassured her, for she hastened to add:

“I believe I may go further than that, and meet your question with a positive no. My uncle was in the habit of confiding in me, and I should have known if anything of importance to him had occurred.”

Questioned in regard to Hannah, she gave that person the best of characters; knew of nothing which could have led either to her strange disappearance, or to her connection with crime. Could not say whether she kept any company, or had any visitors; only knew that no one with any such pretensions came to the house. Finally, when asked when she had last seen the pistol which Mr. Leavenworth always kept in his stand drawer, she returned, not since the day he bought it; Eleanore, and not herself, having the charge of her uncle’s apartments.

It was the only thing she had said which, even to a mind freighted like mine, would seem to point to any private doubt or secret suspicion; and this, uttered in the careless manner in which it was, would have passed without comment if Eleanore herself had not directed at that moment a very much aroused and inquiring look upon the speaker.

But it was time for the inquisitive juror to make himself heard again. Edging to the brink of the chair, he drew in his breath, with a vague awe of Mary’s beauty, almost ludicrous to see, and asked if she had properly considered what she had just said.

“I hope, sir, I consider all I am called upon to say at such a time as this,” was her earnest reply.

The little juror drew back, and I looked to see her examination terminate, when suddenly his ponderous colleague of the watch-chain, catching the young lady’s eye, inquired:

“Miss Leavenworth, did your uncle ever make a will?”

Instantly every man in the room was in arms, and even she could not prevent the slow blush of injured pride from springing to her cheek. But her answer was given firmly, and without any show of resentment.

“Yes, sir,” she returned simply.

“More than one?”

“I never heard of but one.”

“Are you acquainted with the contents of that will?”

“I am. He made no secret of his intentions to any one.”

The juryman lifted his eye-glass and looked at her. Her grace was little to him, or her beauty or her elegance. “Perhaps, then, you can tell me who is the one most likely to be benefited by his death?”

The brutality of this question was too marked to pass unchallenged. Not a man in that room, myself included, but frowned with sudden disapprobation. But Mary Leavenworth, drawing herself up, looked her interlocutor calmly in the face, and restrained herself to say:

“I know who would be the greatest losers by it. The children he took to his bosom in their helplessness and sorrow; the young girls he enshrined with the halo of his love and protection, when love and protection were what their immaturity most demanded; the women who looked to him for guidance when childhood and youth were passed—these, sir, these are the ones to whom his death is a loss, in comparison to which all others which may hereafter befall them must ever seem trivial and unimportant.”

It was a noble reply to the basest of insinuations, and the juryman drew back rebuked; but here another of them, one who had not spoken before, but whose appearance was not only superior to the rest, but also almost imposing in its gravity, leaned from his seat and in a solemn voice said:

“Miss Leavenworth, the human mind cannot help forming impressions. Now have you, with or without reason, felt at any time conscious of a suspicion pointing towards any one person as the murderer of your uncle?”

It was a frightful moment. To me and to one other, I am sure it was not only frightful, but agonizing. Would her courage fail? would her determination to shield her cousin remain firm in the face of duty and at the call of probity? I dared not hope it.

But Mary Leavenworth, rising to her feet, looked judge and jury calmly in the face, and, without raising her voice, giving it an indescribably clear and sharp intonation, replied:

“No; I have neither suspicion nor reason for any. The assassin of my uncle is not only entirely unknown to, but completely unsuspected by, me.”

It was like the removal of a stifling pressure. Amid a universal outgoing of the breath, Mary Leavenworth stood aside and Eleanore was called in her place.

VIII. CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

“O dark, dark, dark!”

AND now that the interest was at its height, that the veil which shrouded this horrible tragedy seemed about to be lifted, if not entirely withdrawn, I felt a desire to fly the scene, to leave the spot, to know no more. Not that I was conscious of any particular fear of this woman betraying herself. The cold steadiness of her now fixed and impassive countenance was sufficient warranty in itself against the possibility of any such catastrophe. But if, indeed, the suspicions of her cousin were the offspring, not only of hatred, but of knowledge; if that face of beauty was in truth only a mask, and Eleanore Leavenworth was what the words of her cousin, and her own after behavior would seem to imply, how could I bear to sit there and see the frightful serpent of deceit and sin evolve itself from the bosom of this white rose! And yet, such is the fascination of uncertainty that, although I saw something of my own feelings reflected in the countenances of many about me, not a man in all that assemblage showed any disposition to depart, I least of all.

The coroner, upon whom the blonde loveliness of Mary had impressed itself to Eleanor's apparent detriment, was the only one in the room who showed himself unaffected at this moment. Turning toward the witness with a look which, while respectful, had a touch of austerity in it, he began:

“You have been an intimate of Mr. Leavenworth's family from childhood, they tell me, Miss Leavenworth?”

“From my tenth year,” was her quiet reply.

It was the first time I had heard her voice, and it surprised me; it was so like, and yet so unlike, that of her cousin. Similar in tone, it lacked its expressiveness, if I may so speak; sounding without vibration on the ear, and ceasing without an echo.

“Since that time you have been treated like a daughter, they tell me?”

“Yes, sir, like a daughter, indeed; he was more than a father to both of us.”

“You and Miss Mary Leavenworth are cousins, I believe. When did she enter the family?”

“At the same time I did. Our respective parents were victims of the same disaster. If it had not been for our uncle, we should have been thrown, children as we were, upon the world. But he”—here she paused, her firm lips breaking into a half tremble—“but he, in the goodness of his heart, adopted us into his family, and gave us what we had both lost, a father and a home.”

“You say he was a father to you as well as to your cousin—that he adopted you. Do you mean by that, that he not only surrounded you with present luxury, but gave you to understand that the same should be secured to you after his death; in short, that he intended to leave any portion of his property to you?”

“No, sir; I was given to understand, from the first, that his property would be bequeathed by will to my cousin.”

“Your cousin was no more nearly related to him than yourself, Miss Leavenworth; did he never give you any reason for this evident partiality?”

“None but his pleasure, sir.”

Her answers up to this point had been so straightforward and satisfactory that a gradual confidence seemed to be taking the place of the rather uneasy doubts which had from the first circled about this woman's name and person. But at this admission, uttered as it was in a calm, unimpassioned voice, not only the jury, but myself, who had so much truer reason for distrusting her, felt that actual suspicion in her case must be very much shaken before the utter lack of motive which this reply so clearly betokened.

Meanwhile the coroner continued: "If your uncle was as kind to you as you say, you must have become very much attached to him?"

"Yes, sir," her mouth taking a sudden determined curve.

"His death, then, must have been a great shock to you?"

"Very, very great."

"Enough of itself to make you faint away, as they tell me you did, at the first glimpse you had of his body?"

"Enough, quite."

"And yet you seemed to be prepared for it?"

"Prepared?"

"The servants say you were much agitated at finding your uncle did not make his appearance at the breakfast table."

"The servants!" her tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of her mouth; she could hardly speak.

"That when you returned from his room you were very pale."

Was she beginning to realize that there was some doubt, if not actual suspicion, in the mind of the man who could assail her with questions like these? I had not seen her so agitated since that one memorable instant up in her room. But her mistrust, if she felt any, did not long betray itself. Calming herself by a great effort, she replied, with a quiet gesture—

"That is not so strange. My uncle was a very methodical man; the least change in his habits would be likely to awaken our apprehensions."

"You were alarmed, then?"

"To a certain extent I was."

"Miss Leavenworth, who is in the habit of overseeing the regulation of your uncle's private apartments?"

"I am, sir."

"You are doubtless, then, acquainted with a certain stand in his room containing a drawer?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long is it since you had occasion to go to this drawer?"

"Yesterday," visibly trembling at the admission.

"At what time?"

"Near noon, I should judge."

"Was the pistol he was accustomed to keep there in its place at the time?"

"I presume so; I did not observe."

"Did you turn the key upon closing the drawer?"

"I did."

"Take it out?"

"No, sir."

"Miss Leavenworth, that pistol, as you have perhaps observed, lies on the table before you. Will you look at it?" And lifting it up into view, he held it towards her.

If he had meant to startle her by the sudden action, he amply succeeded. At the first sight of the murderous weapon she shrank back, and a horrified, but quickly suppressed shriek, burst from her lips. "Oh, no, no!" she moaned, flinging out her hands before her.

"I must insist upon your looking at it, Miss Leavenworth," pursued the coroner. "When it was found just now, all the chambers were loaded."

Instantly the agonized look left her countenance. "Oh, then—" She did not finish, but put out her hand for the weapon.

But the coroner, looking at her steadily, continued: "It has been lately fired off, for all that. The hand that cleaned the barrel forgot the cartridge-chamber, Miss Leavenworth."

She did not shriek again, but a hopeless, helpless look slowly settled over her face, and she seemed about to sink; but like a flash the reaction came, and lifting her head with a steady, grand action I have never seen equalled, she exclaimed, "Very well, what then?"

The coroner laid the pistol down; men and women glanced at each other; every one seemed to hesitate to proceed. I heard a tremulous sigh at my side, and, turning, beheld Mary Leavenworth staring at her cousin with a startled flush on her cheek, as if she began to recognize that the public, as well as herself, detected something in this woman, calling for explanation.

At last the coroner summoned up courage to continue.

"You ask me, Miss Leavenworth, upon the evidence given, what then? Your question obliges me to say that no burglar, no hired assassin, would have used this pistol for a murderous purpose, and then taken the pains, not only to clean it, but to reload it, and lock it up again in the drawer from which he had taken it."

She did not reply to this; but I saw Mr. Gryce make a note of it with that peculiar emphatic nod of his.

"Nor," he went on, even more gravely, "would it be possible for any one who was not accustomed to pass in and out of Mr. Leavenworth's room at all hours, to enter his door so late at night, procure this pistol from its place of concealment, traverse his apartment, and advance as closely upon him as the facts show to have been necessary, without causing him at least to turn his head to one side; which, in consideration of the doctor's testimony, we cannot believe he did."

It was a frightful suggestion, and we looked to see Eleanore Leavenworth recoil. But that expression of outraged feeling was left for her cousin to exhibit. Starting indignantly from her seat, Mary cast one hurried glance around her, and opened her lips to speak; but Eleanore, slightly turning, motioned her to have patience, and replied in a cold and calculating voice: "You are not sure, sir, that this *was* done. If my uncle, for some purpose of his own, had fired the pistol off yesterday, let us say—which is surely possible, if not probable—the like results would be observed, and the same conclusions drawn."

"Miss Leavenworth," the coroner went on, "the ball has been extracted from your uncle's head!"

"Ah!"

"It corresponds with those in the cartridges found in his stand drawer, and is of the number used with this pistol."

Her head fell forward on her hands; her eyes sought the floor; her whole attitude expressed disheartenment. Seeing it, the coroner grew still more grave.

"Miss Leavenworth," said he, "I have now some questions to put you concerning last night. Where did you spend the evening?"

"Alone, in my own room."

"You, however, saw your uncle or your cousin during the course of it?"

"No, sir; I saw no one after leaving the dinner table—except Thomas," she added, after a moment's pause.

"And how came you to see him?"

"He came to bring me the card of a gentleman who called."

"May I ask the name of the gentleman?"

"The name on the card was Mr. Le Roy Robbins."

The matter seemed trivial; but the sudden start given by the lady at my side made me remember it.

"Miss Leavenworth, when seated in your room, are you in the habit of leaving your door open?"

A startled look at this, quickly suppressed. "Not in the habit; no, sir."

"Why did you leave it open last night?"

"I was feeling warm."

"No other reason?"

"I can give no other."

"When did you close it?"

"Upon retiring."

"Was that before or after the servants went up?"

"After."

"Did you hear Mr. Harwell when he left the library and ascended to his room?"

"I did, sir."

"How much longer did you leave your door open after that?"

"I—I—a few minutes—a—I cannot say," she added, hurriedly.

"Cannot say? Why? Do you forget?"

"I forget just how long after Mr. Harwell came up I closed it."

"Was it more than ten minutes?"

"Yes."

"More than twenty?"

"Perhaps." How pale her face was, and how she trembled!

"Miss Leavenworth, according to evidence, your uncle came to his death not very long after Mr. Harwell left him. If your door was open, you ought to have heard if any one went to his room, or any pistol shot was fired. Now, did you hear anything?"

"I heard no confusion; no, sir."

"Did you hear anything?"

"Nor any pistol shot."

"Miss Leavenworth, excuse my persistence, but did you hear anything?"

"I heard a door close."

"What door?"

"The library door."

"When?"

"I do not know." She clasped her hands hysterically. "I cannot say. Why do you ask me so many questions?"

I leaped to my feet; she was swaying, almost fainting. But before I could reach her, she had drawn herself up again, and resumed her former demeanor. "Excuse me," said she; "I am not myself this morning. I beg your pardon," and she turned steadily to the coroner. "What was it you asked?"

"I asked," and his voice grew thin and high,—evidently her manner was beginning to tell against her,—"when it was you heard the library door shut?"

"I cannot fix the precise time, but it was after Mr. Harwell came up, and before I closed my own."

"And you heard no pistol shot?"

"No, sir."

The coroner cast a quick look at the jury, who almost to a man glanced aside as he did so.

"Miss Leavenworth, we are told that Hannah, one of the servants, started for your room late last night after some medicine. Did she come there?"

"No, sir."

"When did you first learn of her remarkable disappearance from this house during the night?"

"This morning before breakfast. Molly met me in the hall, and asked how Hannah was. I thought the inquiry a strange one, and naturally questioned her. A moment's talk made the conclusion plain that the girl was gone."

"What did you think when you became assured of this fact?"

"I did not know what to think."

"No suspicion of foul play crossed your mind?"

"No, sir."

“You did not connect the fact with that of your uncle’s murder?”

“I did not know of this murder then.”

“And afterwards?”

“Oh, some thought of the possibility of her knowing something about it may have crossed my mind; I cannot say.”

“Can you tell us anything of this girl’s past history?”

“I can tell you no more in regard to it than my cousin has done.”

“Do you not know what made her sad at night?”

Her cheek flushed angrily; was it at his tone, or at the question itself? “No, sir! she never confided her secrets to my keeping.”

“Then you cannot tell us where she would be likely to go upon leaving this house?”

“Certainly not.”

“Miss Leavenworth, we are obliged to put another question to you. We are told it was by your order your uncle’s body was removed from where it was found, into the next room.”

She bowed her head.

“Didn’t you know it to be improper for you or any one else to disturb the body of a person found dead, except in the presence and under the authority of the proper officer?”

“I did not consult my knowledge, sir, in regard to the subject: only my feelings.”

“Then I suppose it was your feelings which prompted you to remain standing by the table at which he was murdered, instead of following the body in and seeing it properly deposited? Or perhaps,” he went on, with relentless sarcasm, “you were too much interested, just then, in the piece of paper you took away, to think much of the proprieties of the occasion?”

“Paper?” lifting her head with determination. “Who says I took a piece of paper from the table?”

“One witness has sworn to seeing you bend over the table upon which several papers lay strewn; another, to meeting you a few minutes later in the hall just as you were putting a piece of paper into your pocket. The inference follows, Miss Leavenworth.”

This was a home thrust, and we looked to see some show of agitation, but her haughty lip never quivered.

“You have drawn the inference, and you must prove the fact.”

The answer was stateliness itself, and we were not surprised to see the coroner look a trifle baffled; but, recovering himself, he said:

“Miss Leavenworth, I must ask you again, whether you did or did not take anything from that table?”

She folded her arms. “I decline answering the question,” she quietly said.

“Pardon me,” he rejoined: “it is necessary that you should.”

Her lip took a still more determined curve. “When any suspicious paper is found in my possession, it will be time enough then for me to explain how I came by it.”

This defiance seemed to quite stagger the coroner.

“Do you realize to what this refusal is liable to subject you?”

She dropped her head. “I am afraid that I do; yes, sir.”

Mr. Gryce lifted his hand, and softly twirled the tassel of the window curtain.

“And you still persist?”

She absolutely disdained to reply.

The coroner did not press it further.

It had now become evident to all, that Eleanore Leavenworth not only stood on her defence, but was perfectly aware of her position, and prepared to maintain it. Even her cousin, who until now had preserved some sort of composure, began to show signs of strong and uncontrollable agitation, as if she found it one thing to utter an accusation herself, and quite another to see it mirrored in the countenances of the men about her.

“Miss Leavenworth,” the coroner continued, changing the line of attack, “you have always had free access to your uncle’s apartments, have you not?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Might even have entered his room late at night, crossed it and stood at his side, without disturbing him sufficiently to cause him to turn his head?”

“Yes,” her hands pressing themselves painfully together.

“Miss Leavenworth, the key to the library door is missing.”

She made no answer.

“It has been testified to, that previous to the actual discovery of the murder, you visited the door of the library alone. Will you tell us if the key was then in the lock?”

“It was not.”

“Are you certain?”

“I am.”

“Now, was there anything peculiar about this key, either in size or shape?”

She strove to repress the sudden terror which this question produced, glanced carelessly around at the group of servants stationed at her back, and trembled. “It was a little different from the others,” she finally acknowledged.

“In what respect?”

“The handle was broken.”

“Ah, gentlemen, the handle was broken!” emphasized the coroner, looking towards the jury.

Mr. Gryce seemed to take this information to himself, for he gave another of his quick nods.

“You would, then, recognize this key, Miss Leavenworth, if you should see it?”

She cast a startled look at him, as if she expected to behold it in his hand; but, seeming to gather courage at not finding it produced, replied quite easily:

“I think I should, sir.”

The coroner seemed satisfied, and was about to dismiss the witness when Mr. Gryce quietly advanced and touched him on the arm. “One moment,” said that gentleman, and stooping, he whispered a few words in the coroner’s ear; then, recovering himself, stood with his right hand in his breast pocket and his eye upon the chandelier.

I scarcely dared to breathe. Had he repeated to the coroner the words he had inadvertently overheard in the hall above? But a glance at the latter’s face satisfied me that nothing of such importance had transpired. He looked not only tired, but a trifle annoyed.

“Miss Leavenworth,” said he, turning again in her direction; “you have declared that you did not visit your uncle’s room last evening. Do you repeat the assertion?”

“I do.”

He glanced at Mr. Gryce, who immediately drew from his breast a handkerchief curiously soiled. “It is strange, then, that your handkerchief should have been found this morning in that room.”

The girl uttered a cry. Then, while Mary’s face hardened into a sort of strong despair, Eleanore tightened her lips and coldly replied, “I do not see as it is so very strange. I was in that room early this morning.”

“And you dropped it then?”

A distressed blush crossed her face; she did not reply.

“Soiled in this way?” he went on.

“I know nothing about the soil. What is it? let me see.”

“In a moment. What we now wish, is to know how it came to be in your uncle’s apartment.”

“There are many ways. I might have left it there days ago. I have told you I was in the habit of visiting his room. But first, let me see if it is my handkerchief.” And she held out her hand.

“I presume so, as I am told it has your initials embroidered in the corner,” he remarked, as Mr. Gryce passed it to her.

But she with horrified voice interrupted him. "These dirty spots! What are they? They look like—"

"—what they are," said the coroner. "If you have ever cleaned a pistol, you must know what they are, Miss Leavenworth."

She let the handkerchief fall convulsively from her hand, and stood staring at it, lying before her on the floor. "I know nothing about it, gentlemen," she said. "It is my handkerchief, but—" for some cause she did not finish her sentence, but again repeated, "Indeed, gentlemen, I know nothing about it!"

This closed her testimony.

Kate, the cook, was now recalled, and asked to tell when she last washed the handkerchief?

"This, sir; this handkerchief? Oh, some time this week, sir," throwing a deprecatory glance at her mistress.

"What day?"

"Well, I wish I could forget, Miss Eleanore, but I can't. It is the only one like it in the house. I washed it day before yesterday."

"When did you iron it?"

"Yesterday morning," half choking over the words.

"And when did you take it to her room?"

The cook threw her apron over her head. "Yesterday afternoon, with the rest of the clothes, just before dinner. Indade, I could not help it, Miss Eleanore!" she whispered; "it was the truth."

Eleanore Leavenworth frowned. This somewhat contradictory evidence had very sensibly affected her; and when, a moment later, the coroner, having dismissed the witness, turned towards her, and inquired if she had anything further to say in the way of explanation or otherwise, she threw her hands up almost spasmodically, slowly shook her head and, without word or warning, fainted quietly away in her chair.

A commotion, of course, followed, during which I noticed that Mary did not hasten to her cousin, but left it for Molly and Kate to do what they could toward her resuscitation. In a few moments this was in so far accomplished that they were enabled to lead her from the room. As they did so, I observed a tall man rise and follow her out.

A momentary silence ensued, soon broken, however, by an impatient stir as our little juryman rose and proposed that the jury should now adjourn for the day. This seeming to fall in with the coroner's views, he announced that the inquest would stand adjourned till three o'clock the next day, when he trusted all the jurors would be present.

A general rush followed, that in a few minutes emptied the room of all but Miss Leavenworth, Mr. Gryce, and myself.

IX. A DISCOVERY

*"His rolling Eies did never rest in place,
But walkte each where for feare of hid mischance,
Holding a lattis still before his Pace,
Through which he still did peep as forward he did pace."*

Faerie Queene.

MISS LEAVENWORTH, who appeared to have lingered from a vague terror of everything and everybody in the house not under her immediate observation, shrank from my side the moment she found herself left comparatively alone, and, retiring to a distant corner, gave herself up to grief. Turning my attention, therefore, in the direction of Mr. Gryce, I found that person busily engaged in counting his own fingers with a troubled expression upon his countenance, which may or may not have been the result of that arduous employment. But, at my approach, satisfied perhaps that he possessed no more than the requisite number, he dropped his hands and greeted me with a faint smile which was, considering all things, too suggestive to be pleasant.

"Well," said I, taking my stand before him, "I cannot blame you. You had a right to do as you thought best; but how had you the heart? Was she not sufficiently compromised without your bringing out that wretched handkerchief, which she may or may not have dropped in that room, but whose presence there, soiled though it was with pistol grease, is certainly no proof that she herself was connected with this murder?"

"Mr. Raymond," he returned, "I have been detailed as police officer and detective to look after this case, and I propose to do it."

"Of course," I hastened to reply. "I am the last man to wish you to shirk your duty; but you cannot have the temerity to declare that this young and tender creature can by any possibility be considered as at all likely to be implicated in a crime so monstrous and unnatural. The mere assertion of another woman's suspicions on the subject ought not—"

But here Mr. Gryce interrupted me. "You talk when your attention should be directed to more important matters. That other woman, as you are pleased to designate the fairest ornament of New York society, sits over there in tears; go and comfort her."

Looking at him in amazement, I hesitated to comply; but, seeing he was in earnest, crossed to Mary Leavenworth and sat down by her side. She was weeping, but in a slow, unconscious way, as if grief had been mastered by fear. The fear was too undisguised and the grief too natural for me to doubt the genuineness of either.

"Miss Leavenworth," said I, "any attempt at consolation on the part of a stranger must seem at a time like this the most bitter of mockeries; but do try and consider that circumstantial evidence is not always absolute proof."

Starting with surprise, she turned her eyes upon me with a slow, comprehensive gaze wonderful to see in orbs so tender and womanly.

"No," she repeated; "circumstantial evidence is not absolute proof, but Eleanore does not know this. She is so intense; she cannot see but one thing at a time. She has been running her head into a noose, and oh,——" Pausing, she clutched my arm with a passionate grasp: "Do you think there is any danger? Will they—" She could not go on.

"Miss Leavenworth," I protested, with a warning look toward the detective, "what do you mean?"

Like a flash, her glance followed mine, an instant change taking place in her bearing.

“Your cousin may be intense,” I went on, as if nothing had occurred; “but I do not know to what you refer when you say she has been running her head into a noose.”

“I mean this,” she firmly returned: “that, wittingly or unwittingly, she has so parried and met the questions which have been put to her in this room that any one listening to her would give her the credit of knowing more than she ought to of this horrible affair. She acts”—Mary whispered, but not so low but that every word could be distinctly heard in all quarters of the room—“as if she were anxious to conceal something. But she is not; I am sure she is not. Eleanore and I are not good friends; but all the world can never make me believe she has any more knowledge of this murder than I have. Won’t somebody tell her, then—won’t you—that her manner is a mistake; that it is calculated to arouse suspicion; that it has already done so? And oh, don’t forget to add”—her voice sinking to a decided whisper now—“what you have just repeated to me: that circumstantial evidence is not always absolute proof.”

I surveyed her with great astonishment. What an actress this woman was!

“You request me to tell her this,” said I. “Wouldn’t it be better for you to speak to her yourself?”

“Eleanore and I hold little or no confidential communication,” she replied.

I could easily believe this, and yet I was puzzled. Indeed, there was something incomprehensible in her whole manner. Not knowing what else to say, I remarked, “That is unfortunate. She ought to be told that the straightforward course is the best by all means.”

Mary Leavenworth only wept. “Oh, why has this awful trouble come to me, who have always been so happy before!”

“Perhaps for the very reason that you have always been so happy.”

“It was not enough for dear uncle to die in this horrible manner; but she, my own cousin, had to—”

I touched her arm, and the action seemed to recall her to herself. Stopping short, she bit her lip.

“Miss Leavenworth,” I whispered, “you should hope for the best. Besides, I honestly believe you to be disturbing yourself unnecessarily. If nothing fresh transpires, a mere prevarication or so of your cousin’s will not suffice to injure her.”

I said this to see if she had any reason to doubt the future. I was amply rewarded.

“Anything fresh? How could there be anything fresh, when she is perfectly innocent?”

Suddenly, a thought seemed to strike her. Wheeling round in her seat till her lovely, perfumed wrapper brushed my knee, she asked: “Why didn’t they ask me more questions? I could have told them Eleanore never left her room last night.”

“You could?” What was I to think of this woman?

“Yes; my room is nearer the head of the stairs than hers; if she had passed my door, I should have heard her, don’t you see?”

Ah, that was all.

“That does not follow,” I answered sadly. “Can you give no other reason?”

“I would say whatever was necessary,” she whispered.

I started back. Yes, this woman would lie now to save her cousin; had lied during the inquest. But then I felt grateful, and now I was simply horrified.

“Miss Leavenworth,” said I, “nothing can justify one in violating the dictates of his own conscience, not even the safety of one we do not altogether love.”

“No?” she returned; and her lip took a tremulous curve, the lovely bosom heaved, and she softly looked away.

If Eleanore’s beauty had made less of an impression on my fancy, or her frightful situation awakened less anxiety in my breast, I should have been a lost man from that moment.

“I did not mean to do anything very wrong,” Miss Leavenworth continued. “Do not think too badly of me.”

“No, no,” said I; and there is not a man living who would not have said the same in my place.

What more might have passed between us on this subject I cannot say, for just then the door opened and a man entered whom I recognized as the one who had followed Eleanore Leavenworth out, a short time before.

“Mr. Gryce,” said he, pausing just inside the door; “a word if you please.”

The detective nodded, but did not hasten towards him; instead of that, he walked deliberately away to the other end of the room, where he lifted the lid of an inkstand he saw there, muttered some unintelligible words into it, and speedily shut it again. Immediately the uncanny fancy seized me that if I should leap to that inkstand, open it and peer in, I should surprise and capture the bit of confidence he had intrusted to it. But I restrained my foolish impulse, and contented myself with noting the subdued look of respect with which the gaunt subordinate watched the approach of his superior.

“Well?” inquired the latter as he reached him: “what now?”

The man shrugged his shoulders, and drew his principal through the open door. Once in the hall their voices sank to a whisper, and as their backs only were visible, I turned to look at my companion. She was pale but composed.

“Has he come from Eleanore?”

“I do not know; I fear so. Miss Leavenworth,” I proceeded, “can it be possible that your cousin has anything in her possession she desires to conceal?”

“Then you think she is trying to conceal something?”

“I do not say so. But there was considerable talk about a paper—”

“They will never find any paper or anything else suspicious in Eleanore’s possession,” Mary interrupted. “In the first place, there was no paper of importance enough”—I saw Mr. Gryce’s form suddenly stiffen—“for any one to attempt its abstraction and concealment.”

“Can you be sure of that? May not your cousin be acquainted with something—”

“There was nothing to be acquainted with, Mr. Raymond. We lived the most methodical and domestic of lives. I cannot understand, for my part, why so much should be made out of this. My uncle undoubtedly came to his death by the hand of some intended burglar. That nothing was stolen from the house is no proof that a burglar never entered it. As for the doors and windows being locked, will you take the word of an Irish servant as infallible upon such an important point? I cannot. I believe the assassin to be one of a gang who make their living by breaking into houses, and if you cannot honestly agree with me, do try and consider such an explanation as possible; if not for the sake of the family credit, why then”—and she turned her face with all its fair beauty upon mine, eyes, cheeks, mouth all so exquisite and winsome—“why then, for mine.”

Instantly Mr. Gryce turned towards us. “Mr. Raymond, will you be kind enough to step this way?”

Glad to escape from my present position, I hastily obeyed.

“What has happened?” I asked.

“We propose to take you into our confidence,” was the easy response. “Mr. Raymond, Mr. Fobbs.”

I bowed to the man I saw before me, and stood uneasily waiting. Anxious as I was to know what we really had to fear, I still intuitively shrank from any communication with one whom I looked upon as a spy.

“A matter of some importance,” resumed the detective. “It is not necessary for me to remind you that it is in confidence, is it?”

“No.”

“I thought not. Mr. Fobbs you may proceed.”

Instantly the whole appearance of the man Fobbs changed. Assuming an expression of lofty importance, he laid his large hand outspread upon his heart and commenced.

“Detailed by Mr. Gryce to watch the movements of Miss Eleanore Leavenworth, I left this room upon her departure from it, and followed her and the two servants who conducted her up-stairs to her own apartment. Once there—”

Mr. Gryce interrupted him. “Once there? where?”

“Her own room, sir.”

“Where situated?”

“At the head of the stairs.”

“That is not her room. Go on.”

“Not her room? Then it *was* the fire she was after!” he cried, clapping himself on the knee.

“The fire?”

“Excuse me; I am ahead of my story. She did not appear to notice me much, though I was right behind her. It was not until she had reached the door of this room—which was not her room!” he interpolated dramatically, “and turned to dismiss her servants, that she seemed conscious of having been followed. Eying me then with an air of great dignity, quickly eclipsed, however, by an expression of patient endurance, she walked in, leaving the door open behind her in a courteous way I cannot sufficiently commend.”

I could not help frowning. Honest as the man appeared, this was evidently anything but a sore subject with him. Observing me frown, he softened his manner.

“Not seeing any other way of keeping her under my eye, except by entering the room, I followed her in, and took a seat in a remote corner. She flashed one look at me as I did so, and commenced pacing the floor in a restless kind of way I’m not altogether unused to. At last she stopped abruptly, right in the middle of the room. ‘Get me a glass of water!’ she gasped; ‘I’m faint again—quick! on the stand in the corner.’ Now in order to get that glass of water it was necessary for me to pass behind a dressing mirror that reached almost to the ceiling; and I naturally hesitated. But she turned and looked at me, and—Well, gentlemen, I think either of you would have hastened to do what she asked; or at least”—with a doubtful look at Mr. Gryce—“have given your two ears for the privilege, even if you didn’t succumb to the temptation.”

“Well, well!” exclaimed Mr. Gryce, impatiently.

“I am going on,” said he. “I stepped out of sight, then, for a moment; but it seemed long enough for her purpose; for when I emerged, glass in hand, she was kneeling at the grate full five feet from the spot where she had been standing, and was fumbling with the waist of her dress in a way to convince me she had something concealed there which she was anxious to dispose of. I eyed her pretty closely as I handed her the glass of water, but she was gazing into the grate, and didn’t appear to notice. Drinking barely a drop, she gave it back, and in another moment was holding out her hands over the fire. ‘Oh, I am so cold!’ she cried, ‘so cold.’ And I verily believe she was. At any rate, she shivered most naturally. But there were a few dying embers in the grate, and when I saw her thrust her hand again into the folds of her dress I became distrustful of her intentions and, drawing a step nearer, looked over her shoulder, when I distinctly saw her drop something into the grate that clinked as it fell. Suspecting what it was, I was about to interfere, when she sprang to her feet, seized the scuttle of coal that was upon the hearth, and with one move emptied the whole upon the dying embers. ‘I want a fire,’ she cried, ‘a fire!’ ‘That is hardly the way to make one,’ I returned, carefully taking the coal out with my hands, piece by piece, and putting it back into the scuttle, till—”

“Till what?” I asked, seeing him and Mr. Gryce exchange a hurried look.

“Till I found this!” opening his large hand, and showing me *a broken-handled key*.

X. MR. GRYCE RECEIVES NEW IMPETUS

*"There's nothing ill
Can dwell in such a temple."*

Tempest.

THIS astounding discovery made a most unhappy impression upon me. It was true, then. Eleanore the beautiful, the lovesome, was—I did not, could not finish the sentence, even in the silence of my own mind.

"You look surprised," said Mr. Gryce, glancing curiously towards the key. "Now, I ain't. A woman does not thrill, blush, equivocate, and faint for nothing; especially such a woman as Miss Leavenworth."

"A woman who could do such a deed would be the last to thrill, equivocate, and faint," I retorted. "Give me the key; let me see it."

He complacently put it in my hand. "It is the one we want. No getting out of that."

I returned it. "If she declares herself innocent, I will believe her."

He stared with great amazement. "You have strong faith in the women," he laughed. "I hope they will never disappoint you."

I had no reply for this, and a short silence ensued, first broken by Mr. Gryce. "There is but one thing left to do," said he. "Fobbs, you will have to request Miss Leavenworth to come down. Do not alarm her; only see that she comes. To the reception room," he added, as the man drew off.

No sooner were we left alone than I made a move to return to Mary, but he stopped me.

"Come and see it out," he whispered. "She will be down in a moment; see it out; you had best."

Glancing back, I hesitated; but the prospect of beholding Eleanore again drew me, in spite of myself. Telling him to wait, I returned to Mary's side to make my excuses.

"What is the matter—what has occurred?" she breathlessly asked.

"Nothing as yet to disturb you much. Do not be alarmed." But my face betrayed me.

"There is something!" said she.

"Your cousin is coming down."

"Down here?" and she shrank visibly.

"No, to the reception room."

"I do not understand. It is all dreadful; and no one tells me anything."

"I pray God there may be nothing to tell. Judging from your present faith in your cousin, there will not be. Take comfort, then, and be assured I will inform you if anything occurs which you ought to know."

Giving her a look of encouragement, I left her crushed against the crimson pillows of the sofa on which she sat, and rejoined Mr. Gryce. We had scarcely entered the reception room when Eleanore Leavenworth came in.

More languid than she was an hour before, but haughty still, she slowly advanced, and, meeting my eye, gently bent her head.

"I have been summoned here," said she, directing herself exclusively to Mr. Gryce, "by an individual whom I take to be in your employ. If so, may I request you to make your wishes known at once, as I am quite exhausted, and am in great need of rest."

"Miss Leavenworth," returned Mr. Gryce, rubbing his hands together and staring in quite a fatherly manner at the door-knob, "I am very sorry to trouble you, but the fact is I wish to ask you—"

But here she stopped him. "Anything in regard to the key which that man has doubtless told you he saw me drop into the ashes?"

"Yes, Miss."

"Then I must refuse to answer any questions concerning it. I have nothing to say on the subject, unless it is this:"—giving him a look full of suffering, but full of a certain sort of courage, too—"that he was right if he told you I had the key in hiding about my person, and that I attempted to conceal it in the ashes of the grate."

"Still, Miss—"

But she had already withdrawn to the door. "I pray you to excuse me," said she. "No argument you could advance would make any difference in my determination; therefore it would be but a waste of energy on your part to attempt any." And, with a flitting glance in my direction, not without its appeal, she quietly left the room.

For a moment Mr. Gryce stood gazing after her with a look of great interest, then, bowing with almost exaggerated homage, he hastily followed her out.

I had scarcely recovered from the surprise occasioned by this unexpected movement when a quick step was heard in the hall, and Mary, flushed and anxious, appeared at my side.

"What is it?" she inquired. "What has Eleanore been saying?"

"Alas!" I answered, "she has not said anything. That is the trouble, Miss Leavenworth. Your cousin preserves a reticence upon certain points very painful to witness. She ought to understand that if she persists in doing this, that—"

"That what?" There was no mistaking the deep anxiety prompting this question.

"That she cannot avoid the trouble that will ensue."

For a moment she stood gazing at me, with great horror-stricken, incredulous eyes; then sinking back into a chair, flung her hands over her face with the cry:

"Oh, why were we ever born! Why were we allowed to live! Why did we not perish with those who gave us birth!"

In the face of anguish like this, I could not keep still.

"Dear Miss Leavenworth," I essayed, "there is no cause for such despair as this. The future looks dark, but not impenetrable. Your cousin will listen to reason, and in explaining—"

But she, deaf to my words, had again risen to her feet, and stood before me in an attitude almost appalling.

"Some women in my position would go mad! mad! mad!"

I surveyed her with growing wonder. I thought I knew what she meant. She was conscious of having given the cue which had led to this suspicion of her cousin, and that in this way the trouble which hung over their heads was of her own making. I endeavored to soothe her, but my efforts were all unavailing. Absorbed in her own anguish, she paid but little attention to me. Satisfied at last that I could do nothing more for her, I turned to go. The movement seemed to arouse her.

"I am sorry to leave," said I, "without having afforded you any comfort. Believe me; I am very anxious to assist you. Is there no one I can send to your side; no woman friend or relative? It is sad to leave you alone in this house at such a time."

"And do you expect me to remain here? Why, I should die! Here to-night?" and the long shudders shook her very frame.

"It is not at all necessary for you to do so, Miss Leavenworth," broke in a bland voice over our shoulders.

I turned with a start. Mr. Gryce was not only at our back, but had evidently been there for some moments. Seated near the door, one hand in his pocket, the other caressing the arm of his chair, he met our gaze with a sidelong smile that seemed at once to beg pardon for the intrusion, and to assure us it was made with no unworthy motive. "Everything will be properly looked after, Miss; you can leave with perfect safety."

I expected to see her resent this interference; but instead of that, she manifested a certain satisfaction in beholding him there.

Drawing me to one side, she whispered, "You think this Mr. Gryce very clever, do you not?"

"Well," I cautiously replied, "he ought to be to hold the position he does. The authorities evidently repose great confidence in him."

Stepping from my side as suddenly as she had approached it, she crossed the room and stood before Mr. Gryce.

"Sir," said she, gazing at him with a glance of entreaty: "I hear you have great talents; that you can ferret out the real criminal from a score of doubtful characters, and that nothing can escape the penetration of your eye. If this is so, have pity on two orphan girls, suddenly bereft of their guardian and protector, and use your acknowledged skill in finding out who has committed this crime. It would be folly in me to endeavor to hide from you that my cousin in her testimony has given cause for suspicion; but I here declare her to be as innocent of wrong as I am; and I am only endeavoring to turn the eye of justice from the guiltless to the guilty when I entreat you to look elsewhere for the culprit who committed this deed." Pausing, she held her two hands out before him. "It must have been some common burglar or desperado; can you not bring him, then, to justice?"

Her attitude was so touching, her whole appearance so earnest and appealing, that I saw Mr. Gryce's countenance brim with suppressed emotion, though his eye never left the coffee-urn upon which it had fixed itself at her first approach.

"You must find out—you can!" she went on. "Hannah—the girl who is gone—must know all about it. Search for her, ransack the city, do anything; my property is at your disposal. I will offer a large reward for the detection of the burglar who did this deed!"

Mr. Gryce slowly rose. "Miss Leavenworth," he began, and stopped; the man was actually agitated. "Miss Leavenworth, I did not need your very touching appeal to incite me to my utmost duty in this case. Personal and professional pride were in themselves sufficient. But, since you have honored me with this expression of your wishes, I will not conceal from you that I shall feel a certain increased interest in the affair from this hour. What mortal man can do, I will do, and if in one month from this day I do not come to you for my reward, Ebenezer Gryce is not the man I have always taken him to be."

"And Eleanore?"

"We will mention no names," said he, gently waving his hand to and fro.

A few minutes later, I left the house with Miss Leavenworth, she having expressed a wish to have me accompany her to the home of her friend, Mrs. Gilbert, with whom she had decided to take refuge. As we rolled down the street in the carriage Mr. Gryce had been kind enough to provide for us, I noticed my companion cast a look of regret behind her, as if she could not help feeling some compunctions at this desertion of her cousin.

But this expression was soon changed for the alert look of one who dreads to see a certain face start up from some unknown quarter. Glancing up and down the street, peering furtively into doorways as we passed, starting and trembling if a sudden figure appeared on the curbstone, she did not seem to breathe with perfect ease till we had left the avenue behind us and entered upon Thirty-seventh Street. Then, all at once her natural color returned and, leaning gently toward me, she asked if I had a pencil and piece of paper I could give her. I fortunately possessed both. Handing them to her, I watched her with some little curiosity while she wrote two or three lines, wondering she could choose such a time and place for the purpose.

"A little note I wish to send," she explained, glancing at the almost illegible scrawl with an expression of doubt. "Couldn't you stop the carriage a moment while I direct it?"

I did so, and in another instant the leaf which I had torn from my note-book was folded, directed, and sealed with a stamp which she had taken from her own pocket-book.

"That is a crazy-looking epistle," she muttered, as she laid it, direction downwards, in her lap.

“Why not wait, then, till you arrive at your destination, where you can seal it properly, and direct it at your leisure?”

“Because I am in haste. I wish to mail it now. Look, there is a box on the corner; please ask the driver to stop once more.”

“Shall I not post it for you?” I asked, holding out my hand.

But she shook her head, and, without waiting for my assistance, opened the door on her own side of the carriage and leaped to the ground. Even then she paused to glance up and down the street, before venturing to drop her hastily written letter into the box. But when it had left her hand, she looked brighter and more hopeful than I had yet seen her. And when, a few moments later, she turned to bid me good-by in front of her friend’s house, it was with almost a cheerful air she put out her hand and entreated me to call on her the next day, and inform her how the inquest progressed.

I shall not attempt to disguise from you the fact that I spent all that long evening in going over the testimony given at the inquest, endeavoring to reconcile what I had heard with any other theory than that of Eleanore’s guilt. Taking a piece of paper, I jotted down the leading causes of suspicion as follows:

1. Her late disagreement with her uncle, and evident estrangement from him, as testified to by Mr. Harwell.
2. The mysterious disappearance of one of the servants of the house.
3. The forcible accusation made by her cousin,—overheard, however, only by Mr. Gryce and myself.
4. Her equivocation in regard to the handkerchief found stained with pistol smut on the scene of the tragedy.
5. Her refusal to speak in regard to the paper which she was supposed to have taken from Mr. Leavenworth’s table immediately upon the removal of the body.
6. The finding of the library key in her possession.

“A dark record,” I involuntarily decided, as I looked it over; but even in doing so began jotting down on the other side of the sheet the following explanatory notes:

1. Disagreements and even estrangements between relatives are common. Cases where such disagreements and estrangements have led to crime, rare.
2. The disappearance of Hannah points no more certainly in one direction than another.
3. If Mary’s private accusation of her cousin was forcible and convincing, her public declaration that she neither knew nor suspected who might be the author of this crime, was equally so. To be sure, the former possessed the advantage of being uttered spontaneously; but it was likewise true that it was spoken under momentary excitement, without foresight of the consequences, and possibly without due consideration of the facts.
- 4, 5. An innocent man or woman, under the influence of terror, will often equivocate in regard to matters that seem to criminate them.

But the key! What could I say to that? Nothing. With that key in her possession, and unexplained, Eleanore Leavenworth stood in an attitude of suspicion which even I felt forced to recognize. Brought to this point, I thrust the paper into my pocket, and took up the evening *Express*. Instantly my eye fell upon these words:

SHOCKING MURDER

MR. LEAVENWORTH, THE WELL-KNOWN MILLIONAIRE, FOUND DEAD IN HIS ROOM

NO CLUE TO THE PERPETRATOR OF THE DEED

THE AWFUL CRIME COMMITTED WITH A PISTOL —EXTRAORDINARY FEATURES OF THE AFFAIR

Ah! here at least was one comfort; her name was not yet mentioned as that of a suspected party. But what might not the morrow bring? I thought of Mr. Gryce's expressive look as he handed me that key, and shuddered.

"She must be innocent; she cannot be otherwise," I reiterated to myself, and then pausing, asked what warranty I had of this? Only her beautiful face; only, only her beautiful face. Abashed, I dropped the newspaper, and went down-stairs just as a telegraph boy arrived with a message from Mr. Veeley. It was signed by the proprietor of the hotel at which Mr. Veeley was then stopping and ran thus:

"WASHINGTON, D. C.

"MR. Everett Raymond—

"Mr. Veeley is lying at my house ill. Have not shown him telegram, fearing results. Will do so as soon as advisable.

"Thomas Loworthy."

I went in musing. Why this sudden sensation of relief on my part? Could it be that I had unconsciously been guilty of cherishing a latent dread of my senior's return? Why, who else could know so well the secret springs which governed this family? Who else could so effectually put me upon the right track? Was it possible that I, Everett Raymond, hesitated to know the truth in any case? No, that should never be said; and, sitting down again, I drew out the memoranda I had made and, looking them carefully over, wrote against No. 6 the word suspicious in good round characters. There! no one could say, after that, I had allowed myself to be blinded by a bewitching face from seeing what, in a woman with no claims to comeliness, would be considered at once an almost indubitable evidence of guilt.

And yet, after it was all done, I found myself repeating aloud as I gazed at it: "If she declares herself innocent, I will believe her." So completely are we the creatures of our own predilections.

XI. THE SUMMONS

"The pink of courtesy."

Romeo and Juliet.

THE morning papers contained a more detailed account of the murder than those of the evening before; but, to my great relief, in none of them was Eleanore's name mentioned in the connection I most dreaded.

The final paragraph in the *Times* ran thus: "The detectives are upon the track of the missing girl, Hannah." And in the *Herald* I read the following notice:

"A *Liberal Reward* will be given by the relatives of Horatio Leavenworth, Esq., deceased, for any news of the whereabouts of one Hannah Chester, disappeared from the house – Fifth Avenue since the evening of March 4. Said girl was of Irish extraction; in age about twenty-five, and may be known by the following characteristics. Form tall and slender; hair dark brown with a tinge of red; complexion fresh; features delicate and well made; hands small, but with the fingers much pricked by the use of the needle; feet large, and of a coarser type than the hands. She had on when last seen a checked gingham dress, brown and white, and was supposed to have wrapped herself in a red and green blanket shawl, very old. Beside the above distinctive marks, she had upon her right hand wrist the scar of a large burn; also a pit or two of smallpox upon the left temple."

This paragraph turned my thoughts in a new direction. Oddly enough, I had expended very little thought upon this girl; and yet how apparent it was that she was the one person upon whose testimony, if given, the whole case in reality hinged, I could not agree with those who considered her as personally implicated in the murder. An accomplice, conscious of what was before her, would have hid in her pockets whatever money she possessed. But the roll of bills found in Hannah's trunk proved her *to* have left too hurriedly for this precaution. On the other hand, if this girl had come unexpectedly upon the assassin at his work, how could she have been hustled from the house without creating a disturbance loud enough to have been heard by the ladies, one of whom had her door open? An innocent girl's first impulse upon such an occasion would have been to scream; and yet no scream was heard; she simply disappeared. What were we to think then? That the person seen by her was one both known and trusted? I would not consider such a possibility; so laying down the paper, I endeavored to put away all further consideration of the affair till I had acquired more facts upon which to base the theory. But who can control his thoughts when over-excited upon any one theme? All the morning I found myself turning the case over in my mind, arriving ever at one of two conclusions. Hannah Chester must be found, or Eleanore Leavenworth must explain when and by what means the key of the library door came into her possession.

At two o'clock I started from my office to attend the inquest; but, being delayed on the way, missed arriving at the house until after the delivery of the verdict. This was a disappointment to me, especially as by these means I lost the opportunity of seeing Eleanore Leavenworth, she having retired to her room immediately upon the dismissal of the jury. But Mr. Harwell was visible, and from him I heard what the verdict had been.

"Death by means of a pistol shot from the hand of some person unknown."

The result of the inquest was a great relief to me. I had feared worse. Nor could I help seeing that, for all his studied self-command, the pale-faced secretary shared in my satisfaction.

What was less of a relief to me was the fact, soon communicated, that Mr. Gryce and his subordinates had left the premises immediately upon the delivery of the verdict. Mr. Gryce was not the man to forsake an affair like this while anything of importance connected with it remained

unexplained. Could it be he meditated any decisive action? Somewhat alarmed, I was about to hurry from the house for the purpose of learning what his intentions were, when a sudden movement in the front lower window of the house on the opposite side of the way arrested my attention, and, looking closer, I detected the face of Mr. Fobbs peering out from behind the curtain. The sight assured me I was not wrong in my estimate of Mr. Gryce; and, struck with pity for the desolate girl left to meet the exigencies of a fate to which this watch upon her movements was but the evident precursor, I stepped back and sent her a note, in which, as Mr. Veeley's representative, I proffered my services in case of any sudden emergency, saying I was always to be found in my rooms between the hours of six and eight. This done, I proceeded to the house in Thirty-seventh Street where I had left Miss Mary Leavenworth the day before.

Ushered into the long and narrow drawing-room which of late years has been so fashionable in our uptown houses, I found myself almost immediately in the presence of Miss Leavenworth.

"Oh," she cried, with an eloquent gesture of welcome, "I had begun to think I was forsaken!" and advancing impulsively, she held out her hand. "What is the news from home?"

"A verdict of murder, Miss Leavenworth."

Her eyes did not lose their question.

"Perpetrated by party or parties unknown."

A look of relief broke softly across her features.

"And they are all gone?" she exclaimed.

"I found no one in the house who did not belong there."

"Oh! then we can breathe easily again."

I glanced hastily up and down the room.

"There is no one here," said she.

And still I hesitated. At length, in an awkward way enough, I turned towards her and said:

"I do not wish either to offend or alarm you, but I must say that I consider it your duty to return to your own home to-night."

"Why?" she stammered. "Is there any particular reason for my doing so? Have you not perceived the impossibility of my remaining in the same house with Eleanore?"

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