

Farjeon Benjamin Leopold

Great Porter Square: A Mystery. Volume 1



Benjamin Farjeon
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B. L. Farjeon
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCES MRS. JAMES
PREEDY; HINTS AT THE
TROUBLE INTO WHICH SHE HAS
FALLEN; AND GIVES AN INSIGHT
INTO HER SOCIAL POSITION

MRS. JAMES PREEDY, lodging-house keeper, bred and born in the vocation, and consequently familiar with all the moves of that extensive class of persons in London that has no regular home, and has to be cooked for, washed for, and generally done for, sat in the kitchen of her house, No. 118, Great Porter Square. This apartment was situated in the basement, and here Mrs. Preedy received her friends and “did” for her lodgers, in so far as the cooking for them can be said to be included in that portentous and significant term. The floor of the kitchen was oil-

clothed, with, in distinguished places, strips of carpet of various patterns and colours, to give it an air. Over the mantelpiece was a square looking-glass in a mahogany frame, ranged on each side of which were faded photographs of men, women, and children, and of one gentleman in particular pretending to smoke a long pipe. This individual, whose face was square, whose aspect was frowning, and whose shirt sleeves were tucked up in an exceedingly free and easy fashion, was the pictorial embodiment of Mrs. Preedy's deceased husband. While he lived he was "a worryer, my dear," to quote Mrs. Preedy – and to do the lady justice, he looked it; but being gone to that bourne from which no lodging-house keeper ever returns, he immediately took his place in the affections of his widow as "the dear departed" and a "blessed angel." Thus do we often find tender appreciation budding into flower even at the moment the undertaker nails the lid upon the coffin, and Mr. Preedy, when the breath was out of his body, might (spiritually) have consoled himself with the reflection that he was not the only person from whose grave hitherto unknown or unrecognised virtues ascend. The weapons of the dead warrior, two long and two short pipes, were ranged crosswise on the wall with mathematical tenderness. When her day's work was over, and Mrs. Preedy, a lonely widow, sat by herself in the kitchen, she was wont to look regretfully at those pipes, wishing that he who had smoked them were alive to puff again as of yore; forgetting, in the charity of her heart, the crosses and vexations of her married life, and how often she had called

her “blessed angel” a something I decline to mention for defiling the kitchen with his filthy smoke.

The other faded photographs of men, women, and children, represented three generations of Mrs. Preedy’s relations. They were not a handsome family; family portraits, as a rule, when the sun is the painter, are not remarkable for beauty, but these were a worse lot than usual. In their painful anxiety to exhibit themselves in a favourable light, Mrs. Preedy’s relations had leered and stared to such a degree that it must have been no easy matter for them to get their features back into their natural shape after the photographer in the City Road was done with them. To make things worse, they were in their Sunday clothes, and if they had just been going into the penitentiary they could not have looked more unhappy and uncomfortable.

On the mantelpiece, also, were two odd broken lustres which, in the course of their chequered career, had lost half their crystal drops; two fat vases, with a neat device of cabbage roses painted on them; an erratic clock, whose vagaries supplied a healthy irritant to its mistress; and a weather indicator, in the shape of an architectural structure representing two rural bowers, in one of which, suspended on catgut, dwelt an old wooden farmer, and in the other, also suspended on catgut, a young wooden woman. When the weather was going to be stormy, the wooden old farmer swung out, and with an assumption of preternatural wisdom stared vacantly before him; when it was going to be fine, the wooden young woman made her appearance, with a smirk and

a leer indicative of weak brains. They never appeared together; when one was in the other was out; and that they were more frequently wrong than right in their vaticinations concerning the weather (being out when they ought to have been in, and in when they ought to have been out: which, in an odd way, has a political signification) did not in the slightest degree affect the wooden impostors. In this respect they were no worse than other impostors, not made of wood, who set themselves up as prophets (announcing, for instance, from time to time, the end of the world), and exhibit no sense of shame at the continual confounding of their predictions.

The other furnishings of the room were in keeping. The kitchen range; the dresser, with its useful array of plates and dishes, and pots and pans; the sideboard, with its obstinate drawers, which, when they did allow themselves to be pulled out, gave way with a suddenness which brought confusion on the operator; the six odd chairs, one of black horsehair, bits of which peeped up, curious to see what was going on; one very sad, of green rep, representing faded gentility; two of wood and two of cane, and all of different breeds; the sofa, with a treacherous sinking in its inside, indicative of spasms and rickets; the solid, useful kitchen table, upon which many a pudding had been made, and many a slice cut from lodger's joints; the what-not of walnut wood, utterly useless, despite its pretension; the old-fashioned high-backed piano, with very little music in it, which had been taken for a debt from two old maiden sisters who had seen better

days, and who had drifted, drifted, till they had drifted to Great Porter Square; the extraordinary production in water colours, which might have been a ship on fire, or a cornfield in a fit, or a pig cut open, or a castle on a sunlit mountain, or the “last-day,” or a prairie of wild buffaloes, executed by one of Mrs. Preedy’s nephews, and regarded as a triumph of art; the two coloured prints, one of the Queen, the other of Prince Albert; the six odd volumes of books, all tattered and torn, like the man in the nursery rhyme; – these were the elegant surroundings which set the stamp upon Mrs. Preedy’s social standing in the neighbourhood of Great Porter Square.

There were four doors in the kitchen – one leading into the passage which communicated with the upper portion of the house, another affording an entrance into Mrs. Preedy’s bedchamber, another disclosing a dark cupboard, apparently about four feet square, but which, being used as a bedroom by the maid-of-all-work, must have been slightly larger, and the last conducting to the scullery, which opened into the area, through the iron grating of which in the pavement above, human nature monotonously presented itself in a panoramic prospect of definite and indefinite human legs and ankles. Here, also, glimpses of a blissful earthly paradise were enjoyed by the various maids-of-all-work who came and went (for none stopped long at No. 118), through the medium of the baker, and the butcher, and even of the scavenger who called to collect the dust. Many a flirtation had been carried on in that dark nook. Beneath

area railings, as in the fragrant air of fashionable conservatories, Love is lord of all.

Mrs. Preedy was alone. Not a soul was in the kitchen but herself. In the dark cupboard the maid-of-all-work was enjoying, apparently, a sleep as peaceful and noiseless as the sleep of a flower. It was nearly twelve o'clock at night, and not a sound was to be heard but Mrs. Preedy's heavy breathing, as, with many a sigh, she read, in the columns of a much-thumbed newspaper, an item of news in the shape of a police report, which must have possessed a singular magnetic power, inasmuch as she had read it so often that she ought to have known it by heart. Nevertheless, upon the present occasion, she did not miss a single word. Spectacles on nose, she followed the report line by line, keeping faithful mark with her forefinger until she reached the end; and then she commenced it all over again, and inflicted what was evidently a serious mortification upon herself. For it was not to be doubted, from the various shades of inquietude and distress which passed over her face as she proceeded, that the subject matter was exceedingly distasteful to her. It would have been the driest of dry work but for the glass of gin and water from which Mrs. Preedy occasionally took a sip – moistening her grief, as it were. The liquid might have been supposed to have some kind of sympathy for her, exciting her to tears, which flowed the more freely the more she sipped.

Once, treading very softly, she crept out of the room into the passage, and looked up the dark staircase. As she did so,

she was seized with a fit of trembling, and was compelled to cling to the balustrade for support. She crept upstairs to the street door, at which she listened for a familiar sound. With her hand on the handle she waited until she heard the measured tread of a policeman; then she opened the door suddenly. It was a complaining, querulous door, and as she opened it a jarring sound escaped from its hinges. This sound produced an effect upon the policeman. He started back in affright, and with one leap placed himself outside the kerb of the pavement. No cause for reasonable alarm presenting itself, he looked up, and saw Mrs. Preedy standing upon the threshold.

“O, it’s you, Mrs. Preedy?” he said, half-questioning.

“Yes,” she replied, “it’s me.”

“You startled me,” he said, coming close to her. “As the door opened it sounded like a smothered cry for ‘Help,’ and I won’t deny that it startled me.”

“I don’t wonder at it,” said Mrs. Preedy; “sometimes the least sound sends my ’eart into my mouth.”

By one impulse they both looked at the house next door, No. 119 Great Porter Square. The next moment they turned their heads away from the house.

“Will you have a glass of gin?” asked Mrs. Preedy.

“I’ve no objections,” replied the guardian of the night.

He stepped inside the passage, and waited while Mrs. Preedy went downstairs – now with a brisker step – and returned with a glass of liquor, which he emptied at a gulp. Thus refreshed, he

gave the usual policeman's pull at his belt, and with a "thank 'ee," stepped outside the street door.

"A fine night," he said.

"Yes," said Mrs. Preedy.

"But dark."

"Yes," acquiesced Mrs. Preedy, with a slight shudder, "but dark. 'As anythink been discovered?" with another shrinking glance at No. 119.

"Nothing."

"'As nobody been took up?" she asked.

"No," replied the policeman. "One man come to the station last night and said he done it; but he had the delirium trimmings very bad, and we found out this morning that he was in Margate at the time. So of course it couldn't have been him."

"No," said Mrs. Preedy, "but only to think of it – though it's more than two months ago – sends the cold shivers over me."

"Well, don't you be frightened more than you can help. *I'll* look after you."

"Thank you," she said.

"Good night."

"Good night."

She closed the door and crept down to her kitchen, and sat down once more to a perusal of the newspaper.

There were other papers on the table at which she occasionally glanced, and also a quarto bill printed in large type, with a coat of arms at the top, which caused her to shudder when her eyes

lighted on it; but this one paper which she read and re-read in anguish and tribulation of soul, appeared to enchain her sole attention and sympathy. The quarto bill was carefully folded, and what was printed thereon was concealed from view; but its contents were as vivid in Mrs. Preedy's sight as they would have been if they had been printed in blood.

The truth was, Mrs. Preedy was in trouble. A terrible misfortune had fallen upon her, and had occasioned a shock to her nervous system from which she declared she could never recover. But even this affliction might have been borne (as are many silent griefs from which, not unfrequently, the possessors contrive to extract a sweet and mournful consolation), had it not been accompanied by a trouble of a more practical nature. Mrs. Preedy's means of livelihood were threatened, and she was haunted by grim visions of the workhouse.

The whole of the upper part of her lodging-house – the dining rooms, the drawing rooms, the second and third floors, and the garrets or attics, the boards of which were very close to the roof – were ordinarily let to lodgers in various ranks and stations of life, none apparently above the grade of the middle class, and some conspicuously below it. Many strange tenants had that house accommodated. Some had come “down” in life; some had been born so low that there was no lower depth for them; some had risen from the gutters, without adding to their respectability thereby; some had floated from green lanes on the tide which is ever flowing from country to city. How beautiful is the glare of

lights, seen from afar! "Come!" they seem to say; "we are waiting for you; we are shining for you. Why linger in the dark, when, with one bold plunge, you can walk through enchanted streets? See the waving of the flags! Listen to the musical murmur of delight and happiness! Come then, simple ones, and enjoy! It is the young we want, the young and beautiful, in this city of the wise, the fair, the great!" How bright, even in fragrant lanes and sweet-smelling meadows, are the dreams of the great city in the minds of the young! How bewitching the panorama of eager forms moving this way and that, and crossing each other in restless animation! Laughter, the sound of silver trumpets, the rustle of silken dresses, the merry chink of gold, all are there, waiting to be enjoyed. The low murmur of voices is like the murmur of bees laden with sweet pleasure. Distance lends enchantment, and the sound of pain, the cry of agony, the wail and murmur of those who suffer, are not heard; the rags, the cruelty, the misery, the hollow cheeks and despairing eyes, are not seen. So the ships are fully freighted, and on the bosom of the tide innocence sails to shame, and bright hope to disappointment and despair.

But it mattered not to Mrs. Preedy what kind of lives those who lodged with her followed. In one room a comic singer in low music-halls; in another a betting man; in another a needle-woman and her child; in another a Frenchman who lay abed all day and kept out all night; in another a ballet girl, ignorant and pretty; in another the poor young "wife" of a rich old city man;

and a hundred such, in infinite variety. Mrs. Preedy had but one positive test of the respectability of her lodgers – the regular payment of their rent. Never – except, indeed, during the last few weeks to one person – was a room let in her house without a deposit. When a male lodger settled his rent to the day, he was “quite a gentleman;” when a female lodger did the same, she was “quite a lady.” Failing in punctuality, the man was “a low feller,” and the woman “no better than she should be, my dear.”

At the present time the house was more than half empty, and Mrs. Preedy, therefore, was not in an amiable mood. Many times lately had she said to neighbour and friend that she did not know what would become of her; and more than once in the first flush of her trouble, she had been heard to declare that she did not know whether she stood on her head or her heels. If the declaration were intended to bear a literal interpretation, it was on the face of it ridiculous, for upon such a point Mrs. Preedy’s knowledge must have been exact; but at an important period she had persisted in it, and, as the matter was a public one, her words had found their way into the newspapers in a manner not agreeable or complimentary to her. Indeed, in accordance with the new spirit of journalism which is now all the fashion, three or four smartly-conducted newspapers inserted personal and quizzical leading articles on the subject, and Mrs. Preedy was not without good-natured friends who, in a spirit of the greatest kindness, brought these editorial pleasantries to her notice. She read them in fear and trembling at first, then with tears and

anger, and fright and indignation. She did not really understand them. All that she did understand was that the cruel editors were making fun of the misfortunes of a poor unprotected female. Curious is it to record that the departed Mr. James Preedy came in for a share of her indignation for being dead at this particular juncture. He ought to have been alive to protect her. Had the “blessed angel” been in the flesh, he would have had a warm time of it; as it was, perhaps, he was having – But theological problems had best be set aside.

Mrs. Preedy read and read, and sipped and sipped. Long habit had endowed her with a strength of resistance to the insidious liquid, and, although her senses were occasionally clouded, she was never inebriated. She read so long and sipped so frequently, that presently her eyes began to close. She nodded and nodded, bringing her nose often in dangerous proximity with the table, but invariably, at the critical moment, a violent and spasmodic jerk upwards was the means of saving that feature from fracture, though at the imminent risk of a dislocation of the slumberer’s neck.

While she nods in happy unconsciousness, an opportunity is afforded of looking over the newspapers, especially that which so closely concerns herself, and the quarto bill, printed in large type, the contents of which she so carefully conceals from sight.

CHAPTER II

WHAT WAS PRINTED ON THE QUARTO BILL: A PROCLAMATION BY HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

HAVE you ever observed and studied the expressions on the faces of the people who congregate before the “Murder” proclamations pasted up in Scotland Yard, and on the dead walls of the poor neighbourhoods in England? Have you ever endeavoured, by a mental process, to discover the characters of some of these gaping men and women who read the bills and linger before them with a horrible fascination? Appropriate, indeed, that such announcements of mysterious murders should be pasted on *dead* walls! Come with me, and mingle for a few moments with this little group, gathered before a Government proclamation in Parliament-street, offering a reward for the discovery of a murderer. Here is a respectable-looking workman, with his basket of tools over his shoulder, running his eyes swiftly down the bill, and taking in its purport with rapid comprehension. He knows already about the murder, as indeed all London does, having read the particulars in the newspapers. “They’ve offered a reward at last,” he thinks, with a scornful smile: “they ought to

have done it a month ago. Too late, now. This is another added to the list. How many undiscovered murders have been committed in the last twelve months? Temple of intellect, Scotland Yard!" As he walks away to his work, he looks with a kind of contempt at the policeman sauntering lazily along. Here is a young woman, without a bonnet, reading the bill very slowly; she can read quicker if she likes, but as the words pass before her eyes, she thinks of her own life and the drunken brute of a man she is living with. She would leave him to-day, this very moment, but she is afraid. "Do!" the brute has frequently exclaimed, when she has threatened to run away from him; "and say your prayers! As sure as you stand there I'll kill yer, my beauty! I don't mind being 'ung for yer!" And in proof of his fondness for her, he gives her, for the hundredth time, a taste of his power by striking her to the earth. "Git up!" he cries, "and never cheek me agin, or it'll be worse for yer." "I wonder," the young woman is now thinking as she reads the particulars of the murder, "whether there'll ever be a bill like that out about *me*; for Jack's a cunning one!" Here is an errand boy reading the bill, with his eyes growing larger and larger. Murders will be committed in his dreams to-night. But before night comes an irresistible fascination will draw him to the neighbourhood in which the murder was committed, and he will feast his eyes upon the house. Here is an old woman spelling out the words, wagging her head the while. It is as good as a play to her. She lives in Pye Street, Westminster, and is familiar with crime in its every aspect. She is drunk – she has not been sober

a day for thirty years. Well, she was born in a thief's den, and her mother died in a delirium of drink. Here is a thief, who has lived more than half his life in prison, reading the bill critically, with a professional eye. It would be a pleasure to him to detect a flaw in it. There is in his mind a certain indignation that some person unknown to himself or his friends should have achieved such notoriety. "I'd like to catch 'im," he thinks, "and pocket the shiners." He wouldn't peach on a pal, but, for such a reward, he would on one who was not "in the swim." Here is a dark-visaged man reading the bill secretly, unaware that he is casting furtive glances around to make sure that he is not being watched. There is guilt on the soul of this man; a crime undiscovered, which haunts him by day and night. He reads, and reads, and reads; and then slinks into the nearest public-house, and spends his last twopence in gin. As he raises the glass to his lips he can scarcely hold it, his hand trembles so. How sweet must life be to the man who holds it on such terms; and how terrible the fears of death! Here is another man who reads the bill with an assumption of indifference, and even compels himself to read it slowly a second time, and then walks carelessly away. He walks, with strangely steady steps, along Parliament Street, southwards, and turns to Westminster Bridge, holding all the way some strong emotion in control. Difficult as it is, he has a perfect mastery over himself, and no sound escapes him till he reaches the bridge; then he leans over, and gives vent to his emotion. It takes the form of laughter – horrible laughter – which he sends downwards into the dark

waters of the Thames, hiding his face the while! What secret lies concealed in his brain? Is he mad – or worse?

Many small knots of people had lately gathered before the bills posted on London walls, of which one was in the possession of Mrs. James Preedy:

MURDER

£100 REWARD

Whereas, on the morning of Thursday, the 10th of July, the Dead Body of a MAN was found on the premises, No. 119, Great Porter Square, London, under such circumstances as prove that he was Murdered. An Inquest has been held on the Body, and the Coroner's Jury having returned a "Verdict of Wilful Murder against some Person or Persons Unknown," the above Reward will be paid to any Person (other than a Person belonging to a Police Force in the United Kingdom) who shall give such Information as shall lead to the Discovery and Conviction of the Murderer or Murderers; and the Secretary of State for the Home Department will advise the Grant of her Majesty's Gracious to

PARDON

any Accomplice not being the Person who actually committed the Murder who shall give such evidence as shall lead to a like result.

Evidence to be given, to the Director of Criminal Investigators, Great Scotland Yard, or at any Police station.

CHAPTER III

EXTRACTED FROM

THE “EVENING MOON.”

THE *Evening Moon* was an enterprising little paper, which gave all the news of the day in a fashion so entertaining that it was a success from its first appearance. Between noon and night a dozen editions were published, and were hawked about the streets by regiments of ragged boys and girls (irregular infantry), whose vivacity and impudence added to the circulation, if they did not to the dignity, of the journal. Beneath the heading of the paper was a representation of the moon with the man in it looking at a spade – to which was tacked the legend: “What do you call this?” “A spade.” “Then I shall call it a spade.” Despite this declaration it delighted in word-painting, and its reports of police-court proceedings, highly coloured in many instances and unwarrantably but agreeably spiced with romance, were read with avidity. The *Evening Moon* of the 19th of August contained the following report of the police-court proceedings in

THE GREAT PORTER SQUARE MYSTERY

“The inquiry into the awful and mysterious murder in Great

Porter Square was resumed this morning at the Martin Street Police Court, before the resident magistrate, Mr. Reardon. The accused person, Antony Cowlrick, who presented a woe-begone appearance, was brought up in charge of the warders. The case has been adjourned four times, and this was the fifth appearance of Antony Cowlrick in the dock. The police preserve a strict silence with regard to him – a silence against which we protest. Arrested upon suspicion, without warrant, and without, so far we can learn, a shadow of evidence against him, nothing but injustice and wrong can accrue from the course pursued by the Scotland Yard officials. Antony Cowlrick is unmistakably a poor and miserable man. All that was found upon him when he was arrested were a stale crust of bread and a piece of hard cheese, which he had thrust into his pocket as he was flying from the pursuit of an enterprising constable. His very name – the name he gave at the lock-up on the night of his arrest – may be false, and, if our information is correct, the police have been unable to discover a single person who is acquainted with, or can give any information concerning him. The rumour that Antony Cowlrick is not quite right in his mind certainly receives some confirmation from his haggard and wandering looks; a more wretched and forlorn man has seldom been seen in a magistrate's court, suggestive as such a place is of misery and degradation. He was carefully guarded, and a strict watch was kept upon his movements, the theory of the police being that he is a dangerous and cunning character, whose sullen demeanour

is assumed to defeat the ends of justice. Mr. White Lush, on the part of the Treasury, conducted the inquiry. The interest taken by the public in the case is still unabated, and the court – if a close, abominably-ventilated room fourteen feet square can be so denominated – was crowded to excess.

On the calling of the case, the magistrate inquired if the accused man was still undefended, and the police replied that no one appeared for him. The answer was scarcely given when Mr. Goldberry (of the firm of Goldberry, Entwistle, and Pugh), rose and said that he was there to represent the accused.

Magistrate: Have you been instructed?

Mr. Goldberry: No, your worship. A couple of hours ago I endeavoured to confer with the prisoner, but the police refused me permission to see him.

Inspector Fleming explained that when Mr. Goldberry sought an interview with the prisoner, the prisoner was asked whether he wished to see him; his answer was that he wished to see no one.

Mr. Goldberry: Still, it cannot but be to the prejudice of the prisoner that he should be unrepresented, and I am here to watch the case in his interest.

Magistrate: Perhaps you had better confer with him now.

A few minutes were allowed for this purpose, at the end of which Mr. Goldberry said, although it was impossible to obtain anything like satisfaction from the accused, that he did not object to the appearance of a solicitor on his behalf. “He seems,” added Mr. Goldberry, “to be singularly unmindful as to what becomes

of him.”

Magistrate: The case can proceed.

Mr. White Lush: Call Mrs. Preedy.

The witness presented herself, and was sworn.

Mr. White Lush: Your name is Anna Maria Preedy?

Witness: Yes, sir.

Mr. White Lush: You are a widow?

Witness: Yes, sir, worse luck. 'Is name was James, poor dear!

Mr. White Lush: You live at No. 118, Great Porter Square?

Witness: Yes, sir.

Mr. White Lush: How long have you occupied your house?

Witness: Four and twenty year, come Michaelmas.

Mr. White Lush: What kind of a house is yours?

Witness (with spirit): I defy you or any gentleman to say anything agin its character.

Mr. White Lush: You keep a lodging-house?

Witness: I'm none the worse for that, I suppose?

Mr. White Lush: Answer my question. You keep a lodging-house?

Witness: I do, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Do you remember the night of the 9th of last month?

Witness: I've got reason to.

Mr. White Lush: What reason?

Witness: Two of my lodgers run away without paying their rent.

Mr. White Lush: That circumstance fixes the night in your mind?

Witness: It'd fix it in yours if you kep' a lodging-house.
(Laughter.)

Mr. White Lush: No doubt. There were other circumstances, independent of the running away of your lodgers, which serve to fix that night in your mind?

Witness: There was, sir.

Mr. White Lush: The night was Wednesday?

Witness: It were, sir.

Mr. White Lush: How and at what time did you become aware that your lodgers had run away?

Witness: When the last post come in. I got a letter, and the turn it gave me —

Mr. White Lush: That is immaterial. Have you the letter with you?

Witness: The way the perlice 'as been naggin' at me for that letter —

Mr. White Lush: Have you the letter with you?

Witness: It's lost, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Let me impress upon you that this letter might be an important link in the case. It is right and proper that the police should be anxious about it. Do you swear positively that you have lost it?

Witness: I do, sir.

Mr. White Lush: How did it happen?

Witness: It were a fortnight after the body was found in No. 119. I 'ad the letter in my 'and, and was lookin' at it. I laid it down on the kitchen table, and went to answer the street door. When I come back the letter was gone.

Mr. White Lush: Was any person in the kitchen when you left it?

Witness: Not as I am aware on, sir. There was a 'igh wind on, and I left the kitchen door open, and when I come back I noticed a blaze in the fire, as though a bit of paper had been blown into it.

Mr. White Lush: Then your presumption is that the letter is burnt?

Witness: It air, sir.

Mr. White Lush: You have searched for it since?

Witness: I've 'unted 'igh and low, sir, without ever settin' eyes on it.

CHAPTER IV

THE EXAMINATION OF MRS. PREEDY, CONTINUED FROM THE “EVENING MOON.”

MR. WHITE LUSH: You are quite confident in your own mind that the letter is no longer in existence.

Witness: I can't swear to that, sir.

Mr. White Lush: You swear that you know nothing of it whatever?

Witness: Yes, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Now, what were the contents of the letter?

Witness: It were to inform me that the droring-rooms had bolted —

Magistrate: Bolted?

Witness: Run away, and wasn't coming back, and that I might 'elp myself to what was in the trunk to pay my bill.

Mr. White Lush: Did you help yourself?

Witness: The meanness! I went up to the droring-room, and opened the trunk.

Mr. White Lush: Was it locked?

Witness: It were, sir.

Mr. White Lush: How did you open it?

Witness: With a poker.

Mr. White Lush: What did you find in it?

Witness: Bricks.

Mr. White Lush: Nothing else?

Witness: Not a blessed thing.

Mr. White Lush: What occurred then?

Witness: I were overcome with a 'orrid suspicion.

Mr. White Lush: Concerning what?

Witness: My second floorer.

Magistrate: Is that a poetical image, Mr. Lush?

Mr. White Lush (smiling): I really cannot say. This is a case with very little poetry in it. (To witness): Your second floorer? Do you mean your tenant on the second floor?

Witness: That were my meaning, sir.

Mr. White Lush: And acting on your horrid suspicion, you —

Witness: Run up stairs as fast as my legs would carry me.

Mr. White Lush: What did you discover? That your second floorer had run away?

Witness (very solemnly): He 'ad, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Did you open his trunk?

Witness: I did, sir.

Magistrate: With your universal key — the poker?

Witness: Yes, sir.

Mr. White Lush: That trunk, surely, was not also full of bricks?

Witness: I am sorry to inform you, sir, it were.

Magistrate: A singular coincidence.

Mr. White Lush: The witness's two lodgers were evidently regular bricks. (Great laughter.) Were your drawing rooms and your second floorer on terms of intimacy?

Witness: Not as I was aware on, sir.

Mr. White Lush: What did you do then?

Witness: I went out to speak to a neighbour.

Mr. White Lush: To tell her of your misfortunes?

Witness: Yes, sir.

Mr. White Lush: At what time did you return to your house?

Witness: It were eleven o'clock, sir – striking as I opened the door. I stood on the steps, and counted the strokes: One – Two – Three —

Mr. White Lush: That will do. We will imagine the clock has struck. While you were out, did you observe anything unusual in the next house, No. 119?

Witness: Nothink, sir.

Mr. White Lush: You saw no strangers prowling about?

Witness: I did not, sir. Somebody pushed agin me —

Mr. White Lush: Yes?

Witness: It were Mr. Simpson, dining room, three doors off, in his usual condition. He always comes 'ome so.

Mr. White Lush: Did he speak to you?

Witness: He growled at me.

Mr. White Lush: What did you do then?

Witness: I went down to the kitchen, and fell into a doze.

Mr. White Lush: For how long did you doze?

Witness: I can't rightly say, sir. About arf-an-hour, perhaps.

Mr. White Lush: Was there a candle alight in the kitchen when you fell asleep?

Witness: Yes, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Was it a whole candle?

Witness: No, sir, it were arf burnt down.

Mr. White Lush: What kind of candles do you burn in your kitchen?

Witness: Taller dips, sir – twelves.

Mr. White Lush: For about how long will one of these tallow dips burn?

Witness: Three hours and more.

Mr. White Lush: Was the candle you left burning on your kitchen table when you fell into a doze alight when you awoke?

Witness: It were, sir, and it burnt blue.

Mr. White Lush: What do you mean by that?

Witness: I don't know, sir. It burnt blue. There was something mysterious about it.

Magistrate: Perhaps the witness smelt sulphur also.

Mr. White Lush: Did you smell sulphur?

Witness: Not as I'm aware on, sir.

Mr. White Lush: When you awoke, was it a natural awaking, or were you suddenly aroused?

Witness: I were suddenly woke, and I was all of a tremble.

Mr. White Lush: You were frightened by something?

Witness: I were, sir, and I were not.

Mr. White Lush: I do not understand you. Was there anybody or anything in the room besides yourself?

Witness: I didn't see nothink – not even a mouse.

Mr. White Lush: Then what were you frightened at?

Witness: It were a fancy, perhaps – or a dream that I couldn't remember; and all at once I 'eerd a scream.

Mr. White Lush: From what direction?

Witness: From the next house, No. 119.

Mr. White Lush: You heard a scream proceeding from 119, the house in which the murder was committed?

Witness: As near as I can remember, sir.

Mr. White Lush: That is not what I want. You possess the usual number of senses, I suppose?

Witness: I defy anybody to say anything to the contrary.

Mr. White Lush: You look like a sensible woman. (Here the witness made an elaborate curtsy to Mr. White Lush, which occasioned much laughter.) Your hearing is good?

Witness: It air, sir. Mrs. Beale was saying to me only yesterday morning, 'Mrs. Preedy,' says she —

Mr. White Lush: Never mind what Mrs. Beale was saying to you. Listen to what I am saying to you. On the occasion we are speaking of, you heard a scream?

Witness (after a long pause, during which she seemed to be mentally asking questions of herself): I think I may venture to say, sir, I did.

Mr. White Lush: Ah, that is more satisfactory. Now, Mrs. Preedy, attend to me.

Witness: I'm a-doing of it, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Thank you. Did the scream proceed from a man or a woman?

Witness (with energy): I couldn't tell you, sir, if you went down on your bended knees.

Mr. White Lush: Reflect a little; take time. You have heard hundreds of men's and women's voices —

Witness: Thousands, sir.

Mr. White Lush: And a woman of your discernment must have perceived a difference between them. Women's tones are soft and dulcet; men's, gruffer and more resonant. It is important we should know whether it was a man's or a woman's voice you heard?

Witness: It ain't possible for me to say, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Is that really the only answer you can give?

Witness: I'd give you another if I could, sir. It's true I've 'eerd thousands of men's and women's voices, but I've not been in the 'abit of 'aving thousands of men and women screaming at me.

Mr. White Lush: Was it a loud scream?

Witness: There was a brick wall between us, and it must 'ave been a loud scream, or I couldn't have 'eerd it.

Mr. White Lush: What followed?

Witness: Music. Almost on the top of the scream, as a body might say, I 'eerd music.

Mr. White Lush: What instrument was being played upon?

Witness: The pianner, sir. I 'eerd the pianner playing.

Mr. White Lush: That is to say you heard a man or woman playing the piano?

Witness: I wouldn't swear, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Or a child?

Witness: I wouldn't swear, sir.

Mr. White Lush: But you have sworn. You say that you heard the sound of a piano?

Witness: I did 'ear it, sir. The pianner was playing.

Mr. White Lush: A piano can't play of itself. You heard a man, or a woman, or a child, playing the piano?

Witness: Wild 'orses sha'n't tear it from me, sir. It might 'ave been a spirit.

Mr. White Lush: What do you say to a cat?

Witness: No, sir, it ain't reasonable.

Mr. White Lush: You stick to the spirit, then?

Witness: It might 'ave been.

Mr. White Lush: You believe in spirits?

Witness: I do, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Out of a bottle? (Laughter.)

Magistrate: The witness has the bottle-imp in her mind, perhaps? (Renewed laughter.)

Mr. White Lush: Very likely. (To witness): Did the spirit you heard playing come out of a bottle?

Witness (with dignity): I am not in the habit of making a beast

of myself.

Mr. White Lush: But a little drop now and then, eh, Mrs. Preedy?

Witness: As a medicine, sir, only as a medicine. I suffer a martyrdom from spasms. (Laughter.)

Mr. White Lush: A common complaint, Mrs. Preedy. I suffer from them myself.

Witness: You look like it, sir. (Screams of laughter.)

Mr. White Lush: For how long a time did the music continue?

Witness: For five or six minutes, perhaps.

Mr. White Lush: Are you sure it did not last for a longer time – or a shorter?

Witness: No, sir, I am not sure. I was in that state that everything seemed mixed up.

Mr. White Lush: The music might have lasted for half-an-hour?

Witness: It might, sir.

Mr. White Lush: Or for only a minute?

Witness: Yes, sir.

Mr. White Lush: When the music stopped, what occurred?

Witness: If you was to feed me on bread and water for the next twenty years I couldn't tell you.

Mr. White Lush: Why couldn't you tell me?

Witness: Because I don't know whether I was standing on my 'ead or my 'eels. (Roars of laughter.)

Mr. White Lush: Nonsense, Mrs. Preedy, you do know.

Witness: Beggin' your pardon, sir, I do not know. I ought to know whether I don't know.

Mr. White Lush: Are you standing on your head or your heels at the present moment?

Witness did not reply.

Magistrate: Do you mean to tell the court seriously that you are not aware whether, at the time referred to, you were standing on your head or your heels?

Witness: I wouldn't swear to it, my lordship, one way or another.

Mr. White Lush: What did you do when the music stopped?

Witness: I flopped.

Mr. White Lush: Did you flop on your head or your heels?

Witness: I couldn't take it upon myself to say, sir.

Mr. White Lush: And this is all you know of the murder?

Witness: If you was to keep me 'ere for a month, sir, you couldn't get nothink else out of me.

Mr. White Lush: I have done with you.

Mr. Goldberry: I shall not detain you long, Mrs. Preedy. Look attentively at the prisoner. Do you know him?

Witness: No, sir.

Mr. Goldberry: Have you ever seen him in Great Porter Square?

Witness: Neither there or nowheres else. This is the first time I ever set eyes on 'im.

Mr. Goldberry: You swear that, positively.

Witness: If it were the last word I ever spoke, it's the truth.

Mr. Goldberry: That will do.

Mrs. Preedy left the witness box in a state of great agitation, amid the tittering of the spectators.

Mr. Goldberry, addressing the Bench, said that he saw in the Court three of the constables who had been instrumental in arresting the prisoner, one being the officer who had first observed the prisoner in Great Porter Square. It was well known that the prisoner had declined to put a single question to one of the witnesses called on behalf of the Treasury. He asked to be allowed to exercise the privilege of cross-examining these constables, and he promised to occupy the court but a very short time.

No objection being raised, Police-constable Richards entered the witness box.

Mr. Goldberry: Before you helped to arrest the prisoner in Great Porter Square, had you ever seen him before?

Witness: It's hard to say.

Mr. Goldberry: It is not hard to say. You would find no difficulty in replying to such a question if it were to tell against the prisoner instead of in his favour? I must have an answer. Had you ever seen him before that night?

Witness: I can't call to mind that I have.

Mr. Goldberry: Do you know anything of him, in his favour or against him, at this present moment?

Witness: I do not.

Mr. Goldberry: Call Constable Fleming. (Constable Fleming stepped into the box.) Before the night of the prisoner's arrest had you ever seen him?

Witness: I can only speak to the best of my knowledge —

Mr. Goldberry: You are not expected to speak from any other knowledge. You are aware, if that man is put on his trial, that it will be for his life. I insist upon fair play for him. Had you ever seen him before that night?

Witness: Not as far as I can remember.

Mr. Goldberry: You have taken a lesson from Mrs. Preedy. Do you know anything against him now?

Witness: No.

Mr. Goldberry: Call Constable Dick. (Constable Dick stepped into the box). You have heard the questions I put to the last two witnesses. They are what I shall substantially put to you. Before the night of the prisoner's arrest had you ever seen him?

Witness: No.

Mr. Goldberry: Do you know anything of him at the present moment?

Witness: No.

Mr. Goldberry then addressed the bench. The inquiry had already been adjourned four times, and not a tittle of evidence had been brought forward to connect the prisoner with the dreadful crime. He was utterly unknown to the police, who had instigated the charge against him, and who, being unable to identify him, were deprived the pleasure of testifying that

he belonged to the dangerous classes of society. It was partly because of this singular aspect of the case that he, Mr. Goldberry, had voluntarily come forward to defend a man who, upon the face of the evidence, was innocent of the charge so wildly brought against him. It appeared to him that liberty of the person was in danger. It was monstrous that such a power should be exercised by the police. To be poor, as the accused evidently was, was no crime; to be forlorn and wretched, as the accused appeared to be, was no crime; but the police evidently regarded these misfortunes as proofs of guilt. He applied for the prisoner's discharge.

Mr. White Lush said it was scarcely necessary to say a word in defence of the police, who, in the exercise of their arduous duties, generally acted with fair discretion. To discharge the prisoner at this stage of the proceedings would not unlikely defeat the ends of justice. He understood that the police were on the track of some important evidence regarding the prisoner in connection with the crime, and he asked for an adjournment for a week.

The prisoner, who, during the entire proceedings, had not uttered a word, was remanded, and the case was adjourned until this day week.

CHAPTER V

CONTAINS FURTHER EXTRACTS FROM THE “EVENING MOON” RELATING TO THE GREAT PORTER SQUARE MYSTERY

YESTERDAY the inquiry into the Great Porter Square mystery was resumed at the Martin Street Police Court, before Mr. Reardon. The court was again crowded, and the prisoner, Antony Cowlrick, was brought in handcuffed. His appearance was, if possible, more forlorn-looking and wretched than on the previous occasions, and his face bore the marks of a scuffle. Mr. White Lush again appeared for the Treasury, and Mr. Goldberry for the prisoner. As a proof of the public feeling respecting the conduct of the police in this case we have to record that during his progress down Martin Street towards the Magistrate's Court, Mr. Goldberry, who has so generously come forward on behalf of the prisoner, was loudly cheered.

Mr. White Lush rose, and stated that he was not prepared to offer any further evidence, in consequence of the inquiries of the police not being concluded. He applied for another adjournment of a week.

A buzz of astonishment and indignation ran through the court,

which was quickly suppressed.

Mr. Reardon: I was not prepared for this application. It is my duty to do everything in my power to assist the course of justice, but I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that the prisoner has now been brought before me six times, and that on the occasion of every adjournment the police have promised to produce evidence affecting the prisoner which up to the present moment is not forthcoming. If it is my duty to further the ends of justice, it is equally the duty of the police to see that it does not lag. A suspected person – suspected with cause and reason – should not be allowed the opportunity of escape; but some protection must be given to a man who is presumably innocent. Since last week I have carefully gone over and considered the evidence presented in this court with respect to this awful and mysterious murder; and I am hardly inclined to allow the accused to remain any longer in prison on this charge. What has Mr. Goldberry to say?

Mr. Goldberry: I am glad – as I am sure the public will be – to hear the expression of your worship's sentiments in the matter. It is not my wish to excite false sympathy for the prisoner, but I would draw your worship's attention, and the attention of the police, to the reasonable presumption that while they are wildly hunting for evidence against an innocent man, the criminal is being allowed every opportunity to escape the hands of justice. It would almost seem – far be it from me to assert that it is so, for I am sure it would be untrue – but it would almost seem as if they were playing into the hands of the real criminal. The only

excuse that can be found for the police is, that a murder having been committed, somebody had to be arrested and charged with its committal, and, with this end in view, Cowrick was indiscriminately taken up and so charged. Zeal is a fine quality, but, when misapplied, frequently leads to grave consequences. In my defence of the prisoner I have had great difficulties to contend with. He has not assisted me in the slightest degree. It is no breach of professional confidence to say that, in my interviews with him, he has doggedly refused to give me any information concerning himself; but as I have before asserted that poverty and wretchedness were not to be accepted as marks of guilt, so I now declare that the prisoner's strange reticence concerning himself is also no crime. Nor is eccentricity a crime. I have had no opportunity of conversing with the prisoner this morning, or of seeing him before I entered the court a few minutes since, and I have to ask the meaning of those marks upon his face – to which I direct your worship's attention – and of his being handcuffed.

The police explained that on his way to Martin Street police court the prisoner had attempted to escape, and that a struggle had taken place, during which a constable and the prisoner had received several blows.

Mr. Goldberry asked if the constable who had been struck was present, and the answer was given that he was not; he was on duty in another place.

Mr. Goldberry: I will not comment upon the occurrence; in the marks upon the prisoner's face, and in the absence of the

constable who is said to have been struck, it speaks for itself. I strenuously oppose the application for a remand, and I demand the prisoner's discharge on the plain grounds that there is no evidence against him.

Mr. White Lush: In the interests of justice, I ask for a further remand.

Mr. Reardon: Am I to understand that if I remand the prisoner until this day week, you will be prepared to bring forward evidence which will justify not only his present but his past detention?

Mr. White Lush: I am informed that such evidence will be forthcoming.

Mr. Reardon: Upon that understanding the prisoner is remanded until this day week.

CHAPTER VI

THE “EVENING MOON”

SPEAKS ITS MIND

YESTERDAY, at the Martin Street Police Court, Antony Cowlrick was brought up for the seventh time, on the charge of being concerned in the mysterious murder which took place at No. 119, Great Porter Square. The remarks we have from time to time made upon this case and upon the arrest of Antony Cowlrick have been justified by the result. The prisoner was finally discharged. All that was wanted to complete the tragical farce was a caution from the magistrate to the prisoner not to do it again.

We now intend to speak plainly; and the strong interest the case has excited will be our excuse if our comments are more lengthy than those in which we generally indulge in our editorial columns. The elements of mystery surrounding the awful murder were sufficiently complicated without the assistance of the police. Their proceedings with respect to the man calling himself Antony Cowlrick have rendered the task of bringing the murderer to justice one of enormous difficulty.

Our business at present is not so much with the murder itself as it is with Antony Cowlrick and the police; but a brief recapitulation of the circumstances of the murder is necessary

for the proper understanding of what is to follow.

On Tuesday, the 1st of July, a gentleman engaged a back room on the first floor of the house No. 119, Great Porter Square. There was a piano in the room. The landlady of that house, who has undergone more than one lengthy examination, has stated that she “reckoned him up” as a man who had just come from a voyage, and that there was something superior “in the looks of him.” When she asked him for his name he said it did not matter, and he handed her four weeks’ rent, telling her at the same time not to trouble herself about a receipt. This was sufficient for the landlady; she received the stranger as a tenant, and he took possession of the room.

He led a remarkably quiet life. He did not trouble the landlady to cook a meal for him, although “attendance” was included in the sum charged for the rent of the room. He had but one visitor, a lady, who came so closely veiled that no person in the house caught a glimpse of her face. She called three times, and when the street door was opened, asked for “the gentleman on the first floor,” and went up to him without waiting for an answer. This lady has not come forward, and she has not been tracked. After the 10th of July no female resembling in the slightest the vague description given of her has called at No. 119, Great Porter Square.

It happened, singularly enough, that on the 9th of July the house was almost empty. The landlady’s niece was married on that day, and the landlady was at the wedding; there was to be a

dance in the evening, and she did not expect to be home until very late. Invitations had not only been given to the landlady, but to three of her lodgers, two of whom were married. Another lodger, a violin player, was engaged for the music. It was a kind of happy family affair, arranged by Fate. Only the general servant and the stranger were left.

The servant was human, and took advantage of the golden opportunity. If we had been in her place, and had “a young man,” we should probably have done the same. She did not have many holidays, and knowing that her services would not be required, and that her mistress and the lodger would not be home till early in the morning, she made an appointment with her “young man,” who treated her to the Alhambra. When the performances at the Alhambra were concluded, this young person and her young man indulged in supper, and, tempted to daring by the opportunity, she did not return to the house until an hour past midnight. She noticed nothing unusual when she entered; conscience-stricken at the late hour she did not light a candle, but thankful that her mistress had not returned, she crept down to her bedroom in the basement, and went to bed in the dark. She fell asleep at once, and we have the testimony of her mistress that the girl is an exceedingly heavy sleeper, and most difficult to wake. We ourselves have a servant – a most desirable creature, whom we are ready to part with on moderate terms – similarly afflicted. Thus it may be said that, for many mysterious hours, the only occupant of the house was the stranger who occupied the front

drawing-room.

It was nearly four in the morning before the wedding guests, jaded with pleasure, found themselves in Great Porter Square. The wedding had been a jolly affair, and dancing had been prolonged beyond the anticipated hour of breaking up. Jaded as they were, the spirits of the little knot of merry-makers were not quite exhausted, and as they paused before the door of No. 119, with the morning's sweet fresh light upon them, they laughed and sang, and so inspired the musician that he took his violin from its green baize bag and struck up a jig. With their tired feet moving to the measure they entered the house, the door of which was opened by the landlady with her private key; they tripped up the steps and lingered in the passage, dancing to the music. Exhilarated by the occasion they wound in and out along the narrow passage, until the wife of one of the lodgers suddenly uttered a shriek which drove the colour from their flushed faces.

"My God!" shrieked the terrified woman, "we are dancing in blood!"

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH THE “EVENING MOON” CONTINUES TO SPEAK ITS MIND

IT was fatally true. They were dancing in blood. The woman who made the awful discovery had white satin shoes on. As she uttered the appalling words she looked down at her feet, and, with a wild shudder, sank into her husband's arms. He, overwrought with excitement, had scarcely sufficient strength to support her, and he would have allowed her to slip to the floor had he not, also, cast his eyes earthwards. Quickly he caught her to his breast, and, trembling violently, proceeded upstairs. The weight of his burden compelled him to hold on to the balustrade; but the moment he placed his hand on the polished rail, he screamed, “There's been Murder done here!” And, shaking like a leaf, he retreated in haste till he reached the street door. Flinging it open, he rushed with his wife into the Square, and stood in the light of the sunrise, a picture of terror.

The other actors in the scene had borne appropriate parts in the tragic situation. For a little while they were paralyzed, and incapable of action. The streaming in of the daylight aroused them, and they looked about timidly. On the floor, stairs, and

balustrade were marks of blood not yet quite dried, and they traced the crimson stains to the end of the passage, where it dipped into the narrow staircase which led to the basement. There being no natural means of lighting the stairway, this part of the house was usually lit up by a thin, funereal jet of gas, which burnt as sadly as if its home were a tomb. At present it was in darkness, the gas being turned off.

The thought that had been put into words by the man who had rushed out of the house now took its place in the minds of those who remained within. There had been murder done. But who was murdered, and where was the murderer?

“That comes,” said the violinist to the landlady, “of letting a man into the house who refuses to give his name.”

The landlady wrung her hands. She saw ruin staring her in the face.

“He’s off, of course,” continued the violinist, “and Mary” (the name of the servant) “lies downstairs, murdered in cold blood.”

A sound sleeper, indeed, must Mary have been to have slept through the music, and the dancing, and the cries of terror. The silence that reigned below was confirmation of the violinist’s assumption. Of all suppositions, it was the most reasonable. Who would go downstairs to corroborate it? Not one had sufficient courage.

Meanwhile, events progressed in front of the house. A policeman, attracted by the sounds of music, was drawn thitherwards, and, seeing a man kneeling on the pavement,

supporting a woman, he quickened his steps.

“What’s up?” demanded the policeman.

“Murder! murder!” gasped the man.

The woman’s white shoes, bedabbled in blood, met the policeman’s eye.

“There! there!” cried the man, pointing to the passage.

The policeman was immediately encompassed by the other frightened faces.

“You’re just in time,” said the violinist. “There’s been murder done.”

“Who’s been murdered?” asked the policeman.

“That’s to be found out,” was the answer. “It’s a girl, we believe.”

“Ah,” remarked the policeman, with a certain thoughtfulness; “the last was a girl – an unfortunate girl – and *he’s* not been caught.”

Cautiously they re-entered the house, the policeman with his truncheon drawn, and ascended the stairs to the drawing-room. No person, dead or alive, was found.

“*It’s* downstairs,” said the violinist.

They crept downstairs in a body, keeping close together. There, an awful sight met their eyes. On the floor of the kitchen lay the body of the stranger who, on the 1st of July, had engaged a room on the first floor, and had paid a month’s rent in advance. He had been foully murdered. The servant girl was sound asleep in her bed. It is strange, when she returned home from the

Alhambra, and crept through the passage and the kitchen to bed, that she did not herself make the discovery, for the soles of her boots were stained with the evidences of the crime, and she must have passed within a foot or two of the lifeless body; but satisfactory explanations have since been given, with which and with the details of the murder, as far as they are known, the public have already been made fully acquainted through our columns.

Our business now is with Antony Cowlrick.

So profound was the impression produced by the murder that, from the day it was discovered, no person could be induced to lodge or sleep in the house in which it was committed. The tenants all left without giving notice, and the landlady, prostrated by the blow, has not dared, since that awful night, to venture inside the door. The house is avoided, shunned, and dreaded by all. Any human being bold enough to take it could have it for a term of years on a very moderate rental – for the first year, probably, for a peppercorn; but practical people as we are, with our eyes on the main chance, we are imbued with sentiments which can never be eradicated. The poorest family in London could not, at the present time, be induced to occupy the house. The stain of blood is on those floors and stairs, and *it can never be washed out!* The Spirit of Murder lurks within the fatal building, and when night falls, the phantom holds terrible and undisputed sway over mind and heart. A shapeless shadow glides from room to room – no features are visible but eyes which never close, and which shine only in the dark. And in the daylight, which in

this house is robbed of its lustre, its presence is manifest in the echo of every step that falls upon the boards. Appalling spectre! whose twin brother walks ever by the side of the undiscovered murderer! Never, till justice is satisfied, shall it leave him. As he stole from the spot in which he took the life of a fellow-creature, it touched his heart with its spiritual hand, and whispered, "I am the shadow of thy crime! Thou and I shall never part!" He looks into the glass, and it peers over his shoulder; maddened, he flies away, and when he stops to rest, he feels the breath of the Invisible on his cheek. He slinks into his bed, and hiding his head in the bedclothes, lies there in mortal terror, knowing that the shadow is close beside him. It brings awful visions upon him. He looks over the bridge into the river upon which the sun is shining. How bright is the water! How clear! How pure! Surely over that white surface the shadow can have no power! But suddenly comes a change, and the river is transformed into a river of blood. An irresistible fascination draws him to the river again in the night, when the moon is shining on the waters, and, as he gazes downwards, he sees the ghastly body of his victim, its face upturned, floating on a lurid tide. He cannot avoid it; whichever way he turns it is before him. He walks through country lanes, and trembles at the fluttering of every leaf. Rain falls; it is red; and as he treads along, it oozes up and up till it reaches his eyes, and, resting there, tinges everything that meets his sight with the colour of blood. Water he cannot drink, its taste is so horrible. He must have gin, brandy – any poison that will help him to forget.

Vain hope! He shall never forget! And the shadow of his crime shall never leave until he falls at the feet of outraged justice, and pays the penalty. Then, *and then only*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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