

"Nothing about of murder!" Sir Vivian replied; "and as Mr. Henderson here has been brought into it we have adopted the course of reading for you at once in order that you may acquaint the proper authorities."

"A very proper proceeding, sir, I have no doubt," said the officer, diving his hand into his pocket and producing a pencil and an enormous pocket-book. "I shall be glad, sir, if you will give me the particulars."

For the third time that afternoon Godfrey told his story, while the officer made notes. By the time the contents of the box were shown to him the man's interest was thoroughly aroused. It had always been his ambition to be mixed up in some big affair, and now his chance had come. That being so he was resolved to make the most of it.

"There can be no doubt, sir," he said, addressing Sir Vivian, "that it is likely to be a very serious matter. So far as I can understand the disappearance of the woman has not been noticed, nor has her body been discovered. I will report the facts of the case to Scotland Yard at once, and in the meantime I will take possession of this box and its contents. So far as I can see at present it doesn't look as if it should be very difficult to lay our hands upon the murderer."

"In that case, I suppose your opinion tallies with ours," said Fensden, who had just started another cigarette. "You suspect the Neapolitan lover?"

"I do, sir," the man replied with dignity, as if his suspicions were not things to be treated lightly. "I only wish I had the conducting of this case throughout. But, there, I suppose it will go elsewhere, and others will get the credit of the job. There is nothing else you wish to see me about, I suppose, gentlemen?"

"I think not," said Godfrey. "But I should be glad if you would let us know all that goes on. As I have told you, the poor girl was an old friend, and her cruel death is naturally a great blow to me."

"I will let you know as soon as I hear anything," the man replied. "I shall telegraph to Scotland Yard as soon as I get back to the station, and I expect they will be on the move within the hour. Let me see that I have got the name and address right, sir. Teresina Card, No. 16, Burford-street, Tottenham Court Road. That is correct, I suppose?"

"Quite correct," said Godfrey. "It is a tall house, and there is a lamp-post exactly opposite the door."

"These additional facts having been duly noted, the officer was about to withdraw when the butler entered with the evening papers. He handed them to his master, who made as though he would place them on one side as being irrelevant to the matter at issue, when Sir Vivian stopped him.

"One moment," he said. "Before you go, Griffin, let us make sure that there is no reference in the evening papers to the crime. Will you look, or shall I?"

In answer Godfrey opened the first paper. It was as well that he did so, for on the middle page was this announcement in large type.

TERRIBLE MURDER OF A GIRL! REVOLTING DETAILS!

"I thought as much," said the police officer in a tone of bitter disappointment. "Just my luck again. I was in hopes of being able to put them on the scent, but it seems that they have found it out without me. Might I be so bold, sir, as to ask what it says?"

"I will read the account," said Godfrey.

"At an early hour this morning it was reported to the authorities at Scotland Yard that a murder of an unusual nature had been committed in the vicinity of the Tottenham Court Road. The victim is an Italian woman known as Teresina Card, an artist's model, who, it is stated, has been living in the house in Burford-street, in which her body was discovered, for upwards of a fortnight. It might be mentioned that the house is let out in flats, the occupants being in the main of foreign nationality. The girl herself was of a reserved disposition, and did not associate with the other tenants of the building. She was last seen alive at seven o'clock on the evening of Thursday, when she was observed descending the stairs dressed for going out. The hour of her return is not known, nor was her ab-

sence remarked on Friday. Early on Saturday morning, however, the occupant of a neighbouring room, a German cabinet maker, named Otto Grunther, noticed a small stream of dark red fluid under the door. His suspicions being aroused he informed the owner of the house of what he had seen, who called in the assistance of the policeman on the beat. Together they ascended to the room in question to find that the door was securely locked. Their knocks having elicited no response a key was obtained and the door opened. On entering the room it was discovered that the woman was lying dead upon the floor between the table and the floor. Her throat was cut and she had been stabbed in several places. More horrible still, her hands had been severed at the wrists and were missing. Though the police are naturally reticent as to the matter we are led to believe that they have not succeeded in finding a clue. Needless to say the revolting crime has caused a great sensation in the neighbourhood.

"Later News.—Up to the moment of going to press the most diligent inquiries have been made by our representatives as to the identity of the murdered woman. Teresina Card, it would appear, sat as a model for the central figure in Mr Godfrey Henderson's famous picture 'A Woman of the People,' which attracted so much attention in the Royal Academy Exhibition of last year. She was a Neapolitan by birth, but has spent a considerable time in this country. It has also come to light that on the evening in question she returned home shortly after midnight and was seen talking to a gentleman in evening dress on the pavement in front of the house.

"The police hope very shortly to be able to discover the identity of this mysterious individual, when doubtless further light will be thrown upon the tragedy."

"Good heavens!" said Godfrey, "they surely don't think that I know anything more about it than I have said?"

"You must set the matter right without delay," said Sir Vivian. "Does it say when the inquest will be held?"

"On Monday," Godfrey replied, after he had once more consulted the paper.

"Then you had better communicate with the coroner at once telling him that you are the person referred to and offering him all the information it is in your power to give. You owe it to yourself as well as to the community at large to do this at once."

"I will do so to-night," Godfrey replied. "In the meantime, Griffin, you will communicate with Scotland Yard yourself and tell them what we have discovered. The man who murdered her must have seen us together that night and in the madness of his jealousy have sent the evidence of his crime on to me."

When he had wrapped up the horrible box the police officer took his departure, leaving the others to discuss the matter and to endeavour to come to some understanding about it. At last, when there was nothing further to be said Godfrey proposed that they should go in search of the Indies. He had scarcely opened the door of the studio however, when there was the sound of a heavy fall. Turning round he discovered that Victor Fensden had fallen in a dead faint upon the floor.

(To be continued.)

Copyright Story.

Deputy Lacordaire's Prefecture.

By ROBERT H. SHERARD.

(Author of "The Iron Cross," etc.)

The inspector's attention had been speedily drawn to the lady. In the first place, she was an entire stranger to the public reading-room of the National Library, and secondly the pamphlet which she had asked for was one which no reader had ever applied to see before, although, as the date on the cover showed, it had been deposited on the shelves of that institution just seventeen years ago. The librarian had had great trouble in finding it, and so thickly was the book covered with dust that the inspector's hands had been soiled by touching it.

The lady's conduct had been very suspicious from the first. To begin with, what could an elegant young woman like her want with a dusty, musty political pamphlet, seventeen years old, a "Lifting of the Mask," published by some obscure provincial bookseller, and deposited for copyright purposes only at the Bibliotheque Nationale? It was a beautiful spring afternoon, and the elegant women of Paris were thronging to the Rue de la Paix or the Avenue des Acacias. Everybody was out of doors, and this very reading room, which usually was so crowded, had been deserted by many of its habitual frequenters. She was the very last person one would have expected to see in such a place on such a day.

Then, why had she never once raised the thick black veil which in the fullness of its texture and the sombreness of its hue contrasted so strangely with the lightness and airy gaiety of her fashionable spring hat? She appeared to be deeply interested in this "Lifting of the Mask" of seventeen years ago, and to be reading it eagerly. Such a veil must be like a curtain between her eyes and the book. It was of chenille, and so coarse and thick that it hid her face completely. Why, then, did she keep it down, unless as a disguise?

Again, what was the meaning of those furtive glances which now and again betrayed themselves as she turned her head first to one side and then to the other? That was not consistent with the deep interest with which at other times she pored over the dusty pamphlet.

And then there was a muff. Elegant women were not carrying heavy muffs in May of that year, and this was in itself a suspicious circumstance.

Such were the reflections of the inspector in the reading room of the National Library in Paris that spring afternoon. He was inclined to suspicion because on one or two recent occasions thefts of some importance had been committed under his very eyes and he had been hauled over the coals in proper bureaucratic fashion in consequence. He was determined that nothing of the sort should happen again, if a sharp look-out could prevent it.

In this instance, however, he felt but little anxiety. Suspicious as were the lady's appearance and conduct, the book which she held in her hands was one of no value at all. It was but one of the thousand pamphlets by unknown scribblers which every year are sent to encumber the crowded shelves of the National Library, because the French law will only afford protection to the author's copyright, when he has deposited a copy of his work in this institution.

So the inspector quieted himself by thinking that none but the least rational of kleptomaniacs would care to steal a book of which the intrinsic value was nothing, and deciding that the "petite dame" was merely keeping a rendezvous, turned his attention elsewhere. Ladies were not literary as a rule. The little lady, no doubt, had asked for the first book whose title came into her pretty head. It was possibly by some relation of hers

and, in any case, would serve as well as any other to keep her in countenance.

In these consolatory reflections, unfortunately, the good man was mistaken. The lady's conduct was suspicious, and for the very good reason that her purpose in coming to the National Library was to steal the dusty pamphlet for which she had asked.

Poor Madame Lacordaire—her name was Madame Lacordaire—sat there, quaking. Would she ever be able to manage it? That horrid inspector kept glaring at her through his spectacles. He certainly mistrusted her. No, the law ought not to punish thieves so severely: their trade was punishment enough in itself. Never, never had she suffered in the whole course of her life as much as she had suffered since she had taken this stupid "Lifting of the Mask" in her daintily gloved fingers.

The thing, however, had to be done, and done it was, suddenly, with feminine deftness.

The pamphlet was crushed into the muff at one end, while from the other a booklet which exactly resembled it in outward appearance was whisked forth; a lace handkerchief made an ambush, and with the pseudo-pamphlet in her hand Madame Lacordaire stepped up to the receiving desk to return her book.

Oh, how her heart beat! She could not breathe again, until having tripped out of the reading room and across the courtyard and under the archway she once more found herself in the busy Rue de Richelieu, with the stolen national property safe in her chinchilla muff under the Valenciennes handkerchief.

"Done! Hurrah! Done! Done! Done!" But what was that? Madame Lacordaire's heart leapt in her mouth, and instinctively she hurried on, turning the corner of the rue Caumartin.

"Stop her! Au voleur! Stop her! La petite dame!" It was that odious inspector, who, hatless, with his hair flying out in every direction, and his spectacles hanging down over his chin, was tearing after her, pointing and shouting, "Stop her! The little lady! Stop thief! Stop thief!"

Madame Lacordaire tried to break into a run, but not for such exercise had her dainty botines been constructed. And at the same moment the inspector laid his rough hairy hand on her delicate wrist.

"Not so fast, little mother," said this odious man.

"How dare you, sir," cried Madame Lacordaire, gaining courage in her indignation at the impact. "How dare you touch me? What do you want?"

"A little explanation, my good little lady," said the official panting hideously. "Will you kindly come back to the library?"

"Certainly not," cried Madame Lacordaire, freeing her wrist with a jerk, which left four blue marks for days afterwards on the soft white skin. "I have nothing to do at the library. Who are you? Let me pass."

"Yes, let the lady pass," said a cabman who was looking on. The crowd which had collected rapidly was beginning a hostile manifestation against this hatless bureaucrat, who wanted to force a pretty little lady to accompany him against her will, and the inspector was in despair at the prospect of her escaping him with national property in her possession, when a sergeant-de-ville appeared.

"I charge this woman with stealing a volume from the Bibliotheque Nationale," said the inspector.

"This woman—" cried Madame Lacordaire, indignantly. However, there was no use in protesting. Perforce she accompanied the policeman and her odious persecutor to the police office in the rue Vivienne. The crowd followed, hooting.

The commissaire was writing at his table when this party entered his of-

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