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The man came unsteadily down the room.

'Will you come at once, sir?' he said, in the greatest agitation. 'Something awful has happened. Madame Rozier is dead!'

Those who were near enough, heard what was said.

The gay laughter ceased.

Every face wore an expression of incredulous horror.

Lady Metherell, knowing nothing of what had occurred, spoke in haughty annoyance.

'What is this mystery, Martin—what has happened?'

The baronet's lips moved, but no words came from them.

The servants stood staring at the footman who could hardly stand, while the butler hastily left the room to discover the exact cause of the disturbance.

Then at last Sir Martin gained some control over his voice and actions.

'An awful calamity has occurred,' he said, speaking in a painfully, labored way. 'Madame Rozier is—dead!'

His limbs refused to support him longer. He sank upon his chair.

'Dead!' Lady Metherell repeated, in awestruck tones. 'Oh, impossible! Doctor Forbes you are the only medical man present would you see this unfortunate lady at once? It may not be late.'

The doctor—who was a friend staying in the house—rose at once, and followed Lady Metherell from the room, or rather would have done so, had not Wilson, the butler, blocked the way.

'You cannot go, my lady—you cannot go!' he cried, tremulously; adding, appealingly, to the doctor: 'Don't let her go—it is no sight for her ladyship!'

'Stand aside!' Lady Metherell commanded, astonished at the man's manner. 'There is no time to lose.'

She swept past him, paying no heed to the doctors' protest that he should go alone.

Some servants were gathered in the corridor, looking terribly frightened.

Madame Rozier's door stood open.

The room was all in confusion.

A curtain had been dragged from the bed, on which a ghastly, rigid figure was lying beneath the blood-stained clothes.

It was such a terrible spectacle, that both Lady Metherell and Dr. Forbes paused on the threshold, with a cry of horror.

'Wilson was right' he said, 'this is no sight for you.'

'See what has happened!' she returned, faintly. 'I—I—this is awful!'

He led her, unresisting, from the room, and then re-entered, closing the door.

When he came out, a few minutes later, he found her waiting for him.

'There is no hope?' she questioned.

'She has been dead for hours,' he replied. 'I must see Sir Martin at once, Lady Metherell. This is a serious matter.'

He had locked the door, and placed the key in his pocket.

'You think,' she questioned, 'that—that the poor thing committed suicide?'

He shook his head.

'It looks like murder,' he said.

Lady Metherell possessed strong nerves and plenty of sense.

She neither screamed nor fainted, though she grew very white.

'It cannot be that,' she said, quietly.

'You must surely be mistaken.'

'I trust I am,' he answered, gravely.

The guests were still in the dining-room, talking together in subdued voices.

Sir Martin has gone to the library.

Lady Metherell and the doctor followed him thither.

'I suppose,' Dorrien said, standing with a little group by one of the windows, 'this will put an end to everything? Was Madame Rozier an intimate friend?'

'An old friend of Dad's,' Gilbert said. 'It is beastly unfortunate.'

'She did not look the least bit dying,' Shirley said. 'Poor thing, it is awful!'

'It must have been her heart,' said Lucy, swinging the blind-cord to and fro. 'It is dreadful to think of her lying there dead, while we were all enjoying ourselves.'

'It is deuced rough luck her dying here,' Gilbert declared.

'Don't be so unfeeling!' Shirley said.

'Well, as I never saw her in my life till yesterday, and then only spoke half-a-dozen words to her, I really don't see why I should be expected to feel very cut-up about it,' he expostulated.

'Miss Ware has taken it very much to heart,' Lucy remarked, dryly.

Eva Ware had been weeping copiously. She was now seeking consolation from Mr. Ridley, who was holding a glass of wine for her.

'Poor Mr. Metherell!' Shirley said, mischievously, 'you are being cut out.'

'You mean that poor old Ridley is being let in,' he returned.

Then they all laughed in a husky, shamed sort of way.

'You knew Madame Rozier very well, did you not?' Lady Daresdale said to Capt. Dorrien.

He looked surprised.

'No; that is to say, very slightly.'

'She told me you had met in Paris,' her ladyship said.

'She told me so, also,' Dorrien replied with a little laugh; 'but I could not remember the occasion on which we met, though I was not so ungallant as to admit it.'

Then Lady Metherell came into the room.

Lady Daresdale was her intimate friend. She went forward to meet her.

'My dear Clara,' she said, 'we feel so deeply for you. It is so unfortunate at such a time of merry-making. Of course I can none of us experience any great grief for one whom we scarcely knew, but we are all terribly shocked.'

Lady Metherell passed her friends hand as she slowly moved to the window, where most of her guests were congregated.

'It is, indeed, a shock,' she said, glancing from one to the other; 'more severe and terrible than any as you at present

imagine. You are bound to hear the truth, sooner or later, and, therefore, I have decided to tell you at once.'

She paused for an instant.

No one moved or spoke.

All eyes were turned to her, all were waiting for her next words.

When they came a thrill of horror ran through the assembly.

'Doctor Forbes says Madame Rozier has been stabbed through the heart. He believes she has been murdered. It is awful, is it not? We think that thieves must have got into the house, for her room is all in disorder. No doubt they intended to ransack the place. Perhaps she awoke, and tried to raise an alarm—it is impossible to say. The police have been sent for. We shall hear of their views of the case.'

'Why, we might all have been murdered in our beds!' Eva Ware cried, looking very frightened.

'Great Scott!' Gilbert Metherell exclaimed incredulously. 'You don't mean this!'

'It seems incredible,' Dorrien declared.

'Why, it was almost daylight before we left off dancing.'

'They must have hidden themselves in the house,' Lady Metherell said; adding: 'I think you had all better see if your jewellery is safe.'

There was a general movement towards the door.

Shirley sat down in the window-seat.

'I have nothing worth taking,' she said, 'I thought, Lucy began, 'that I heard someone moving about very early this morning.'

'That is queer,' Dorrien exclaimed. 'I thought so, too, but imagined it to be the servants. Has much gone from the house, Lady Metherell?'

'Up to the present we have missed nothing. The plate chests are untouched. The thieves must have been disturbed at the commencement of their work.'

'Poor Sir Martin!' Shirley said, breaking a short pause. 'He looked so terribly upset.'

'Mr. Ridley had to help him from the room,' added Lady Daresdale.

'He felt it more keenly, as she was an old friend of his,' Lady Metherell explained.

'At least, they were acquainted many years ago. But unfortunately, we know nothing of her people, and have no idea how to let them hear until they write. You will excuse me now; but there are many things I must see to.'

As she left the room with Lady Daresdale, Wilson came to tell her that the inspector and a couple of men had arrived.

The dead woman's room was visited, the servants all closely questioned, but not the faintest clue was discovered.

Nothing had been taken from the house, not a single article of jewellery was missing.

The whole affair seemed shrouded in hopeless mystery.

A telegram was despatched to Scotland Yard for a detective.

He reached Coddington by the last train that night, and remained at the Court until after the inquest, at which a verdict was returned of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown.

No letters came for Madame Rozier, and though her relatives were widely advertised for, none came forward.

The detective returned to town, fairly baffled.

The murder had put an end to all the festivities.

The guests—with the exception of one or two intimate friends—had left the day following the tragedy.

Lucy Brend accepted an invitation to stay with the Lorraines, and Captain Dorrien departed on a visit to Scotland.

A heavy gloom seemed to hang over Metherell Court.

Even the servants spoke in whispers, and started at their own shadows.

Lady Metherell appeared colder and more formal than ever, while Sir Martin seemed incapable of recovering from the shock.

Before it, he had been a young looking man for his age; now he was an old one.

His hair grew suddenly grey, deep lines came about his eyes and mouth, his shoulders were bent.

He avoided all society, and spent long hours alone in his study.

He refused to consult a doctor, declaring there was nothing the matter with him beyond being a trifle run down.

And when Lady Metherell expressed her desire to go away at once for change of air and scene, he declined to accompany her.

'My dear Martin,' she exclaimed, in annoyance, 'I must insist that you do so. Doctor Lewis says that your nerves are evi-

dent in a terrible state, and that you must have a complete change.'

'Lewis knows nothing about it,' was the curt reply.

They were sitting at breakfast alone, Gilbert not having put in appearance.

'I shall arrange to leave on the eighth,' said he ladyship, with decision.

'Certainly; but I shall not accompany you.'

'And why?'

'Because, my dear, I do not wish to leave home at present.'

He rose as he spoke, and moved slowly towards the door; but his wife's voice arrested him before reaching it.

'One moment,' she said, in her quiet, icy way. 'I have a question to ask you. What was Madame Rozier to you, that her death should affect you like this?'

At the first mentioned of that dreaded name, he felt the blood leave his lips.

He came back to the table, and leaned upon a chair for support.

'I do not understand you,' he said.

She raised her eyebrows, one white hand idly playing with the ring of her serviette!

'Surely my question is plain enough! That you should have been shocked and grieved, one could understand; but that the death of an old friend—who you have not met for many years—should alter you so entirely, is beyond my comprehension. I merely ask you to explain it.'

Her words dispelled the sickening dread that she had discovered some clue to his secret.

The tight pain about his heart began to die away.

He breathed more freely.

'There is nothing to explain,' he replied.

'Say, rather, that you refuse to do so,' she returned impatiently. 'I know that there is something the matter. You are foolish to keep it from me.'

'My dear Clara, you are laboring under a delusion,' he said, and left her.

She gave an angry little laugh as he did so.

She was utterly commonplace and practical, and had no conception of the agony of mind he was suffering.

Added to the terrible belief that he was really guilty of the awful crime, was the wearing uncertainty as to what had become of the papers relating to his elder son.

He had managed to secretly visit the room before the police had arrived, and had searched for the small bag in which he had last seen the letters.

It was soon found, and, with bated breath and nerveless fingers, he had pressed the clasp.

It opened easily, but—it was empty.

There was no sign of the papers anywhere; nor in the time which followed, did they come to light.

It was most unlikely that he should have destroyed them; but, if they still existed, who had them?

Day and night the question haunted him.

The suspense and the horror were killing him.

Was it possible there was another who knew the secret—another who, through the knowledge, might bring the death of Dola Rozier home to him?

Then, too, there was the missing dagger. No trace of it had ever been discovered, though he was always silently and secretly hunting and hunting for it.

Up to the present no one had noticed that it was gone, though he lived in daily terror of someone doing so.

No man, surely, ever suffered more keenly for his sins than Sir Martin Metherell.

Sometimes the longing to speak became intolerable.

There were moments when he felt an unconquerable desire to cry out: 'I am the guilty man! I am the murderer!'

Moments when he felt that exposure, shame, and death, would be infinitely preferable to the tortures he endured.

And so the summer days went by, and people gloried in the sunshine and found life full of pleasure; but at Metherell Court pale lips cursed the glaring sun, and the shadow upon the house grew ever deeper.

'The old pater is going into his dotage,' said Gilbert Metherell, one day, as he lay on the bed beside Shirley.

'I think you are horribly heartless,' she said, 'to speak in that way. Anyone can see that he is very ill.'

'He won't see a doctor. He declares he is all right. I suppose he ought to know.'

'If you were half a son,' she said, with a little touch of contempt, 'you would try to cheer him.'

'The mater has tried,' Gilbert argued. 'He doesn't want to be cheered. The poor old mother is sick of it. She is going away for a change.'

'And you will stay and take care of your father?'

'And die of the blues? Not likely. I'm off yachting; but, before I go, Shirley, I

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'And you will stay and take care of your father?'

'And die of the blues? Not likely. I'm off yachting; but, before I go, Shirley, I

want an answer to what I have been asking you for the last six months.'

'I hate questions and answers,' Shirley said.

'That can't be helped,' he replied. 'You can say "Yes," and it is all over. Shirley, will you marry me?'

She was not taken by surprise.

She had known for some time that the hour would come when she would have to decide one way or the other. She looked at his weak face, at his dandy clothes.

She did not love him—she did not even admire him—and yet she thought of Madge and her mother, and of how awful it was to be so poor, and of all she could do if she married Gilbert Metherell.

'I wish you would not ask me now,' she said, crossly.

'Can't wait any longer,' he declared, feeling in his pocket for something.

It turned out to be a small leather case, containing a beautiful opal and diamond ring.

'If you like to take it, say so; if you don't, we can throw it in the sea.'

'But Sir Martin—' Shirley began, feebly.

'Is ready to give us his blessing,' Metherell interrupted, happily. 'Everyone is agreeable—you had better say "Yes."'

Shirley flung a little stone into the water, across the faint blue of which a white gull was lazily flapping.

'I don't love you' she said, with cruel abruptness.

But fortunately, her lover was not thin-skinned, and smiled complacently.

'That will be all right. I'm sure we shall hit it off splendidly. I can't talk the stuff they do in books, you know, about adoring and all that sort of thing; but I'm awfully fond of you—you are so com-
foundedly pretty.'

'Suppose I grow ugly?'

'Oh, you couldn't!'

'I might lose an eye, or otherwise disfigure my face, bicycling?'

'I'll risk that.'

She gave a little sigh, then regarded him with dissatisfaction.