

IN THE FOG

BY
Richard Harding Davis.

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"I asked her what she meant by writing me that she was dying in a garret, and she laughed, and said she had done so because she was afraid, unless I thought she needed help, I would not try to see her. That was where we were when you arrived. And now," Chetney added, "I will say good-by to her, and you had better return home. No, you can trust me, I shall follow you at once. She has no influence over me now, but I believe, in spite of the way she has used me, that she is, after her queer fashion, still fond of me, and when she learns that this good-by is final there may be a scene, and it is not fair to her that you should be here. So, go home at once, and tell the governor that I am following you in ten minutes."

"That," said Arthur, "is the way we parted. I never left him on more friendly terms. I was happy to see him alive again, I was happy to think he had returned in time to make up his quarrel with my father, and I was happy that at last he was shut of that woman. I was never better pleased with him in my life." He turned to Inspector Lyle, who was sitting at the foot of the bed taking notes of all he told us.

"Way in the name of common sense," he cried, "should I have chosen that moment of all others to send my brother back to the grave? For a moment the Inspector did not answer him. I do not know if any of you gentlemen are acquainted with Inspector Lyle, but if you are not, I can assure you that he is a very remarkable man. Our firm often applies to him for aid, and he has never failed us; my father has the greatest possible respect for him. Where he has the advantage over the ordinary police official is in the fact that he possesses imagination. He imagines himself to be the criminal, imagines how he would act under the same circumstances, and he imagines to such purpose that he generally finds the man he wants. I have often told Lyle that if he had not been a detective he would have made a great success as a poet, or a playwright."

"When Arthur turned on him Lyle hesitated for a moment, and then told him exactly what was the case against him."

"Ever since your brother was reported as having died in Africa," he said, "your Lordship has been collecting money on post obits. Lord Chetney's arrival last night turned them into waste paper. You were suddenly in debt for thousands of pounds—for much more than you could ever possibly pay. No one knew that you and your brother had met at Madame Zichy's. But you knew that your father was not expected to outlive the night, and that if your brother were dead also, you would be saved from complete ruin, and that you would become the Marquis of Edam."

"Oh, that is how you have worked it out, is it?" Arthur cried. "And for me to become Lord Edam was it necessary that the woman should die, too?"

"They will say," Lyle answered, "that she was a witness to the murder—that she would have told."

"Then why did I not kill the servant as well?" Arthur said.

"He was asleep, and saw nothing."

"And you believe that?" Arthur demanded.

"It is not a question of what I believe," Lyle said gravely. "It is a question for your peers."

"The man is insolent!" Arthur cried. "The thing is monstrous! Horrible!"

"Before we could stop him he sprang out of his cot and began pulling on his clothes. When the nurses tried to hold him down, he fought with them."

"Do you think you can keep me here," he shouted, "when they are plotting to hang me? I am going with you to that house!" he cried at Lyle. "When you find those bodies I shall be beside you. It is my right. He is my brother. He has been murdered, and I can tell you who murdered him. That woman murdered him. She first ruined his life, and now she has killed him. For the last five years she has been plotting to make herself his wife, and last night, when he told her he had discovered the truth about the Russian, and that she would never see him again, she flew into a passion and stabbed him, and then, in terror of the gallows, killed herself. She murdered him, I tell you, and I promise you that we will find the knife she used near her—perhaps still in her hand. What will you say to that?"

"Lyle turned his head away and stared down at the floor. 'I might say,' he answered, 'that you placed it there.'"

"Arthur gave a cry of anger and sprang at him, and then pitched forward into his arms. The blood was running from the cut under the bandage, and he had fainted. Lyle carried him back to the bed again, and we left him with the police and the doctors, and drove at once to the address he had given us. We found the house not three minutes' walk from St. George's Hospital. It stands in Trevor Terrace, that little row of houses set back from Knightsbridge, with one end in Hill Street."

"As we left the hospital Lyle had said to me, 'You must not blame me for treating him as I did. All is fair in this work, and if by angering that boy I could have made him commit himself I was right in trying to do so; though, I assure you, no one would be better pleased than myself if I could prove his theory to be correct. But we cannot tell. Everything depends upon what we see for ourselves within the next few minutes.'"

"When we reached the house, Lyle broke open the fastenings of one of the windows on the ground floor, and, hidden by the trees in the garden, we scrambled in. We found ourselves in the reception-room, which was the first room on the right of the hall. The gas was still burning behind the colored glass and red silk shades, and when the daylight streamed in after us it gave the hall a hideously dissipated look, like the foyer of a theater at a matinee, or the entrance to an all-day gambling hell. The house was oppressively silent, and because we knew why it was so silent we spoke in whispers. When Lyle turned the

handle of the drawing-room door, I felt as though some one had put his hand upon my throat. But I followed close at his shoulder, and saw, in the subdued light of many-tinted lamps, the body of Chetney at the foot of the divan, just as Lieutenant Sears had described it. In the drawing-room we found the body of the Princess Zichy, her arms thrown out, and the blood from her heart frozen in a tiny line across her bare shoulder. But neither of us, although we searched the floor on our hands and knees, could find the weapon which had killed her."

"For Arthur's sake," I said, "I would have given a thousand pounds if we had found the knife in her hand, as he said we would."

"That we have not found it here," Lyle answered, "is to my mind the strongest proof that he is telling the truth, that he left the house before the murder took place. He is not a fool, and had he stabbed his brother and this woman, he would have seen that by placing the knife near her he could help to make it appear as if she had killed Chetney and then committed suicide. Besides, Lord Arthur insisted that the evidence in his behalf would be our finding the knife here. He would not have urged that if he knew we would not find it, if he knew he himself had carried it away. This is no suicide. A suicide does not rise and hide the weapon with which he kills himself, and then lie down again. No, this has been a double murder, and we must look outside of the house for the murderer."

"While he was speaking Lyle and I had been searching every corner, studying the details of each room. I was so afraid that, without telling me, he would make some deductions prejudicial to Arthur, that I never left his side. I was determined to see everything that he saw, and, if possible, to prevent his interpreting it in the wrong way. He finally finished his examination, and we sat down together in the drawing-room, and he took out his notebook and read aloud all that Mr. Sears had told him of the murder and what we had just learned from Arthur. We compared the two accounts word for word, and weighed statement with statement, but I could not determine from anything Lyle said which of the two versions he had decided to believe."

"We are trying to build a house of blocks," he exclaimed, "with half of the blocks missing. We have been considering two theories," he went on; "one that Lord Arthur is responsible for both murders, and the other that the dead woman in there is responsible for one of them, and has committed suicide; but, until the Russian servant is ready to talk, I shall refuse to believe in the guilt of either."

"What can you prove by him?" I asked. "He was drunk and asleep. He saw nothing."

"Lyle hesitated, and then, as though he had made up his mind to be quite frank with me, spoke freely."

"I do not know that he was either drunk or asleep," he answered. "Lieutenant Sears describes him as a stupid boor. I am not satisfied that he is not a clever actor. What was his position in this house? What was his real duty here? Suppose it was not to guard this woman, but to watch her. Let us imagine that it was not the woman he served, but a master, and see where that leads us. For this house has a master, a mysterious, absentee landlord, who lives in St. Petersburg, the unknown Russian who came between Chetney and Zichy, and because of whom Chetney left her. He is the man who bought this house for Madame Zichy, who sent these rugs and curtains from St. Petersburg to furnish it for her after his own tastes, and I believe, it was he also who placed the Russian servant here, ostensibly to serve the Princess, but in reality to spy upon her. At Scotland Yard we do not know who this gentleman is; the Russian police confess to equal ignorance concerning him. When Lord Chetney went to Africa, Madame Zichy lived in St. Petersburg; but there her receptions and dinners were so crowded with members of the nobility and of the army and diplomats, that among so many visitors the police could not learn which was the one for whom she most greatly cared."

"Lyle pointed at the modern French paintings and the heavy silk rugs which hung upon the walls."

"The unknown is a man of taste and of some fortune," he said, "not the sort of man to send a stupid peasant to guard the woman he loves. So I am not content to believe, with Mr. Sears, that the servant is a boor. I believe him instead to be a very clever ruffian. I believe



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him to be the protector of his master's honor, or, let us say, of his master's property, whether that property be silver plate or the woman his master loves. Last night, after Lord Arthur had gone away, the servant was left alone in this house with Lord Chetney and Madame Zichy. From where he sat in the hall he could hear Lord Chetney bidding her farewell; for, if my idea of him is correct, he understands English quite as well as you or I. Let us imagine that he heard her entreating Chetney not to leave her, reminding him of his former wish to marry her, and let us suppose that he hears Chetney denounce her, and tell

her that at Cairo he has learned of this Russian admirer—the servant's master. He hears the woman declare that she has had no admirer but himself, that this unknown Russian was, and is, nothing to her, that there is no man she loves but him, and that she cannot live, knowing that he is alive, without his love. Suppose Chetney believed her, suppose his former infatuation for her returned, and that in a moment of weakness he forgave her and took her in his arms. That is the moment the Russian master has feared. It is to guard against it that he has placed his watchdog over the Princess, and how do we know but that, when the moment came, the watchdog served his master, as he saw his duty, and killed them both? What do you think? Lyle demanded. "Would not that explain both murders?"

"I was only too willing to hear any theory which pointed to any one else as the criminal than Arthur, but Lyle's explanation was too utterly fantastic. I told him that he certainly showed imagination, but that he could not hang a man for what he imagined he had done."

"No," Lyle answered, "but I can frighten him by telling him what I think he has done, and now when I again question the Russian servant I will make it quite clear to him that I believe he is the murderer. I think that will open his mouth. A man will at least talk to defend himself. Come," he said, "we must return at once to Scotland Yard and see him. There is nothing more to do here."

"He arose, and I followed him into the hall, and in another minute we would have been on our way to Scotland Yard. But just as he opened the street door a postman halted at the gate of the garden, and began fumbling with the latch."

"Lyle stopped, with an exclamation of chagrin."

"How stupid of me!" he exclaimed. He turned quickly and pointed to a narrow slit cut in the brass plate of the front door. "The house has a private letter-box," he said, "and I had not thought to look in it! If we had gone out as we came in, by the window, I would never have seen it. The moment I entered the house I should have thought of securing the letters which came this morning. I have been grossly careless." He stepped back into the hall and pulled at the lid of the letter-box, which hung on the inside of the door, but it was tightly locked. At the same moment the postman came up the steps holding a letter. Without a word Lyle took it from his hand and began to examine it. It was addressed to the Princess Zichy, and on the back of the envelope was the name of a West End dressmaker."

"That is of no use to me," Lyle said. He took out his card and showed it to the postman. "I am Inspector Lyle from Scotland Yard," he said. "The people in this house are under arrest. Everything it contains is now in my keeping. Did you deliver any other letters here this morning?"

"The man looked frightened, but answered promptly that he was now upon his third round. He had made one postal delivery at seven that morning and another at eleven."

"How many letters did you leave here?" Lyle asked.

"About six altogether," the man answered.

"Did you put them through the door into the letter-box?"

"The postman said, 'Yes, I always slip them into the box, and ring and go away. The servants collect them from the inside.'"

"Have you noticed if any of the letters you leave here bear a Russian postage stamp?" Lyle asked.

"The man answered, 'Oh, yes, sir, a great many.'"

"From the same person, would you say?"

"The writing seems to be the same," the man answered. "They come regularly about once a week—one of those I delivered this morning had a Russian postmark."

"That will do," said Lyle eagerly. "Thank you, thank you very much."

"He ran back into the hall, and, pulling out his penknife, began to pick at the lock of the letter-box."

"I have been supremely careless," he said in great excitement.

"Twice before when people I wanted had flown from a house I have been able to follow them by putting a guard over their mail-box. These letters, which arrive regularly every week from Russia in the same handwriting, they can come from but one person. At least, we shall know the name of the master of this house. Undoubtedly it is one of his letters that the man placed here this morning. We may make a most important discovery."

"As he was talking he was picking at the lock with his knife, but he was so impatient to reach the letters that he pressed too heavily on the blade and it broke in his hand. I took a step backward and drove my heel into the lock, and it burst open. The lid flew back, and we pressed forward, and each ran his hand down into the letter-box. For a moment we were both too startled to move. The box was empty."

"I do not know how long we stood staring stupidly at each other, but it was Lyle who was the first to recover. He seized me by the arm and pointed excitedly into the empty box."

"Do you appreciate what that means?" he cried. "It means that

some one has been here ahead of us. Some one has entered this house not three hours before we came, since eleven o'clock this morning."

"It was the Russian servant!" I exclaimed.

"The Russian servant has been under arrest at Scotland Yard," Lyle cried. "He could not have taken the letters. Lord Arthur has been in his cot at the hospital. That is his alibi. There is some one else, some one we do not suspect, and that some one is the murderer. He came back here either to obtain those letters because he knew they would convict him, or to remove something he had left here at the time of the murder, something incriminating—the weapon, perhaps, or some personal article; a cigarette case, a handkerchief with his name upon it, or a pair of gloves. Whatever it was it must have been damning evidence against him to have made him take so desperate a chance."

"How do we know," I whispered, "that he is not hidden here now?"

"No, I'll swear he is not," Lyle answered. "I may have bungled in some things, but I have searched this house thoroughly. Nevertheless," he added, "we must go over it again, from the cellar to the roof. We have the real clew now, and we must forget the others and work only this." As he spoke he began again to search the drawing-room, turning over even the books on the tables and the music on the piano."

"Whoever the man is," he said over his shoulder, "we know that he has a key to the front door and a key to the letter-box. That shows us he is either an inmate of the house or that he comes here when he wishes. The Russian says that he was the only servant in the house. Certainly we have found no evidence to show that any other servant slept here. There could be but one other person who would possess a key to the house and the letter-box—and he lives in St. Petersburg." (To be Continued)