

rice, and it did not need much persuasion for him to send a telephone message to say so. Yet, in a way, he felt the cowardice of it all.

"How is mother this morning?" he asked.

"Oh, she slept on like the rest of us, and is only now up."

"I am glad of that. She is quite well!" he looked at her in a way she understood.

"Yes, father dear, mother is quite all right. She is sorry she worried you last night."

The morning paper came up. She read him the foreign news and then the leading articles. This led to conversation. Afterwards he read the stock market and Exchange news, she still sitting by his side.

A tap at the door and her maid entered with a box.

"By special messenger," she said.

A flush of pleasure mounted to the face of Edith Langthorne. She quickly cut the string and there was before her the mass of white roses. She gathered them all together and carried them off to her room. There was no note, but as she began to arrange them a card dropped out.

Her pleasure gave way to indignation as she looked at the name. She had started off at once with the card to her father, but at her door she stopped and rang the bell.

"These will lighten up your room," she said to her maid. "They are very fresh and sweet."

The young woman looked surprised and formed her own conclusions, which were wrong. Edith tore the card into small pieces and threw them into the fire place.

"What marvellous impudence!" was her only comment, but this act of Barking's started a train of thought which did not make her any the happier.

She heard her mother go into her father's room, and then their voices in conversation. Presently her mother entered.

"Where are the flowers?" she asked, looking round surprised.

"Jordan is arranging them," she said with her back to her mother.

"Jordan arranging them?" repeated her mother. "Well, girls have changed very much since my young days. When John—your father—sent me flowers, had anyone attempted to touch them but myself, I should have regarded it as nothing less than sacrilege."

Edith remained silent.

"Mr dear child, be sure of your own mind before you encourage young Jordan's father. I am afraid we have both spoiled you."

"I am quite sure of my own mind, mother."

"Be sure of your own heart, girl. I think, after all, it is the best guide; it must be so in your case."

Mr Langthorne tapped at the door. "Can you come and write a few letters for me, Edith?"

She and her father were no sooner seated, than a servant brought in a card. A hunted look came into his eyes and instinct told her the visitor was Barking.

"I told you that my father was not to be disturbed this morning."

"Yes, miss, but the young man was very pressing."

"Tell Mr Barking that I am not well this morning," said Mr Langthorne.

The man bowed and withdrew. Edith had settled to her writing again when the footman returned.

"I hope I am acting for the best, sir, but this young man—I thought I had better come and tell you, sir," and he hesitated.

"Yes; yes," said his master, impatiently.

"He refuses to leave the house, sir."

#### CHAPTER XXX.

When Barking entered his master's house his mind was made up. He knew he could not continue the game of bluff for ever; that he was, in a way, living on a powder mine which might explode any minute and prove fatal to him and his prospects. Barking was sure that he was a clever man. Vanity prompted him to demand the hand of Edith Langthorne in marriage; safety urged him to press it. If the worst came to the worst, and his game be known to Mr Langthorne, though he would not scruple to punish his clerk, it might be fairly inferred that he would hesitate to bring a criminal charge against his son-in-law. Still a lump sum and America had its attractions; but he had read of felons being extradited, and he resolved to play for the higher and safer stake.

He was always melodramatic. As he rang the bell he turned, for a moment, looked up at the sky and then along the garden.

"When I come out again from here, I shall be a partner in Langthorne and Son, and a prospective son-in-law, or the game will be up," he said, and London will know Dug Barking no more. As we have seen, he refused to be denied.

"When I heard the lion in his den, I am not going to fall with the harmless animal outside," he said to himself, when the footman had taken the card he forced into his hand.

"Take a seat, young man," said the footman, after some hesitation.

"By gad! I will put a civil tongue in that fellow's head before long."

It was Miss Langthorne who came in response to his second request for an interview. He gave her an elaborate stage bow, and was just framing a compliment when she cut him short.

"My father is not well, sir. He cannot be seen this morning."

This was a use of the polite understatement which he did not quite understand or relish.

"But he will see me?"

"Your card was given to him, and he declines."

"Miss Langthorne, it will be a serious matter if I do not see him."

Her eyes flashed at once; "Indeed," she said coolly, "I think my father is capable of managing his own affairs independently of your aid, sir."

He saw his mistake. This high-spirited girl was not to be taken in by bluff.

"But, Miss Langthorne, it means ruin to me. Unless I see Mr Langthorne this morning the consequences will be too terrible. I have news for him—for his ear alone, of the greatest possible importance."

She shook her head: "My father cannot be troubled this morning."

Barking was wondering what his next

move was to be, when the library door opened and Mr Langthorne appeared. Without a word he beckoned him. The two men entered the room and the door was shut.

Edith choked down a lump that came into her throat. She was annoyed at the persistency of the man, and the success attending it. Not that she was overbearing to her subordinates, but there was something in the youth that roused her worst nature.

"It's all out; the evening papers had the whole thing in last night," he whispered, with stage-like emphasis as soon as the door was closed.

Mr Langthorne felt a cold chill at his heart.

Barking flung himself down into a chair and watched his master as he steadied himself against the table.

"There's the 'Globe.' You had better read it for yourself."

He took up the paper. Barking had marked the paragraph, which was double-headed:

"A Woman's Body Found in the City.  
Foul Play."

"I thought you had—you told me you would get clear of—the body," he gasped, as if the words caused him pain to repeat it.

"Couldn't do it. I deposited the body there where it was found. The other risk was too great. I have not slept since that infernal night," he went on, "and I seem to get no thanks for it. This morning, because I did doze off, and was a few minutes late at the office, I was grossly insulted. My head was in such a whirl I could not work. It was impossible with that paper in my pocket, so I thought I would come on and warn you, and a nice reception I got here."

"You have played me false," Mr Langthorne said, but the firm face was firm

no longer. The muscles quivered; despair and perplexity were there only too plainly.

"I am game to play to the end," said Barking, jauntily, and with assumed bravado. "I am going to risk my neck, and if I lose the rub I am prepared to take the consequences—to take all the guilt upon myself, and if necessary pay the capital punishment of certain conditions."

"I do not trust you, Barking. I do not trust you," said his master.

"Here I am prepared to execute a document, my signature can be witnessed so long as you only read the confession, in which I shall confess the murder of Mrs. Langthorne. That document you can use as evidence against me, if the worst comes to the worst."

"That I could never permit, whatever the consequences might be."

"Well, you will admit that it shows my sincerity, and my anxiety to save you?"

"Yes; I suppose I must admit that," was the reply.

"But I must have my price."

Some of the old dignity came to his master's aid: "Your price? It has come to that then?"

"It has," said the unabashed Barking. "You do not think, you do not seriously maintain that one hundred pounds a year is recompense for the risk I run. Suppose it is traced to me. How can I clear myself?"

"I would give myself up; no man should suffer for my crime."

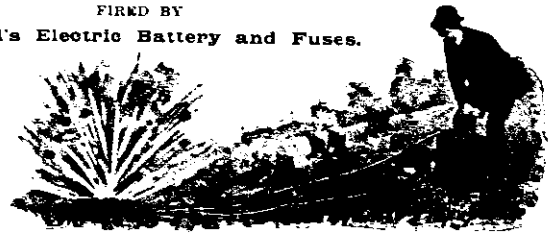
"Yes; now we are calling things by their right names, so far so good, but one can be very philosophical in a study. When disgrace and death face you, Mr Langthorne, you might change your mind."

There was a second's pause. Then the distressed man got up and paced the room.

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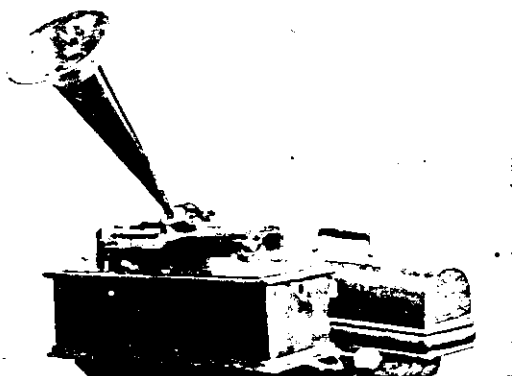


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