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# THE LADY FROM NOWHERE.

## A DETECTIVE STORY.

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### CHAPTER XVII.

#### AN EXPLANATION.

It took Gebb some time to grasp the meaning of Miss Wedderburn's remarks; for the information it conveyed seemed impossible for belief. He looked so doubtful that she repeated her speech with some impatience. 'I tell you Miss Gilmar gave me that necklace on the night she was murdered.'

'At what hour?' gasped Gebb, not quite master of himself.

'Shortly after nine o'clock.' 'Did you see her on that night?' 'Of course I did!' said Edith sharply. 'How else could I have got the necklace?'

'But you told me at Kirkstone Hall that you did not know Miss Gilmar was in Grangebury.'

'That is perfectly true,' rejoined Edith, colouring, 'but I told you many things that were false. I was forced to do so, to protect Arthur and myself.'

'So you knew of the murder when I paid my first visit?'

'Yes; and when you inquired after Arthur I fancied you had discovered his pawing of the necklace; and that you intended to accuse him of the crime. Naturally, I was anxious to save him.'

'That was why you fainted,' said Gebb, suddenly enlightened.

'It was; in a moment I saw Arthur's danger, as I knew well he would not say that I gave him the necklace; so the thought made me faint. When I learned later that you knew nothing, I held my tongue.'

'You did, and to some purpose. I congratulate you on your power of acting, Miss Wedderburn. You deceived me completely.'

'What else was I to do?' said Edith, resentfully. 'You would not have had me betray myself or Arthur? How did you find out that the necklace was pawned?'

'That I shall explain later,' replied Gebb, annoyed by her attitude. 'And in my turn, may I ask you why you killed Miss Gilmar?'

Edith stared at him in surprise, and laughed. 'You are making a mistake!' she said with haughty coolness. 'I did not kill Ellen Gilmar.'

'But you were with her on that night?'

'So I was; but I left her at nine o'clock, and then she was alive and well. Why should I kill her?'

'To obtain the necklace.'

'What nonsense you talk, Mr Gebb. She gave me the necklace for Arthur, of her own free will. Even if she had refused to give it to me I should certainly not have murdered her. I love Arthur very much, it is true, but hardly enough to commit so wicked a deed for his sake.'

'Do you swear that you are innocent?' asked Gebb, looking at her keenly.

'Yes, I swear I am,' she answered, meeting his look with much frankness. 'If necessary I can prove my innocence, and that of Arthur.'

'Oh, Mr Alder has proved his innocence already.'

'Very kind of him,' said Edith, with sarcasm. 'For I daresay he was glad enough to hear of Arthur's arrest.'

'You do him wrong, Miss Wedderburn. On seeing the case in the paper Mr Alder came round at once to see me. He stated that Mr Ferris was present in the Town Hall at Mr Basson's lecture, and, therefore, could not have been with Miss Gilmar at ten o'clock, the hour when she was killed. He proved your lover's innocence.'

Edith raised her eyebrows and looked surprised. 'Why did Mr Alder

do that?' she said half to herself. 'He hates Arthur because—'

'Because he is engaged to you,' finished Gebb. 'That is a mistake, miss; for Mr Alder is quite friendly with Mr Ferris, and bears him no grudge for winning your hand. You may not credit it, but Mr Alder is a real gentleman.'

'The leopard can change his spots then,' said Edith, still puzzled. 'I should never have thought that Mr Alder was so generous. It is very strange,' she finished, musingly, 'very strange indeed.'

The detective quite agreed with her. He thought that the whole affair was wonderfully strange, particularly as he was ignorant of how Edith had obtained a valuable necklace from an old miser like Miss Gilmar; and, also, he could not understand her reason for taking it. He quite saw that she had deceived him in order to save herself and Ferris from being accused of the murder, but he was doubtful if she was so innocent of all knowledge concerning the death as she feigned to be. With this idea in his mind he addressed her with some sharpness, and asked her a leading question.

'If you did not kill the woman yourself,' said he, 'who did?'

'I don't know,' answered Edith, candidly. 'She was alive when I left her at nine o'clock, and when I saw her death in the paper I was as much surprised as anyone.'

'You knew, then, that she called herself Miss Ligram at Grangebury?'

'Oh, yes, else I would not have known she was the victim; though, to be sure,' added Edith, with a nod, 'the description of the Yellow Boudoir would have made me suspect. I spoke falsely for my own ends when I told you that I saw no newspapers at Norminster.'

'Well, Miss Wedderburn,' said Gebb, after a pause, 'I see no reason to doubt your innocence, but I should like to hear your reasons for getting the necklace.'

'I'll tell you the whole story, Mr Gebb. Indeed, I am sorry now that I did not do so when you called to see me, but I was afraid of getting Arthur into trouble, and so held my tongue.'

'It was your silence which caused his arrest,' said Gebb. 'Had you spoken out, he would not have been arrested.'

'He could have exculpated himself,' protested Edith, earnestly.

'I daresay; but in order to shield you—as I now see—he refused to speak. However, we can talk of these things later, Miss Wedderburn. Tell me your story.'

'Certainly; I shall explain fully,' said the girl, quickly, 'and anything you do not quite understand you can ask me about afterwards. Well, Mr Gebb, you must know, first of all, that Arthur is the son of Marmaduke Dean, who—'

'I am aware of that fact,' interrupted Gebb. 'Prain told me.'

'Very good,' said Edith, composedly. 'It makes my task the easier. Yes, he is the son of Dean, and when his father escaped from prison some years ago, he came down to Kirkstone Hall to see if the poor man had returned there. You know that Dean desired to revenge himself on Miss Gilmar for her share in his condemnation. Well, Arthur thought that his father might have gone to the Hall to punish her; so he came down to warn Miss Gilmar and prevent a second crime, if possible.'

'And what did Miss Gilmar do?'

'She was greatly alarmed by the news; and, terrified lest Dean should really come, she went away, as I told you before, and hid herself in

London under those several names. It was in this way that I became acquainted with Arthur, and we were very friendly. He used to visit me frequently, and in the end we fell in love with one another.'

'As was natural,' said Gebb, smiling. 'But before you proceed, tell me if Dean ever came to the Hall, as he was expected.'

'No,' replied Edith, vehemently, 'he never did. I don't know where he is.'

'Does Ferris know?' asked the detective, eagerly.

'Not he. Neither of us have set eyes on his father. The poor man may be dead for all we know.'

'I'm not so sure of that,' said Gebb, thinking of the murder. 'Go on, please.'

'I would not tell you about my engagement,' said Edith, who did not relish the smiles of the detective, and, therefore, spoke with some resentment, 'but that it is necessary for the safety of Arthur and myself that I should speak freely. Mr Ferris—she adopted this more formal style of mention to keep Gebb in order—'

'Mr Ferris came to see me frequently, and confided to me all his troubles. He was greatly in want of money, as his pictures did not sell, and he had no one to help him. I could not, as I had no money, and I was simply earning my living as my cousin's housekeeper at Kirkstone Hall. In July Ar—, that is, Mr Ferris, was in such distress that I resolved to aid him by obtaining from Miss Gilmar the diamond necklace which had belonged to his father.'

'I know,' said Gebb, who was listening attentively, 'the necklace which Dean gave Laura Kirkstone.'

'Yes, it was a family jewel, and Dean gave it to Laura only because she was to be his wife. When she died, it should have been returned to Dean—or, as he was a convict—to his son. Miss Gilmar, however, seized it, and all the rest of Laura's jewels. With the other jewels I had nothing to do, but I was resolved to obtain the necklace for Arthur. Was it not right to do so?'

'Yes,' rejoined Gebb, promptly, 'the necklace certainly belonged to Mr Ferris, as his father could not benefit by it. But my wonder is how you got it. From what I have heard of Miss Gilmar I should have thought the task an impossible one.'

'It was difficult to obtain it, but I did so in the end. I told you,' said Edith, with some colour, 'that I did not know Miss Gilmar was at Grangebury. Well, that was not true; for she wrote to me stating that she was living in Paradise Row under the name of Ligram, and, in her letter, she asked me about some business. I resolved to visit Grangebury, but as I did not know where it was, I asked Arthur to escort me.'

'Did he know of your intention?'

'No; but curiously enough the week I wrote to him he was going down to Grangebury to hear a friend lecture. That was on the 24th July; so I came up to town, and went with him on that night.'

'To the lecture?'

'Well, not at first. The lecture did not begin until close on nine o'clock, and I wished to see Miss Gilmar; so I sent Arthur into the Town Hall, and intended to join him when I got the necklace. I then visited Miss Gilmar. She was alone in the house, and admitted me herself. She was much alarmed at seeing me, and still more so when I demanded the necklace.'

'I don't wonder at it. Did she refuse to give it up?'

'Yes. Although she was wearing it at the time. I told her then that if she did not give it up to me for Arthur, I should search for Dean and tell him where she was. Indeed,' said Edith, reflectively, 'I am not sure but what I did not say that I knew where Dean was.'

'But you did not, said Gebb, looking at her keenly.

'No, certainly not,' she rejoined hastily, 'but I said so to frighten Miss Gilmar. She was terrified, and implored me not to take the necklace or tell Dean, but I knew that I was acting rightly, so in the end she gave me the necklace, which I put into my pocket, and left at once.'

'About what time?'

'About half-past nine, I think, Miss Gilmar seemed anxious to get me away from the house, and almost pushed me out of the front door, which she locked after me. I then went to the Town Hall, but as Arthur was in one of the front seats, and the lecturer was speaking, I did not wish to create a disturbance by joining him, so I sat down near the door. I had some conversation with the doorkeeper as to where Mr Ferris was seated so if you ask him, he'll tell you that I sat near him until the lecture concluded at half-past ten o'clock. Then Arthur joined me in much alarm, as he thought I had got into trouble. We returned to London, where I gave him the necklace, and told him to pawn it and pay his debts. I slept at the Grosvenor Hotel, near the Victoria Station, and Arthur went back to his rooms in Chelsea. So you see, Mr Gebb, both he and I are quite innocent.'

'It seems so,' said the cautious Gebb, not committing himself.

'It is so,' insisted Edith, haughtily. 'The doorkeeper can tell you that both Mr Ferris and myself were in the Town Hall before and after ten, and it was about that time Miss Gilmar was murdered.'

'Was anyone with her when you called?'

'No. I told you she was alone; but there was wine on a small table, and with that and the way she pushed me out I was sure she expected some one.'

'Did you meet anyone in the street going there?'

'Not a soul. I saw no one. Everybody in Grangebury seemed to be at the lecture.'

'Did you write and tell Mr Ferris about my visit to you?'

'Yes, I did, and warned him not to pawn the necklace, as he might be suspected. But it was too late, for he pawned it the day after I gave it to him. But he is innocent, as you see, Mr Gebb. Surely he will be released.'

'When his trial takes place he will,' said Gebb. 'He would have been left off before if he had told this story to the magistrate.'

'Ah! said Edith, in a low voice, 'he held his peace for my sake. Good, brave Arthur! No wonder I love him.'

### CHAPTER XVIII.

#### WHAT MRS. PRESK FOUND.

Gebb continued to question and cross-question Edith until he became thoroughly acquainted with the details of her visit to Miss Gilmar at Grangebury. When in full possession of the facts he permitted her to depart, but took the precaution to ask for her London address in case he should require her further evidence. Edith informed him that since leaving Kirkstone Hall she had been staying with an old schoolfellow in Bloomsbury Square, and was likely to remain there for some time, or at all events until she could find a situation.

'I must work, you know, Mr Gebb,' she confessed frankly. 'I am very poor.'

'Yet had you accepted Mr Alder you would—'

'Accept Mr Alder!' interrupted Edith, colouring. 'I would sooner sweep the streets than marry anyone but Arthur. Mr Gebb,' she added, imploringly, 'now that you are convinced of his innocence do get him out of prison.'

'I'll do my best,' promised the detective. 'He will come up for trial in a week or two, but in the meantime if I place the actual facts of the case before the magistrate who committed him, I have no doubt he will be admitted on bail.'

'Anything—anything, dear Mr Gebb, as long as he is set free!'

The detective proved to be as good as his word, and worked zealously in the interest of Ferris. As the