

Morton drew her relentlessly back to the subject. "I will talk to you about that later," he said impatiently. "In the meantime, I can't tell you how urgent the need is, Mrs. Laidlaw. I will not speak to your daughter. I will not disturb her in any way, but I must see her—now! Five minutes from now will be too late."

"If you will not disturb her," she said weakly. "She was not to be disturbed, the doctor said, on any account, or he would not answer for the consequences."

Morton set her aside pitilessly. "Who is with her?" he asked hurriedly. "No one? That is good. No, don't detain me any longer, Mrs. Laidlaw—please! I want to—set something right, and I have only a moment to do it. Wait for me here."

He pushed the door of the sick-room open as he spoke and entered it. A minute passed—another. There was no sound save that of the girl's quiet breathing. No movement; not the slightest noise. Then the waiting woman saw the young man come out again. He was smiling a little, although his lips were set and stiff. Just as he started to speak, however, there was a little sound behind him in the silent room—the vague fluttering of the leaves of an opened book—the faint slap of a curtain caught in the breeze.

"I want to speak to your husband," he said restlessly, before she could question him. "Come down to the dining-room, Mrs. Laidlaw, and have some hot coffee. You are shaking like a leaf."

She tried to twist herself loose from his hold. "John has left the window open in there," she said hurriedly. "She will take cold. I must see—"

But the smile had faded out of Sterling Morton's grin face and tightly closed lips.

"The windows are closed," he persisted stubbornly. "I want you to help me to find Mr. Laidlaw now."

The detective came out of the dead man's room just too late to catch their conversation. He waited until they had vanished.

"Principal or accomplice. I wonder?" he whispered under his breath. "I will be able to answer that question to-mor-

row, when I find out where and how he spent the time from six to eleven to-night. Is he shielding her—or protecting himself? He went into her room just now—what for? To hide some evidence of the crime? I was too far away to catch what he said to her mother or to know what she said to him. I am sure that his movements were too noiseless to break the girl's stupor. What did he want?"

He listened quietly, but no one else came into the dimly lighted hall. He heard the sound of voices below, conversing in low tones, but he could not solve the mystery of which he sought the solution. He listened intently again and then stepped inside Miss Laidlaw's room.

It was dimly lighted, but the young girl's face was in shadow. He knew, from her heavy breathing, that her sleep was due to an opiate rather than to fatigue.

The clothing that she had worn during the day was thrown carelessly across a chair, and on the table beside the bed was a second sleeping draft, to be taken in case the first did not produce the desired result.

Her slippers were on the window-sill, and the window itself was wide open. A light breeze fluttered the white curtains and made the flame of the candle flare ominously.

A moment later the detective stepped outside in the hall and heard slow steps ascending the stairs. "He went inside to open the window," he said to himself. "What was the object? What possible reason—? Yet some motive—some motive strong enough to make him risk the fastening of suspicion upon himself—"

Young Morton and Mrs. Laidlaw came down the hall again, together.

The landlady was saying:—

"Mr. Gresham often had letters from Ogden. John fancied that maybe some of his people lived there, or that the postmaster there would know where to reach them."

"I will wait for them," said Morton restlessly.

"I think that I have heard him speak of Richard Gresham, of Ogden, who was

either his brother or cousin. I think ——" Then he caught sight of the waiting detective and stopped short.

"The verdict of the coroner's jury will be 'death as the result of poison administered by a party or parties unknown,'" said Carter, the detective.

He looked at Morton, but he addressed the woman. "There are a dozen people in the house who will be examined by the coroner in the morning, but I expect to gain but little information from any of them. I understand that Miss Laidlaw has been engaged to the deceased, and that the engagement had recently terminated in a—shall we say, disagreement?"

Sophie Laidlaw flushed in a conscious fashion.

"I believe that there was something in the nature of an engagement existing at one time between them," she said, reluctantly. "They were not engaged, however, at the—"

The detective looked at her oddly. "So the engagement was dissolved," he said, musingly. "May I ask at whose request?"

Morton had been making signs to Mrs. Laidlaw—signs which she was too bewildered to understand.

"Mr. Gresham was much older than Emmy," she said, plaintively, "and he was of an exceedingly jealous disposition. She was quite as fond of him as he was of her, but he made her life a burden with his groundless suspicions. She got tired of it at last, and told him so flatly. They agreed to terminate the engagement then. It had been a mistake from the beginning."

"Did the rupture of the relations seem to affect Mr. Gresham—his general health or his spirits?"

The excitement, the fright through which she had passed, her anxiety about her daughter, stirred Mrs. Laidlaw's usually placid nature to hitherto unstirred depths of bitterness.

"He was on with a new love soon enough after his quarrel with my daughter," she said, with unwonted asperity.

"He was soon engaged to a woman on the East Side somewhere. Emmy said that he had the assurance to tell her all

about it. I think she was a widow. They were to have been married in a month—so he said. Personally, I think he was too selfish to care for any woman. He only wanted to spite Emmy—"

Morton's signs were now too plain to be disregarded. He was shaking his head violently.

Carter wheeled about sharply just in time to catch this signal from Morton. Again the detective wondered—"Principal or accomplice? Is he trying to shield the woman or to protect himself?"

There was a faint sound from the room where the sick girl lay, and the mother scuttled agitatedly away. Morton seemed eager to terminate the interview, but the detective stopped him.

"As near as I can find out, Mr. Morton," he said, gaily, "you seem to have been more familiar with the character of the deceased than anyone else, who will be asked a lot of questions about that to-morrow."

Morton frowned. "In spite of the fact that I positively disclaim any knowledge whatever about the man," he asked, pointedly.

"You have lived under the same roof with him for nearly eight months," said the unperturbed Carter. "You have known him as the anxious lover, the accepted suitor, the ex-janitor of a charming young woman in whom you were interested."

"Interested?"

"Come, Mr. Morton, you will have to tell the coroner's jury to-morrow; you may as well tell me the truth to-night. Were you not, in some sort, a rival of the man who now lies numbered upstairs?"

"So that is what all this palaver points to?" said young Morton, contemptuously.

"I can account for every moment of my time, Mr. Carter, from the hour of six until that of eleven. I feel no interest—speaking in an especial and personal sense—in Miss Laidlaw. So far as I know, Mr. Gresham may have committed suicide."

"Do you believe that?"

Morton nodded.

"No, frankly, I do not," he said, decidedly. "He was too much of a coward to do anything of the kind."

"I have examined his room through-

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