The Roupell Mystery

By Austyn Granville

CHAPTER VI.—(Continued.)

The doctor and Emily Weldon continued to slowly promenade up and down the terrace. United by that secret bond of sympathy which ofttimes brings two natures together unconsciously, they experienced an indefinable comfort in each other's society.

A solitary figure, that of some worthy burgher of Paris, attracted, doubtless, to Villeneuve by the sensational reports in the newspapers, was the only living object that was in view. Looking at him the doctor observed:

"There is no gauging the depth of human curiosity."

"That is so. There have been several here since—" and she glanced up to the darkened chamber above, with a shudder. "They walk in and out as if they owned the place. He looks like a retired tradesman of some kind. He is pretty cool for a trespasser. See, he has seated himself on the turf, and is throwing bread to the swans."

"Don't disturb him," said the doctor. "See with what care he spreads that red handkerchief over his knees. He has taken out some sandwiches, and is evidently enjoying them."

Miss Weldon again smiled. It was really quite ludicrous to watch the old gentleman from Paris. He appeared to be totally oblivious of the presence of the people on the terrace. Having eaten his sandwich, he presently arose and threw the crumbs adhering to his handkerchief to the expectant swans. The doctor laughed outright; so loudly, indeed, as to apparently attract the attention of the old gentleman who, glancing but once in their direction with an indignant air, walked away and disappeared among the trees.

A half hour more elapsed and still M. Cassagne did not come. Hardly able to conceal his irritation at the delay, Dr. Mason at length retired to the library, where he busied himself in some scientific calculations in which he had been abruptly interrupted by the startling news of the murder of Mme. Roupell. For an hour he remained oblivious to all else save sines, cosines, tangents, secants and cosecants. An abtruse trigonometrical problem was before him, and to its solution he was devoting himself heart and soul, when suddenly he became aware of an obstruction of the light from the window. Looking up, to his intense annoyance he perceived the inquisitive burgher from Paris, his nose flattened against the glass, staring vacuously into the apartment.

Anger was expressed in every feature of the physician's countenance as he threw the French window wide open; but the worthy burgher did not seem to be at all disconcerted. On the contrary, availing himself of the opportunity, before the doctor could stop him, he stepped over the low sill and entered the library.

"Sir, this unwarrantable intrusion at such a moment—" began the physician.

"May perhaps surprise you," interrupted the burgher; "but have you given orders about the truffles?"

The doctor stared with astonishment and stepped back two or three paces.

"You are," he gasped, "you cannot be Monsieur——"

"I am," replied the burgher, an indescribable twinkle in his eye, as he noted the doctor's amazement. "I am the person you are about to mention—Alfred Cassagne, the detective," and with a profound bow, he handed Dr. Mason his card.

CHAPTER VII.

Alfred Cassagne was the son of a large contractor, who had accumulated a considerable fortune in the construction of those remarkable docks in the city of Havre, which have helped to make that place the most important harbor of France. He lost his father when a mere child. His mother, dying when he was but twenty-two years of age, had left him amply provided for. But he had never married. Of quite a studious turn of mind, he had devoted himself to books, and might possibly have degenerated into a book worm, or have sunk so low as to become an author, if an event had not transpired which changed the whole current of his existence.

He awoke one morning to find that the cashier of a bank where he usually had a large balance, had absconded with the funds of that institution. Where he had gone, was equally a mystery to the police and the officers of the concern. Having considerable interest in the capture of the fugitive, Cassagne set about making inquiries on his own account. From these inquiries he quietly deduced his own theories, and one morning, to the intense astonishment of the chief of police, he entered the presence of that functionary and stated his opinion on the case very briefly. It was to the effect that the president of the bank and the cashier were in collusion, and that the cashier, whom most people believed to be by that time safely in America, that Mecca for European rogues, would be found hiding in the president's own private residence.

The chief of police had laughed at first; but Alfred Cassagne was permitted to proceed. It was known he was a gentleman of fortune; and men of means are never snubbed very badly anywhere. Very soon, moreover, the official grew serious. By a system of logical deduction from circumstances already known, Cassagne established his theory on a basis so ingenious as to excite the chief's warmest admiration. Subsequent search discovered that the state of things Cassagne had believed to exist in theory, was really true.

Alfred Cassagne might now possibly have been forty years of age, though when not disguised, owing to his smoothly shaven face, he appeared to be younger. He was rather above the middle height, and though somewhat narrow across the shoulders, the great depth of his chest made ample amends for this deficiency. His hair was cut very short to permit of his more readily wearing the various wigs by which he frequently concealed his identity. His mouth was well cut, the lips thin and somewhat pursed together, as is often the habit with men who pass much time in thinking. His nose was large and very prominent. His hands and feet small and rather delicate. His voice singularly soft and gentle; his manner that of a man entirely at ease, and of one who thoroughly understands his business.

He sat quite still in the easy chair to which Dr. Mason had motioned him on his arrival. It was not until the latter had given him the outlines of the case that he spoke at all, and then he said:

"We will begin by premising a certain state of facts. Madame Roupell has been murdered. Who did it? Public opinion says your friend Van Lith. I always mistrust public opinion. The prefect of police is not at all sure but Monsieur Chabot had a hand in it. I sometimes mistrust the prefect of police."

"You mean to imply that both may be wrong?" inquired the doctor.

"Yes, and if I am right, it leaves us confronting two alternatives."

"And they are?"

"Either that the unfortunate woman committed suicide while of unsound mind, or that the crime is the act of a third party to us at present unknown.'

"I can dispose of the first of those suppositions immediately," said the doctor. "Madame Roupell's mind was as sound as yours or mine is at the present moment."

"Let us proceed to an examination of the body. I have provided myself with a written permit to break the seals," said the detective. "Lead the way, please."

They entered the chamber of death. Nothing had been disturbed since the visit of the prefect. Alfred Cassagne took a rapid survey of the room. He advanced to the bedside, and commenced a minute inspection of the body of the murdered woman.

He carefully removed the bandages from the wound in the head; he turned the body over so that the light from the window fell full upon the face of the dead woman, revealing in the strong sunlight each line and shadow already showing in their marked change of the lineaments the inevitable approach of decay. Taking out his penknife, Cassagne carefully removed one of the clots of blood which had accumulated near the entrance of the wound, and walking to the window examined it through a small magnifying glass which he took from his pocket. Presently he said:

"Doctor, look at that blood!"

Dr. Mason took the magnifying glass and the penknife and gazed steadfastly upon the little red gout.

"Do you see anything peculiar about it?" asked Cassagne. "Do you not notice an entire absence of natural crystallization?"

The doctor's face turned pale as a sheet; his lips twitched nervously.

"This crime grows more horrible and more mysterious than ever. It is impossible to mistake your meaning. This wound was inflicted after death," he exclaimed. "The blood is certainly what we call in the profession 'dead blood.'"

"And is that not often the case where a wound is inflicted when a person is in a comatose condition?"

"It might be," replied the physician. "I have known the phenomenon of total suspension of the circulation in comatose bodies."

"And in such case, would blood flowing from a wound crystallize or not?"

"It is possible that it might crystallize somewhat, if the person wounded, while in a comatose condition, was young and healthy. In the case of an old and feeble woman, like Madame Roupell, I should consider it extremely doubtful. In the present instance, by means of the glass, one can plainly discern that no crystallization has taken place."

"In fact, that this wound was inflicted after the wound which produced either death or insensibility?" said the detective.

"Exactly so," replied the physician. "The question now is, where is that wound?"

"We will find it," said Cassagne. "Give me your help here."

"We had better look for a contusion of some sort. Insensibility could be produced by a sharp blow on the back of the head, or under the ear," remarked Dr. Mason.

"I am not of that opinion," replied Cassagne. "I have already looked there. There is no swelling of any kind on the back of the head, and as she is dressed in demi-toilette, it is easy to see that no injury has been inflicted to the upper part of the spinal cord."

"For what kind of wound shall we search? It must be a small one, indeed, to escape the examination of so good a surgeon as Monsieur Croizet."

"Unfortunately Monsieur Croizet," replied Cassagne, with a curious smile, "is a surgeon only. He is not a detective. He is good at generalizations; he fails in particulars. The wound we must look for, since you sound Monsieur Croizet's praises so highly, must be no larger than a pencil point. Have you never heard of the Venetian stiletto?"

"No, I cannot say that I have," answered Dr. Mason.

"It is an instrument made of toughened glass, no thicker than a knitting needle. When plunged into a victim, it can be broken short off in the flesh which closes around it, so that it is hard to tell how death supervenes. Many such deaths have undoubtedly been charged to apoplexy, and other causes."

"Is it possible?" ejaculated the physician.

"Not only possible but more than probable. Let us instantly begin our search for such a weapon. There will not be a drop of blood visible. Death generally ensues from internal hemorrhage, unless the stiletto reaches the heart, when, of course, the victim dies instantly. Turn her over on her face," said the detective. "She may have been wounded in the back."

This was done, and they carefully examined that portion of the body. For the first time Dr. Mason's blind faith in the skill of the man he had employed began to show signs of wavering. He little knew Cassagne's marvelous resources. The doctor had left the body and was standing over by the window, again examining the blood on the penknife through the magnifying glass. A slight exclamation from the bed caused him to glance in that direction.

He could hardly repress a cry of surprise. He held his breath almost, so anxiously did he await the result of an experiment that Cassagne had put in operation. With his eyes closed and with his head raised very much after the style of a blind man reading from a raised-letter book, the detective was moving his fingers, soft and delicate as a young girl's, over the cold, stiff body of the murdered woman. Dr. Mason knew in an instant that he was about to depend upon his sense of touch to find the tiny wound that his eyes had failed to detect.

For over a minute the two men remained in their relative positions. Then the voice of Cassagne was heard breaking the silence, which had grown almost painful in its intensity:

"I am right. Madame Roupell was stabbed in the back."

CHAPTER VIII.

Dr. Mason, in his agitation, dropped the penknife and the magnifying glass and rushed to the bedside.

"Where is the wound?" he ejaculated.

M. Cassagne, cool, calm and collected, still held one tell-tale finger, which, like a living eye, had detected a slight inequality in the surface of the flesh, firmly pressed down upon a spot no larger than a pin's head.

"Take it easy, doctor," he said, smiling at the agitation of the physician, "and if the magnifying glass is still unbroken, I will trouble you for it. The penknife also, if you please, doctor. Now," after he had gently pushed back the flesh with the point of the knife, "look through the glass, and tell me what you see."

"I see a rough, glistening surface."

"Try it with the point of the penknife."

The doctor took the knife, and scraped upon the hard surface thus exposed to view.

"It is glass," he exclaimed. "I haven't a doubt of it."

"It is the wound which caused death. You see it has penetrated the lumbar region. Death has been caused by two things. Shock and internal bleeding. Have you a small pair of pincers here? No? Well, then I must use my fingers."

M. Cassagne having enlarged the opening of the wound by dilitation, plunged his finger and thumb into the orifice and drew out, though not without much difficulty and after repeated failures, the broken piece of a small, sharpened glass stiletto. Its withdrawal from the wound was followed by a few drops of blood, which the doctor, who notwithstanding his professional experiences was greatly affected by the spectacle, was about to wipe reverently away, when he was stopped by the detective.

"Don't do that. That blood has a tale of its own to tell. I wish to examine it through the glass."

He took up some on the point of the knife, and the two men as before went to the window. Notwithstanding that it had not been exposed to the outer air, the blood was strongly crystallized.

"One thing is proved, and almost conclusively," exclaimed Cassagne. "It is the wound which caused her death. See how the blood is crystallized. Now to discover the assassin. The prefect's theory is that Madame Roupell was sitting at her desk writing, when the crime was committed. In support of that, he points to the scattered papers and the overturned chair. Now notice which way the chair has fallen."

"It has fallen toward the desk," said Dr. Mason.

"Precisely; and that proves to me that it was the murderer, not Madame Roupell, who was engaged in the examination of the papers."

"Why?"

"Because, had Madame Roupell been surprised from behind and stabbed, as we now believe to be the case, she would have fallen forward, and the chair would have been thrown backward or away from the desk, not toward it. Madame Roupell surprised this unknown person, perhaps while he was rifling the contents of her desk; springing to his feet he overthrew the chair, drew his stiletto, and advanced toward her. She doubtless turned to flee, too frightened to scream, and he then stabbed her in the back."

"I see; and having no other weapon than the stiletto, and that having been broken off short in the body, he fired at her to make sure of his work."

(To be continued.)

Wife with a Conscience.

Billikin—What's the matter, Willikin?

Willikin—Matter enough. You know, some time ago I assigned all my property to my wife, to—to keep it out of the hands of—of people I owe, you know.

Billikin—Yes.

Willikin—Well, she's taken the money and gone off—says she won't live with me because I swindled my creditors.

Dull Season for the Hobo.

"June is me favorite month," said the poetical hobo, as he scribbled an ode on the back of a tomato can label.

"Tain't mine," sighed Sandy Pikes, lugubriously. "I always have to go barefooted troo dat month."

"Barefooted? Why, how is that, pal?"

"Why, you see people throw all deir old shoes at de June brides."

He Made It.

"Love," said the fair maid, "is the greatest thing in the world."

"Don't you believe it," rejoined the young man in the parlor scene. "I am greater than love."

"How do you figure that out?" queried the fair party of the prelude.

"A manufacturer," explained the young man, "is greater than the thing he manufactures—and I make love. See?"

A Fellow-Feeling.

"You were very lenient with that conductor," said the first passenger.

"O!" replied the other, "we're all liable to make mistakes."

"Ah! perhaps you were a conductor yourself once."

"No, sir; I'm a weather forecaster."—Catholic Standard and Times.

HUNDREDS ARE DEAD

End Comes Suddenly to Miners In West Virginia.

ONLY FIVE ESCAPE WITH LIVES

Explosion of the Deadly Black Damp Slays 400 Men and Wrecks Two Coal Mines.

Monongah, W. Va., Dec. 7.—That not less than 400 miners were killed by an explosion of black damp in mines No. 6 and No. 8 of the Consolidated Coal company, of Baltimore, at this place yesterday, is now conceded by those who take the most hopeful and most conservative view of the disaster. Five badly injured men made their way to the surface.

Of the victims six dead bodies had been taken from mine No. 6 at midnight and 65 more were piled up in the entry awaiting completion of facilities for bringing them to the surface. From mine No. 8 at the same hour, 14 bodies had been removed and a number of others are ready to be brought out as soon as arrangements can be completed.

There is much speculation as to the cause of the explosion, but the most generally accepted theory is that it resulted from black damp, scientifically known as methane. It is believed that a miner attempted to set off a blast, which blew out and ignited an accumulation of this deadly gas, and that this in turn ignited the coal dust, a highly inflammable substance found in greater or less quantities in all West Virginia mines. However, all explanations of the cause up to this time are necessarily speculative. Only a thorough investigation after the mine is reopened will disclose the cause, if it is ever ascertained. The explosion affected both mines, and so far as now known appears to have done about as much damage in one as in the other. It has not been established in which mine it originated.

Three of the living men, while unable to give any detailed report of the disaster, state that immediately back of them, when they began their frantic struggle for liberty, there was a large number of men engaged in a similar struggle, while still further back in the workings there was a larger number of whom they know nothing. It is the opinion of the mine officials and others familiar with mining that these men had not penetrated the mine as far as had the majority of the day shift, when the explosion occurred, and that they headed for and reached the main entrance before the heavy cave-in that now blockades the entrance not more than a few hundred feet from the entrance.

HELD IN PEONAGE.

Grave Charge Brought Against Civil Service Commissioner.

New Orleans, La., Dec. 7.—That John Avery McIlhenny, member of the United States civil service commission, holds more than 1,000 ignorant foreigners in a state of peonage, and that brutality and cruelty are practiced to force these people to remain on Avery island, La., where the McIlhenny interests operate vast oyster canning and tobacco manufacturing properties, is the charge brought by Stephen Jozca, special commissioner of the Austro-Hungarian government, to which nationality most of the alleged peons belong.

The stories of peonage in certain sections of the South recently were called to the attention of the Austro-Hungarian government, and official warning was given intending emigrants of the dangers ahead of them. Mr. Jozca who is assistant secretary of the Louisiana state board of immigration was sent to Avery Island by Emile Hoehn the Austro-Hungarian consul in New Orleans following complaints made by one of the immigrants who escaped the McIlhenny guards.

Co-operate More Closely.

Washington, Dec. 7.—To effect a closer tie between the department of commerce and labor and the commercial bodies of this country, a conference was held today in the office of Secretary Straus. Besides Secretary Root and Mr. Straus, who initiated the movement for the conference, there were present delegates from the chambers of commerce, boards of trade and other organizations of New York, Chicago, St. Louis, Denver, Galveston, Portland, Seattle, San Francisco and other cities.

Maintains State Rights.

Raleigh, N. C., Dec. 7.—The State Supreme court in a decision handed down last night reversed Judge Long, of the Superior court, in the matter of the $30,000 fine imposed on the Southern Railway company for selling passenger tickets at a rate in excess of 2¼ cents, the state rate. At the same time the decision affirms the act of the court and the constitutionality of the legislative act prescribing punishment of agents and any officials of the road.

Two Ships Reach Peru.

Callao, Peru, Dec. 7.—The American cruisers Washington and Tennessee, which have arrived, will remain a week, taking on coal. The health conditions aboard the ships are excellent.

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