

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 every-

where dealt with it. The disappearance of Sir Jaffray'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' won-

Popular suspicion fastened on the fact of Lela'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 daily and weekly papers, while pen portraits of the most conflicting kinds abounded everywhere.

"If 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 we, 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, 2st 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 got hold of were greedily sought for and used, and at the inquest 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 by the dagger and the bracelet. It was the latter which made the mystery complete, and Inspector Borderham himself was most baffied 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 among those who could have access to Leycester Court. For Sir Jaffray 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 poign-

"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 thingseither 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 same state and may know nothing of what has every step you take. If this thing's happened."

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 were peaceful it is best so." He sighed heavily. "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 knowl-"We may all be out of our senses in

that respect, Jaffray. 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 can't. I have tried to piece the things together that you and I know and to find in them anything but the proofs of her deed, and J can't. Look at the things as I wf 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 ingenuity 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 the letter telling her to meet him. It is clear again that she get 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 used that dagger, and then on the top of all comes this absolutely inexplicable flight. It would all be different if only she were here. If she would come here and lay her hand in mine and tell me she knew nothing of all this, I would believe her and hold out for her innecence against the whole world, mad or sane. But she doesn't come. And yet I hate and loathe myself for harbering the thought that, mad or sane, she could even think of taking this man's life. And the strain of it all is enough to

Beryl thought it best to let him speak freely and without interruption. "There is only the one thing that I have often mentioned to you that I can't fathom-whether there was any sort of understanding between Lola and that brute. I have thought sometimesfact, Gifford suggested the idea to methat he may have had some kind of hold

kill one."

Jaffray; if this thing is ever to be traced. over her, something that-but, there. I won't try to think in that vein. I wish to heaven I'd had the beggar out and shot him before he caused all this "She says in her letter," he said, harking back suddenly to the thought

anonymous writer." Sir Jagray. CHAPTER XXIII. ing from his pocket Lola's last letter to him, already thumbed and soiled from constant reading, "that she was within an ace of telling me when something

said stopped her. What a tactless, blundering dolt I must be! If I hadn't checked her, all this misery and tragedy and ruin might have been saved. Oh, how I have cursed myself for that clumsiness!" he cried angrily. "I see no need for self reproach," said Beryl. "It would have been better if she had been led to speak, but"-

She left the sentence unfinished, and Sir Jaffray looked at her as though to question her. While he was thinking what to reply the police inspector was announced. "Excuse my troubling you again, Sir Jaffray," he said-he had already been once that day at the manor house-"but I am on my way to the adjourned inquest, and I thought you would like

plete the inquiry this afternoon and not have another adjournment." "That is certainly what I wish, in-The inquiry had indeed been some-

to know that I have arranged to com-

what hurried over in deference to the expressed wish of the baronet, while that course also fell in with the inspector's own desires. He had been pleased enough to get the utmest publicity given to the case and had himself secretly helped to insure this end by spreading some few unimportant but telling de-

But now the publicity was getting much greater than he wished, and the comments were taking quite a different form from what he wanted. The papers were trying the case and were handling rather roughly in the process. Moreover, the details published were such as could not fail to put those implicated, however dense, on their guard and to keep them posted as to the actions of the police; hence the inspector's eagerness to stop the whole thing and by limiting as much as possible the scope of the inquest to hide

the intentions and plans of the police. His ambition was to burke the inquiry at the very moment when public curiosity was at the highest fever point and then suddenly and as if by a kind of police magic produce the culprit and the evidence of guilt. To do this he was prepared to go to quite unusual

"I don't think we need to go into anything more now but the barest facts," he continued. "We shall have the medical evidence of the cause of death, that the wound could not have been self inflicted and that the blow must have been struck by some one else. That will be enough to warrant the jury giving a verdict, and that's what we

"What will the verdict be, Mr. Bor-

"There can be but one, Sir Jaffraywillful murder by some person or persons unknown. That's clear. It's the "And you think the inquiry will fin-

"It really rests with me and the coroner, Sir Jaffray, and, in truth, we both thought you would prefer to have the matter ended as soon as possible. We can do no good by prolonging an inquest of the kind, and I am simply not going to offer any evidence which will be likely to drag it out. Personally I



"No, no, Sir Jaffray; the tracing will have to be done quietly." don't like working in the light in that way, with all the countryside knowing ever to be found out at all, it won't be by means of a coroner's jusy. It's all a farce and nothing else. It's all right enough for a twopensy bailpenny tin pot case, where the facts lie as plain in sight as eggs in a thrush's nest, but where there's serious business inquests are worse than no good."

"I see," said Sir Jaffray shortly. "Take such a thing as this matter of the dagger, now," continued the inspector. "What would a coroner's jury make of that, I should like to know? Suppose I was to tell 'em all the facts—that the dagger was one of two just alike which you brought home from America, and that the bracelet was one of two brought home just in the same way, and that, whereas Lady Walcote was missing and Miss Leycester here was on the spot, Miss Leycester's dagger and bracelet had got mixed up in this crime, while Lady Walcote's were both lying where they had always been, one in the cabinet and the other in the jewel case. What do you suppose they would make of that? What could

they make of it?" He stopped and looked at both his hearers in turn, as if waiting for them

But neither of them said anything, and he continued: "That would be a poser by itself, but

now just throw in a spice of mystery and try to imagine what the effect would be. Suppose I were to read them a letter that has been sent to me to the effect that at the time of the death of this Frenchman neither the dagger nor the bracelet was in the manor here, but that both were put in their places afterward, put there from Leycester Court. What do you think they would say then? Why, we should have all sorts of wild stories repeated everywhere, with all sorts of charges against all sorts of people. And how could I carry on my

work of inquiry then?" He stopped again, but only for a second, and it was evident now to both Sir Jaffray and Beryl that he was speaking

with a purpose. "But I don't work in that way. I simply leave that letter-of course it's anonymous-out of the question. If I ask any question, it is how the writer, whoever it is, comes to know so much about it. And then I argue thus; If the story be true and these things were put back, no one knows anything about it officially and authoritatively except myself and the people who may be supposed to have done it, and what isn't known officially can always be contradicted. And if it were ever known to be true that any one had, in a moment of misapprehension, done anything of the kind and wanted to cancel the arrangement nothing would be easier, supposing it is not officially known. Publicity, therefore, would be a huge

apart from any coroner's court." He rose as he said this and made as if to leave the room, and when he reached the door he turned and said:

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mistake in all interests. No. no. Sir

the tracing will have to be done quiet-

ly, under the surface, and altogether

"You'll be at the inquest, Sir Jafray? 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 that 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 "I shall be at the inquest," answered

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.

"HER LADTONIP, SER JAFFRAY!" For some time after the pelice in spector's departure neither Sir Jaffray nor Besyl spoke a word, both being eversome with astonishment at the hints which Inspector Borderham had in reply. dropped.

Buryl was the first to speak and characteristically took the blame upon "It is my fault," she said. "Oh.

Jaffray, 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, I am 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 be missed. I wonder!" he cried and then stopped and exclaimed, "That is too dreadful a thought!"

"What is that?" asked Beryl anx-"Can it be possible that any one can full well that such a man's first adrice have seen Lola take that dagger out of

"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 I could feel that if. What I fear 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 point now. I am mad with 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

"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 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 you instead. I've been miserably selfish

cause, Jaffray. I am not one bit ashamed would do it again tomorrow, and don't believe the bulk of people would blame me. If they did, I should not care," she added, fisshing in her entha-

siasm, "if I had helped you." "Spoken like my dear, dear old friend and playmate, Beryl," he said, taking 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 that would only make my responsibility the greater. But now there is no use in regretting. I must find out what

"Do you think really that Mr. Borderham has had that letter?" "Unquestionably I do, and, what is more, he means us 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 but when he comes, as he will, o

"He knows," said Beryl.

carry about faces like open books. I'll speak to Gifford and see what happens at the inquest. Meantime try to think I

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

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 very slightly and murmured: "I'm glad I did it. Whatever happens they can't do anything very dreadful to me, and Jaffray must see I did it for his

"And new," said the inspector to Mr. Gifford and Sir Jaffray when it business of the investigation."

strous one! I suppose you haven't a ghost of an idea who wrote this?" "If I had, I am afraid I could hardly tell you, Mr. Gifford," was the reply,

am thinking where to look." "So am I." returned the other shortly. "Who is there owes you a grudge, Sir Jaffray-Miss Leycester or, for that matter, Lady Walcote either? Hate

"May I take a tracing of a bit of the

"What do you think of it, Mr. Gif-"I can't see it all yet, but I have a be to hold out against the inspector's hint, 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

"I can't imagine."

and the second second

as difficult as to go on." "Why not go through with it?" asked Beryl firmly. was no serious responsibility. Heaven

just when I ought to have been most careful to guard you." "I think you blame yourself without of what I have done. I would stand up tell what I did, and, what is more, I

speak plainly to him.

"How do you mean?" asked the bar-Beryl told him what Mr. Gifford had said to her about the absence of dust on

am really and honestly troubled to have

room, just turning by the door to smile

sake." Then she went up stairs to Lady

At the inquest everything went as Inspector Borderham had anticipated. He offered just such evidence as he thought necessary, and the coroner summed up the case on the evidence presented. One juryman was disposed to question the desirability of not going into more of the facts, but the other 11, who had been drawn carefully from the Walcote estates, took their cue from the foreman and declared themselves perfactly satisfied and gave their verdict

in the exact terms the inspector had prophesied that they would. was all over and the courtroom was emptying fast-'now begins the serious

"You've had some anonymous letter, I hear, about the weapon," said Mr. Gifford, to whom the baronet had already spoken. "Do you mind my see-

"Not in the least. Here it is." And he produced it. "You see the suggestion," he said pointedly. "And a most monstrous one it is, exclaimed My. Gifford, "a most mon-

given with a smile, "but I have not, I

of some kind inspired that letter." "I am at a loss even to guess," re-

plied Sir Jaffray. letter, Mr. Borderbam?" And without waiting for permission Mr. Gifford did so, rapidly and cleverly, and handed the letter back to the inspector, and then Sir Jaffray and the private detective walked back together to the manor house, the baronet explaining more fully all that had passed.

ford?" he asked at the close. suspicion. I think the better plan will solve the mystery of the weapon, and somebody seems to want to help him. Who's that somebody?"

"Braotly. Multher can I at mosent,

just a dodge of our friend Borderham? If he had a ghost of an idea that anything of the kind had been done, it's all on the cards he'd get such a letter written to himself just to bounce us into throwing that trump card down on the table. It stands to common sense that he'd give a lot to get the difficulty of that dagger business cleared up, and if he could show that it really was Lady Walcote's dagger and not Miss Leycester's it would be a good enough thing for him to conclude that Lady Walcote was the person wanted. And, don't make any mistake, that inspector would give half his nose to spot the truth in this thing. I never saw a man keener. He scents promotion in it, removal to a busy center and reputation as a clever

spot-I mean, detective. I know him." "His manner was in the highest degree courteous to me," said Sir Jaffray 'Cause he's no fool," was the blunt answer. "He wasts to stand well with you, and, if anything is to be found out that will pain you, to have it seem to be forced out. But he's quite clever enough to try to use you all the same. Sir Jaffray. You see, he argues in this way: If there's been any exchange of these daggers, he can frighten you to

go running off to your solicitor in the

fear that you may be involved as some

sort of accessory"-

"Do you mean"— began the baronet hurricity, taking alorm for Bong's sake at the other's words and bursting in with his interruption. "Wast a moment, sir, please, and try to hear what I have to say. He wants to frighten you to go rushing off to tell some very respectable, study going solicitor all the facts, knowing

will be to you to take Borderham's hint and make the change again while the change seems epen''-"If there is any possibility," interrupted Sir Jaffray again, when his companion out him short case more:

"Please, please, please allow me and do try to hear me pattently. If you do that, Borderham will not hesitate one minute. He'll be off to the neggest J. P. and get a warrent for Lady Welsote's arrest. At present he has absolutely nothing to go on, ber the fact of her ladyship's absence and the circumstance that there was a quarrel on the morning of the day about her as the result of which you turned the Brenchman out of the house. That's all the evidence he's got, because we've got all the rest, and at best it's only mere filmsy suspicion. But add the fact of the danger found in the man's heart being the property of her ladyship, and you have just that substantial evidence on which a man can work and act. You see that?" "Yes, yes. Of course," assented the

baronet hurriedly. "Exactly. Well, then, if it's bounce, it's clear that you had better not give the thing away yet. But I'm not disposed to think it's bounce. I believe he did receive a letter."

"Well, but who could send such a "Precisely. We'll see about that presently. First let us see what we

ought to do in this matter, supposing the letter's genuine. What can he do? He won't threaten you. He knows better than to do that for personal reasons. If you were a poor and obscure indi-vidual, and if Miss Leycester were a wretched, friendless girl, nothing would be easier than to take you both by the throat, so to speak, and just shake the knowledge out of you. There's no difference between rich and poor in the eye of the law, you know, but there's a deal of difference between 'em in the hands of the police, I can tell you," said Mr. Gifford dryly.

"As it is," he continued after pause, "the inspector comes to you all soft tongued and pleasant, hints that if you've been hoaxed you may wish to see that the thing is put right, and so on. I know all that sort of talk, and, putting it bluntly, it means that so long as you don't speak he daren't try to make you unless-unless, mind you, he can get some definite, positive evidence. You needn't bother yourself one little bit about the thing yet, therefore, course, you can just say that you wouldn't think of doing anything, because some skulking coward has written as an anonymous letter what a newspaper penny a liner might hint for the purpose of getting up a sensation, and the dagger and the significant way he had spoken.

Sir Jaffray listened with a gathering frown of regret and annoyance.

"Borderham may have suspected it even then," he said. "Those men don't to check him."

"This is old very distanteful to me, Mr. Gifford," said Sir Jeffray after he had thought over the other's suggestion. "I've no doubt it is, Sir Jaffray," returned his companion shortly, "but the alternative is an immediate warrant for

"But I object very strongly to any course that entails this deceit and falsenity upon Miss Leycester. If she were

questioned"-"She'd be quite equal to keeping Mr. Borderham at bey," interposed Mr. Gifford blantly. "The world isn't a palace of truth, sir, and if we have to have a nodding acquaintence now and then with the father of hies it needn't hart us. But of course you can do as you like, only if you're going to do this I may as well go back to town." "But what do you expect to gain by

suspected? "Time, Sir Jaffray, which is everything. Let us put the thing plainly to Miss Levester. I know what she'll

Sir Jaffrey assented to this, and Mr. Gifferd went over the whole ground with Beryl, telling her precisely what he had told the barones and leaving her to decide. Without a moment's hesitation she decided in favor of stand-

ing by what they had done. "I don't like the 'eception, Beryl," said Sir Jagray at the older. "When Mr. Borderham comes to question you. you will be placed in a most awkward fix. But I will do this: I will consent to saying nothing for three days-no longer. Then, whatever happens, the facte shall be told."

It was left so, but there was no need for even so long a delay, for the next day brought a startling development. The inspector came in the morning and by his desire saw Beryl and Sir Jaffray together. Mr. Gifford was pres-

To be Continued.

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