



to destroy that clue. "But— "Then there is another thing. Read the confession itself, Mr. Raymond, and tell me what you gather from it.

comment as he hastily read it, and then stood turning it over and over in his hand, examining it.

"A remarkable piece of evidence," exclaimed I, "not without a certain feeling of triumph; quite changes the aspect of affairs."

"Think so?" answered he sharply; then whilst I stood staring at him in amazement, his manner was so different from what I expected, looked up and said, "You tell me that you found this in her bed. Whereabouts in her bed?"

"Under the body of the girl herself," returned I, "saw one corner of it protruding from beneath her shoulders, and drew it out."

"He came and stood before me. "Was it folded or open, when you first looked at it?"

"Folded; fastened up in this envelope," showing it to him. He took it, looked at it for a moment, and went on with his questions.

"This envelope has a very crumpled appearance, as well as the letter itself. Where they were when you found them?"

"Yes, not only so, but doubled up as you see."

"Doubled up? You are sure of that? Folded, sealed and then doubled up as if her body had rolled across it while alive?"

"Yes. "The trickery about it? No look as if the thing had been insinuated there since her death?"

"Not at all, I should rather say that to every appearance she held it in her hand when she lay down, but turning over, dropped it and had lain upon it."

"Mr. Gryce's eyes which had been very bright, ominously clouded; evidently he had been disappointed in my answers. Laying the letter down, he stood musing, but suddenly lifted it again, scrutinized the edges of the paper on which it was written, and, starting me a quick look, vanished with it into the shade of the window-curtain. His manner was so peculiar, I involuntarily rose to follow, but he waved me back, saying:

"Amuse yourself with that box on the table, which you had such an ado over; see if everything is there according to Mrs. Belden's telling; I want to be by myself for a moment."

Subduing my astonishment, I proceeded to comply with his request, but scarcely had I lifted the lid of the box before me, when he came hurrying back, flung the letter down on the table with an air of the greatest excitement and cried:

"Did I say there had never been anything like it since the Lafage affair? I tell you there has never been anything like it in any affair. It is the rummest case on record! Mr. Raymond—" and his eyes, in his excitement, actually met mine for the first time in my experience of him; "prepare yourself for a disappointment. This pretended confession of Hannah's, is a fraud?"

"A fraud? "Yes, fraud, forgery, what you will; the girl never wrote it."

"Amazed, outraged almost, I bounded from my chair. "How do you know that?" cried I.

"Bending forward, he put the letter into my hand. "Look at it," said he, examine it closely. Now tell me what is the first thing you notice in regard to it."

"Why, the first thing that strikes me, is that the words are printed, instead of written; something which might be expected from this girl, according to all accounts."

"Well? "That they are printed on the inside of a sheet of ordinary paper—" "Ordinary paper?"

of a man appeared like one secretly elated. "But—" "Then there is another thing. Read the confession itself, Mr. Raymond, and tell me what you gather from it."

"Why," said I, after complying, "that the girl, worn out with constant apprehension, has made up her mind to do away with herself, and that Henry Clavering—" "Henry Clavering!"

The interrogation was put with so much meaning, I looked up. "Yes," said I, "I didn't know that Mr. Clavering's name was mentioned there; excuse me."

"His name is not mentioned, but a description is given so strikingly in accordance with—" Here Mr. Gryce interrupted me. "Does it not seem to you a little surprising that a girl like Hannah should have stopped to describe a man she knew by name?"

"You believe Mrs. Belden's story, don't you?" "Yes."

"Consider her accurate in her relation of what took place here a year ago?" "I do."

"Must believe, then; that Hannah, the go-between, was acquainted with Mr. Clavering, and with his name?" "Undoubtedly."

"Then why didn't she use it? If her intention was, as she here professes, to save Eleanor Leavenworth from the false imputation which had fallen upon her, she would naturally take the most direct method of doing it. This description of a man, whose identity she could have at once put beyond doubt by the mention of his name, the work, not of a poor ignorant girl, but of some person who in attempting to play the role of one, has signally failed. But that is not all. Mrs. Belden, according to you, maintains that Hannah told her upon entering the house, that Mary Leavenworth sent her here. But in this document she declares it to have been the work of Black Mustache."

"I know, but could they not have been both parties to the transaction?" "Yes, and he. "Yet it is always a suspicious circumstance, when there is any discrepancy between the written and spoken declaration of a person. But why do we stand here fooling, when a few words from this Mrs. Belden you talk so much about will probably settle the whole matter?"

"A few words from Mrs. Belden," I repeated; "I have had thousands from her to-day, and find the matter no nearer settled than in the beginning."

"You have had," said he, "but not I. Fetch her in, Mr. Raymond." My presence, had altered his mood from the severe to the benevolent, received Mrs. Belden with just that show of respectful courtesy likely to impress a woman as dependant as she, upon the good opinion of others.

"Ah! and this is the lady in whose house this very disagreeable event has occurred," exclaimed he, partly rising in his enthusiasm to greet her. "May I request you to sit," he asked, "it is a sort of honor to have you here, and the liberty of inviting a lady to sit in her own house."

"It does not seem like my own house any longer," said she, but in a sad, rather than an aggressive, way; so much had her genial way imposed upon her. "Little better than a prisoner here, I go and come, keep silence or speak, just as I am bidden; and all because an unhappy creature, whom I took in for the most unlikable of mortals, had been allowed to die in my house."

"Just so!" exclaimed Mr. Gryce, "it is very unjust. But perhaps we can right matters. I have every reason to believe me can. This sudden death ought to be easily explainable. You say you had no poison in the house?"

"No, sir." "And that the girl never went out?" "Never, sir."

"And that no one has ever been here to see her?" "No, sir."

"So that she could not have procured any such thing if she had wished?" "No, sir."

"Unless," he added suavely, "she had had some one else here?" "That couldn't have been, sir. She brought no baggage; and as for her pocket, I know every thing there was in it, for I looked."

"And what did you find there?" "Some money in bills, more than you would have expected such a girl to have, some loose pennies and a common handkerchief."

"Well, then, it is proved the girl didn't die of poison, there being none in the house."

He said this in so convinced a tone, she was deceived. "This is just what I have been telling Mr. Raymond, giving me a triumphant look."

"Must have been heart disease," he went on. "You say she was well yesterday?" "Yes, sir; or seemed so."

"Though not cheerful?" "I don't not say that; she was, sir, very."

"What, ma'am, this girl?" giving me a look. "I don't understand that. I should think her anxiety about those she had left behind her in the city, would have been enough to keep her from being cheerful."

"So you would," returned Mrs. Belden; "but it wasn't so. On the contrary, she never seemed to worry about that at all."

"Eleanor, who, according to the papers, stands in so cruel a position before the world? But perhaps she didn't know anything about that—Miss Leavenworth's position, I mean?"

"Yes, she did, for I told her, I was so astonished could not keep it to myself. You see, I had always considered Eleanor as one above reproach and it shocked me so to see her name mentioned in the newspaper in such a connection, that I went to Hannah and read the article aloud and watched her face to see how she took it."

"And how did she?" "I can't say. She looked as if she didn't understand, asked me why I read such things to her, and told me she didn't want to hear any more; that I had promised not to trouble her about this murder, and that if I continued to do so she wouldn't listen."

"Humph! and what else?" "Nothing else. She put her hand over her ears and frowned in such a sulken way I left the room."

"That was when?" "About three weeks ago."

"She has, however, mentioned the subject since?" "No, sir; not once."

"What! not asked what they were going to do with her mistress?" "No, sir."

"She has shown, however, that something was pressing on her mind—fear, remorse, or anxiety?" "No, sir; on the contrary, she has

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