

**CLARA CRASHAY**  
BY AN MARCHMONT

**CHAPTER XXII.**  
"THE MYSTERY OF WALCOTE MANOR."  
The murder of Pierre Turrian soon spread over the whole country. It contained those incidents which attract and hold popular attention, and for some days following the discovery of the body all the newspapers everywhere dealt with it.  
The disappearance of Sir Jeffrey's wife, the garbled accounts of the manner in which Pierre Turrian had left the manor house, the apparently complete absence of any conclusive proofs of how the deed was done and the social position of the people interested made "The Mystery of Walcote Manor" as it was termed, a nine-days' wonder.  
Popular suspicion fastened on the fact of Lola's disappearance as strong presumptive evidence of her guilt, and in many papers the fact was commented upon in a manner which left no doubt whatever of the writer's opinion.  
A hue and cry was started all over the country, and portraits of Lola in all degrees of unresemblance appeared in all manner of papers and weekly papers, while pen portraits of the most conflicting kinds abounded everywhere.  
"Lady Walcote knows nothing of this most puzzling mystery, why does she not come forward and explain her conduct?" asked one writer. "It is not she, who but point out the facts, who do her injustice, but she herself in not making public an explanation," suggested another. "The law of this country very rightly holds all persons innocent, until they have been proved guilty, and it is far from our intention," insinuated a third, "to attempt to reverse that proper attitude in the present case, but Lady Walcote and those friends who are advising her in this critical time must see that she and they are accepting a very heavy responsibility in not clearing up exactly her relation to this most inscrutable affair."  
These were only some of the comments, while the reports of every incident that could be made public were greedily sought for and used, and at the request a small regiment of reporters appeared.  
But when all was said and done and questioned there was nothing came out that really damaged Lola except the one fact that she had gone away under circumstances which no one could understand.  
In the smaller circle of those who knew the facts great curiosity and comment were aroused at the manner of her departure. It was the latter which made the mystery complete, and Inspector Bordenham himself was most baffled by this. As he said over and over again, he himself had found the bracelet. Not a soul knew of its having been found until he got to Walcote manor and took it out of his pocket, and therefore he was most emphatic that the only course was to accept the position and look for the person who had done the deed, and that person who could have access to Leycester Court. For Sir Jeffrey himself the time was one of the most distressing trouble, and his disappointment when Lola was not found and did not of her own free will return to the manor was keen and poignant.  
"I am afraid she is dead, Beryl," he said on the third day after the discovery of the murder. "She has made away with herself in her sorrow and madness."  
"There is nothing to suggest that, nothing more than there was two days ago," replied Beryl, thinking secretly that it could perhaps be the best ending for them all.  
"Yes, there is the fact that she has not come back," he answered. "If, which heaven forbid, she did this deed in her madness and any knowledge came to her afterward of what she had done, she would do one of two things—either come back at once and own the full truth or lay violent hands on her own life. I know her."  
"There is time for her to come back yet. Suppose, as you say, that she did this in her delirium. She may yet be wandering somewhere in the State and may know nothing of what has happened."  
"The whole country is ringing with news of the man's death. She could not fail to hear of it if she were alive. I tell you she is dead, and if her end was peaceful is the best she could have."  
"It is an awful thing that I should ever have to say that about her, but I would rather see her dead than mad, and she must be one or the other, or we are all out of our senses."  
Beryl did not answer this at once, but sat thinking out the problem as it showed in the light of her own knowledge.  
"We may all be out of our senses in that respect, Jeffrey. We may be judging her without cause."  
"I would to God that I could think so!" he exclaimed, with fierce energy. "I would give my life to feel sure of it, but I can't Beryl. I have seen her, and I would give my life to find in them anything but the proofs of her deed, and I can't. Look at the things as I will, they lead me nowhere but to one conclusion. There is not a man in England who if he knew what we know would not think what we think. I don't understand the thing. I can't, except on the one supposition that she is mad, and it breaks my heart to think that."  
He paused, but Beryl did not break the silence.  
"The thing is all so horribly complete! I have talked it over and over with Gifford, trying to get from him a suggestion that may point in another direction, but all his sagacity cannot offer a hint that the evidence doesn't utterly smash. It is perfectly clear that she left the manor house before this man was killed. It is quite as certain that he wrote to her, a letter telling her to meet him. It is clear again that she got the letter, and that she did go to see him, and just as clear that she was there and dropped that bracelet in the struggle with him and need that dagger, and then in that vain effort to escape she was shot."  
"She says in her letter," he said, "that she had started and left and taken..."

"You'll be at the inquest, Sir Jeffrey? And I suppose there's no possibility of any mistake having been made, of any hoax having been played upon you and Miss Leycester in the matter of the dagger and bracelet? If it is possible in any way, I really think you ought to make some inquiries. It would be well to be able to give the lie to that anonymous writer."  
"I shall be at the inquest," answered Sir Jeffrey.  
Then the police inspector went away, and the baronet turned to Beryl, feeling very uneasy at the unexpected turn matters had taken in regard to the replacing of the dagger and the bracelet.  
**CHAPTER XXIII.**  
"THE LADY OF WALCOTE MANOR."  
For some time after the police inspector's departure neither Sir Jeffrey nor Beryl spoke a word, both being overcome by astonishment at the hints which Inspector Bordenham had dropped.  
Beryl was the first to speak and characteristically took the blame upon herself.  
"It is my fault," she said. "Oh, Jeffrey, I am so sorry!"  
"No, no, Beryl; I can't let you blame yourself. I ought to have seen what would certainly happen, though, now that it has happened, an bound to say I am taken absolutely by surprise. Who can possibly have noticed that the things were absent for a time and then put back? At most there can only have been a few hours during which they could have been missed, I wonder!" he cried and then stopped and exclaimed, "That is too dreadful a thought!"  
"What is that?" asked Beryl anxiously.  
"Can it be possible that any one can have seen Lola take that dagger out of the cabinet?"  
"I had not thought of that. It can't be possible. Even if she did take it she would be cautious not to be seen."  
"If," he repeated, "if I wish with all my heart that I could feel sure that I fear it is that in the frenzy in which she must have acted she would be utterly heedless of anything and anybody and not give a thought to the question whether she was seen or not. But that is not the question. I want to know myself for ever having brought your name into this most miserable affair. The thing has been bruited all over the kingdom now, and to draw back seems as difficult as to go on."  
"Why not go through with it?" asked Beryl firmly.  
"Because we cannot. It is a sheer impossibility. So long as there was no question asked and the weapons remained to speak for themselves there was no serious responsibility. Heaven knows I had no intention of doing anything wrong. I know your object, Beryl, well enough, and I cannot tell you how inexpressibly grateful I am to you for it, but we have been wrong. We have tried to set the honor of our family before the truth, and now we see the result. I have tried to shield my poor, misguided wife, and I've sacrificed just when I ought to have been most careful to guard you."  
"I think you blame yourself without cause, Jeffrey. I am not one bit ashamed of what I have done. I stand up tomorrow in the face of all England and tell what I did, and what is more, I tell the truth. It is again some of those things that you don't believe the talk of people would blame me. If they did, I should not care," she added, flinging in her enthusiasm.  
"Spoken like a dear, dear old friend and playmate," Beryl said, "and you her hand and pressing it. 'You brace one's faith in human nature, and I believe with you that the world would not blame you for what has happened. But the world is not my responsibility. But as you are not, if you use in regretting, I must find out what we can do."  
"Do you think really that Mr. Bordenham has had that letter?"  
"I questionably I do, and what is more, he means to understand that he will act upon it if I make it necessary for him. I will go to the inquest and hear what transpires, and then I will have a talk with Gifford. I must speak plainly to him."  
"He knows," said Beryl.  
"How do you mean?" asked the baronet quickly.  
Beryl told him what Mr. Gifford had said to her about the absence of dust on the dagger and the significant way he had spoken.  
Sir Jeffrey listened with a gathering frown of regret and annoyance.  
"Bordenham may have suspected it even then," he said. "Those men don't carry about faces like open book. I'll speak to Gifford and see what happens at the inquest. Meantime try to think I am really and honestly troubled to have brought this on you."  
He stood for a moment near her, as if going to say more, and Beryl, thinking this, did not reply, but he said nothing, and at the close of a somewhat embarrassed pause he went out of the room, just turning by the door to smile to her.  
She was a little puzzled by his conduct, and with a frown of perplexity on her forehead she sat for a minute or two thinking of it all. Then she smiled to herself slightly and murmured: "If I'm glad I did it, why doesn't he say so? What happens then they can't do anything very dreadful to me, and Jeffrey must see I did it for his sake." Then she went up stairs to Lady Walcote's room.  
At the inquest everything went as Inspector Bordenham had anticipated. He offered just such evidence as he thought necessary, and the coroner summed up the case on the evidence presented. One jurymen was disposed to question the desirability of not going into more of the facts, but the other, who had been drawn carefully from the foreman and declared themselves perfectly satisfied and gave their verdict in the exact terms the inspector had prophesied that they would give.  
"And now," said the inspector to Mr. Gifford and Sir Jeffrey when it was all over and the courtroom was emptying fast—"now begins the serious business of the investigation. I am without waiting for permission Mr. Gifford did so, rapidly and cleverly, and handed the letter back to the inspector, and then Sir Jeffrey and the private detective walked back together to the manor house, the baronet explaining more fully all that had passed."  
"What do you think of it, Mr. Gifford?" he asked at the close.  
"I can't see it all yet, but I have a suspicion. I think the better plan will be to hold out against the inspector, but, at any rate for a time. It's clear enough what he means. What he wants is to be spared the trouble of having to solve the mystery of the weapon, and somebody seems to want to help him. Who's that somebody?"  
"I can't imagine."  
"Beryl? I rather can't see..."

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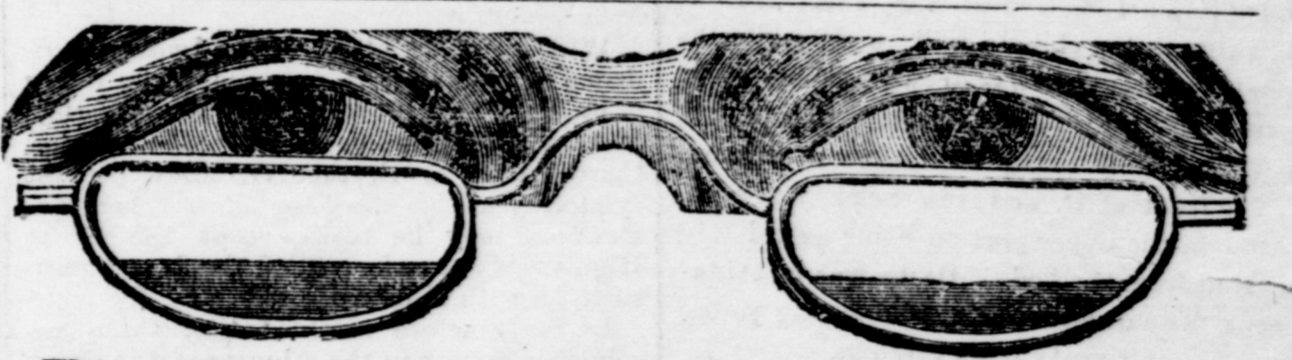
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