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# THE LADY



*and* NOWHERE







THE  
LADY FROM NOWHERE

A DETECTIVE STORY

BY  
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AUTHOR OF "THE MYSTERY OF A HANSON CAB," ETC.



BRENTANO'S  
31 UNION SQUARE, NEW YORK

1900

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# THE LADY FROM NOWHERE

## CHAPTER I

### THE TRAGEDY OF THE STRANGE ROOM

ON the night of July 24th, in the year 1896, between the hours of eleven and twelve, Grangebury, a little-known suburb of London, was wrapped in slumber, as became a respectable neighbourhood whose inhabitants retired regularly shortly after sunset. Not that they had done so on this particular night, for the unusual excitement of a lecture on Dickens, delivered in the tiny Town Hall, had kept them from their beds later than was customary. At a quarter to eleven, a stream of instructed pleasure-seekers, discussing lecture and lecturer, filled the narrow streets; but gradually the crowd diminished until highways and byways were left deserted, save by watchful policemen and vagrant cats. The lamps were then extinguished by order of an economical municipality, the few lights still twinkling from the upper windows of various houses disappeared, and the little town lay

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under moon and stars as silent and almost as lonely as the spell-bound cities in eastern fables.

Every now and then the footsteps of policemen making their rounds, could be heard echoing along the streets, and sometimes an official lantern would be flashed into dark corners to search out possible burglars or homeless beggars. But no thieves or vagabonds could be discovered ; for, on the whole, Grangebury, being a comparatively new suburb, was free from such criminal pests, and the police force there, under the command of Mr. Inspector Lackland had a very easy time. There was nothing on this night to indicate any ending to this Arcadian Age of security and innocence ; yet, shortly after eleven o'clock a yawning policeman, leaning against a convenient wall, heard a word cried aloud which told him of crime and danger. The word was "Murder !"

"Murder !" repeated the constable, looking up and down the street.

"Murder !" shrieked the voice again ; and then there came the sound of running feet, cries for help, and the quick panting of an exhausted creature. Before the policeman could decide in which direction to move, a dishevelled woman, screaming and gesticulating, came at full speed round the corner, and almost fell into his arms. Her face was pearly white in the moonlight, her eyes were filled with

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terror, and an almost continuous cry issued from her open mouth without any motion of the lips.

"'Ere! 'ere, wot's this?" said the policeman, seizing the flying creature by the arm. "Wot d'ye mean, screeching out murder like a loonatic? Come now!"

Trembling violently, the woman grappled with the policeman, shrieking the while, and evidently beside herself with terror. Not being gifted with brains, the officer of the law shook her vigorously to brighten her intellect; and she wavered limply in his grasp like a dummy figure.

"Murder!" she whimpered, clawing and clutching at the man. "Lord! it's awful! Ugh! Ugh! I've seen her dead!"

"Seen 'oo dead?" demanded the policeman, stolidly.

"My lodger! Dead! Strangled! Ugh! Ugh!" cried the woman, breathlessly, raising her voice higher at each word. "A corpse in the Yellow Room! Paradise Row! Come and see—come and— Oh, poor soul!" and she fell to wringing her hands again, quivering and panting.

"Wait a bit!" said the jack-in-office, bound by red-tapeism, "the police station is just roun' th' corner. Kim up an' see th' Inspector!"

"I—I—I am innocent!" gasped the woman, hanging back. "Neither 'Tilda nor I laid a finger on her."

"'Oo said y' did?" retorted the man, suspiciously; and, for his own protection he recited an official formula, "Wot y' say now 'ull be used in hevidence agin y'. Kim up, I tell y'." And, grasping her arm, he hurried her fighting and crying round the near corner, and into a red-brick building, over the door of which was a lamp inscribed "Police Station."

In a stuffy room, rendered almost unbearable by the heat of the flaring gas, two men were talking earnestly together, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour. The one in uniform was a burly, red-faced martinet known in Grangebury as Inspector Lackland. He was too completely hemmed in by red tapeism to count for much; but the other in plain clothes was Absolom Gebb, well known in Scotland Yard as a capable detective, but not so infallible as the miracle-monger of fiction. It was Gebb who brought home the theft of Lady Daleshire's diamonds to herself; who proved Dr. Marnier to be guilty of poisoning his wife, in spite of strong evidence to the contrary; who solved nine out of every ten criminal problems submitted to him, and who was the terror of all evil-doers. This tall, lean man with his clean-shaven face and black, observant eyes was an enthusiast in his profession, and loved to ponder over and follow out the intricacies of criminal mysteries. At the present moment he was conversing with Lackland about a recent Anarchist conspiracy, and

therefore happened to be in the Grangebury Police Office when the zealous policeman appeared with his terrified prisoner. She cried out when she was thrust into the room, and, confronted by inspector and detective, covered her face with her hands.

"Hey! What!" said Lackland, in his rasping voice. "What's all this about?"

"Case of murder, sir," jerked out the policeman, pushing forward the prisoner. "Paradise Row! Woman strangled!"

"Murder?" cried Gebb, pricking up his ears at the ominous word.

"Murder!" screeched the woman, and fell into a chair. Evidently she had received a shock and was on the verge of hysterics, for she began to babble and weep copiously. Accustomed to deal with this sort of emotion, Lackland seized a jug of water standing near his desk, and dashed the contents into her face. The remedy was efficacious, for with a gasp and a shiver the woman recovered her self-control and tongue, also her inherent feminine vanity. "You brute!" she screamed, jumping up wrathfully. "My best bonnet's spoilt."

"Attention!" roared the inspector in his sternest military manner; "none of this nonsense here. What about this murder in——"

"I didn't kill her!" interrupted the woman, wiping her face. "Tilda and me knew nothing about it till

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we found her strangled when we came back from the lecture."

"Did you attend the lecture on Dickens in the Town Hall?" asked Gebb,

"Yes, I did, sir; both me and 'Tilda, who is my servant, went."

"What is your name?" asked the detective, with professional sharpness.

"Maria Presk."

"Married or single?"

"Married once, single now," sighed the woman. "I am what you call a widow, sir; and I let lodgings in Paradise Row."

"Was this dead woman a lodger of yours?"

"Miss Ligram, you mean? Yes. Miss Ligram was in the first floor front."

"And who killed Miss Ligram?" asked Gebb, looking keenly at Mrs. Presk.

The good lady turned ever paler than before.

"I—I don't know, sir," she stammered, with a scared look. "I can take my stand in any court of——"

"Face this way, ma'am!" interrupted Lackland, who was indignant at the way in which Gebb was usurping his authority. "I'm in charge of this office. I'm the officer to take your evidence. Mr. Gebb! Discipline!"

"Alright! Go ahead!" replied the detective,

inwardly cursing the too methodical procedure of his superior. "I don't want to interfere. But," he added with emphasis, "I think we should go at once and look at the corpse."

"All in good time, Mr. Gebb. More haste, less speed!" said Lackland, crisply.

"And the more delay, the less chance of getting at the truth," retorted Gebb.

The fact was that Gebb's sporting instincts were roused, and he wanted to be off on the trail while it was yet fresh. Every moment was of importance. Yet, as he was not in charge of the case, he was forced to stand idly by and hear the blundering inspector putting a lot of irrelevant questions—good for nothing, but wasting time. However, Gebb managed to extract some grains of wheat out of a vast quantity of chaff, and in a roundabout way—thanks to the inspector's method of questioning—learned the following facts, which were sufficient to inform him how matters stood at present.

Miss Ligram was—or rather, had been, since she no longer existed—a lodger in the house of Mrs. Presk, No. 13, Paradise Row. She was a quiet, inoffensive old lady, who gave little trouble, and who remained by preference in her own room. On the night of the 24th July, Mrs. Presk and her servant, Matilda Crane, had attended a lecture delivered in the Town Hall. The lecture—an amusing one on

Charles Dickens and his works—had afforded them much pleasure, and they returned at eleven o'clock to Paradise Row in a state of high spirits. On passing round to the back entrance they saw that a light was still burning in Miss Ligram's sitting-room, and, wondering at the sight—for the lodger usually retired early—Mrs. Presk, on entering the house, had gone upstairs to see if anything was wrong. To her horror she found Miss Ligram dead, with a cord round her neck. Terrified by the sight, she had called up Matilda Crane, who, more impressionable and less hardened, had promptly fainted away. Mrs. Presk, a woman of energy and resource, had immediately sought the aid of the police, and now insisted that Lackland and his subordinates should remove the corpse and capture the murderer.

"That last is easier said than done," was Gebb's comment on this demand. "By this time the assassin is far enough away. However, there's no time to be lost in looking at the scene of the crime, as I suggested."

"Quite so," said Lackland, gruffly. "No time to waste, ma'am"—to Mrs. Presk. "March! Gebb, come with me and catch the murderer!"

This proposition recommending itself to Mrs. Presk, she left the police-office with inspector and detective, and led the pair to her house, which was situated down a side street no great distance away. As the



front door was closed, she conducted the men round the back way, through the kitchen, and up the stairs into Miss Ligram's sitting-room. On the mat in the passage, 'Tilda, the servant, lay still insensible, so Mrs. Presk lifted her in her strong arms and carried her to the kitchen to be revived as speedily as possible, in case, as was almost certain, her evidence might be wanted. In the mean time Lackland and Gebb had entered the room wherein the crime had been committed, and were amazed at the splendour of the apartment. For colouring and evidence of wealth it was like a scene out of the Arabian Nights.

The room was of no great size, with a window looking out on to the street, and two doors, one leading in from a narrow passage, the other giving admittance into an inner apartment, evidently a bedroom. The walls were draped with rich hangings of satin, yellow as a buttercup in hue, and a tent-like roof of the same tint and material was drawn in many folds to a dome-like centre, whence depended by a brass chain an Arabian lantern studded with knobs of yellow glass, which, illuminated from within, shone like pale topaz stones. Tables, chairs, and couches were framed of gilded cane, with coverlets and quilts of yellow silk, and the ground of the carpet was of the same colour, embroidered with bunches of primrose flowers. Also there were tall narrow mirrors framed in yellow satin, clusters of daffodils in

grotesque Chinese vases of a deep yellow shade, and numerous candles—all lighted—in candelabra silver gilt. Near the window, from a brass chafing-dish standing on a tripod of the same metal, curled up a thin white vapour diffusing a heavy rich perfume, and everywhere lay nicknacks of gold and silver more or less costly; fur mats and rugs dyed yellow, and many books covered in a homely fashion with yellow paper. The prevailing colour of the room was a violent yellow; and this, with the glare of the candles, the glitter of the mirrors, the scent of the flowers, and the strong perfume of the incense, made the heads of the onlookers reel. Even the matter-of-fact inspector was impressed by the uncanny magnificence of the place.

"By George, sir!" said he to Gebb, with the instincts of an old soldier, "it's like a Mandalay Pagoda. If t'was in Burmah, now, shouldn't mind looting it."

Gebb was rubbing his hands, with sparkling eyes.

"By the sight of it," he said joyfully, "this is going to be a romantic case. I only hope I'll be lucky enough to get charge of it. Did you furnish this room, ma'am?" he asked, turning sharply to Mrs. Presk, whose pale grey face appeared over the shoulder of the burly, staring inspector.

"No, I didn't," retorted the landlady. "Miss Ligram furnished it herself, and called it her Yellow Boudoir."

"Why!" said Mrs. Presk, astonished at the question, which to her seemed unnecessary, "it's the card in the pack as stands for death. When you turn up the ace of spades you know it's time to order your coffin."

"Rubbish!" said Gebb. "Humbug!" roared the inspector; and they both shrugged their shoulders to show their contempt for such superstition.

Mrs. Presk shook her head gloomily. "Talk won't alter the matter!" she said, pointing to the card. "There's the death-token, and there's the corpse; what do you make of that?"

"I make this," said Gebb, dryly; "that the murderer must be a person of imagination."

"He ought to be shot, the blackguard," growled Lackland, "play-acting with a corpse. I wonder what they were fooling with cards for? Looks like a madman's work to me. What do you say, Gebb?"

Gebb said nothing at the moment. He was examining the dead woman, who was arrayed with unusual splendour quite in keeping with the room, yet too richly for the front parlour of a fifth-rate lodging-house.

Miss Ligram's body was that of an old woman close upon sixty years of age, with a wrinkled face, and a profusion of silvery white hair turned back in the style of Marie Antoinette. It was dressed in an old-fashioned dinner-dress of white silk, trimmed with

valuable lace, and this was designed so as to show the lean neck and bony arms of the wearer. Anything more incongruous than that poor clay clothed in such costly garments can scarcely be imagined. It seemed to accentuate the grimness of the crime, almost to elevate a sordid murder to the level of tragedy.

"Did Miss Ligram usually dress like this?" asked Gebb, turning to Mrs. Presk.

"Every evening!" replied the landlady, promptly.

"She must have been eccentric!" was Gebb's comment on this reply.

"Very eccentric, sir. I don't think she was quite right here." And the landlady tapped her head significantly.

"A Crazy Jane?" questioned Lackland.

"She was and she wasn't," answered Mrs. Presk, enigmatically. "She wasn't mad enough to be shut up, but she acted in a queerer way than most people. Look at this room, and all its lights; every night it was the same. She usually dined off a chop and potatoes, yet she dressed in silk and lace to eat them. And——" Thus far Mrs. Presk with her eyes on the corpse had proceeded volubly, when suddenly—still staring at the dead woman—she stopped, and her jaw dropped. Motionless as a stone image she stood looking; and then with an ejaculation she ran out of the room. The detective and the inspector looked at her vanishing form, looked at the corpse, looked

at one another, and failed to understand her action.

"What the devil does that mean?" said Gebb, with surly amazement.

"Only the devil knows," retorted Lackland, grimly; "but if that jade is hiding anything of importance the sooner we get it out of her the better. You're a bit of a lawyer, Gebb, so I'll bring back Mrs. Presk, and you'll examine her!"

"No!" said Gebb, detaining his friend; "let her go now. I'll get the truth out of her to-morrow."

"By George you will, will you!" grumbled Lackland, annoyed that his advice was not taken; "and what if you don't get charge of the case?"

"I'll grin and bear it, I suppose!" retorted the other; "but I'll work my hardest to be given the handling of this affair, for it strikes me that it will prove a sight more difficult than either of us guesses. This room's a rum one, ain't it? And that pack of cards aren't there for nothing. Then there is the dead woman's dress, and the landlady's queer conduct. Oh, you can bet, inspector, there's a jolly lot more in these things than meets the eye, and I'm the man to find out what they all mean."

"You can blow your own trumpet, I see!" said Lackland, dryly.

Gebb laughed, in nowise embarrassed. "My trumpeter's dead from over-work," he replied coolly.

"If I don't praise myself no one else will. However, I'll see to-morrow if the big wigs will let me run this show in my own way. Now you go and look round the house, Lackland, and leave me here to examine the room."

"What about the body?" asked the inspector, dominated by Gebb's strong will.

"We'll let it lie here as it is, until the doctor comes. I told that policeman who brought Mrs. Presk to the station to knock up an M.D."

"By George, sir, one would think you were inspector here!" spluttered the indignant Lackland. "Am I nobody?"

"You're a good fellow—too good to get your monkey up for nothing. You let me look after this murder myself. I'll do you a good turn some other time."

"Well, I'll let you have your own way for once. You're no fool, I will say," muttered Lackland, and withdrew to look through the house. He knew that Gebb was very clever, and in his heart was not unwilling to avail himself of the detective's assistance. Therefore, he left him to his own devices, and set out to seek Mrs. Presk in the kitchen. Having found her, he made her show him the house, but judiciously refrained from commenting on her late conduct. He left the elucidation of that to Gebb.

Left to himself, the detective examined the dead

woman and the room with minute attention to detail, keeping up a running commentary the while on his discoveries. He had a habit of talking aloud when alone, as if to emphasize his opinions, and, while examining the boudoir, soliloquized with appropriate actions like a stage-player.

"The furniture is quite in order," he murmured, his keen eyes roving hither and thither. "Therefore there can have been no struggle. The murderer was no intruder, but was expected. A visitor! perhaps a friend! He—let me presume the criminal to be a man—he no doubt entered, and was kindly received by the deceased. Here is a bottle, and two glasses with wine in each; so the two were friendly enough to drink in company. There is a chair on either side of this table whereon the cards are laid out. The dead body remains in the one nearest the wall; so I expect the visitor sat in the other with his back to the door. Were they playing cards? I think not, as in that case the whole pack would not be laid out in this fashion. I have it!" cried Gebb, smiting his open palm with his fist, "the visitor was telling Miss Ligram's fortune. He placed the cards in that position and told her to draw one. She drew the ace of spades, which yet lies in her lap, and when face to face with the omen of death he killed her."

Here the detective paused to consider if he was

correct in assuming the assassin to be a man. Fortune-telling—especially by cards—is usually indulged in by the other sex. But would a woman, however cruel, have so brutally strangled her unsuspecting hostess, and—as it may be assumed—friend? Gebb examined the chair on which the visitor had sat, and found traces of tobacco ash.

“Cigarette ash?” he pronounced it after an examination, “the quality is fine and quantity small. The visitor was a man and he was smoking. H'm! That is not like a professional fortune-teller. Such a one would be too desirous of impressing his dupe to spoil the gravity of the situation by smoking. The man must have been a friend, and he probably told the woman's fortune in this way to throw her off her guard. Let us look further.”

The chair in which the dead body was lying, stood some little distance from the hangings of the wall. These, as Gebb discovered on further examination, had been draped back with a cord to reveal a small oil painting; but the cord—which had a loop at either end to slip over a brass nail, concealed beneath the hangings of satin—had been deftly removed (not torn) from its peg, and flung round the victim's neck. On the floor behind the chair Gebb picked up a half-burnt cigarette, which had smouldered out. With this in his hand he returned to the centre of the

c



room and looked once more at the cards. These attracted him strangely.

"Without doubt the fortune-telling was a trick," he said aloud. "The man set out the cards, and while his victim was selecting one he lighted a cigarette, and rose to stroll round the room. Not suspecting any danger—which shows, by the way, that she must have trusted him—his victim let him pass behind her chair. While there, he slipped the loops of the cord off the nail. Then when she turned up the death-card—a pure coincidence, no doubt—he threw the cord over her head and choked her before the poor wretch had time to call out for assistance. He then robbed the body at his leisure, and left the house. It's as clear as day."

Presuming that the murderer had gone out by the front door, Gebb left the room and went into the passage. To his surprise he found that the front door was locked, but, as the detective noted, not bolted.

"He must have locked it after he left the house," thought Gebb, "and no doubt did so to prevent intrusion and a too sudden discovery of his crime. I expect he threw away the key when outside. In the front garden most probably ; I'll look."

Before he could put his design into execution, which he intended doing by passing out the back way, Mrs. Presk arrived downstairs with the

intelligence that Inspector Lackland was still searching the upper portion of the house for traces of the assassin, but could find nothing and no one. "So," said she, "I expect the wretch ran away after killing poor Miss Ligram."

"By the front door," Gebb informed her, "and he locked it after him."

"Did he?" said Mrs. Presk, with a stare; "now that's queer."

"Why?" asked the detective, sharply.

"Because Miss Ligram always kept the front door locked, and the key in her pocket. That was one of her queer ways which I never could abide."

Without a word Gebb returned to the Yellow Boudoir, and searched in the pocket of the dead woman. Sure enough he found therein a large key which Mrs. Presk immediately declared to be that of the front door. Gebb was puzzled, as this discovery upset much of his previous reasoning.

"In that case the man could not have cleared out by the front," he said, "as not having the key he could not lock the door after him. Let us see the back door; he may have escaped in that direction."

"The back door was locked," said Mrs. Presk, promptly. "I had the key in my pocket when I went to the lecture."

"Was the door locked when you returned?" asked Gebb, more puzzled than ever.

"Yes, sir, it was. I had no thought that anything was wrong until I came upstairs and saw the corpse; though, to be sure," added Mrs. Presk, suddenly, "I fancied it strange that the lights should be burning so late in Miss Ligram's boudoir. I saw them from the road, you know, Mr. Gebb; and the sight gave me a turn, I can tell you."

"He must have got out through a back window," murmured Gebb.

"Indeed, he didn't, sir. When I brought 'Tilda out of her faint in the kitchen I looked at all the windows in the basement; they are all bolted and barred proper. 'Tilda and me's both careful on account of burglars."

Gebb pinched his chin and shook his head in a perplexed manner; after which he walked to the window of the yellow room and examined it carefully. It was fastened by a snick, the position of which showed that the window was closed, and could not have been used as an exit.

"Let alone the danger of the cove being seen by a chance policeman, and taken up as a burglar," mused Gebb, "what about the upstairs windows, Mrs. Presk?"

"They're all locked, sir. Mr. Inspector examined every one."

"Then the man must be in the house still," was Gebb's final conclusion.

"He isn't," insisted Mrs. Presk, with a startled glance over her shoulder; "we've looked under all the beds, and into all the rooms and cupboards. Unless he is like a sparrow on the house-top, I don't know where he can be."

"Well, there doesn't seem any way by which he could get out," said Gebb, in a vexed tone. "Did you hear any sound in the house when you arrived home?"

"No, I didn't, sir. I went up to see if Miss Ligram was ill, as I noticed that her room was lighted up, then I saw the corpse, and called 'Tilda, who ran up and fainted. She ain't got my nerves, Mr. Gebb."

"Did you lock the back door when you came in?"

"Lawks, no, sir! 'Tilda and me was in such a flurry to see if Miss Ligram was ill that we just left the door anyhow.

"When you went upstairs was the door closed to?"

"I think so," replied Mrs. Presk, after a pause, "for 'Tilda banged it to; but it wasn't locked, I'll take my dying word on that."

"When you came for the police did you leave by that door?"

"Yes, I did; by the back door, as Miss Ligram kept the front one locked."

"Was it closed when you went out?"

Mrs. Presk looked up suddenly, rather alarmed.

"No sir, it wasn't," said she in startled tones, "it was—as you might say—ajar."

"Aha!" said Gebb, triumphantly, "then you may depend upon it, Mrs. Presk, that when you came home the assassin was in the house."

"In the house!" gasped Mrs. Presk. "Lor, sir! it ain't possible."

"Yes! he did not know where to find the front-door key; and discovering that the back door was locked, he just hid himself in the kitchen until you and the servant went upstairs to look on his handiwork. Then he slipped out to escape the consequences."

Mrs. Presk's knees gave way, and she was fain to sit down—as far away from the dead body as possible however. "It's past believing," she moaned, rocking herself to and fro. "Lord! what an escape 'Tilda and me's had from being strangulated. Ugh!" she shuddered, "look at that poor soul, sir, ain't it enough to freeze your blood."

"Did it freeze yours, that you ran out of the room?" asked Gebb, hoping to take her unawares.

"No! a'wasn't that!" whispered Mrs. Presk, turning pale, "but I was afeard!"

"Of what?" asked the detective, rather puzzled.

"Of you, sir," was the unexpected reply.

"Indeed! then you know something about the matter?"

"Yes!" issued from the landlady's pale lips, "I—I noticed something."

"What did you notice?"

"I daren't tell you."

"You must!"

Mrs. Presk rose and hastily made for the door. Before she could reach it Gebb had placed his back against it. "You don't leave this room until I know what you are hiding."

"I'm hiding nothing!" burst out Mrs. Presk, "haven't you got eyes?" She pointed towards the dead woman. "Look!" she cried. "Look!"

## CHAPTER III

### A WOMAN WITHOUT A PAST

AS desired, Gebb looked at the gaily decked figure in the chair, and tried to find out what Mrs. Presk meant.

"Well, I'm looking," he said at length, "but I'm blest if I can see anything."

"Of course you can't!" cried the landlady, hysterically triumphant, "'cause they ain't there!"

"What aren't there?"

"The diamonds!"

"Diamonds!" repeated Gebb, with a start, as he noted that the dead woman wore no jewellery. "Had she diamonds?"

"I should think she had!" said Mrs. Presk, sitting down again. "Stars for her hair, rings, bracelets, and the loveliest necklace you ever saw—just like dewdrops with the sun on them. She wore her jewellery every night, and all to eat her chop. I saw them diamonds on her afore I went to the lecture."

"And when you came back they were gone."

"Every one of them," replied Mrs. Presk, defiantly, "and when I noticed it—for, to own up, Mr. Gebb,

I didn't notice they were gone till I was here with you talking about her dress—but when I did notice, I ran out of the room 'cause I was a-feared you might say 'Tilda and I stole 'em."

"Nonsense! Why should I say that?"

"Oh, there ain't no tellings," said Mrs. Presk, with a toss of her head.

"Was that why you made all that howling?"

"Yes, it was, sir; and I ran out to the kitchen to ask 'Tilda if she had noticed if the diamonds were gone when we came in first; for I was that flurried I didn't look for 'em."

"And does 'Tilda say the diamonds were gone?"

"Yes! I dessay the murdering villain who killed the poor dear stole 'em. I wish I had the hanging of him."

"Oh, you may assist me to put the rope round his neck," said Gebb. "Well, Mrs. Presk, I'll come and see you to-morrow, and you must tell me all you know about this woman. In the mean time, I think I hear the doctor coming."

The detective's ears had not deceived him, for the approaching footsteps were those of the doctor. Escorted by the policeman who had met Mrs. Presk, he entered in no very good humour at being knocked up at so late an hour. However, the looks of the corpse, and the appearance of the room both astonished and interested him; and he made his



examination. It took only a few minutes for him to decide that the death had taken place shortly before or after ten o'clock, and must have been almost instantaneous. When the examination was concluded, Gebb and the inspector left the house in charge of the policeman, and returned to the station to make their report. While the prosaic Lackland set down the bare details of the case for the information of the authorities, Gebb mused over the events of the night, and pondered what was best to be done under the circumstances.

As yet he had gained no information from Mrs. Presk about her lodger, but intended to examine her on the morrow when she was somewhat recovered from the strain of the late events. In the mean time, Gebb fancied that the strange room, designed and furnished by the dead woman, might turn out a more important factor in the matter than at present appeared. Even if Mrs. Presk did prove to be ignorant of Miss Ligram's past—which was extremely unlikely—the strongly marked and eccentric taste of the lodger, as exemplified in illumination, colouring, and furnishing, might provide a sufficiently stable basis for operations. In a word, Gebb considered that the most promising clue to the mystery was the predominance of the colour yellow in the sitting-room. Criminal problems, as he knew, had been solved by slighter means.

As Lackland surmised, Gebb, being high in favour with the authorities as a detective of no ordinary capabilities, had little difficulty in gaining their consent to taking charge of the case. The inspector made his report, Gebb his application, and after the due formalities had been complied with, the detective found that the responsibility of tracing Miss Ligram's assassin lay solely on his own shoulders, which—as he comfortably assured himself—were quite capable of bearing the burden. He was the more pleased with his employment, as the Grangebury murder case promised to be one of those mysteries which he loved. A dead woman : a strangely furnished room : a pack of cards : these were the elements of the case, and, so far as Gebb could see at present, there was no clue—save the lavish use of the colour yellow—to the past of the victim, or the identity of the assassin. In Mrs. Presk lay his sole hope of gaining intelligence likely to lead to some practical result ; so at eleven o'clock next morning Gebb, in an anxious frame of mind, was once more on the scene of the murder, and in the presence of his principal witness.

In the searching light of day Mrs. Presk was more uncomely than ever. Tall, gaunt, angular, and dressed in the worst possible taste, she presented few of the alluring graces of her sex. To have woo'd, and won, and lived with this strident