



secretly married to Mr. Clavering. "And yet," cried I, unable to give up without a struggle the hope I had been cherishing for so long, "you do not believe the noble-looking Eleanor guilty of this horrible crime?"

"No," said he, slowly; "you might as well know right here what I think about that. I believe Eleanor Leavenworth to be an innocent woman."

"You do?" Then what, I cried, swaying between joy at this admission and doubt as to the meaning of his former expressions. "Remains to be done," Mr. Gryce quietly responded. "Why, nothing, but to prove that your supposition is not true."

THOMAS COOK I stared at him in amazement. "I doubt if it will be so very difficult," said he. Then in a sudden burst, "Where is the man Cook?"

"He is below," returned I, "and I brought him up with me." "Where is he?" asked I. "He is in the kitchen," he said, and I stepped to the door I called them.

"Expected of course you would want to question them," said I coming back. In another moment the spruce Q and the shock-headed Cook entered the room.

"Ah," said Mr. Gryce, looking towards the latter if not directly at him; "this is the deceased Mr. Stebbins' hired man, is it? Well, you look as though you could tell the truth."

"I usually calculate to do that thing, sir; at all events I was never called a liar that I can remember."

"Of course not, of course not," returned the detective, very affably for an introduction—"What was the first name of the lady you saw married in your master's house last summer?"

"Bliss me if I know! I don't think I heard, sir."

"But you recollect how she looked?" "As well as if she was my own mother. No disrespect to the lady, sir, if you know her," he made haste to add, glancing hurriedly at me.

"What I mean is, that she was so handsome, I could never forget the look of her sweet face if I lived a hundred years."

"Can you describe her?" "I don't know, sir; she was tall and grand looking, had the brightest eyes and the whitest hand and smile in a way to make even a common man like me wish he had never seen her."

"Would you know her in a crowd?" "I would know her anywhere."

"Very well, now tell us all you can about that marriage."

"Well, it was something like this. I had been in Mr. Stebbins' employ I should say about a year, when one morning as I was hoeing in the garden that runs along by the road, I saw a gentleman step down from the platform of the depot, look up and just upon the point of revealing its nature, when Mr. Clavering enters the house. Upon his departure he mentions the subject again."

Mr. Gryce slowly waved the paper aside. "And from these facts you draw the inference that Eleanor Leavenworth is the wife of Mr. Clavering?"

"I do."

"And that being his wife—" "It would be natural for her to make what endeavor she could, to conceal any thing she knew serving to criminate him."

"Always supposing Clavering himself had done any thing criminal?" "Of course."

"Which latter supposition you now propose to justify?" "Which latter supposition we must now endeavor to prove justifiable."

A peculiar gleam shot over Mr. Gryce's somewhat abstracted face. "Then you have no new evidence against Mr. Clavering?"

"I should think the fact just given, of his standing in the relation of unacknowledged husband to the suspected party was something."

"No positive evidence as to his being the assassin of Mr. Leavenworth, I mean?"

"I was obliged to tell him no, none which he would call of a positive nature. But I can show the existence of motive, and I can likewise show that it was not only possible, but probable that he was in the house at the time of the murder."

"Ah, you can?" cried Mr. Gryce, rousing a little from his abstraction. "The motive was the usual one of self-interest. Mr. Leavenworth stood in the way of Eleanor's acknowledging him as a husband, and he must therefore be put out of the way."

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But I was obstinate. "I do not care for the criminal records. All the criminal records in the world would never make me believe Eleanor perpetrated this crime, nor will I be less generous towards her cousin, Mary Leavenworth, is a faulty woman, but not a guilty one."

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"Your theory must be the correct one, I do not deny; it was undoubtedly Eleanor who spoke. She believes in Mary's guilt and I have been blind, indeed, not to have seen it from the first."

"If Eleanor Leavenworth believes in her cousin's criminality, she must have some good reason for doing so, and I should be glad to admit that, too."

"She did not conceal in her bosom that tell-tale key—found who knows where—and destroy, or seek to destroy it and the letter which introduced her cousin to the public as the cruel, unprincipled destroyer of a trusting man's peace, for nothing."

"And yet you, a stranger, a young man who have never seen Mary Leavenworth in any other light than that in which her coquettish nature sought to display itself, presume to say she is innocent, in the face of the attitude maintained by Eleanor Leavenworth from the first?"

"But," said I, in my great unwillingness to accept his conclusions, "Eleanor Leavenworth is but mortal. She may have been mistaken in her inferences. She has never stated what her suspicion was founded upon, nor can we know what basis she has for maintaining the attitude you speak of. Clavering is as likely to be the assassin as Mary for all we know, and possibly I repeated."

"You seem to be almost superstitious in your belief in Clavering's guilt. I recoiled. Was it? Could it be that Mr. Harwell's fanciful conviction regarding this man had in any way influenced me to the detriment of my better judgment?"

"And you may be right," Mr. Gryce went on, "but do not pretend to be set in your notions. Future investigation may succeed in fixing something upon him, though I hardly think it likely. His behavior as the secret husband of a woman possessing motives for the commission of a crime, has been too consistent throughout."

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