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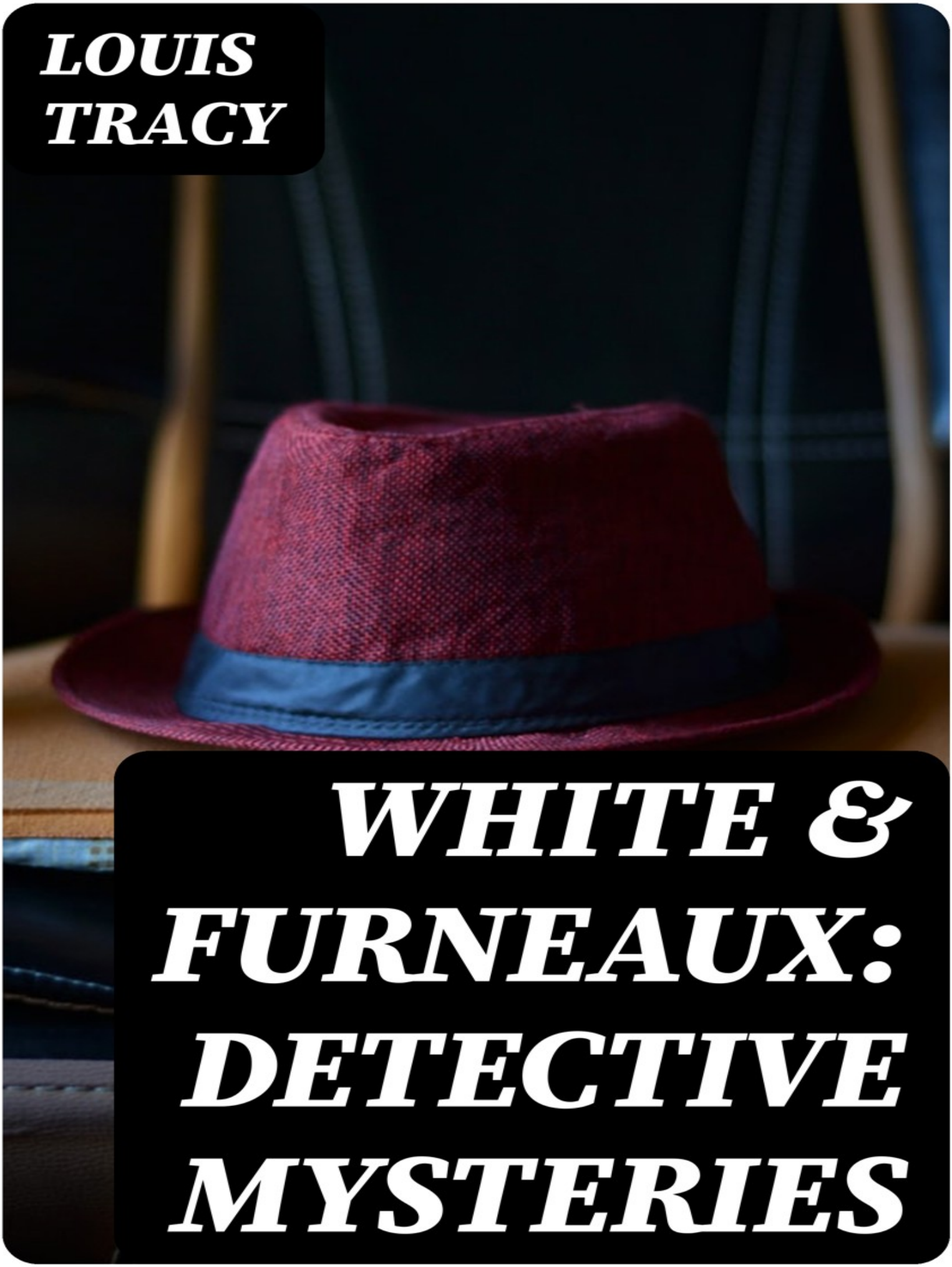

WHITE & FURNEAUX: DETECTIVE MYSTERIES

Louis Tracy

White & Furneaux: Detective Mysteries

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Table of Contents

The Postmaster's Daughter

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I
The Face at the Window

Table of Contents

John Menzies Grant, having breakfasted, filled his pipe, lit it, and strolled out bare-headed into the garden. The month was June, that glorious rose-month which gladdened England before war-clouds darkened the summer sky. As the hour was nine o'clock, it is highly probable that many thousands of men were then strolling out into many thousands of gardens in precisely similar conditions; but, given youth, good health, leisure, and a fair amount of money, it is even more probable that few among the smaller number thus roundly favored by fortune looked so perplexed as Grant.

Moreover, his actions were eloquent as words. A spacious French window had been cut bodily out of the wall of an old-fashioned room, and was now thrown wide to admit the flower-scented breeze. Between this window and the right-hand angle of the room was a smaller window, square-paned, high above the ground level, and deeply recessed—in fact just the sort of window which one might expect to find in a farm-house built two centuries ago, when light and air were rigorously excluded from interiors. The two windows told the history of *The Hollies* at a glance. The little one had served the needs of a "best" room for several generations of Sussex yeomen. Then had come some iconoclast who hewed a big rectangle through the solid stone-work, converted the oak-panelled apartment into a most comfortable dining-room, built a new wing with a

gable, changed a farm-yard into a flower-bordered lawn, and generally played havoc with Georgian utility while carrying out a determined scheme of landscape gardening.

Happily, the wrecker was content to let well enough alone after enlarging the house, laying turf, and planting shrubs and flowers. He found *The Hollies* a ramshackle place, and left it even more so, but with a new note of artistry and several unexpectedly charming vistas. Thus, the big double window opened straight into an irregular garden which merged insensibly into a sloping lawn bounded by a river-pool. The bank on the other side of the stream rose sharply and was well wooded. Above the crest showed the thatched roofs or red tiles of Steynholme, which was a village in the time of William the Conqueror, and has remained a village ever since. Frame this picture in flowering shrubs, evergreens, a few choice firs, a copper beech, and some sturdy oaks shadowing the lawn, and the prospect on a June morning might well have led out into the open any young man with a pipe.

But John Menzies Grant seemed to have no eye for a scene that would have delighted a painter. He turned to the light, scrutinized so closely a strip of turf which ran close to the wall that he might have been searching for a lost diamond, and then peered through the lowermost left-hand pane of the small window into the room he had just quitted.

The result of this peeping was remarkable in more ways than one.

A stout, elderly, red-faced woman, who had entered the room soon after she heard Grant's chair being moved, caught sight of the intent face. She screamed loudly, and

dropped a cup and saucer with a clatter on to a Japanese tray.

Grant hurried back to the French window. In his haste he did not notice a long shoot of a Dorothy Perkins rose which trailed across his path, and it struck him smartly on the cheek.

"I'm afraid I startled you, Mrs. Bates," he said, smiling so pleasantly that no woman or child could fail to put trust in him.

"You did that, sir," agreed Mrs. Bates, collapsing into the chair Grant had just vacated.

Like most red-faced people, Mrs. Bates turned a bluish purple when alarmed, and her aspect was so distressing now that Grant's smile was banished by a look of real concern.

"I'm very sorry," he said contritely. "I had no notion you were in the room. Shall I call Minnie?"

Minnie, it may be explained, was Mrs. Bates's daughter and assistant, the two, plus a whiskered Bates, gardener and groom, forming the domestic establishment presided over by Grant.

"Nun-no, sir," stuttered the housekeeper. "It's stupid of me. But I'm not so young as I was, an' me heart jumps at little things."

Grant saw that she was recovering, though slowly. He thought it best not to make too much of the incident; but asked solicitously if he might give her some brandy.

Mrs. Bates remarked that she was "not so bad as that," rose valiantly, and went on with her work. Her employer, who had gone into the garden again, saw out of the tail of

his eye that she vanished with a half-laden tray. In a couple of minutes the daughter appeared, and finished the slight task of clearing the table; meanwhile, Grant kept away from the small window. Being a young man who cultivated the habit of observation, he noticed that Minnie, too, cast scared glances at the window. When the girl had finally quitted the room, he laughed in a puzzled way.

"Am I dreaming, or are there visions about?" he murmured.

Urged, seemingly, by a sort of curiosity, he surveyed the room a second time through the same pane of glass. Being tall, he had to stoop slightly. Within, on the opposite side of the ledge, he saw the tiny brass candlestick with its inch of candle which he had used over-night while searching for a volume of Scott in the book-case lining the neighboring wall. Somehow, this simplest of domestic objects brought a thrill of recollection.

"Oh, dash it all!" he growled good-humoredly, "I'm getting nervy. I must chuck this bad habit of working late, and use the blessed hours of daylight."

Yet, as he sauntered down the lawn toward the stream, he knew well that he would do nothing of the sort. He loved that time of peace between ten at night and one in the morning. His thoughts ran vagrom then. Fantasies took shape under his pen which, in the cold light of morning, looked unreal and nebulous, though he had the good sense to restrain criticism within strict limits, and corrected style rather than matter. He was a writer, an essayist with no slight leaven of the poet, and had learnt early that the

everyday world held naught in common with the brooding of the soul.

But he was no long-haired dreamer of impossible things. Erect and square-shouldered, he had passed through Sandhurst into the army, a profession abandoned because of its humdrum nature, when an unexpectedly "fat" legacy rendered him independent. He looked exactly what he was, a healthy, clean-minded young Englishman, with a physique that led to occasional bouts of fox-hunting and Alpine climbing, and a taste in literature that brought about the consumption of midnight oil. This latter is not a mere trope. Steynholme is far removed from such modern "conveniences" as gas and electricity.

At present he had no more definite object in life than to watch the trout rising in the pool. He held the fishing rights over half a mile of a noted river, but, by force of the law of hospitality, as it were, the stretch of water bordering the lawn was a finny sanctuary. Once, he halted, and looked fixedly at a dormer window in a cottage just visible above the trees on the opposite slope. Such a highly presentable young man might well expect to find a dainty feminine form appearing just in that place, and eke return the greeting of a waved hand. But the window remained blank—windows refused to yield any information that morning—and he passed on.

The lawn dipped gently to the water's edge, until the close-clipped turf gave way to pebbles and sand. In that spot the river widened and deepened until its current was hardly perceptible in fine weather. When the sun was in the west the trees and roofs of Steynholme were so clearly

reflected in the mirror of the pool that a photograph of the scene needed close scrutiny ere one could determine whether or not it was being held upside down. But the sun shone directly on the water now, so the shelving bottom was visible, and Grant's quick eye was drawn to a rope trailing into the depths, and fastened to an iron staple driven firmly into the shingle.

He was so surprised that he spoke aloud.

"What in the world is that?" he almost gasped; a premonition of evil was so strong in him that he actually gazed in stupefaction at a blob of water and a quick-spreading ring where a fat trout rose lazily in midstream.

Somehow, too, he resisted the first impulse of the active side of his temperament, and did not instantly tug at the rope.

Instead, he shouted:—

"Hi, Bates!"

An answering hail came from behind a screen of laurels on the right of the house. There lay the stables, and Bates would surely be grooming the cob which supplied a connecting link between *The Hollies* and the railway for the neighboring market-town.

Bates came, a sturdy block of a man who might have been hewn out of a Sussex oak. His face, hands, and arms were the color of oak, and he moved with a stiffness that suggested wooden joints.

Evidently, he expected an order for the dogcart, and stood stock still when he reached the lawn. But Grant, who had gathered his wits, summoned him with crooked forefinger, and Bates jerked slowly on.

"What hev' ye done to yer face, sir?" he inquired.

Grant was surprised. He expected no such question.

"So far as I know, I've not been making any great alteration in it," he said.

"But it's all covered wi' blood," came the disturbing statement.

A handkerchief soon gave evidence that Bates was not exaggerating. Miss—or is it Madam?—Dorothy Perkins can scratch as well as look sweet, and a thorn had opened a small vein in Grant's cheek which bled to a surprising extent.

"Oh, it is nothing," he said. "I remember now—a rose shoot caught me as I went back into the dining-room a moment ago. I shouted for you to come and see *this.*"

Soon the two were examining the rope and the staple.

"Now who put *that* there?" said Bates, not asking a question but rather stating a thesis.

"It was not here yesterday," commented his master, accepting all that Bates's words implied.

"No, sir, that it wasn't. I was a-cuttin' the lawn till nigh bed-time, an' it wasn't there then."

Grant was himself again. He stooped and grabbed the rope.

"Suppose we solve the mystery," he said.

"No need to dirty your hands, sir," put in Bates. "Let I haul 'un in."

In a few seconds the oaken tint in his face grew many shades lighter.

"Good Gawd!" he wheezed. At the end of the rope was the body of a woman.

There are few more distressing objects than a drowned corpse. On that bright June morning a dreadful apparition lost little of its grim repulsiveness because the body was that of a young and good-looking woman.

If one searched England it would be difficult to find two men of differing temperaments less likely to yield to the stress of even the most trying circumstance than Grant and Bates, yet, during some agonized moments the one, of tried courage and fine mettle, was equally horrified and shaken as the other, a gnarled and hard-grained rustic. It was he from whom speech might least be expected who first found his tongue. Bates, who had stooped, straightened himself slowly.

"By gum!" he said, "this be a bad business, Mr. Grant. Who is she? She's none of our Steynholme lasses."

Still Grant uttered no word. He just looked in horror at the poor husk of a woman who in life had undoubtedly been beautiful. She was well but quietly dressed, and her clothing showed no signs of violence. The all-night soaking in the river revealed some pitiful little feminine secrets, such as a touch of make-up on lips and cheeks, and the dark roots of abundant hair which had been treated chemically to lighten its color. The eyes were closed, and for that Grant was conscious of a deep thankfulness. Had those sightless eyes stared at him he felt he would have cried aloud in terror. The firm, well-molded lips were open, as though uttering a last protest against an untimely fate. Of course, both men were convinced that murder had been done. Not only were arms and body bound in a manner that was impossible of accomplishment by the dead woman herself, but an ugly

wound on the smooth forehead seemed to indicate that she had been stunned or killed outright before being flung into the river.

And then, the rope and the staple suggested an outlandish, maniacal disposal of the victim. Here was no effort at concealment, but rather a making sure, in most brutal and callous fashion, that early discovery must be unavoidable.

The bucolic mind works in well-scored grooves. Receiving no assistance from his master, Bates pulled the body a little farther up on the strip of gravel so that it lay clear of the water.

"I mum fetch t' polis," he said.

The phrase, with its vivid significance, seemed to galvanize Grant into a species of comprehension.

"Yes," he agreed, speaking slowly, as though striving to measure the effect of each word. "Yes, go for the police, Bates. This foul crime must be inquired into, no matter who suffers. Go now. But first bring a rug from the stable. You understand? Your wife, or Minnie, must not be told till later. They must not see. Mrs. Bates is not so well to-day."

"Not so well! Her ate a rare good breakfast for a sick 'un!"

Bates was recovering from the shock, and prepared once more to take an interest in the minor features of existence. Among these he counted ability to eat as a sure sign of continued well-being in man or beast.

Grant, too, was slowly regaining poise.

"I hardly know what I am saying," he muttered. "At any rate, bring a rug. I'll mount guard till you return with the

policeman. There can be no doubt, I suppose, that this poor creature is dead."

"Dead as a stone," said Bates with conviction. "Why, her's bin in there hours," and he nodded toward the water. "Besides, if I knows anythink of a crack on t'head, her wur outed before she went into t'river.... But who i' t'world can she be?"

"If you don't fetch that rug I'll go for it myself," said Grant, whereupon Bates made off.

He was soon back again with a carriage rug, which Grant helped him to spread over the dripping body. Then he hastened to the village, taking a path that avoided the house.

The lawn and river bank of *The Hollies* could only be overlooked from the steep wooded cliff opposite, and none but an adventurous boy would ever think of climbing down that almost impassable rampart of rock, brushwood, and tree-roots. At any rate, when left alone with the ghastly evidence of a tragedy, Grant troubled only to satisfy himself that no one was watching from the house. Assured on that point, he lifted a corner of the rug, and, apparently, forced himself to scrutinize the dead woman's face. He seemed to search therein for some reassuring token, but found none, because he shook his head, dropped the rug, and walked a few paces dejectedly.

Then, hardly knowing what he was about, he relighted his pipe, but had hardly put it in his mouth before he knocked out the tobacco.

Clearly, he was thinking hard, mapping out some line of conduct, and the outlook must have been dark indeed,

judging by his somber and undecided aspect.

More than once he looked up at the attic window of the cottage which had drawn his eyes before tragedy had come so swiftly to his very feet. But, if he hoped to see anyone, he was disappointed, though, in the event, it proved that his real fear was lest the person he half expected to see should look out.

He was not disturbed in that way, however. Fish rose in the river; birds sang in the trees; a water-wagtail skipped nimbly from rock to rock in the shallows; honey-laden bees hummed past to the many hives in the postmaster's garden. These were the normal sights and sounds of a June morning —that which was abnormal and almost grotesque in its horror lay hidden beneath the carriage rug.

To and fro he walked in that trying vigil, carrying the empty pipe in one hand while, with the other, he dabbed the handkerchief at the cut on his face. He was aware of some singular change in the quality of the sunlight pouring down on lawn and river and trees. Five minutes earlier it had spread over the landscape a golden bloom of the tint of champagne; now it was sharp and cold, a clear, penetrating radiance in which colors were vivid and shadows black. He was in no mood to analyze emotions, or he might have understood that the fierce throbbing of his heart had literally thinned the blood in his veins and thus affected even his sight. He only knew that in this crystal atmosphere the major issues of life presented themselves with a new and crude force. At any rate, he made up his mind that the course suggested by truth and honor was the only one to follow, and that, in itself, was something gained.

By the time Bates returned, accompanied by the village policeman, and two other men carrying a stretcher, Grant was calmer, more self-contained, than he had been since that hapless body was dragged from the depths. He was not irresponsive, therefore, to the aura of official importance which enveloped the policeman; he sensed a certain uneasiness in Bates; he even noted that the stretcher was part of the stock in trade of Hobbs, the local butcher, and ordinarily bore the carcase of a well-fed pig.

These details were helpful. Naturally, Bates had explained his errand, and the law, in the person of the policeman, was prepared for all eventualities.

"This is a bad business, Mr. Grant," began the policeman, producing a note-book, and moistening the tip of a lead pencil with his tongue. Being a Sussex man, he used the same phrase as Bates. In fact, Grant was greeted by it a score of times that day.

"Yes," agreed Grant. "I had better tell you that I have recognized the poor lady. Her name is Adelaide Melhuish. Her residence is in the Regent's Park district of London."

Robinson, the policeman, permitted himself to look surprised. He was, in fact, rather annoyed. Bates's story had prepared him for a first-rate detective mystery. It was irritating to have one of its leading features cleared up so promptly.

"Oh," he said, drawing a line under the last entry in the note-book, and writing the date and hour in heavy characters beneath. "Married or single?"

"Married, but separated from her husband when last I had news of her."

"And when was that, sir?"

"Nearly three years ago."

"And you have not seen her since?"

"No."

"You didn't see her last night?"

Grant positively started, but he looked at the policeman squarely.

"It is strange you should ask me that," he said. "Last night, while searching for a book, I saw a face at the window. It was that window," and four pairs of eyes followed his pointing finger. "The face, I now believe, was that of the dead woman. At the moment, as it vanished instantly, I persuaded myself that I was the victim of some trick of the imagination. Still, I opened the other window, looked out and listened, but heard or saw nothing or no one. As I say, I fancied I had imagined that which was not. Now I know I was wrong."

"About what o'clock would this be, Mr. Grant?"

"Shortly before eleven. I came in at a quarter past ten, and began to work. After writing steadily for a little more than half an hour, I wanted to consult a book, and lighted a candle which I keep for that purpose. I found the book, and was about to blow out the candle when I saw the face."

Robinson wrote in his note-book:—

"Called to *The Hollies* to investigate case of supposed murder. Body of woman found in river. Mr. Grant, occupying *The Hollies*, says that woman's name is Adelaide Melhuish"—at this point he paused to ascertain the spelling —"and he saw her face at a window of the house at 10.45 P.M., last night."

"Well, sir, and what next?" he went on.

"It seems to me that the next thing is to have the unfortunate lady removed to some more suitable place than the river bank," said Grant, rather impatiently. "My story can wait, and so can Bates's. He knows all that I know, and has probably told you already how we came to discover the body. You can see for yourself that she must have been murdered. It is an extraordinary, I may even say a phenomenal crime, which certainly cannot be investigated here and now. I advise you to have the body taken to the village mortuary, or such other place as serves local needs in that respect, and summon a doctor. Then, if you and an inspector will call here, I'll give you all the information I possess, which is very little, I may add."

Robinson began solemnly to jot down a summary of Grant's words, and thereby stirred the owner of *The Hollies* to a fury which was repressed with difficulty. Realizing, however, the absolute folly of expressing any resentment, Grant turned, and, without meaning it, looked again in the direction of the cottage on the crest of the opposite bank. This time a girl was leaning out of the dormer window. She had shaded her eyes with a hand, because the sun was streaming into her face, but when she saw that Grant was looking her way she waved a handkerchief.

He fluttered his own blood-stained handkerchief in brief acknowledgment, and wheeled about, only to find P. C. Robinson watching him furtively, having suspended his note-taking for the purpose.

CHAPTER II
P. C. Robinson "Takes a Line"

Table of Contents

"It will help me a lot, sir," he said, "if you tell me now what you know about this matter. If, as seems more than likely, murder has been done, I don't want to lose a minute in starting my inquiries. In a case of this sort I find it best to take a line, and stick to it."

His tone was respectful but firm. Evidently, P. C. Robinson was not one to be trifled with. Moreover, for a sleuth whose maximum achievement hitherto had been the successful prosecution of a poultry thief, it was significant that the unconscious irony of "a case of this sort" should have been lost on him.

"Do you really insist on conducting your investigation while the body is lying here?" demanded Grant, deliberately turning his back on the girl in the distant cottage.

"Not that, sir—not altogether—but I must really ask you to clear up one or two points now."

"For goodness' sake, what are they?"

"Well, sir, in the first place, how did you come to find the body?"

"I walked out into the garden after finishing breakfast a few minutes ago, and noticed the rope attached to the staple, just as you see it now."

"Did you walk straight here?"

"No. Not exactly. I was—er—curious about the face I saw, or thought I saw, last night, and looked into the room

through the same window. By doing so I scared Mrs. Bates, who was clearing the table, and she screamed—"

"Her would, too," put in Bates. "Her'd take 'ee for Owd Ben's ghost."

"You shut up, Bates," said the policeman. "Don't interrupt Mr. Grant."

Grant was conscious of an undercurrent of suspicion in the constable's manner. He was wroth with the man, but recognized that he had to deal with narrow-minded self-importance, so contrived again to curb his temper.

"I am not acquainted with old Ben or his ghost," he said quietly. "I can only tell you that I went inside to reassure Mrs. Bates, and then strolled slowly to this very spot. Naturally, I could not miss the rope and the staple. To my mind, it was not intended that I or anyone else should miss them. I regarded them as so peculiar that I shouted for Bates. He came at once, and drew the body out of the water."

"And you recognized the dead woman as the one you saw last night?"

"Yes."

"At about ten minutes to eleven?"

"Yes."

"Is it likely, sir, that any other person saw her in these grounds a bit earlier?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, sir, I can't put it much plainer. Could anybody else have seen her here, say about 10.15?"

Grant met the policeman's inquiring glance squarely before he answered.

"It is possible, of course," he said, "but most unlikely."

"Were you alone here at that hour?"

Again Grant sought and held that inquisitive gaze, held it until Robinson affected to consult his notes. There was a moment of tense silence. Then the reply came with an icy stubbornness that was not to be denied.

"I decline absolutely to be cross-examined about my movements. If you are unable or unwilling to order the removal of the body, I'll telegraph to the chief of police at Knolesworth, and ask him to act. Further, I shall request Dr. Foxton to examine the poor lady's injuries. It strikes me as a monstrous proceeding that you should attempt to record my evidence at this moment, and I refuse to become a party to it."

"Now, then, Robinson, stop yer Sherlock Holmes work, an' help me to lift this poor woman on to the stretcher," said Bates gruffly.

The policeman's red face grew a shade deeper with annoyance, but he had the sense to avoid a scene. He was not popular in the village, and was well aware that the two rustics pressed into service as stretcher-bearers would joyfully retail the fact that he had been "set down a peg or two by Mr. Grant."

"I'll do all that's necessary in that way, sir," he said stiffly. "I suppose you have no objection to my askin' if you noticed any strange footprints on the ground hereabouts?"

"That was the first thing I looked for, both here and outside the window—the latter, of course, for another reason. I found none. These stones would show no signs. The ground is so dry that even the five men now present

leave no traces, but I remember seeing in the bed of the stream certain marks which, unfortunately, were obliterated when Bates hauled the body ashore. They were valueless, however—shapeless indentations in the mud and sand."

"Were they wide apart or close together, sir?"

"Quite irregular. No one could judge by the length of the stride whether they were made by the feet of a man or a woman, if that is what you have in mind ... but, really—"

Grant's impatient motion was not to be misunderstood. Robinson stooped, removed the rug, and unfastened the rope, after noting carefully how it was tied, a point which he called on the others to observe as well. Then he and the villagers went away with their sad burden, the rug being requisitioned once more to hide that wan face from the vivid sunshine.

Bates had a trick of grasping a handful of his short whiskers when puzzled; he did so now; it seemed to be an unconscious effort to pull his jaws apart in order to emit speech.

"I've a sort of idee, sir," he said slowly, "that Robinson saw Doris Martin on the lawn with 'ee last night."

Grant turned on his henchman in a sudden heat of anger.

"Miss Martin's name must be kept out of this matter," he growled.

But Sussex is not easily browbeaten when it thinks itself in the right.

"All very well a-sayin' that, sir, but a-doin' of it is a bird of another color," argued Bates firmly.

"How did you know that Miss Martin was here?"

"Bless your heart, sir, how comes it that us Steynholme folk know everythink about other folk's business? Sometimes we know more'n they knows themselves. You've not walked a yard wi' Doris that the women's tittle-tattle hasn't made it into a mile."

No man, even the wisest, likes to be told an unpalatable truth. For a few seconds, Grant was seriously annoyed with this village Solon, and nearly blurted out an angry command that he should hold his tongue. Luckily, since Bates was only trying to be helpful, he was content to say sarcastically:

"Of course, if you are so well posted in my movements last night, you can assure the coroner and the Police that I did not strangle some strange woman, tie a rope around her, and throw her in the river."

"Me an' my missis couldn't help seein' you an' Doris a-lookin' at the stars through a spyglass when us were goin' to bed," persisted Bates. "We heerd your voices quite plain. Once 'ee fixed the glass low down, an' said, 'That's serious. It's late to-night.' An' I tell 'ee straight, sir, I said to the missis:—'It will be serious, an' all, if Doris's father catches her gallivantin' in our garden wi' Mr. Grant nigh on ten o'clock.' Soon after that 'ee took Doris as far as the bridge. The window was open, an' I heerd your footsteps on the road. You kem' in, closed the window, an' drew a chair up to the table. After that, I fell asleep."

Perturbed and anxious though he was, Grant could hardly fail to see that Bates meant well by him. The mental effort needed for such a long speech said as much. The allusion to Sirius, amusing at any other time, was now most valuable, because an astronomical almanac would give the hour at

which that brilliant star became visible. Other considerations yielded at once, however, to the fear lest Robinson and his note-book were already busy at the post office. Without another word, he hurried away by the side-path through the evergreens, leaving Bates staring after him, and, with more whisker-pulling, examining the rope and staple, which, by the policeman's order, were not to be disturbed.

Grant reached the highroad just as Robinson and the men with the stretcher were crossing a stone bridge spanning the river about a hundred yards below *The Hollies*. A slight, youthful, and eminently attractive female figure, walking swiftly in the opposite direction, came in sight at the same time, and Grant almost groaned aloud when the newcomer stood stock still and looked at the mournful procession. He, be it remembered, was somewhat of an idealist and a poet; it grieved his spirit that those two women, the quick and the dead, should meet on the bridge. He took it as a portent, almost a menace, he knew not of what. He might have foreseen that unhappy eventuality, and prevented it, but his brain refused to work clearly that morning. A terrible and bizarre crime had bemused his faculties. He seemed to be in a state of waking nightmare.

He was stung into impetuous action by seeing the policeman halt and exchange some words with the girl. He began to run, with the quite definite if equally mad intent of punching Robinson into reasonable behavior. He was saved from an act of unmitigated folly by the girl herself. She caught sight of him, apparently broke off her talk with the policeman abruptly, and, in her turn, took to her heels.

Thus, on that strip of sun-baked road, with its easy gradient to the crown of the bridge, there was the curious spectacle offered by two men jogging along with a corpse on a stretcher, a young man and a young woman running towards each other, and a discomfited representative of the law, looking now one way and now the other, and evidently undecided whether to go on or return. Ultimately, it would seem, Robinson went with the stretcher-bearers, because Grant and the girl saw no more of him for the time.

Grant had received several shocks since rising from the breakfast-table, but it was left for Doris Martin, the postmaster's daughter, to administer not the least surprising one.

Though almost breathless, and wide-eyed with horror, her opening words were very much to the point.

"How awful!" she cried. "Why should any-one in Steynholme want to kill a great actress like Adelaide Melhuish?"

Now, the name of the dead woman was literally the last thing Grant expected to hear from this girl's lips, and the astounding fact momentarily banished all other worries.

"You knew her?" he gasped.

"No, not exactly. But I couldn't avoid recognizing her when she asked for her letters, and sent a telegram."

"But—"

"Oh, Robinson told me she was dead. I see now what is puzzling you."

"It is not quite that. I mean, why didn't you tell me she was in Steynholme? Has she been staying here any length of time?"

The girl's pretty face crimsoned, and then grew pale.

"I—had no idea—she was—a friend of yours, Mr. Grant," she stammered.

"She used to be a friend, but I have not set eyes on her during the past three years—until last night."

"Last night!"

"After you had gone home. I was doing some work, and, having occasion to consult a book, lighted a candle, and put it in the small window near the bookcase. Then I fancied I saw a woman's face, *her* face, peering in, and was so obsessed by the notion that I went outside, but everything was so still that I persuaded myself I was mistaken."

"Oh, is that what it was?"

Grant threw out his hands in a gesture that was eloquent of some feeling distinctly akin to despair.

"You don't usually speak in enigmas, Doris," he said. "What in the world do you mean by saying:—'Oh, is that what it was?'"

The girl—she was only nineteen, and never before had aught of tragic mystery entered her sheltered life—seemed to recover her self-possession with a quickness and decision that were admirable.

"There is no enigma," she said calmly. "My room overlooks your lawn. Before retiring for the night I went to the window, just to have another peep at Sirius and its changing lights, so I could not help seeing you fling open the French windows, stand a little while on the step, and go in again."

"Ah, you saw that? Then I have one witness who will help to dispel that stupid policeman's notion that I killed Miss

Melhuish, and hid her body in the river at the foot of the lawn, hid it with such care that the first passerby must find it."

Every human being has three distinct personalities. Firstly, there is the man or woman as he or she really is; secondly, there is the much superior individual as assessed personally; thirdly, and perhaps the most important in the general scheme of things, there is the same individuality as viewed by others. For an instant, the somewhat idealized figure which John Menzies Grant offered to a pretty and intelligent but inexperienced girl was in danger of losing its impressiveness. But, since Grant was not only a good fellow but a gentleman, his next thought restored him to the pedestal from which, all unknowing, he had nearly been dethroned.

"That is a nice thing to say," he cried, with a short laugh of sheer vexation. "Here am I regarding you as a first-rate witness in my behalf, whereas my chief worry is to keep you out of this ugly business altogether. Forgive me, Doris! Never before have I been so bothered. Honestly, I imagined I hadn't an enemy in the world, yet someone has tried deliberately to saddle me with suspicion in this affair. Not that I would give real heed to that consideration if it were not for the unhappy probability that, strive as I may, your name will crop up in connection with it. What sort of fellow is this police constable? Do you think he would keep his mouth shut if I paid him well?"

Grant was certainly far from being in his normal state of mind, or he would have caught the tender gleam which lighted the girl's eyes when she understood that his concern

was for her, not for himself. As it was, several things had escaped him during that brief talk on the sunlit road.

On her part, Doris Martin was now in full control of her emotions, and she undoubtedly took a saner view of a difficult situation.

"Robinson is a vain man," she said thoughtfully. "He will not let go the chance of notoriety given him by the murder of a well-known actress. Was she really murdered? Robinson said so when I met him on the bridge."

"I'm afraid he is justified in that belief, at any rate."

"Well, Mr. Grant, what have we to conceal? I was in your garden at a rather late hour, I admit, but one cannot watch the stars by day, and a big telescope with its tripod is not easily carried about. Of course, father will be vexed, because, as it happens, I did not tell him I was coming out. But that cannot be helped. As it happens, I can fix the time you opened your window almost to a minute, because the church clock had chimed the quarter just before you appeared."

Grant, however, was not to be soothed by this matter-of-fact reasoning.

"I am vexed at the mere notion of your name, and possibly your portrait, appearing in the newspapers," he protested. "Miss Melhuish was a celebrated actress. The press will make a rare commotion about her death. Look at the obvious questions that will be raised. What was she doing here? Why was she found in the river bordering the grounds of my house? Don't you see? I had to decide pretty quickly whether or not I would admit any previous knowledge of her. I suppose I acted rightly?"

"Why hide anything, Mr. Grant? Surely it is always best to tell the truth!"

He looked into those candid blue eyes, and drew from their limpid depths an element of strength and fortitude.

"By Jove, Doris, small wonder if a jaded man of the world, such as I was when I came to Steynholme, found new faith and inspiration in friendship with you," he said gratefully. "But I am wool-gathering all the time this morning, it would seem. Won't you come into the house? If we have to discuss a tragedy we may as well sit down to it."

"No," she said, with the promptitude of one who had anticipated the invitation. "I must hurry home. There are accounts to be made up. And Robinson and others will be telegraphing to Knoleworth and London. I must attend to all that, because dad gets flustered if several messages are handed in at the same time."

"Come and have tea, then, about four o'clock. The ravens will have fled by then."

"The ravens?"

"The police, you dear child, and the reporters, and the photographers—the flock of weird fowl which gathers from all points of the compass when the press gets hold of what is called 'a first-rate story,' By midday I shall be in the thick of it. But, thank goodness, they will know nothing to draw them your way until the inquest takes place, and not even then if *I* can manage it."

"Don't mind me, Mr. Grant. You must not keep anything back on my account. I'll try and come at four. But I may be very busy in the office. By the way, you ought to know. Miss Melhuish came here on Sunday evening. She arrived by the

train from London. I—happened to notice her as she passed in the Hare and Hounds 'bus. She took a room there, at the inn, I mean, and came to the post office twice yesterday. When I heard her name I recognized her at once from her photographs. And—one more thing—I guessed there was something wrong when I saw you, and Robinson, and Bates, and the other men standing near a body lying close to the river. That is why I came out. Now I really must go. Good-by!"

She hastened away. Grant stood in the road and looked after her. Apparently she was conscious that he had not stirred, because, when she reached the bridge, she turned and waved a hand to him. She was exceedingly graceful in all her movements. She wore a simple white linen blouse and short white skirt that morning, with brown shoes and stockings which harmonized with the deeper tints of her Titian red hair. As she paused on the bridge for a second or two, silhouetted against the sky, she suggested to Grant's troubled mind the Spirit of Summer.

Returning to the house by way of the main gate, which gave on to the highway, he bethought him of Mrs. Bates and Minnie. They must be enlightened, and warned as to the certain influx of visitors. He resolved now to tackle a displeasing task boldly. Realizing that the worst possible policy lay in denying himself to the representatives of the press, who would simply ascertain the facts from other sources, and unconsciously adopt a critical vein with regard to himself, he determined to go to the other extreme, and receive all comers.