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# THE LADY FROM NOWHERE.

## A DETECTIVE STORY.

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### CHAPTER XIX.

#### THE UNEXPECTED OCCURS.

Gebb found it impossible to discover the owner of that third-class railway ticket. He went himself to Norminster to find out, if possible, to whom it had been issued, but all in vain. The station-master had taken another situation in Scotland, the ticket clerk was absent on his annual holidays, and none of the porters could remember any particular person who had gone up to London on that particular day. On the whole, circumstances seemed to be against Gebb in following this clue, and after several vain attempts he gave it up, at all events for the present. This he confessed to Parge, who at once reproved him for faint-heartedness, and preached a lengthy sermon on the folly of being discouraged.

"You don't expect roast ducks to fly into your mouth, do you?" said Parge indignantly. "Of course, it is no easy task to hunt down a criminal. We'd have all the bad 'uns in gaol if such was the case. You've only been a week looking after this ticket business, yet you shy off just because you can't find out about it straight away. You never were a detective, Absalom, and you never will be."

"But just look here," cried the badgered Absalom. "What can I do, I've been—"

"I know where you've been—to Norminster," growled Parge, "and I know what you've done—nothing. You think I'm past work. I saw that the other day. Well, from nat'ral infirmity, or too much fat, so I am; but in nowise else, Absalom, so don't you believe it. If I was in your shoes, which I ain't, I'd write up to that station-master in Scotland, and ask him if he knows of any partic'lar person as left Norminster on that day. It ain't a big place, and if he's a sharp one he might remember."

"I've written to the station-master," cried Gebb, crossly.

"Oh, have you?" returned Parge, rather disappointed. "Then I'll be bound you don't know what you're going to do about that ticket clerk."

"Yes, I do. I'm going to wait till he comes back, and then question him at once. In about a week I'll know all those two know, though I dare say it won't be much. And look you here, Simon," cried Gebb, warming up, "it's all very well your pitching into me over this case, but is it an easy one? 'Cause if you say it is, it ain't. I never in my born days came across such a corker of a case as this one. Who would have thought that Ferris and the girl would be mixed up in it?—yet they were. And who would have thought them guilty? Everybody! And were they guilty? You know they weren't. Can you find Dean? No, you can't, though you tried yourself when his trail was still fresh. Then how the devil do you expect me to find him after all these years? It's very easy to sit in your chair and pick holes, Simon, but when you come to work the case for yourself, you'll be as up a tree as I am at this blessed moment."

"I don't deny that the case is hard, Absalom."

"Hard!" echoed Gebb with scorn; "it's the most unnat'ral case as ever was. The only got one blessed clue after all my hard work, and that's the railway ticket; which, so far as I can see, is about as much good as a clock would be to a baby."

"Why don't you question Mrs. Presh?"

"I have questioned her, and the servant too; and beyond the ticket, she don't know a blessed thing."

"Can't Basson help you, or Mr Alder, or Mr Ferris?"

"No! none of the three; they don't know who killed Miss Gilmar, and if it comes to a point, Simon, I don't see why they should know."

"It is queer that the lot of them, including the girl, should have been in Grangebury on the very night of the murder," said Parge, with a musing air.

"It's a coincidence, that's all," retorted Gebb, "and you know very well in our profession there's no end of coincidences, though if you write them in a book people tell you they're impossible. You can't accuse any one of the three of killing the old woman, as they were all in the lecture hall the whole evening. You know all about Ferris, and Miss Wedderburn; well, it couldn't have been them. Mr. Basson was lecturing; it couldn't have been him. Mr Alder was looking after the money and the house, so as to get plenty of cash in for his friend, so it couldn't have been him. If not them, who is guilty?"

"Well, Dean must be the criminal," "I don't believe it," replied Gebb, obstinately. "And if he is, he'll not be hanged; for Old Nick himself couldn't hunt him out. By the way, Simon, what kind of a man was he to look at; to the naked eye, so to speak?"

"I don't know what like he'll be now," replied Parge, briskly, "but he was uncommonly good-looking in the dock. I can tell you. Just the man to take a woman's fancy. Tall and dark, and smiling."

"Any particular mark?" asked Gebb, professionally.

"Well, he wasn't scarred or scratched in any way that I know of," replied Parge, reflectively, "but he had a frown."

"Get along! Everyone's got a frown," said Gebb, in a disgusted tone.

"Not of his sort," was Parge's answer. "Since sitting here, Absalom, I've been reading a heap of books I never read before. Amongst others one called 'Redgauntlet,' by a baronet, Sir Walter Scott. Know it?"

"No, I don't. What has it got to do with Dean?"

"There was a fellow in it," said Parge, following his own reflections, "as had a horseshoe mark over his nose when he frowned. Quite queer it was."

"Must have been," said Gebb, derisively, "and has Dean a horseshoe?"

"No. But when he scowls, or frowns, like this," here Parge made a hideous face, "he's got a queer mark, deep as a well and quite straight, between his eyebrows. I'd know him from among a thousand by it. Seems to cut his forehead in two like. If you see a man with a mark like that when he's in a rage, Absalom, just you nab him, for that's Dean."

"Stuff!" said Gebb, impatiently. "Lots of men wrinkle up into lines when they get out of temper. I've seen foreheads like Clapham Junction for lines."

"Not so deep," answered Parge, shaking his head, "and not so straight down between the eyes. Most men frown in lines which run across the forehead, when they raise their eyebrows like; but Dean draws everything up to a deep mark as dips just between the eyebrows and on to the nose. It's the queerest mark I ever saw; and whatever disguise he puts on he can't smooth that furrow off. A baby could tell him by it."

"Hum!" said Gebb, who had been thinking. "Now you come to talk of it, Simon, that young Ferris has a mark like that; but not very deep."

"He's young yet, Absalom; but I daresay he takes after his father. Well, all I say is that there's no other way

in which you'll spot Dean. He may grow old, and white and shaky, or he may disguise himself in all kinds of ways, but he can't rub out that brand of Cain as Nature has set on him. I said it before, and I say it again."

"I'll look round for a man of that sort," said Gebb, rising to take his leave, "but I can't say I've much hope of finding him. Dean's been lost for so long that I daresay he's lost for ever. Well, good-bye, Simon. I won't see you for a day or two. There's heaps for me to do."

"Where are you going?" grunted the fat man.

"I'm off to ask Mr Alder to let me search in Kirkstone Hall for that confession of Miss Gilmar's. Then I'm going down there to look it up."

"That won't do any good towards finding out who killed her," said Parge, shaking his head.

"I don't know so much about that, Simon," replied Gebb, coolly. "I wouldn't be a bit surprised to find as the person who killed Kirkstone was someone quite different from those we suspect."

"It must be either Miss G. or Miss K.," said Parge, "and knowing the truth about them won't help you to spot the assassin. You look for Dean first, Absalom, and leave the confession alone for a while."

"No," replied Gebb, obstinately. "I'll look for the confession, and fly round afterwards for Dean. You let me negotiate the job in my own way, Simon."

With this determination, of which Parge by no means approved, but was unable to hinder, Gebb went off to make his last venture in solving the mystery. By this time he was in a furious rage at his many failures, and swore under his breath that come what might he would hunt down and punish the unknown assassin of the wretched old woman who had been strangled in Paradise Row. He had three designs in his head, one of which he hoped might serve to attain the much-desired end. Firstly, he intended to search for the confession of Miss Gilmar, in the belief that it might throw some light on the later case. Secondly, he resolved to follow the clue of the railway ticket, and learn who had come up from Norminster on that fatal night to visit Miss Gilmar, since such person—on the evidence of the ticket found in the Yellow Boudoir—was undoubtedly her murderer. Thirdly, he was bent upon making another search round the pawn-shops to see if any of the other jewels taken from the body had been turned into money. The appearance of the necklace was accounted for by Edith, as she had received it from the old woman before the assassin had arrived; but the rings, bracelets, and hair ornaments were still missing. Sooner or later, in order to benefit by his crime, the murderer would seek to turn them into cash when he thought the storm had blown over. Then was the time to trace and capture him.

The French have a proverb which runs in English "that nothing is certain but the unforeseen," and certainly Gebb proved the truth of this when he arrived at Alder's lodgings. As yet the barrister, pending the administration of the estate, had not moved from his rooms in the Temple; but he intended to do so shortly, and already had engaged handsome chambers in Half-moon-street. These, however, he was never destined to occupy, for on the very day Gebb called to see him he met with an accident which seemed likely to result in his death. As one pleasure to be gained from his riches Alder had purchased a horse, shortly after coming into his fortune, and every morning went riding in the Row. He was a good rider, but not

having indulged in the exercise for some years, by reason of his impetuosity, he had lost a portion of his skill, with the result that the horse, a fiery animal with tricks of which Alder was ignorant, bolted unexpectedly, and threw his rider against the rails. Alder fell across them with such force that he had injured his spine, and now was lying in his rooms in a crippled condition.

"Do you think he'll get over it?" asked Gebb when Alder's servant was relating the occurrence.

"No, sir," answered the man, shaking his head. "The doctor says he's bound to die sooner or later. The spine is injured, and my poor master can't feel anything below his waist. It's death in life already, and the end is sure to come."

"Can I see him?" asked the detective, after some thought.

"No, sir, the doctor left word that he was to see no one."

With this Gebb was forced to be content; and as already he had obtained Alder's permission to search the Hall, he went away rather low-spirited. It seemed hard that the man should come to an untimely end, just when he inherited his kingdom. Moreover, he had behaved very well in defending Ferris in the face of all evidence, and releasing him from prison; therefore Gebb thought it just as well to send a line to the artist and Edith, so that they might come forward in their turn to do what they could for the man who had acted so generously towards them both.

"It's hard lines," said Gebb to himself when he had posted his letter. "I do call it hard. Alder gained a fortune, it is true; but he lost the woman he wished to marry, and now he loses his life. It's a queer world, that gives a man a pleasure only to take it away from him again. I don't understand the workings of Providence now."

With this philosophical reflection, Gebb went home to make his plans before going down to Norminster the next day. He had little hope of success, however, and now that Alder was dying he wondered if he did capture this murderer, if the reward would be paid to him.

"Of course it will," he said to himself on reflection, "for if Alder dies, Miss Wedderburn becomes mistress of the Hall."

### CHAPTER XX.

#### A NEEDLE IN A HAYSTACK.

It was a bright and sunny day when Gebb found himself once more at Kirkstone Hall. In the sunshine the building looked grim and desolate. The smokeless chimneys, the closed doors, dusty windows, and grass-grown terraces, gave the place a forlorn and wretched aspect, and the absence of life, the silence broken only by the twittering of the birds, the neglected gardens, created, even to the detective's prosaic mind, an atmosphere of menace and dread. It looked like a place with a history; and Gebb wondered if Miss Wedderburn, on becoming its mistress, would care to inhabit it again.

"When she marries Ferris and begins a new life, I dare say she will seek some more cheerful abode," he thought, as he stood on the terrace, and looked on the silent house. "It would be foolish for a young couple to dwell with the ghosts of the past. I am not imaginative myself, but I should not care to live here; no, not if the house was given to me rent free. If I were Miss Wedderburn I'd pull it

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