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CHAPTER II. [CONTINUED.]

BY J. H. HESELTINE.

"The young woman's idea was to poison Miss Decima's mind against you, I suppose, so that her father could get the property?"

Sir Tom's brows contracted.

"I do not think the property was so much in her mind."

"She wanted to marry you herself, then?" I asked.

"I am afraid so. And although she is so frightened to think what she has done, she actually seems to imagine that it will make me like her to know what wickedness she has committed to gain me. I told her—but it is of no use going further into the matter." Only the sternness of his face suggested to me with what sort of an answer he had met the hysterical girl's distracted confession of love. "As you say, women are strange creatures," I remarked. "Here is Dallinger's reply."

The landlady was entering the room with it, and although I had little doubt what it would be, it relieved me to actually hear from the brain specialist that he was already on his way to us.

The time passed with heart-wearing slowness till it was time to start for him, in the only vehicle we could get in the village, a crazy wagonette.

I somehow felt a weight of responsibility off my shoulders as soon as I caught sight of the physician's well-known figure, and heard him ask, as we drove back to the Abbey together, a hundred questions in his quiet way which gave me no idea of why the questions were asked, or what train of thought was in the physician's mind.

When at last we reached the Abbey, the faithful Wilson let us in quietly, and took us up to the locked room where Sir Tom had left his fiancée's motionless cofined form six hours earlier. It was now nearly nine o'clock and the landing was lighted dimly by a hanging lamp which cast a mysterious light over our eager earnest faces.

Miss Caryll's maid seemed quite awed by the presence of so many grave faces, and she flushed when Dallinger fixed his keen eyes on her face. She was a fresh looking country girl of not more than seventeen, with pretty, honest-looking eyes.

Dallinger took the key from her. "I suppose that this has not left your possession since Sir Tom Warburton gave it to you?" he asked; and Mary Aungard answered with clear emphasis:

"No, sir; it has not."

Dallinger nodded and put the key in the lock. Then, as he turned it, we followed him in a body into the room, a large, handsome one, wainscoted in oak. In the center of it, at the foot of the bed, loomed dimly in the light of Wilson's candle, the shape of the coffin supported on trestles.

Sir Tom took the candle from him impatiently, and advanced alone towards it. Then we heard him utter an exclamation of astonishment and anger.

"The fiend!" he cried. "See—he has murdered her!"

The lid had been laid on the coffin, and as Sir Tom drew it away we all crowded round, and then, I think that we all started back a step, and I know that I gasped for

breath—for the coffin was empty!

Sir Tom was the first to speak. "This is Oliver Grendall's doing," he said, in a tone that made me afraid, and when, after we had made an examination of the room, he strode through the astonished group to the door, I followed him, afraid of what might happen if he met his fiancée's guardian alone.

Grendall was seated at a writing desk at the other end of the study with a heap of papers before him, and as he looked up in astonishment at our entrance, one, a large, legal looking envelope, fell from his fingers to the carpet. It lay right in the glare of the desk-lamp, and as Sir Tom strode towards him, he caught sight of the bold writing upon it, and picked it up before Grendall could reach it.

"To be opened by Decima Caryll on her wedding day," he read aloud, and turned to the elder man with blazing eyes. "How dare you open this, before you know whether Miss Caryll is alive or dead?" he hissed; and the other man rubbed his bony hands together nervously.

"I have not the least doubt that Miss Caryll is dead," he said; and Sir Tom clinched his fists, but still spoke with a certain determined calmness.

"If she is dead, you have murdered her," he said. "It is impossible for her to have left the room by herself, for the door has remained locked, and they tell me that none of Miss Caryll's dresses are missing."

Mr. Grendall looked more cunning than ever.

"I see perfectly what has happened," he said.

For my part, I was quite at a loss for an explanation, unless the man himself possessed a duplicate key to the room, or had gained access through a widdow in order to hide the body, and prevent Dallinger's examination. But even then, it seemed incredible that he could really have succeeded in getting her body away and hiding it while the house was full of servants.

"It is very plain," he said to me, with his evil leer. "Sir Thomas Warburton was the only person who could enter the room. He has evidently removed the body himself in order to trump up afterwards some story of Miss Caryll's recovery and marriage to himself, which shall enable him to claim the estate."

Sir Tom still kept control of himself.

"Look here, Oliver Grendall," he said, with calm determination, "you may take my word for it that we shall not rest till we have found Miss Caryll; and if she is dead, I tell you this, Dr. Dallinger will be able to tell definitely whether she died before or after her apparent death four days ago, and whether her death was due to your action or not. If it was, you will hang. So I give you a last chance of saving your neck by telling us where she is and seeing whether it is too late to save you from the crime of murder."

Oliver Grendall only smiled.

"You know as well as I do, that I have no idea where the corpse has been hidden," he said, and try as we would, we could get nothing more out of him.

"You have shown the enemy your hand again," I said, regretfully, to Sir Tom, when we had left him alone. "Of course, we must get a search warrant, if it is possi-

ble under such remarkable circumstances; but why give the fellow warning? It will only make him try to hide the body more securely."

"That is just what I want him to do," said the baronet. "You see, he must have hidden Decima very quickly, because Wilson swears that he has never been out of sight more than ten minutes at a time. If he expects a search tomorrow he is almost certain to cover up any trace he may have left, or to find a more secure hiding-place. So that all we have to do is to watch him."

"We will leave the house to put him off his guard. Wilson will watch him incessantly until the household retires, although it is improbable that he will do anything before. Then Wilson will come down and let us in; and I think we shall only have to wait to make the man lead us to the hiding-place."

"We had better search the house as thoroughly as we can do now," I said; "and then there seems nothing left but to follow out your plan. It is lucky we are in the country, or Grendall would have called the police and had us all ejected before now. Where is Dallinger?"

Dallinger was too busy questioning everybody to join in our search through the house, although I could not conceive what questions there were to ask. The search was perfectly useless, and we all left the house together, giving strict injunctions to Wilson to follow his master about like a shadow, and if anything suspicious occurred, to summon us at once. Sir Tom and I were to remain watching the house. Dallinger agreed to take back the wagonette, which had remained all the while unattended at the bottom of the avenue.

"You will get back as soon as possible," said Sir Tom, eagerly. "I want you to see Debima the moment we find her."

The physician nodded.

"You must not expect me too soon, though," he said. "I have one or two things to attend to."

TO BE CONTINUED.



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