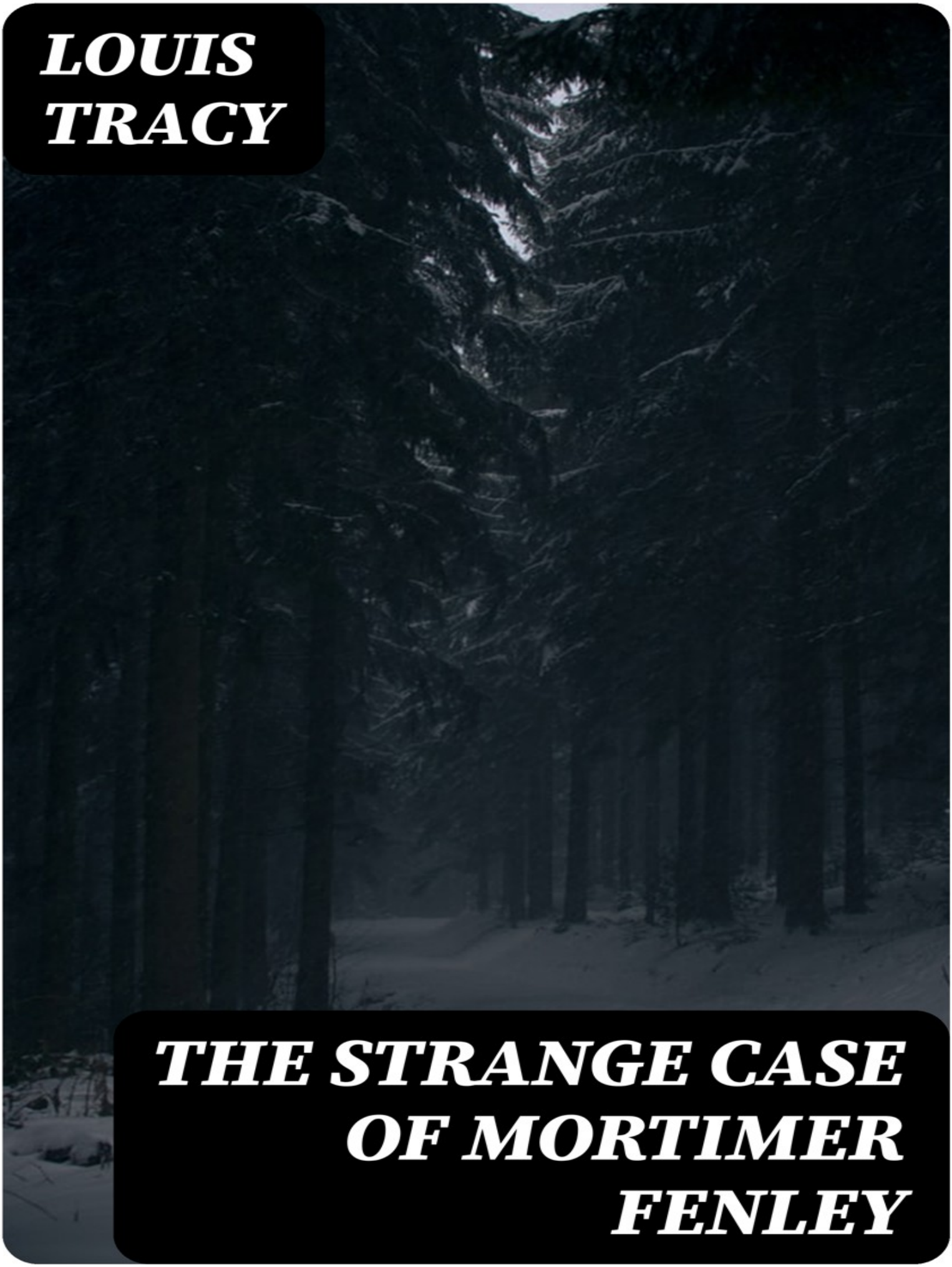
LOUIS TRACY
THE STRANGE CASE OF MORTIMER FENLEY

Louis Tracy

The Strange Case of Mortimer Fenley

EAN 8596547366942

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

The Water Nymphs

Table of Contents

Does an evil deed cast a shadow in advance? Does premeditated crime spread a baleful aura which affects certain highly-strung temperaments just as the sensation of a wave of cold air rising from the spine to the head may be a forewarning of epilepsy or hysteria? John Trenholme had cause to think so one bright June morning in 1912, and he has never ceased to believe it, though the events which made him an outstanding figure in the "Strange Case of Mortimer Fenley," as the murder of a prominent man in the City of London came to be known, have long since been swept into oblivion by nearly five years of war. Even the sun became a prime agent of the occult that morning. It found a chink in a blind and threw a bar of vivid light across the face of a young man lying asleep in the front bedroom of the "White Horse Inn" at Roxton. It crept onward from a firm, well-molded chin to lips now tight set, though not lacking signs that they would open readily in a smile and perhaps reveal two rows of strong, white, even teeth. Indeed, when that strip of sunshine touched and warmed them, the smile came; so the sleeper was dreaming, and pleasantly.

But the earth stays not for men, no matter what their dreams. In a few minutes the radiant line reached the sleeper's eyes, and he awoke. Naturally, he stared straight at the disturber of his slumbers; and being a mere man, who

emulated not the ways of eagles, was routed at the first glance.

More than that, he was thoroughly aroused, and sprang out of bed with a celerity that would have given many another young man a headache during the remainder of the day.

But John Trenholme, artist by profession, was somewhat of a light-hearted vagabond by instinct; if the artist was ready to be annoyed because of an imaginary loss of precious daylight, the vagabond laughed cheerily when he blinked at a clock and learned that the hour still lacked some minutes of half past five in the morning.

"By gad," he grinned, pulling up the blind, "I was scared stiff. I thought the blessed alarm had missed fire, and that I had been lying here like a hog during the best part of the finest day England has seen this year."

Evidently he was still young enough to deal in superlatives, for there had been other fine days that Summer; moreover, in likening himself to a pig, he was ridiculously unfair to six feet of athletic symmetry in which it would be difficult to detect any marked resemblance to the animal whose name is a synonym for laziness.

On the way to the bathroom he stopped to listen for sounds of an aroused household, but the inmates of the White Horse Inn were still taking life easily.

"Eliza vows she can hear that alarm in her room," he communed. "Well, suppose we assist nature, always a laudable thing in itself, and peculiarly excellent when breakfast is thereby advanced a quarter of an hour."

Eliza was the inn's stout and voluble cook-housekeeper, and her attic lay directly above Trenholme's room. He went back for the clock, crept swiftly upstairs, opened a door a few inches, and put the infernal machine inside, close to the wall. He was splashing in the bath when a harsh and penetrating din jarred through the house, and a slight scream showed that Eliza had been duly "alarmed."

A few minutes later came a heavy thump on the bathroom door.

"All right, Mr. Trenholme!" cried an irate female voice. "You've been up to your tricks, have you? It'll be my turn when I make your coffee; I'll pepper an' salt it!"

"Why, what's the matter, Eliza?" he shouted.

"Matter! Frightenin' a body like that! I thought a lot o' suffrigettes were smashin' the windows of the snug."

Eliza was still touchy when Trenholme ventured to peep into the kitchen.

"I don't know how you dare show your face," she cried wrathfully. "The impidence of men nowadays! Just fancy you comin' an' openin' my door!"

"But, *chérie*, what have I done?" he inquired, his brown eyes wide with astonishment.

"I'm not your cherry, nor your peach, neither. Who put that clock in my room?"

"What clock, *ma belle*?"

Eliza picked up an egg, and bent so fiery a glance on the intruder that he dodged out of sight for a second.

"Listen, *carissima*," he pleaded, peering round the jamb of the door again. "If the alarm found its way upstairs I must

have been walking in my sleep. While you were dreaming of suffragettes I may have been dreaming of you."

"Stop there a bit longer, chatterin' and callin' me names, an' your bacon will be frizzled to a cinder," she retorted.

"But I really hoped to save you some trouble by carrying in the breakfast tray myself. I hate to see a jolly, good-tempered woman of your splendid physique working yourself to a shadow."

Eliza squared her elbows as a preliminary to another outburst, when the stairs creaked. Mary, the "help," was arriving hurriedly, in curl papers.

"Oh, *you*'ve condescended to get up, have you?" was the greeting Mary received.

"Why, it's on'y ten minutes to six!" cried the astonished girl, gazing at a grandfather's clock as if it were bewitched.

"You've never had such a shock since you were born," went on the sarcastic Eliza. "But don't thank *me*, my girl. Thank Mr. Trenholme, the gentleman stannin' there grinnin' like a Cheshire cat. Talk to him nicely, an' p'raps he'll paint your picter, an' then your special butcher boy will see how beautiful you reelly are."

"Jim don't need tellin' anything about that," said the girl, smiling, for Eliza's bark was notoriously worse than her bite.

"Jim!" came the snorting comment. "The first man who ever axed me to marry him was called Jim, an' when, like a wise woman, I said 'No,' he went away an' 'listed in the Royal Artillery an' lost his leg in a war—that's what Jim did."

"What a piece of luck you didn't accept him!" put on Trenholme.

"An' why, I'd like to know?"

"Because he began by losing his head over you. If a leg was missing, too, there wasn't much of Jim left, was there?"

Mary giggled, and Eliza seized the egg again; so Trenholme ran to his sitting-room. Within half an hour he was passing through the High Street, bidding an affable "Good morning" to such early risers as he met, and evidently well content with himself and the world in general. His artist's kit revealed his profession even to the uncritical eye, but no student of men could have failed to guess his bent were he habited in the garb of a costermonger. The painter and the poet are the last of the Bohemians, and John Trenholme was a Bohemian to the tips of his fingers.

He carried himself like a cavalier, but the divine flame of art kindled in his eye. He had learned how to paint in Julien's studio, and that same school had taught him to despise convention. He looked on nature as a series of exquisite pictures, and regarded men and women in the mass as creatures that occasionally fitted into the landscape. He was heart whole and fancy free. At twenty-five he had already exhibited three times in the Salon, and was spoken of by the critics as a painter of much promise, which is the critical method of waiting to see how the cat jumps when an artist of genius and originality arrests attention.

He had peculiarly luminous brown eyes set well apart in a face which won the prompt confidence of women, children and dogs. He was splendidly built for an out-door life, and moved with a long, supple stride, a gait which people mistook for lounging until they walked with him, and found that the pace was something over four miles an hour. Add to

these personal traits the fact that he had dwelt in Roxton exactly two days and a half, and was already on speaking terms with most of the inhabitants, and you have a fair notion of John Trenholme's appearance and ways.

There remains but to add that he was commissioned by a magazine to visit this old-world Hertfordshire village and depict some of its beauties before a projected railway introduced the jerry-builder and a sewerage scheme, and his presence in the White Horse Inn is explained. He had sketched the straggling High Street, the green, the inn itself, boasting a license six hundred years old, the undulating common, the church with its lych gate, the ivy-clad ruin known as "The Castle," with its square Norman keep still frowning at an English countryside, and there was left only an Elizabethan mansion, curiously misnamed "The Towers," to be transferred to his portfolio. Here, oddly enough, he had been rebuffed. A note to the owner, Mortimer Fenley, banker and super City man, asking permission to enter the park of an afternoon, had met with a curt refusal.

Trenholme, of course, was surprised, since he was paying the man a rare compliment; he had expressed in the inn his full and free opinion concerning all money grubbers, and the Fenley species thereof in particular; whereupon the stout Eliza, who classed the Fenley family as "rubbish," informed him that there was a right of way through the park, and that from a certain point near a lake he could sketch the grand old manor house to his heart's content, let the Fenleys and their keepers scowl as they chose.

The village barber, too, bore out Eliza's statement.

"A rare old row there was in Roxton twenty year ago, when Fenley fust kem here, an' tried to close the path," said the barber. "But we beat him, we did, an' well he knows it. Not many folk use it nowadays, 'coss the artful ole dodger opened a new road to the station; but some of us makes a point of strollin' that way on a Sunday afternoon, just to look at the pheasants an' rabbits, an' it's a treat to see the head keeper's face when we go through the lodge gates at the Easton end, for that is the line the path takes."

Here followed a detailed description, for the Roxton barber, like every other barber, could chatter like a magpie; it was in this wise that Trenholme was able to defy the laws forbidding trespass, and score off the seemingly uncivil owner of a historical dwelling.

He little imagined, that glorious June morning, that he was entering on a road of strange adventure. He had chosen an early hour purposely. Not only were the lights and shadows perfect for water color, but it was highly probable that he would be able to come and go without attracting attention. He had no wish to annoy Fenley, or quarrel with the man's myrmidons. Indeed, he would not have visited the estate at all if the magazine editor had not specially stipulated for a full-page drawing of the house.

Now, all would have been well had the barber's directions proved as bald in spirit as they were in letter.

"After passin' 'The Waggoner's Rest,' you'll come to a pair of iron gates on the right," he had said. "On one side there's a swing gate. Go through, an' make straight for a clump of cedars on top of a little hill. There mayn't be much of a path,

but that's it. It's reelly a short cut to the Easton gate on the London road."

Yet who could guess what a snare for an artist's feet lay in those few words? How could Trenholme realize that "a pair of iron gates" would prove to be an almost perfect example of Christopher Wren's genius as a designer of wrought iron? Trenholme's eyes sparkled when he beheld this prize, with its acanthus leaves and roses beaten out with wonderful freedom and beauty of curve. A careful drawing was the result. Another result, uncounted by him, but of singular importance in its outcome was the delay of forty minutes thus entailed.

He crossed an undulating park, and had no difficulty in tracing an almost disused path in certain grass-grown furrows leading past the group of cedars. On reaching this point he obtained a fair view of the mansion; but the sun was directly behind him, as the house faced southeast, and he decided to encroach some few yards on private property. A brier-laden slope fell from the other side of the trees to a delightful-looking lake fed by a tiny cascade on the east side. An ideal spot, he thought.

This, then, was the stage setting: Trenholme, screened by black cedars and luxuriant brushwood, was seated about fifty feet above the level of the lake and some forty yards from its nearest sedges. The lake itself, largely artificial, lay at the foot of the waterfall, which gurgled and splashed down a miniature precipice of moss-covered bowlders. Here and there a rock, a copper beech, a silver larch, or a few flowering shrubs cast strong shadows on the dark, pellucid mirror beneath. On a cunningly contrived promontory of

brown rock stood a white marble statue of Venus Aphrodite, and the ripples from the cascade seemed to endow with life the shimmering reflection of the goddess.

Beyond the lake a smooth lawn, dotted with fine old oaks and chestnuts, rose gently for a quarter of a mile to the Italian gardens in front of the house. To the left, the park was bounded by woods. To the right was another wood, partly concealing a series of ravines and disused quarries. Altogether a charming setting for an Elizabethan manor, pastoral, peaceful, quite English, and seeming on that placid June morning so remote from the crowded mart that it was hard to believe the nearest milestone, with its "London, 30 miles."

Had Trenholme glanced at his watch he would have discovered that the hour was now half past seven, or nearly an hour later than he had planned. But Art, which is long-lived, recks little of Time, an evanescent thing. He was enthusiastic over his subject. He would make not one sketch, but two. That lake, like the gates, was worthy of immortality. Of course, the house must come first. He unpacked a canvas hold-all, and soon was busy.

He worked with the speed and assured confidence of a master. By years of patient industry he had wrested from Nature the secrets of her tints and tone values. Quickly there grew into being an exquisitely bright and well balanced drawing, impressionist, but true; a harmony of color and atmosphere. Leaving subtleties to the quiet thought of the studio, he turned to the lake. Here the lights and shadows were bolder. They demanded the accurate appraisement of the half closed eye. He was so absorbed in

his task that he was blithely unconscious of the approach of a girl from the house, and his first glimpse of her was forthcoming when she crossed the last spread of velvet sward which separated a cluster of rhododendrons in the middle distance from the farther edge of the lake.

It was not altogether surprising that he had not seen her earlier. She wore a green coat and skirt and a most curiously shaped hat of the same hue, so that her colors blended with the landscape. Moreover, she was walking rapidly, and had covered the intervening quarter of a mile in four minutes or less.

He thought at first that she was heading straight for his lofty perch, and was perhaps bent on questioning his right to be there at all. But he was promptly undeceived. Her mind was set on one object, and her eyes did not travel beyond it. She no more suspected that an artist was lurking in the shade of the cedars than she did that the man in the moon was gazing blandly at her above their close-packed foliage. She came on with rapid, graceful strides, stood for a moment by the side of the Venus, and then, while Trenholme literally gasped for breath, shed coat, skirt and shoes, revealing a slim form clad in a dark blue bathing costume, and dived into the lake.

Trenholme had never felt more surprised. The change of costume was so unexpected, the girl's complete ignorance of his presence so obvious, that he regarded himself as a confessed intruder, somewhat akin to Peeping Tom of Coventry. He was utterly at a loss how to act. If he stood up and essayed a hurried retreat, the girl might be frightened, and would unquestionably be annoyed. It was impossible to

creep away unseen. He was well below the crest of the slope crowned by the trees, and the nymph now disporting in the lake could hardly fail to discover him, no matter how deftly he crouched and twisted.

At this crisis, the artistic instinct triumphed. He became aware that the one element lacking hitherto, the element that lent magic to the beauty of the lake and its vivid environment of color, was the touch of life brought by the swimmer. He caught the flash of her limbs as they moved rhythmically through the dark, clear water, and it seemed almost as if the gods had striven to be kind in sending this naiad to complete a perfect setting. With stealthy hands he drew forth a small canvas. Oil, not mild water color, was the fitting medium to portray this Eden. Shrinking back under cover of a leafy brier, he began a third sketch in which the dominant note was the contrast between the living woman and the marble Venus.

For fifteen minutes the girl disported herself like a dolphin. Evidently she was a practiced swimmer, and had at her command all the resources of the art. At last she climbed out, and stood dripping on the sun-laved rock beside the statue. Trenholme had foreseen this attitude—had, in fact, painted with feverish energy in anticipation of it. The comparison was too striking to be missed by an artist. Were it not for the tightly clinging garments, the pair would have provided a charming representation of Galatea in stone and Galatea after Pygmalion's frenzy had warmed her into life.

Trenholme was absolutely deaf now to any consideration save that of artistic endeavor. With a swift accuracy that

was nearly marvelous he put on the canvas the sheen of faultless limbs and slender neck. He even secured the spun-gold glint of hair tightly coifed under a bathing cap—a species of head-dress which had puzzled him at the first glance—and there was more than a suggestion of a veritable portrait of the regular, lively and delicately beautiful features which belonged to a type differing in every essential from the cold, classic loveliness of the statue, yet vastly more appealing in its sheer femininity.

Then the spell was broken. The girl slipped on her shoes, dressed herself in a few seconds, and was hurrying back to the house, almost before Trenholme dared to breathe normally.

"Well," he muttered, watching the swaying of the green skirt as its owner traversed the park, "this is something like an adventure! By Jove, I've been lucky this morning! I've got my picture for next year's Salon!"

He had got far more, if only he were gifted to peer into the future; but that is a privilege denied to men, even to artists. Soon, when he was calmer, and the embryo sketch had assumed its requisite color notes for subsequent elaboration, he smiled a trifle dubiously.

"If that girl's temperament is as attractive as her looks I'd throw over the Salon for the sake of meeting her," he mused. "But that's frankly impossible, I suppose. At the best, she would not forgive me if she knew I had watched her in this thievish way. I could never explain it, never! She wouldn't even listen. Well, it's better to have dreamed and lost than never to have dreamed at all."

And yet he dreamed. His eyes followed the fair unknown while she entered the garden through a gateway of dense yews, and sped lightly up the steps of a terrace adorned with other statues in marble and bronze. No doorway broke the pleasing uniformity of the south front, but she disappeared through an open window, swinging herself lightly over the low sill. He went with her in imagination. Now she was crossing a pretty drawing-room, now running upstairs to her room, now dressing, possibly in white muslin, which, if Trenholme had the choosing of it, would be powdered with tiny *fleurs de lys*, now arranging her hair with keen eye for effect, and now tripping down again in obedience to a gong summoning the household to breakfast.

He sighed.

"If I had the luck of a decent French poodle, this plutocrat Fenley would eke have invited me to lunch," he grumbled.

Then his eyes sought the sketch, and he forgot the girl in her counterfeit. By Jove, this *would* be a picture! "The Water Nymphs." But he must change the composition a little—losing none of its character; only altering its accessories to such an extent that none would recognize the exact setting.

"Luck!" he chortled, with mercurial rise of spirits. "I'm the luckiest dog in England today. Happy chance has beaten all the tricks of the studio. O ye goddesses, inspire me to heights worthy of you!"

His visions were rudely dispelled by a gunshot, sharp, insistent, a tocsin of death in that sylvan solitude. A host of rooks arose from some tall elms near the house; a couple of cock pheasants flew with startled chuckling out of the wood

on the right; the white tails of rabbits previously unseen revealed their owners' whereabouts as they scampered to cover. But Trenholme was sportsman enough to realize that the weapon fired was a rifle; no toy, but of high velocity, and he wondered how any one dared risk its dangerous use in such a locality. He fixed the sound definitely as coming from the wood to the right—the cover quitted so hurriedly by the pheasants—and instinctively his glance turned to the house, in the half formed thought that some one there might hear the shot, and look out.

The ground floor window by which the girl had entered still remained open, but now another window, the most easterly one on the first floor, had been raised slightly. The light was peculiarly strong and the air so clear that even at the distance he fancied he could distinguish some one gesticulating, or so it seemed, behind the glass. This went on for a minute or more. Then the window was closed. At the same time he noticed a sparkling of glass and brasswork behind the clipped yew hedge which extended beyond the east wing. After some puzzling, he made out that a motor car was waiting there.

That was all. The clamor of the rooks soon subsided. A couple of rabbits skipped from the bushes to resume an interrupted meal on tender grass shoots. A robin trilled a roundelay from some neighboring branch. Trenholme looked at his watch. Half past nine! Why, he must have been mooning there a good half hour!

He gathered his traps, and as the result of seeing the automobile, which had not moved yet, determined to forego

his earlier project of walking out of the park by the Easton gate.

He had just emerged from the trees when a gruff voice hailed him.

"Hi!" it cried. "Who're you, an' what are you doin' here!"

A man, carrying a shotgun and accompanied by a dog, strode up with determined air.

Trenholme explained civilly, since the keeper was clearly within his rights. Moreover, the stranger was so patently a gentleman that Velveteens adopted a less imperative tone.

"Did you hear a shot fired somewhere?" he asked.

"Yes. Among those trees." And Trenholme pointed. "It was a rifle, too," he added, with an eye at the twelve-bore.

"So *I* thought," agreed the keeper.

"Rather risky, isn't it, firing bullets in a place like this?"

"I just want to find out who the ijiot is that did it. Excuse me, sir, I must be off." And man and dog hurried away.

And Trenholme, not knowing that death had answered the shot, took his own departure, singing as he walked, his thoughts altogether on life, and more especially on life as revealed by the limbs of a girl gleaming in the dark waters of a pool.

CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

"Who Hath Done This Thing?"

Table of Contents

Trenholme's baritone was strong and tuneful—for the Muses, if kind, are often lavish of their gifts—so the final refrain of an impassioned love song traveled far that placid morning. Thus, when he reached the iron gates, he found the Roxton policeman standing there, grinning.

"Hello!" said the artist cheerily. Of course he knew the policeman. In a week he would have known every man and dog in the village by name.

"Good mornin', sir," said the Law, which was nibbling its chin strap and had both thumbs stuck in its belt. "That's a fine thing you was singin'. May I arsk wot it was? I do a bit in that line meself."

"It's the *cantabile* from Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalila*," replied Trenholme. "Mon cœur s'ouvre à ta voix!"

"Is it now? An' wot may that be, sir?"

The policeman's humor was infectious. Trenholme laughed, too. Realizing that the words and accent of Paris had no great vogue in Hertfordshire, he explained, and added that he possessed a copy of the song, which was at the service of the force. The man thanked him warmly, and promised to call at the inn during the afternoon.

"By the way, sir," he added, when Trenholme had passed through the wicket, "did you hear a shot fired while you was in the park?"

"Yes."

"Jer see anybody?"

"A keeper, who seemed rather annoyed about the shooting. Some one had fired a rifle."

"It sounded like that to me, sir, and it's an unusual thing at this time of the year."

"A heavy-caliber rifle must sound unusual at any time of the year in an enclosed estate near London," commented Trenholme.

"My idee exactly," said the policeman. "I think I'll go that way. I may meet Bates."

"If Bates is a bandy-legged person with suspicious eyes, a red tie, many pockets, brown leggings, and a yellow dog, you'll find him searching the wood beyond the lake, which is the direction the shot came from."

The policeman laughed.

"That's Bates, to a tick," he said. "If he was 'wanted,' your description would do for the *Police Gazette*."

They parted. Since Trenholme's subsequent history is bound up more closely with the policeman's movements during the next hour than with his own unhindered return to the White Horse Inn, it is well to trace the exact course of events as they presented themselves to the ken of a music-loving member of the Hertfordshire constabulary.

Police Constable Farrow did not hurry. Why should he? A gunshot in a gentleman's park at half past nine on a June morning might be, as he had put it, "unusual," but it was obviously a matter capable of the simplest explanation. Such a sound heard at midnight would be sinister, ominous, replete with those elements of mystery and dread which

cause even a policeman's heart to beat faster than the regulation pace. Under the conditions, when he met Bates, he would probably be told that Jenkins, underkeeper and Territorial lance corporal, had resolved to end the vicious career of a hoodie crow, and had not scrupled to reach the wily robber with a bullet.

So Police Constable Farrow took fifteen minutes to cover the ground which Trenholme's longer stride had traversed in ten. Allow another fifteen for the artist's packing of his sketching materials, his conversation with gamekeeper and policeman, and the leisurely progress of the latter through the wood, and it will be found that Farrow reached the long straight avenue leading from the lodge at Easton to the main entrance of the house about forty minutes after the firing of the shot.

He halted on the grass by the side of the well-kept drive, and looked at the waiting motor car. The chauffeur was not visible. He had seen neither Bates nor Jenkins. His passing among the trees had not disturbed even a pheasant, though the estate was alive with game. The door of The Towers was open, but no stately manservant was stationed there. A yellow dog sat in the sunshine. Farrow and the dog exchanged long-range glances: the policeman consulted his watch, bit his chin strap, and dug his thumbs into his belt.

"Mr. Fenley is late today," he said to himself. "He catches the nine forty-five. As a rule, he's as reliable as Greenwich. I'll wait here till he passes, an' then call round an' see Smith."

Now, Smith was the head gardener; evidently Police Constable Farrow was not only well acquainted with the

various inmates of the mansion, but could have prepared a list of the out-door employees as well. He stood there, calm and impassive as Fate, and, without knowing it, represented Fate in her most inexorable mood; for had he betaken himself elsewhere, the shrewdest brains of Scotland Yard might have been defeated by the enigma they were asked to solve before Mortimer Fenley's murderer was discovered.

Indeed, it is reasonable to suppose that if chance had not brought the village constable to that identical spot, and at that very hour, the precise method of the crime might never have been revealed. Moreover, Farrow himself may climb slowly to an inspectorship, and pass into the dignified ease of a pension, without being aware of the part he played in a tragedy that morning. Of course, in his own estimation, he filled a highly important rôle as soon as the hue and cry began, but a great deal of water would flow under London Bridge before the true effect of his walk through the wood and emergence into sight in the avenue began to dawn on other minds.

His appearance there was a vital fact. It changed the trend of circumstances much as the path of a comet is deflected by encountering a heavy planet. Presumably, neither comet nor planet is aware of the disturbance. That deduction is left to the brooding eye of science.

Be that as it may, Police Constable Farrow's serenity was not disturbed until a doctor's motor car panted along the avenue from Easton and pulled up with a jerk in front of him. The doctor, frowning with anxiety, looked out, and recognition was mutual.

"Have you got the man?" he asked, and the words were jerked out rather than spoken.

"What man, sir?" inquired Farrows, saluting.

"The man who shot Mr. Fenley."

"The man who shot Mr. Fenley!" Farrow could only repeat each word in a crescendo of amazement. Being a singer, he understood the use of a crescendo, and gave full scope to it.

"Good Heavens!" cried the doctor. "Haven't you been told? Why are you here? Mr. Fenley was shot dead on his own doorstep nearly an hour ago. At least that is the message telephoned by his son. Unfortunately I was out. Right ahead, Tom!"

The chauffeur threw in the clutch, and the car darted on again. Farrow followed, a quite alert and horrified policeman now. But it was not ordained that he should enter the house. He was distant yet a hundred yards, or more, when three men came through the doorway. They were Bates, the keeper, Tomlinson, the butler, and Mr. Hilton Fenley, elder son of the man now reported dead. All were bareheaded. The arrival of the doctor, at the instant alighting from his car, prevented them from noticing Farrow's rapid approach. When Hilton Fenley saw the doctor he threw up his hands with the gesture of one who has plumbed the depths of misery. Farrow could, and did, fit in the accompanying words quite accurately.

"Nothing can be done, Stern! My father is dead!"

The two clasped each other's hand, and Hilton Fenley staggered slightly. He was overcome with emotion. The shock of a terrible crime had taxed his self-control to its

uttermost bounds. He placed a hand over his eyes and said brokenly to the butler:

"You take Dr. Stern inside, Tomlinson. I'll join you in a few minutes. I must have a breath of air, or I'll choke!"

Doctor and butler hurried into the house; then, but not until then, Hilton Fenley and the keeper became aware of Farrow, now within a few yards. At sight of him, Fenley seemed to recover his faculties; the mere possibility of taking some definite action brought a tinge of color to a pallid and somewhat sallow face.

"Ah! Here is the constable," he cried. "Go with him, Bates, and have that artist fellow arrested!"

"Meaning Mr. Trenholme, sir?" inquired the policeman, startled anew by this unexpected reference to the man he had parted from so recently.

"I don't know his name; but Bates met him in the park, near the lake, just after the shot was fired that killed my father."

"But I met him, too, sir. He didn't fire any shot. He hadn't a gun. In fact, he spoke about the shootin', and was surprised at it."

"Look here, Farrow, I am incapable of thinking clearly; so you must act for the best. Some one fired that bullet. It nearly tore my father to pieces. I never saw anything like it. It was ghastly—oh, ghastly! The murderer must be found. Why are you losing time? Jump into the car, and Brodie will take you anywhere you want to go. The roads, the railway stations, must be scoured, searched. Oh, do something, or I shall go mad!"

Hilton Fenley did, indeed, wear the semblance of a man distraught. Horror stared from his deep-set eyes and lurked in the corners of his mouth. His father had been struck dead within a few seconds after they had separated in the entrance hall, both having quitted the breakfast room together, and the awful discovery which followed the cry of an alarmed servant had almost shaken the son's reason.

Farrow was hardly fitted to deal with a crisis of such magnitude, but he acted promptly and with fixed purpose—qualities which form the greater part of generalship.

"Bates," he said, turning a determined eye on the keeper, "where was you when you heard the shot?"

"In the kennels, back of the lodge," came the instant answer.

"And you kem this way at once?"

"Straight. Didn't lose 'arf a minute."

"So no one could have left by the Easton gate without meeting you?"

"That's right."

"And you found Mr. Trenholme—where?"

"Comin' away from the cedars, above the lake."

"What did he say?"

"Tole me about the shot, an' pointed out the Quarry Wood as the place it kem from."

"Was he upset at all in his manner?"

"Not a bit. Spoke quite nateral-like."

"Well, between the three of us, you an' me an' Mr. Trenholme, we account for both gates an' the best part of two miles of park. Where is Jenkins?"

"I left him at the kennels."

"Ah!"

The policeman was momentarily nonplussed. He had formed a theory in which Jenkins, that young Territorial spark, figured either as a fool or a criminal.

"What's the use of holding a sort of inquiry on the doorstep?" broke in Hilton Fenley shrilly. His utterance was nearly hysterical. Farrow's judicial calm appeared to stir him to frenzy. He clamored for action, for zealous scouting, and this orderly investigation by mere words was absolutely maddening.

"I'm not wastin' time, sir," said Farrow respectfully. "It's as certain as anything can be that the murderer, if murder has been done, has not got away by either of the gates."

"If murder has been done!" cried Fenley. "What do you mean? Go and look at my poor father's corpse——"

"Of course, Mr. Fenley is dead, sir, an' sorry I am to hear of it; but the affair may turn out to be an accident."

"Accident! Farrow, you're talking like an idiot. A man is shot dead at his own front door, in a house standing in the midst of a big estate, and you tell me it's an accident!"

"No, sir. I on'y mentioned that on the off chance. Queer things do happen, an' one shouldn't lose sight of that fact just because it's unusual. Now, sir, with your permission, I want Brodie, an' Smith, an' all the men servants you can spare for the next half hour."

"Why?"

"Brodie can motor to the Inspector's office, an' tell him wot he knows, stoppin' on the way to send Jenkins here. Some of us must search the woods thoroughly, while others watch the open park, to make sure no one escapes without

bein' seen. It's my firm belief that the man who fired that rifle is still hidin' among those trees. He may be sneakin' off now, but we'd see him if we're quick in reachin' the other side. Will you do as I ask, sir?"

Farrow was already in motion when Fenley's dazed mind recalled something the policeman ought to know.

"I've telephoned to Scotland Yard half an hour ago," he said.

"That's all right, sir. The main thing now is to search every inch of the woods. If nothing else, we may find footprints."

"And make plenty of new ones."

"Not if the helpers do as I tell 'em, sir."

"I can't argue. I'm not fit for it. Still, some instinct warns me you are not adopting the best course. I think you ought to go in the car and put the police into combined action."

"What are they to do, sir? The murderer won't carry a rifle through the village, or along the open road. I fancy we'll come across the weapon itself in the wood. Besides, the Inspector will do all that is necessary when Brodie sees him. Reelly, sir, I *know* I'm right."

"But should that artist be questioned?"

"Of course he will, sir. He won't run away. If he does, we'll soon nab him. He's been stayin' at the White Horse Inn the last two days, an' is quite a nice-spoken young gentleman. Why should *he* want to shoot Mr. Fenley?"

"He is annoyed with my father, for one thing."

"Eh? Wot, sir?"

Farrow, hitherto eager to be off on the hunt, stopped as if he heard a statement of real importance.

Hilton Fenley pressed a hand to his eyes.

"It was nothing to speak of," he muttered. "He wrote asking permission to sketch the house, and my father refused—just why I don't know; some business matter had vexed him that day, I fancy, and he dashed off the refusal on the spur of the moment. But a man does not commit a terrible crime for so slight a cause.... Oh, if only my head would cease throbbing!... Do as you like. Bates, see that every assistance is given."

Fenley walked a few paces unsteadily. Obviously he was incapable of lucid thought, and the mere effort at sustained conversation was a torture. He turned through a yew arch into the Italian garden, and threw himself wearily into a seat.

"Poor young fellow! He's fair off his nut," whispered Bates.

"What can one expect?" said Farrow. "But we must get busy. Where's Brodie? Do go an' find him."

Bates jerked a thumb toward the house.

"He's in there," he said. "He helped to carry in the Gov'nor. Hasn't left him since."

"He must come at once. He can't do any good now, an' we've lost nearly an hour as it is."

The chauffeur appeared, red-eyed and white-faced. But he understood the urgency of his mission, and soon had the car in movement. Others came—the butler, some gardeners, and men engaged in stables and garage, for the dead banker maintained a large establishment. Farrow explained his plan. They would beat the woods methodically, and the searcher who noted anything

"unusual"—the word was often on the policeman's lips—was not to touch or disturb the object or sign in any way, but its whereabouts should be marked by a broken branch stuck in the ground. Of course, if a stranger was seen, an alarm should be raised instantly.

The little party was making for the Quarry Wood, when Jenkins arrived on a bicycle. The first intimation he had received of the murder was the chauffeur's message. There was a telephone between house and lodge, but no one had thought of using it.

"Now, Bates," said Farrow, when the squad of men had spread out in line, "you an' me will take the likeliest line. You ought to know every spot in the covert where it's possible to aim a gun at any one stannin' on top of the steps at The Towers. There can't be many such places. Is there even one? I don't suppose the barefaced scoundrel would dare come out into the open drive. Brodie said Mr. Fenley was shot through the right side while facin' the car, so he bears out both your notion an' Mr. Trenholme's that the bullet kem from the Quarry Wood. What's *your* idea about it? Have you one, or are you just as much in the dark as the rest of us?"

Bates was sour-faced with perplexity. The killing of his employer was already crystallizing in his thoughts into an irrevocable thing, for the butler had lifted aside the dead man's coat and waistcoat, and this had shown him the ghastly evidences of a wound which must have been instantly fatal. Now, a shrewd if narrow intelligence was concentrated on the one tremendous question, "Who hath done this thing?" He looked so worried that the yellow dog, watching him, and quick to interpret his moods, slouched