

DR. RUMSEY'S PATIENT:

A VERY STRANGE STORY.

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CHAPTER IX.

Rumsey began the severe routine of his daily work. He was particularly busy that day, and had many anxious cases to consider; it was also one of his hospital mornings, and his hospital cases were, he considered, some of the most important in his practice. Nevertheless Mrs. Everett's face and her words of excitement kept flashing again and again before his memory.

"There is a possibility of that woman losing her senses if her mind is not diverted into another channel, and soon too," he thought to himself. "If she allows her thoughts to dwell much longer on this fixed idea, she will see her son's murderer in the face of each man and woman with whom she comes in contact. Still there is something queer in her story—the young woman whom she addressed on Salisbury Plain was evidently the victim of nervous terror to a remarkable extent—can it be possible that she is concealing something?"

Rumsey thought for a moment over his last idea. Then he dismissed it from his mind.

"No," he said to himself, "a village girl could not stand cross-examination without betraying herself. I shall get as fanciful as Mrs. Everett if I dwell any longer upon this problem. After all there is no problem to consider. Why not accept the obvious fact? Poor Everett killed his friend in a moment of strong irritation—it was a very plain case of manslaughter."

At the appointed hour Margaret Awdrey appeared on the scene. She was immediately admitted into Dr. Rumsey's presence. He asked her to seat herself, and took a chair facing her. It was Margaret's way to be always very direct. She was direct now, knowing that her auditor's time was of extreme value.

"I have not troubled you about my husband for some years," she began.

"You have not," he replied.

"Do you remember what I last told you about him?"

"Perfectly. But excuse me one moment, to satisfy you I will look up his case in my casebook. Do you remember the year when you last spoke to me about him?"

Margaret instantly named the date, not only of year, but of month. Dr. Rumsey quickly looked up the case. He laid his finger on the open page in which he had entered all particulars, ran his eyes rapidly over the notes he had made at the time, and then turned to Mrs. Awdrey.

"I find as I expected that I have forgotten nothing," he said. "I was right in my conjectures, was I not? Your husband's symptoms were due to nervous distress?"

"I wish I could say so," replied Margaret.

"Dr. Rumsey slightly raised his brows.

"Are there fresh symptoms?" he asked.

"He is not well. I must tell you exactly how he is affected."

The doctor bent forward to listen. Margaret began her story.

"Since the date of our marriage there has been a very gradual, but also a marked deterioration in my husband's character," she said. "But until lately he has been in possession of excellent physical health, his appetite has been good, he has been inclined for exercise, and has slept well. In short, his bodily health has been without a flaw. Accompanying this state of physical well-being there has been a very remarkable mental torpor."

"Are you not fanciful on that point?" asked Dr. Rumsey.

"I am not. Please remember that I have known him since he was a boy. As a boy he was particularly ambitious, full of all sorts of schemes for the future—many of these schemes were really daring and original. He did well at school, and better than well at Balliol. When we became engaged his strong sense of ambition was quite one of the most remarkable traits of his character. He always spoke of doing much with his life. The idea was that as soon as possible he was to enter the House, and he earnestly hoped that when that happy event took place he would make his mark there. One by one all these thoughts all these hopes and aims, have dropped away from his mind; each year has robbed him of something, until at last he has come to that pass when even books fail to arouse any interest in him. He sits for many hours absolutely doing nothing, not even sleeping, but gazing straight before him into vacancy. Our little son is almost the only person who has any power to rouse him. He is devoted to the child, but his love even for little Arthur is tempered by that remarkable torpor—he never plays with the boy, who is a particularly strong-willed, spirited child, but likes to sit with him on his knee, the child's arms clasped round his neck. He has trained the little fellow to sit perfectly still. The child is devoted to his father, and would do anything for him. As the years have gone on, my husband has become more and more a man of few words—I now believe him to be a man of few thoughts—of late he has been subject to moods of deep depression, and although he is my husband, I often feel, truly as I love him, that he is more like a log than a man."

Tears dimmed Margaret's eyes; she hastily wiped them away.

"I would not trouble you about all this," she continued, "but for a change which has taken place within the last few months. That change directly affects my husband's physical health, and as such is the case I feel it right to consult you about it."

"Yes, speak—take your own time—I am much interested," said the doctor.

"The change in my husband's health of body has also begun gradually," continued Mrs. Awdrey. "You know, of course, that he is now the owner of Grandcourt. He has taken a great dislike to this place—in my opinion, an unaccountable dislike. He absolutely refuses to live there. Now I am fond of Grandcourt, and our little boy always seems in better health and spirits there than anywhere else. I take my child down to the old family place whenever I can spare a week from my husband. Last autumn I persuaded Mr.

Awdrey with great difficulty to accompany me to Grandcourt for a week. I have never ceased to regret that visit."

"Indeed, what occurred?" asked the doctor.

"Apparently nothing, and yet evidently a great deal. When we got into the country Robert's sabbath seemed to change; he roused himself and became talkative and even excitable. He took long walks, and was particularly fond of visiting Salisbury Plain, that part which lies to the left of the Court. He invariably took these rambles alone, and often went out quite late in the evening, not returning until midnight."

"On the last of these occasions I asked him why he was so fond of walking by himself. He said with a forced laugh, and a very queer look in his eyes, that he was engaged trying to find a favourite walking stick which he had lost years ago. He laid such stress upon what appeared such a trivial subject that I could scarcely refrain from smiling. When I did so he swore a terrible oath, and said, with blazing eyes, that life or death depended upon the matter which I thought so trivial. Immediately after his brief blaze of passion he became moody, dull, and more inert than ever. The next day we left the Court. It was immediately after that visit that his physical health began to give way. He lost his appetite, and for the last few months he has been the victim of a very peculiar form of sleeplessness."

"Ah, insomnia would be bed in a case like his," said Dr. Rumsey.

"It has had a very irritating effect upon him. His sleeplessness, like all other symptoms, came on gradually. At the same time he became intensely sensitive to the slightest noise. Against my will he tried making small doses of chloral, but they had the reverse of a beneficial effect upon him. During the last month he has towards morning dropped off into uneasy slumber, from which he awakens bathed in perspiration and in a most curious state of terror. Night after night the same sort of thing occurs. He seizes my hand and asks me in a voice choking with emotion if I see anything in the room 'Nothing,' I answer."

"Am I awake or asleep?" he asks next.

"Wide awake," I say to him.

"Then it is as I fear," he replies. "I see it, I see it distinctly. Can't you? Look, you must see it too. It is just over there, in the direction of the window. Don't you see that sphere of perfect light? Don't you see the drops in the middle? He shivers; the drops of perspiration fall from his forehead."

"Margaret," he says, "for God's sake look Tell me that you see it too."

"I see nothing," I answer him.

"Then the vision is for me alone. It haunts me. What have I done to deserve it?" Margaret, there is a circle of light over there—in the centre a picture—it is the picture of a murder. Two men are in it—yes, I know now—I am looking at the Plain near the Court—the moon is hidden behind the clouds—there are two men—they fight. God in Heaven, one man falls—the other bends over him. I see the face of the fallen man, but I cannot see the face of the other. I should rest content if I could only see his face. Who is he, Margaret, who is he?"

"He falls back on his pillow half fainting. This sort of thing goes on night after night, Dr. Rumsey. Towards morning the vision which tortures my unhappy husband begins to fade, he sinks into heavy slumber and awakens late in the morning with no memory whatever of the horrible thing which has haunted him during the hours of darkness."

"The days which follow are more full than ever of that terrible inertia, and now he begins to look what he really is, a man stricken with an awful doom."

"The symptoms you speak of are certainly alarming," said Dr. Rumsey, after a pause. "They point to a highly unsatisfactory state of the nerve centres. These symptoms, joined to what you have already told me of the peculiar malady which Awdrey inherits, make his case a grave one. Of course, I by no means give up hope, but the recurrence of this vision nightly is a singular symptom. Does Awdrey invariably speak of not being able to see the face of the man who committed the murder?"

"Yes, he always makes a remark to that effect. He seems every night to see the murdered man lying on the ground with his face upward, but the man who commits the murder has his back to him. Last night he shrieked out in absolute terror on the subject."

"Who is the man? That man on the ground is Horace Frere—he has been hewn down in the first strength of his youth—he is a dead man. There stands the murderer, with his back to me, but who is he? Oh, my God!" he cried with great passion. "Who is the one who has done this deed? Who has murdered Horace Frere? I would give all I possess, all that this wide world contains, only to catch one glimpse of his face."

"He sprang out of bed as he spoke, and went a step or two in the direction where he saw the peculiar vision, clasping his hands, and staring straight before him like a person distraught, and almost out of his mind. I followed him and tried to take his hand."

"Robert!" I said, "you know, don't you, quite well, who murdered Horace Frere? Poor fellow, it was not murder in the ordinary sense. Frank Everett is the name of the man whose face you cannot see. But it is an old story now, and you have nothing to do with it, nothing whatever—don't let it dwell any longer on your mind."

"Ha, but he carries my stick," he shrieked out, and then he fell back in a state of unconsciousness against the bed."

"And do you mean to tell me that he remembered nothing of this agony in the morning?" queried Dr. Rumsey.

"Nothing whatever. At breakfast he complained of a slight headache and was

particularly dull and moody. When I came off to you he had just started for a walk in the Park with our little boy."

"Should like to see your husband, and to talk to him," said Dr. Rumsey, rising abruptly. "Can you manage to bring him here?"

"I fear I cannot, for he does not consider himself ill."

"Shall you be at home this evening?"

"Yes, we are not going out tonight."

"Then I'll drop in between eight and nine on a friendly visit. You must not be alarmed if I try to lead up to the subject of these nightly visions for I would infinitely rather your husband remembered them than that they should quite slip from his memory."

"Thank you," answered Margaret. "I will leave you alone with him when you call to night."

"It may be best for me to see him without anyone else being present."

Margaret Awdrey soon afterwards took her leave.

That night, true to his appointment, Dr. Rumsey made his appearance at the Awdreys' house in Seymour street. He was shown at once into the drawing room, where Awdrey was lying back in a deep chair on one side of the hearth, and Margaret was sitting playing a Sonata of Beethoven in the distance. She played with great feeling and power, and not use any notes. The part of the room where she sat was almost in shadow, but the part round the fire where Awdrey had placed himself was full of bright light.

Margaret's dark eyes looked full of pain, full thought when the great doctor was ushered into the room. He did not see her at first, then she noticed him and faltered in her playing. She took her fingers from the piano, and rose to meet him.

"Pray go on, Margaret. What are you stopping for?" cried her husband. "Nothing soothes me like your music. Go on, go on. I see the moonlight on the trees, I feel the infinite peace, the waves are beating on the shore, there is rest."

He broke off abruptly, starting to his feet. "I beg your pardon, Dr. Rumsey, I assure you I did not see you until this moment."

"I happened to have half-an-hour at my disposal, and thought I would drop in for a chat," said Dr. Rumsey in his pleasant voice.

Awdrey's somewhat fretful brow relaxed. "You are heartily welcome," he said. "Have you dined? Will you take anything?"

"I have dined, and I only want one thing," said Dr. Rumsey.

"Pray name it; I'll ring for it immediately."

You need not do that, for the person to give it to me is already in the room."

The doctor bowed to Margaret as he spoke.

"I love the Moonlight Sonata beyond all other music," he said. "Will you continue playing it, Mrs. Awdrey? Will you rest a tired physician as well as your husband with your music?"

"With all the pleasure in the world," she replied. She turned at once to her shady corner, and the soothing effects of the sonata once more filled the room. For a short time Awdrey sat upright, forced into attention of others by the fact of Dr. Rumsey's presence, but he soon relaxed the slight effort after self-control, and lay back in his chair once again with his eyes half shut.

Rumsey listened to the music and watched his strange patient at the same time.

Margaret suddenly stopped, almost as if she had had a signal. She walked up to the room, and stood in the bright circle of light. She looked very lovely, and almost spiritual—her face was pale—her eyes luminous as if lit from within—her pathetic and perfect lips were slightly apart. Rumsey thought her something like an angel who was about to utter a benediction.

"I am going up now to see little Arthur," she said. She glanced at her husband, and left the room.

Rumsey had not failed to observe that Awdrey did not even glance at his wife when she stood on the hearth. There was a full moment's pause after she left the room. Awdrey's eyes were half closed, they were turned in the direction of the bright blaze. Rumsey looked at him.

"Strange case, strange man," he muttered under his breath. "There is something for me to unravel here. The man who is insensate enough not to see the beauty in that woman's face, not to revel in the love she bestows on him—he is a log, not a man—and yet—"

"Are you well?" cried the doctor abruptly. He spoke on purpose with great distinctness and his words had something, the effect of a pistol shot.

Awdrey sat bolt upright and stared full at him.

"Why do you ask me that question?" he replied, irritation in his tone.

"Because I wish to question you with regard to your health," said Dr. Rumsey.

"Whether you feel it or not you are by no means well."

"Indeed! What do I look like?"

"Like a man who sees more than he ought," replied the doctor with deliberation. "But before we come to that may I ask you a question?"

Awdrey looked disturbed—he got up and stood with his back to the fire.

"Ask what you please," he said, rubbing up his hair as he spoke. "As there is a heaven above, Dr. Rumsey, you see a wretched man before you to-night."

"My dear fellow, what strong words! Surely, you of all people—"

Awdrey interrupted with a hollow laugh. "Ah," he said, "it looks like it, does it not? In any circle, amongst any course of people, I should be pointed out as the fortunate man. I have money—I have a very good and beautiful wife—I am the father of as fine a boy as the heart of man could desire. I belong to one of the old and established families of our country, and I also, I suppose, may claim the indelible privilege of youth, for I am only twenty-six years of age—nevertheless, He shuddered, looked down the long room, and then closed his eyes.

"I am glad I came here," said Dr. Rumsey. "Believe me, my dear sir, the symptoms you have just described are by no means uncommon in the cases of singularly fortunate individuals like yourself. The fact is, you have got too much. You want to empty yourself of some of your abundance in order that contentment and health of mind may flow in."

Awdrey stared at the doctor with lack-lustre eyes. Then he shook his head.

"I am past all that," he said. "I might at



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the first have managed to make a superhuman effort; but now I have no energy for anything. I have not even energy sufficient to take away my own life, which is the only thing on all God's earth that I crave to do."

"Come, come, Awdrey, you must not allow yourself to speak like that. Now sit down. Tell me, if you possibly can, exactly what you feel."

"Why should I tell you? I am not your patient."

"But I want you to be."

"Is that why you came here this evening?"

Dr. Rumsey paused before he replied; he had not expected this question.

"I will answer you frankly," he said, with a pause. "Your wife came to see about you. She did not wish me to mention the fact of her visit, but I believe I am wise in keeping nothing back from you. You love your wife, don't you?"

"I suppose I do; that is if I love anybody."

"Of course, you love her. Don't sentimentalize over a fact. She came to see me because her love for you is over-abundant. It makes her anxious; you have her, Awdrey, a great deal of anxiety lately."

"I cannot imagine how. I have done nothing."

"That is just it. You have done too little. She is naturally terribly anxious. She told me one or two things about your state which I do not consider quite satisfactory. I said it would be necessary for me to have an interview with you, and asked her to beg of you to call at my house. She said you did not consider yourself ill, and might not be willing to come to me. I then resolved to come to you, and here I am."

"It is good of you, Rumsey, but you can do nothing; I am not really ill. It is simply that something—I have not the faintest idea what—has killed my soul. I believe, before heaven, that I have stated the case in a nutshell. You may be, and doubtless are, a great doctor, but you have not come across living men with dead souls before."

"I have not Awdrey; nor is your soul dead. You state an impossibility."

Awdrey started excitedly. His face, which had been deadly pale, now blazed with animation and color.

"Learned as you are," he cried, "you will gain some fresh and valuable experience from me tonight. I am the strangest patient you ever attempted to cure. You have roused me, and it is good to be roused. Perhaps my soul is not dead after all—perhaps it is struggling with a demon which crushes it down."

CHAPTER XII.

Dr. Rumsey did not reply to this for a moment, then he spoke quietly.

"Tell me everything," he said. "Nothing you can say will startle me, but there is any possibility of my helping you I must know the case as far as you can give it me."

"I have but little to say," replied Awdrey. "I am paralysed day after day simply by want of feeling. Even a sense of pain, of irritation, is a relief—the deadness of my life is so overpowering. Do you know the history of my house?"

"Your wife has told me. It is a queer story."

"It is a damnable story," said Awdrey. "Was such a fate hanging over me, why was I born? Why did my father marry? Why did my mother bring a man-child into the world? Men with dooms like mine ought never to have descendants. I curse the thought that I have a child myself. It is all cruel, monstrous."

"But the thing you fear has not fallen upon you," said Dr. Rumsey.

"Has it not? I believe it has."

"How can you possibly imagine what is not the case?"

"Dr. Rumsey," said Awdrey, advancing a step or two to meet him, "I don't imagine what I know. Look at me. I am six-and-twenty. Do I look that age?"

"I must confess that you look older than your years."

"Aye, I should think so. See my hair already mingled with grey. Feel the nerveless hand. Is this the hand of the English youth of six and twenty—look at my eyes—how dull they are—are they the eyes of a man in his prime? No, no, I am going down to the grave as the other men of my house have gone, simply because I cannot help it. I take those who have gone before me to slip, and slip, and cannot get a grip of life anywhere, and so I go out, or go over the precipice into God knows what—anyhow I go."

"Poor fellow, he is far worse than I had any idea of," thought the doctor. He took his patient's hand, and led him to a seat.

"You are quite ill enough to see a doctor," he said, "and ought to have had advice

"I am going to take you to your bedroom now," he said.

"Thanks," answered Awdrey. "The whole thing seems extraordinary," he added. "I cannot make out why I am to sleep in your house."

"You sleep here as my patient. I am going to sit up with you."

"You! I cannot allow it, Doctor!"

"No," a word, my dear sir. Pray don't overwhelm me with thanks. Your case is one of great interest to me. I shall certainly not regret the few hours I steal from sleep to watch it."

Awdrey made a dull reply. The two men went upstairs. Rumsey had already given order, and a bedroom had been prepared. A bright fire burned in the grate, and electric light made the room cheerful as day. The bed was placed in an alcove by itself. In front of the fire was drawn up a deep, easy chair, a small table, a reading-lamp ready to be lighted, and several books.

"For me?" said Awdrey, glancing at these. "Excuse me, Dr. Rumsey, but I do not appreciate books. Of late months I have had a difficulty in centering my thoughts on what I read. Even the most exciting story fails to arouse my attention."

"These books are for me," said the doctor. "You are to go straight to bed. You will find everything you require for the night in that part of the room. Pray undress as quickly as possible—I shall return at the end of a quarter of an hour."

"Will you give me a sleeping draught? I generally take chloral."

"My dear sir, I will give you nothing. It is my impression you will have a good night without having recourse to sedatives. Get into bed now—you look sleepy already."

The doctor left the room. When he came back at the end of the allotted time, Awdrey was in bed—he was lying on his back with his eyes already closed. His face looked very cadaverous and ghastly pale; but for the gentle breathing which came from his partly opened lips he might almost have been a dead man.

"Six-and-twenty," muttered the doctor, as he glanced at him, "six-and-forty, six-and-fifty rather. This is a very queer case. There is something at the root of it. I can no longer make light of Mrs. Awdrey's fears—something is killing that man inch by inch. He has described his own condition very accurately. He is slipping out of life because he has not got grip enough to hold it. Nevertheless, at the present moment, no child could sleep more tranquilly."

The doctor turned off the electric light, and returned to his own bright part of the room. The bed in which Awdrey lay was now in complete shadow. Dr. Rumsey opened a medical treatise, but he did not read. On the contrary, the book lay unnoticed on his knee, while he himself stared into the blaze of the fire—his brows were contracted in anxious thought. He was this king of the sleeper and his story—the tragedy which all this meant to Margaret. Then, by a queer chain of connection, his memory reverted to Mrs. Everett—her passionate life quest—her determination to consider her son innocent. The queer scene she had described as taking place between Hetty and herself returned vividly once more to the doctor's retentive memory.

"Is it possible that Awdrey can in any way be connected with that tragedy?" he thought. "It looks almost like it. According to his own wife's showing, the strange symptoms which have brought him to his present pass began about the date of that somewhat mysterious murder. I have thought it best to make light of that lapse of memory which worries the poor fellow so much in connection with his walking stick, but there is not something in it after all. Can he possibly have witnessed the murder? Would it be possible for him to throw any light upon it and save Everett? If I really thought so? But no, the hypothesis is too wild."

Dr. Rumsey turned again to his book. He was preparing a lecture of some importance. As he read he made many notes. The sleeper in the distant part of the room slept on calmly—the night gradually wore itself away—the fire smouldered in the grate.

"If this night passes without any peculiar manifestation on Awdrey's part, I shall begin to feel assured that the wife has overrated the case," thought the doctor. He bent forward as the thought came to him to replenish the fire. In the act of doing so he made a slight noise. Whether this noise disturbed the sleeper or not no one can say—Awdrey abruptly turned in bed, opened his eyes and uttered a heavy groan and then sat up.

"There it is again," he cried. "Margaret, are you there?—Margaret, come here."

Dr. Rumsey immediately approached the bed.

"Your wife is not in the room, Awdrey," he said, "you remember, don't you, that you are passing the night with me."

Awdrey rubbed his eyes—he took no notice of Dr. Rumsey's words. He stared straight before him in the direction of one of the windows.

"There it is," he said, "the usual thing—the globe of light and the picture in the middle. There lies the murdered man on his back. Yes, that is the bit of the Plain that I know so well—the moon drifts behind the clouds—now it shines out, and I see the face of the murdered man—but the murderer, who is he? Why will he keep his back to me? Good God! why can't I see his face?—Look, can't you see for yourself? Margaret, can't you see?—do you notice the stick in his hand?—it is my stick—and—the scoundrel, he wears my clothes. Yes, those clothes are mine. My God, what does this mean?"

(To be continued.)

Courts of Love.

"Courts of Love" were established in the middle ages, when chivalry was at its height, and love the serious occupation of life among the higher class of society. The first "Court of Love" was established in the South of France in the twelfth century, and was composed of knights, poets and ladies, and their decisions on subtle questions connected with affairs of the heart were given with great formality.

Baby Nearly Died.

SRS.—My baby was very bad with rummer complaint and I thought he would die, until I tried Dr. Fowler's Extract of Wild Strawberry. With the first dose I noticed a change for the better, and now he is cured, and is fat and healthy.

Mrs. A. NORMAND, London, Ont.