The Detective Officer
by the Author of "Ashley"

I.

THERE sat one Tuesday evening in the month of June, in a room at Rotherhithe, a small collection of country people, men and women. A discontented expression was on their faces, and not without cause. They were from Suffolk, intended emigrants to Sydney, who ought to have gone out of dock on the previous Saturday, but from some bad management, which they could not or would not comprehend, the ship was to be detained for another week: and they rebelled at the delay.

"A boxing of us up in this here wicked Lunnon, as is full of murders and revellings!" cried a woman, who was spelling over a newspaper. "A poor innocent lamb they have been a murdering of now. A pretty little fellow, with flax-coloured hair, it says."

"Read it out, Goody Giles," said some of the company.

Goody Giles preferred to tell it. "He were found in a place they call the Regent's Park. A gentleman were a passing along, and his dog jumped into the water, and fished up a bundle, which they think had lodged on the side, without sinking. They got it out and opened it, and it were a poor little boy strangled to death."

"When was it ? How big was he?" inquired one of the men.

"It were last Friday morning, and he looked to be a going on of two year," replied Goody Giles. "His frock and pinafore were of blue cotton."

Another woman, seated at the window, turned round her head. "What else do it say?" she asked, in a quick tone.

"Well, I don't mind as it says much else. Tam, take the news, and look."

"Tam" took the newspaper, and ran his eyes over it. "Yes it does, mother. It says as there's a reward of 20£ offered for the murderer. And he had got on a shirt and petticoat clumsily marked 'R. P.' in grey-worsted."

"Hey, Mrs. Thrupp! what's the matter of you?"

For Mrs. Thrupp had risen from her seat at the window, and stood as if petrified." Forgive me if I'm wrong!" she breathed, "but it's just the likeness of little Randy."

"Thou foolish woman!" uttered her husband. "Thy thoughts be tied on nought but that little 'un, night and noon. Thee'll get crazy about him shortly."

"Randy wore his blue frock and pinafore the day I left him."

“For the matter of that, Mother Thrupp,” interposed Peter Miles, “there be a hundred or two children in blue frocks and pinafores in this town of Lunnon alone.”

“And that’s the very mark of his shirt and petticoat,” persisted Mrs. Thrupp. “I thought his ma might be fashed at seeing no mark, for ladies is particular, and when I were a mending up Thrupp’s stockings, ready for the start, I took the needle and worsted, and marked his three shirts and his two petticoats, R, for Randy, and P, for Penryn.”

“R. P. is but common letters,” interposed Robert Pike, “and stands for many a name. They stands for mine.”

“Don’t take no note of she, Robin,” cried John Thrupp; “her head’s turned with losing the little urchin.”

Mrs. Thrupp said no more. But she read the account, and noted the address where application might be made to the police, and the body of the child seen. When she was alone with her husband at night, she told him she should go and ask to see it.

“Thee’d never be so soft!”

“I must satisfy myself. Something keeps whispering that it’s little Randy. I told you his mother shook him and hit him, like a dog a shaking a rat.”

“A pretty figure thee’ll cut, a going to own a drownded child, when thee gets sight, and finds it’s one thee never set eyes on afore!” exclaimed John Thrupp.

“It’s only my time and a walk, and my mind’ll be at rest. While we are kept a waiting here, we have got nothing to do, now all our things is aboard.”

The same evening that these several labourers and their families were conversing together, there appeared at the police station, indicated in the advertisements connected with the crime, a shrewd-looking man, airily attired about the neck and waistcoat. He demanded to see the inspector.

“What for?” inquired an officer in attendance.

“Something touching the murder. If I can’t see him now, I’ll come again.”

“Go in there,” said the policeman.

He went into the room indicated, and stood before the inspector, who inquired his name.

“John Ripley.”

“Who and what are you?”

"I was well-to-do once, but I got down in the world, and I am lately reduced to drive a night cab. I tried a day one, but I had to pay sixteen shillings to its master every morning, before I took it out, and I could not make it answer. I pay six shillings for the night one."

"Its number, and its owner?"

John Ripley satisfied him, also in various other particulars. Some of his answers were written down.

"And now," said the officer, "what have you to say about this affair?"

"First of all, sir, I want to know whether the reward will be paid to me, if I point out the person who put the child in the water? Because that person," shrewdly argued the man, "may not have been the one who actually did the deed—though I wouldn't mind laying something that it was."

"If you can indicate to us the individual who put the body where it was found, and through that information the murderer be discovered and taken, you will be entitled to the reward."

"And receive it?" added the man.

"And receive it," said the inspector, with a checked attempt at a smile. "Now go on."

"Well, sir, last Thursday evening I took out my cab at nine o'clock, and for more than half an hour not a fare did I get. Then one hailed me, and I drove him all up to the Regent's Park, on to St. John's Wood. I set him down there, and was going back, when a woman came out of the Park, put up her hand, and made a noise."

"How made a noise?"

"Why, she had tried to speak, but was so out of breath she couldn't, and only a noise came from her. I got down, opened the door, and she scrambled in. I have seen many a one make haste over getting into a cab," continued the speaker, "but I never saw one tumble in as quick as she did. She was like a hare that the dogs are after.   'road, St.John's Wood,' she said to me.

"'What part of it?' I asked.

"'Drive on,' she said. 'I'll tell you when to pull up.' So I did as she told me, and—"

"What time was this?" interrupted the officer.

"I can't say to a few minutes. Between ten and half-past."

"Proceed."

"I drove to the part she told me, and presently she pulled the string, and I jumped off and let her out. I thought I should get a shilling from her, but she puts half-a-crown into my hand, and goes away on, down the road."

"Is that all?"

"Not quite. I turned back with my cab, and had not gone far, when a gentleman, two ladies, and two children, hailed me, and told me to turn round. They got in, and I was driving down the road again, when at a house, past which I had driven her, I saw the same woman—or lady; whichever she was. She was standing inside its gate, looking up and down the road."

"How do you connect all this with the finding of the child's body?"

"Why, sir, I feel a positive conviction, in my own mind, that it was that very woman who had been placing the body in the water. She panted and shook as she came from the Park, like, as I said, a hunted hare, and the moment she was inside the cab, huddled herself into one corner of it, like the same hare run down. And why should she conceal her house from me, and make me drive past it, if she had been up to good?"

"These circumstances amount to very little," said the inspector.

"At all events, they look suspicious enough for the police to follow up," quickly retorted the man. "Which I suppose you'll do, sir."

The inspector kept his own counsel; as inspectors are sure to do. Neither eye nor lip moved. "What house was this?" he asked.

"I cannot describe it as you would understand, but I can point it out when I'm there."

"How was the woman dressed?"

"In a big dark shawl, which nearly covered her, and a silk dress. And she kept a black veil over her face."

"Should you know her again?"

"I should know the dress. I didn't see much of her features. She was young."

"Like a lady, or like a servant?"

"Like a lady."

The inspector wrote for a few minutes. "Are you always to be found at this address that you have given?"

"Except at night, when I'm out with my cab."

He continued to write. “Have you talked about this ?” he suddenly demanded.

“I have never opened upon it till now. It was only last night I began to have my suspicions.”

“Good.” The inspector touched a handbell, and a policeman came in. “Begbie,” was the only word he spoke, but the man appeared to understand it, for he withdrew, and another officer appeared, in plain clothes. The inspector turned to the cabman.

“You will go with this officer,” he said, “and point out to him the house you have mentioned. Do not linger before it, or turn your head to look at it; just tell him which it is, and walk past it. You understand?”

“I should be dull if I didn’t.”

“Mark it,” was his brief direction to the policeman.

It is marvellous the ways and means employed by the metropolitan police when they are bent upon obtaining information. None know how they do it, or when they do it; save to themselves, their inquiries are secret as ever were those of the French inquisition. By eleven o’clock the following morning, the police knew all about the suspected house, what character it bore, and who lived in it. A widow lady of great respectability was its occupant with her two servants: she had lived there for years.

About twelve o’clock, a gentleman stood before it, a tall, well-dressed, middle-aged man of superior manners, looking very unlike a dreaded detective officer. He knocked and rang, and one of the maids came to the door.

“Is Mrs. Cooke at home?”

“Yes, sir.”

He walked into the hall without ceremony. “I wish to see her.”

“What name, sir?”

“Mr. Smith.”

Whether Mr. Smith was his real name is no matter to us. It did for the servant, as well as any other. Mrs. Cooke was seated in her parlour, a handsome, well-appointed room. She was a tall, stately lady, dressed in rich black silk and a widow’s cap. She was looking over some account books, but rose at the visitor’s entrance and laid down her spectacles. Amongst her friends was a gentleman named Smith, and she advanced to shake hands, but drew back at meeting a stranger.

“Ma’am,” he began, in a low, cautious tone, drawing, unasked, a chair near to hers, and sitting down in it, “I have come to seek a little private information from you. I am a member of the detective police.”

Mrs. Cooke was shocked and startled. A detective officer had always been associated, in her mind, with a blunderbuss and two horse-pistols. She nervously began to draw on her black mittens, which lay on the table, but her shaking fingers could hardly accomplish it.

“Don’t be alarmed, ma’am,” he said, with a voice and smile tending to reassure her. “My visit has nothing formidable in it. Look upon me as an acquaintance only, who has called to sit half an hour with you.”

“Sir,” she answered, “I have lived to six-and-fifty years, and never had anything to do with the police in my life, or my husband either. He was in Somerset House, and I can assure you we never did anything to bring the police upon us. All we have ever done, or said, might be laid open to the world.”

“Had *you* fallen under their mark, I should not come to visit you in this private manner,” was his composed reply. “I require a little information, which you can afford me.”

“Dear me!” groaned Mrs. Cooke.

“Do you live in this house alone with your two servants?”

“Until last week I did. I suppose I am compelled to answer your questions?”

“Madam, yes. Or you may be called upon to answer them in public: which would be less pleasant to you. Since last week, who has resided in your house?”

“A newly married gentleman and his wife. My house is large for me since my husband died, and they have taken part of it. They entered last Wednesday.”

“Respectable parties, I conclude?”

“Respectable! Sir, it is Mr. Frederick Lyvett, a son of Lawyer Lyvett, one of the highest legal firms in London. The family live in the greatest style at the West End.”

“I know them,” nodded the officer. “Lyvett, Castlerosse, and Lyvett. Just married, are these parties?”

“About a fortnight ago.”

“Who was the lady?”

“I know very little of her. I believe she was inferior in position to himself, and his friends were against the match. She was a Miss May, and resided somewhere in Brompton. But, sir,” added Mrs. Cooke, while the stranger was making a note of her last words, “I feel that there is something mean and dishonourable, in thus speaking of the affairs of other people. It is what I have not been accustomed to do.”

“Nevertheless it is necessary,” he answered, in an impatient tone, as if ignoring the scruples. “They came in on Wednesday afternoon. Did they bring any children with them?”

“Oh dear no. I said they were just married.”

“Did any children, or child, come to visit them that day, or the next? Any young boy—say two years old?”

What doubt, what feeling came over Mrs. Cooke at this question, perhaps she could not herself have explained. She did not answer it, but her face grew white, and she sat staring at the officer. Did the account she had read of the little child in blue, who was found in the Regent’s Park, arise unaccountably before her? The officer drew his chair closer.

“Mrs. Cooke,” he said, “by the expression of your face, I think you now begin to suspect the drift of my questions. A dreadful crime has been committed, and certain facts, which have come to our knowledge, would seem to point to a suspicion that an inmate of your house may have been connected with it. It is your duty to throw upon this matter any and every light that may be in your power; and the law will demand it of you.”

“What crime is it?” ejaculated Mrs. Cooke.

“I ask if you saw any child here with your lodgers?” he continued, passing by her question. “Did you hear any child with them?”

“A woman, a countrywoman, from Suffolk, did bring a child here on the Wednesday, an hour or two before they came home,” replied Mrs. Cooke, evidently much pained at vouchsafing information, yet afraid to withhold it. “She said it was Mrs. Lyvett’s child by a previous marriage, and had been placed at nurse with her, but she could no longer keep it, because she and her husband were going out to Australia. Sir, suppose I decline to answer all these questions? Have you the power to compel me?”

“Yes, madam. At a police court, before a magistrate.”

The alternative was not palatable, and Mrs. Cooke resigned herself to her fate. “The woman wanted to leave the child in my charge,” she said.

“Did you take it?”

“Of course not. I thought it a strange tale, for I believed Mr. Frederick Lyvett to have married a single lady. I allowed the woman to wait here till they arrived, and she then carried the child upstairs to Mrs. Lyvett.”

“Was Mr. Lyvett there?”

"He was gone out. The woman stayed with Mrs. Lyvett in her bedroom, and we heard the child crying violently. Afterwards, one of my servants, in passing the rooms, heard the woman hushing him to sleep. After that the woman left the house."

"And what became of the child?"

"I don't know. I wondered what did become of him; for when the woman left I saw no child. I asked about him the following day, and Mrs. Lyvett said the woman had taken him. I supposed she was right, for we certainly neither saw nor heard traces of the child after her departure."

"Neither saw nor *heard* any?" repeated the officer.

"None whatever."

"Now, madam, bring your thoughts to bear, if you please, on the following evening, Thursday. Did Mr. and Mrs. Lyvett dine at home? I presume their dinner hour is late?"

"Six o'clock. Only Mrs. Lyvett dined on Thursday evening. Mr. Frederick went to his father's to dine."

"She was alone, then?"

"Yes, she was."

The officer stopped for a minute, considering. When he resumed, the tone of his voice was low and grave; as if conscious that he was asking a grave question.

"Do you happen to know whether she went out that night?"

"She did. She went out without anybody's knowing it, and left the hall door open. By which means, a tramping beggar got inside the house, and startled us."

"At what hour did she go out?"

"It is impossible to say precisely. The servant fetched down her tea things before nine, and it was about half-past nine when we found the tramp in the hall."

"What time did she return?"

"She returned with her husband. It was getting on for eleven."

"With her husband?" he repeated, possibly in surprise. Only that the tone of a wary police officer rarely betrays it.

"Yes, with her husband. I was sitting here, and heard his cab stop. Then they came in together."

“They may have met at the gate,” muttered the inspector to himself. “Did you observe how she was dressed?”

“Not particularly. Except that she wore a very large dark shawl. Which I thought she must be smothered in, so hot a night.”

“And a veil?”

“Yes; for she kept it down. Mr. Lyvett stopped to say good evening, as they passed this door, and I spoke to Mrs. Lyvett about the beggar, and requested her in future to ring for a servant to show her out.”

The detective looked over his notebook. “I have forgotten one question in its order,” he said. “What clothes did the child wear?”

Mrs. Cooke’s voice sank to a whisper. “When his cape was off, I saw he wore a blue frock and pinafore.”

“Did you perceive anything strange in Mrs. Lyvett’s manner between Wednesday, when the countrywoman was here, and Thursday evening?” he resumed.

“Nothing strange. She had an attack of illness once or twice, which was attributed to the fatigue of travelling.”

“What sort of illness?”

“Ann, who saw her, said she shook worse than one in the palsy, and had a cold, ghastly look.”

The officer coughed, a peculiar cough. “The rooms they occupy were open, I suppose, to your servants on the Wednesday and Thursday?”

“Quite so. As they are now. It is Ann only who waits on them.”

“Is Ann a discreet girl?”

“Discreet, sir! In what way discreet?”

“Can she keep a silent tongue?”

“I think she can. She is a very good girl.”

“Allow me to ring for her,” he said. And without waiting permission, he rose and rang the bell.

Ann herself answered it. And stood with the door in her hand.

“Come in,” said Mrs. Cooke, and the officer rose and closed the door behind her. She looked surprised, half frightened, a short, pale, quiet-looking young woman, with a real cap upon her head. “Ann,” said her mistress, “this gentleman wishes to ask you a question or two. Be particular in replying.”

“You wait upon Mr. and Mrs. Lyvett?” he began.

“Yes, sir.”

“Make beds, sweep rooms, &c.?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Last Wednesday, after they came here, and the day following, were the rooms quite open to you?”

“Open, sir?” repeated the girl, as if she scarcely understood the question. “Yes, they were open.”

“You saw nothing to induce you to suppose anything was lying hid—any bundle, for example?”

“I never thought anything about it, sir,” was Ann’s answer, wondering to herself what the drift of all this was. “There was nothing hid that I noticed.”

“Closets, cupboards were all open?”

“Yes, I think so. Except one closet,” added the servant, carelessly, as if she thought that of little consequence. “The key of it was mislaid.”

“Ah!” remarked the officer, briskly, a keen look of intelligence rising to his countenance and fading again. “When was that?”

“On the Wednesday evening, sir. I was going to hang the dresses up which the lady had left about, and I could not find the key of the closet, the one in the dressing room, where the pegs are. It was locked, and the key gone.”

“Did you ask for the key?”

“No, sir. On the following morning, Mr. Lyvett rang the bell and asked me for it. And then the lady said perhaps she had got it, she would look and see, and I came down again.”

“Did she speak readily? At once”

“No. Not till Mr. Lyvett pressed for the key, and seemed displeased, telling me I must find it.”

“Was that closet opened, do you remember, during the day, Thursday?”

"I am sure it was not open when I made the bed. It may have been, when I put the rooms straight at night, but I did not notice. The next morning, I saw it was open, and Mr. Lyvett's things were placed in it."

"Mrs. Lyvett was ill on one, or both, of those days. What was the matter with her?"

"She said she was tired with the railway journey. She shook a good deal."

"Did she look terrified?"

"Well, she did, sir," was the servant's reply. "At least, so it struck me."

The officer asked a few further questions, but she could say no more of import. He rose from his chair, drew up his form to its full height, and placed his hands upon her shoulders. "Now, my girl, do you know what I am? I am an officer in the detective police force, and you have been under examination. You must observe strict silence as to what has passed in this room. Shall I swear you to it?"

The girl gasped, and looked for help to her mistress. He saw his end was gained. There was little need to swear her.

When the officer quitted Mrs. Cooke's, he went straight to the station, and there he found a countrywoman waiting. She also had come about the murder. A Suffolk woman, who said she had nursed a child, which she fancied answered to the description of the one advertised. Could she see the body?

Yes, she was taken to see it. It was lying with its little blue clothes on, and the cord round its neck, just as it had been found. The woman gave one look, and fell in a passion of grief upon the board. It was, indeed, the child she had nursed for the year and nine months of his life. The officer calmly waited till her burst of tears had spent itself, and then took her away, and inquired particulars.

"Who is his mother? Do you know?"

"Mrs. Penryn, sir, was the name we knew her by, down in Suffolk, but we heard that in Lunnon she called herself Miss May. My husband thought that perhaps she had never been Mrs. Penryn at all; but that was no business of ours."

"And you say you left the child with her, last Wednesday?"

"I did. I brought him up to Lunnon, and a rare hunt I had to find out where she was, for she was married again, und had left the old place. I got to her at last, and it was in a place they call St. John's Wood—a rare beautiful house. She and her husband had not come home, and I waited till they came. She was in a fierce way with me for bringing him, and offered me any money to take him with me to Australia, or to get him a home to be at, in Lunnon. But I told her I could not, and I left him there with his clothes."

“He was alive then—when you left him?”

“Alive! Bless him, he was alive and sleeping sweetly on the grand high bed, where I laid him. The tears was wet on his cheeks, though, for his mother had nearly shook the life out of him, with her temper: but he’d have forgot it all when he awoke.”

We need not follow Mrs. Thrupp’s conversation with the officer; in a little time he intimated that he had done with her for the present, and she was at liberty to depart. “I must inform you of one thing,” he observed, “that you are not first in the field, as to the reward.”

“Ay,” she mused, “I do mind me that the news sheet spoke of a reward. What did you please to say, sir?”

“Another has been here before you, and given information which led us on the same scent, so that the reward will be his, not yours.”

“The reward mine!” uttered the poor woman, aghast. “Sir, do you think I would touch a reward for telling out about the killing of little Randy? No, never. Let them take it that has got heart to do it, but it shall never trouble me nor my husband.”

II.

THAT same morning, not long after the departure of the officer from Mrs. Cooke’s, the drawing room bell rang, and Ann went up to answer it. Mrs. Lyvett was at her piano, trying some new music. She kept the servant waiting, with the door in her hand, some minutes. That was just her way.

“Oh!” she said, when she condescended to turn round, “I forgot, when I ordered dinner, to say that we want it earlier than usual. At five.”

They were going to one of the theatres. Mr. Lyvett had engaged a box the previous day. In the afternoon Mrs. Lyvett went out. She did a little shopping, bought a shell wreath for the hair, and a few other pretty trinkets which took her fancy, ordered home some fine fruit, regardless of the cost, set down her name as a subscriber to a new and expensive work just coming out, and also became a first-class subscriber to one of the large circulating libraries, paying for the year in advance, five guineas. She seemed determined to let her husband’s money fly. She told them she should want books changed every day, and they must hold themselves in readiness to send to her as often as she required. She looked out six or eight volumes to take with her then, had a cab called, and went home in it. The library people thought her a very peculiar-mannered lady, restless, absent, and irritable.

It was then nearly half-past four. She rushed into her bedroom, intending to dress for the theatre before dinner, sat down to the glass and did her hair, placing in it the ornamental flowers she had bought, and then rang for Ann to help her with her dress. Mr. Lyvett came home and dressed also. It was nearly half-past five when they began to dine.

When the cloth was removed, Ann placed the wine on the table, then ran downstairs to fetch up the coffee which had been ordered. She placed the waiter, with the two cups and the silver coffeepot, before Mrs. Lyvett.

"And now, Ann," Mr. Lyvett said, "you must go to the stand and get a cab. We shall soon be ready for it."

Ann went, and returned in the cab. As she got out of it, the gentleman who had given her such a fright in the morning came up to the gate. His dress was altered, and he had an official look now. She saw two policemen hovering near, and the girl's heart leaped into her mouth with alarm.

"For whom have you fetched that cab?" he inquired.

"For Mr. and Mrs. Lyvett, sir," she answered, in a tremor. "They are going to the theatre."

"Good. We may want it. Consider yourself engaged to me, my man."

The driver touched his hat, and looked on with curiosity. He also had noticed the policemen, and knew they were not on ordinary duty: a cabman's instinct, on these points, is keen. Ann flew up the path to the door, which she opened with her latchkey. It came across her mind to lock and bar it against those dreaded officers: but she did not dare, and held it open for the superior to enter. " Don't shut the door," he said; "leave it on the latch." She did not know what was going on, but had a vague consciousness that it related to Mr. or Mrs. Lyvett. Mrs. Cooke saw the officer's approach from her parlour window; the cook, who happened to look up from the kitchen area, saw it also: the former came out of her room, and the latter came peeping up the stairs. "Mr. and Mrs. Lyvett are in their sitting room?" the officer remarked to Mrs. Cooke.

"Yes," she answered, her hands working nervously one over the other, "I believe so."

He turned to Ann. "Step up and announce me. Mr. Smith. I'll follow you."

"Oh, sir—if you please—*must I* do it?" she stammered, with a white face and chattering teeth.

He looked at her. "No. You would do more harm than good. I will announce myself." He went softly up the stairs, as he spoke, and the three frightened women clung to the balusters and gazed after him. Suddenly the cook clutched hold of her mistress, and gave a smothered cry. Standing against the wall, were the two policemen, who had quietly entered.

Mr. Lyrett was in his place at table. Mrs. Lyvett had drawn away from it, and leaned back in an easy chair. The detective glanced at her with a detective's critical eye. He saw a handsome young

woman, in a rich evening dress, gold ornaments on her fair neck and arms, and the braids of her fair hair interspersed with a wreath of white flowers.

Mr. Lyvett rose in surprise, to see the stranger walk coolly in, and close the door after him. “I am deeply grieved to come here on my present errand,” said the officer, “and apologise for the intrusion, but the law knows no favour. My business is with this lady.”

“What business?” haughtily demanded Frederick Lyvett.

“I am sorry to say that I have a warrant for her apprehension.”

“What do you mean?” broke from Mr. Lyvett, after a pause of consternation. “This lady is my wife.”

“I know it. And I can only say I hope that things, which at present look—look dark, may be satisfactorily cleared up, so that Mrs. Frederick Lyvett may be restored to her friends.”

Frederick Lyvett interrupted, prefacing his words with a passionate oath. “How dared an insolent street policeman invade his house—how dared he insult Mrs. Lyvett?” Such was their purport.

“I am not a street policeman, Mr. Lyvett,” was the calm answer. “There is my card : you will see what I am. I have the pleasure of being acquainted with your father and Mr. Castlerosse, and I came here myself this evening, instead of despatching my subordinates, that this arrest—which *must* be made, understand me—should be accomplished with as little offence to your feelings as is possible.”

The officer’s address and manner were so businesslike and temperate, that Frederick Lyvett insensibly calmed down. A sudden thought came over him.

“Should my wife, as Miss May, have contracted a debt, or debts,” he said, “your recourse will be against me now; not against her.”

“It is not an affair of debt,” answered the detective, “I wish it was. The warrant sets forth a criminal charge.”

“Pooh!” contemptuously rejoined Mr. Lyvett. “I tell you, you must be labouring under some extraordinary delusion. You have mistaken my wife for somebody else.”

The officer drew a paper from his pocket, and opened it. “The warrant,” he said, “is against Sophia Lyvett, otherwise May, otherwise Penryn.”

Mr. Lyvett, somewhat staggered, turned his eyes on his wife. He never saw a countenance express so much horror. It was perfectly livid, and the dark circles, gathered round the eyes once before, a week ago, had reappeared, and the chin had dropped down, like we see it in the dead.

“Come, madam,” said the officer, “the quicker these things are concluded, the less pain they bring. I pledge you my word that all shall be done as considerately as possible. No one shall go inside the cab but myself, unless you wish your husband to go. Allow me to ring for a shawl, or cloak.”

“I will never go with you,” she gasped. “I dare you to arrest me.”

“Madam, you are already arrested, and it will be well to accompany me quietly. I have policemen at hand, but I do not wish to call for their aid, unless you compel me.”

She made a movement to rise, probably in resistance, but sank back again, motionless and breathless.

“You have killed her!” exclaimed Frederick Lyvett, in agitation. “How dare you come here with your wicked and preposterous tales? Help! help!” he added, ringing the bell.

“Hush-ssh!” quickly interrupted the officer, “pray don’t get the room full; for her sake; for yours. Raise her head up. Only a little water,” he called out, darting to the door, and looking down the well of the staircase. “*One* of you can bring it up.”

It was Mrs. Cooke who entered with it, whether from a feeling of curiosity, or the more considerate one of shielding Mrs. Lyvett from the gaze of servants. The detective nodded in approval, and closed the door the instant she was in the room.

“A pretty disgraceful business this is,” exclaimed Mr. Frederick Lyvett to her, “that police officers should be permitted to enter houses as they please!”

“I would have given any money, Mr. Lyvett, rather than it should have happened here,” she answered. “It will be a stain upon my house forever.”

The words—nay, it was the tone rather than the words—struck oddly upon the confused mind of Frederick Lyvett. “What is it you accuse my wife of?” he asked, turning to the officer.

“The charge is that of murder.”

“MURDER!” echoed the young man.

“Wilful and deliberate murder.”

He staggered back, positively staggered back, and sank down in the seat opposite his wife, his lips as blanched as her own.

“Upon whom? When committed?” he gasped forth.

“Well—” returned the officer, willing to spare his feelings, “the accusing circumstances are not pleasant. I would not advise you to inquire into them to-night, Mr. Lyvett.”

“But I will inquire into them; ay, and refute them. Murder indeed! Why don’t you arrest me for housebreaking? It would be more in accordance with probability. Upon whom, I ask you again, sir?”

“Upon her own child, as it is stated,” whispered the officer.

Frederick Lyvett stared at him, and then burst into a laugh.

“Why, man! why could you not say this before? It is a refutation at once. She has no child. She was only married a fortnight ago.”

“So I find,” shortly answered the officer. “The child was two years old—getting on for it.”

Frederick Lyvett turned hot and cold. He passed his handkerchief over his damp brow. “Let me hear these ridiculous particulars,” he said, striving to speak lightly. “I will hear all.”

“A bundle was found last Friday, in the Regent’s Park, containing the body of a child.”

“With its legs in the water,” interrupted Frederick Lyvett, “and a cord round its neck. I read the account of it. Go on.”

“That child, Mr. Lyvett, appears to have been traced to this house. It was brought here, last week, alive and well, and was left with Mrs. Lyvett.”

“Absurd!” said Frederick Lyvett. “I should think Mrs. Cooke could refute that. Who should bring a child here?”

“I fear I must confirm it, instead of refuting,” answered Mrs. Cooke, who was busy trying to restore the unhappy Mrs. Lyvett. “The woman was waiting here with it when you arrived on Wednesday.”

“Whose child was it?”

“Sir, I only know what the woman said. She said it was Mrs. Lyvett’s—not that she knew Mrs. Lyvett by her present name.”

“Go on. Tell *all*,” wailed Frederick Lyvett. “Whether the tale be true or false, it must be grappled with.”

“She said the child was a Mrs. Penryn’s, a very young widow, who went by the name of Miss May, in London, and taught music. That she had nursed him from his birth, but could not keep him longer, so had brought him to his mother. She took him upstairs to Mrs. Lyvett.”

Mrs. Cooke stopped. He made a motion for her to continue.

“I saw the woman go away, without, as I thought, the child, and after your dinner I sent Ann up to ask if she should make it some food. Mrs. Lyvett’s answer was, that the child had left with the woman. I think I could take upon myself to say it did not.”

“Then where was the child?” cried Mr. Lyvett.

“That is the point,” said the detective officer, for Mrs. Cooke did not reply. “The child appears to have been brought into this house, and never to have left it—alive. The woman says she got it to sleep, and placed it on Mrs. Lyvett’s bed. When next seen, it was in the Park, strangled to death with a cord.”

“The cords from Mrs. Lyvett’s boxes were on the floor that afternoon,” observed Mrs. Cooke, in a low tone. “It is possible that in a moment of temptation—of embarrassment—having a child, she, perhaps, could not dare to account for, thus thrown on her hands—”

Mr. Lyvett groaned. “How do they connect the child found in the Park with the one left here?” he asked, lifting his head.

“The woman has done that,” said the officer; “she came today and identified the child. A cabdriver was the first evidence. He drove a lady from the outskirts of the Regent’s Park to this neighbourhood, and saw her inside this gate. That was on Thursday night.”

“You and Mrs. Lyvett came in together,” said Mrs. Cooke, looking at Mr. Lyvett. “You had been to dine at your father’s.”

“Why, yes! I—“met her at the gate, he was going to add, but stopped in time. It was not his place to help to criminate his unfortunate wife. “Mrs. Lyvett did come in with me,” he added. “But that was on the Thursday night, and you say the child was left here on the Wednesday: I am certain no child could have been here a night and a day without my knowing it.”

“A live child probably not,” observed the officer. “The surgeon who examined the body on Friday morning was of opinion the child had been dead some forty hours, which would give Wednesday afternoon or evening as the time of the deed. It is easy enough to conceal a dead child for a night and a day.”

Recollection flashed over Frederick Lyvett. Of the disappearance of the closet key, and his wife’s agitation when he wished for it. What was in that closet? Something else also flashed upon him; a conviction, deep and terrible, of the guilt of his wife: her conduct then, and now in meeting the charge, was not that of an innocent woman.

She was allowed to change her dress. Mrs. Cooke and her husband took off that she wore, and put on one more suitable, she shrieking defiance one moment, prostrate as a dead thing the next. Then they removed the ornaments from her hair, and put on her a shawl and bonnet. The officer and Mr. Lyvett sat with her inside the cab, and a policeman bore company with the driver. And thus she was conveyed to fast-keeping for the night. A short examination before the magistrate

the following day was followed by a long and conclusive one the next, and Sophia Lyvett was committed to prison to await her trial.

On the night subsequent to the last examination, Frederick Lyvett found his way to his father's home. He saw only his mother: he cared to see only her. It was a fearful disgrace to have fallen on that proud family—that one, bearing their name, should be a byword in the mouths of men. Frederick Lyvett's feelings were laid prostrate with the blow which had struck him, and he gave vent to them outwardly, even as does a woman.

"Oh, mother, mother!" he sobbed, "forgive me this that I have brought upon you! My great punishment is to know that the wretchedness, the disgrace, cannot fall solely upon me."

How can a mother resist her boy's penitence, his tears? She leaned her head on his shoulder, and cried with him. "My dear, I do not mean to reproach you; but, if you had but listened to your father, when he said that person was not a fit wife for you, how different all would have been! If you had but listened to me, when I prayed you to wait the changes time brings about; to have patience; not to be betrayed into a self-willed and disobedient marriage! I told you, my darling, that no blessing would attend such. It never does."

Frederick Lyvett groaned, his heart was torn with remorse and anguish, and he hid his face away from his mother.

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