

# *The Mystery of a Pullman Car*

by Blanche L. Macdowell

## Chapter I

It was time for the Western Express to leave the Bonaventure Station at Montreal. It was Winter, the season was particularly blustery, the travelers were few, and only one Pullman was attached to the train. The first passenger to get on the car was an invalid gentleman, attended by his servant. He was so utterly helpless that his arrival created quite a commotion. A group of curious spectators gathered to watch him lifted on; the negro porters and two train-hands were pressed into the service. With some difficulty he was at length settled in his berth. This Mr. Rathbon, from the accounts given of him by his attendants, appeared to be an object worthy of commiseration. He was an English gentleman of fortune and position, who had been terribly injured in a railway accident; he was paralyzed and almost blind, his eyes being screened from the light by a large green silk shade, and he constantly suffered excruciating agonies from his shattered nerves. He was traveling for his health, had been for some time in Montreal, and was now going West.

The other passengers consisted of two commercial travelers; a young girl of sixteen going to Toronto to school; Frank Carter, a young lawyer from Montreal, who was going up to attend his sister's wedding; and a very handsome, majestic English woman, attended by a younger lady. The older woman appeared to be about thirty, was dressed with simple elegance, her furs being superb. Her companion was an excessively pretty English girl. Frank Carter, the lawyer, recognized the pair, having often seen them at the Windsor Hotel, where Mrs. Mervyn had spent some months. Nothing was known of her except that she lived luxuriously and avoided making any acquaintances. This lady reserved for herself an entire section, her companion, Miss Travers, sleeping in a berth above that occupied by the young girl. Mr. Rathbon had the next section, his servant being located directly opposite, above one of the commercials. After the train had left Cornwall, the lights were turned out, and absolute quiet reigned in the Pullman.

It was a tempestuous night, the wind raved and howled, the snow drifted into massive banks and peaked drifts, the engine moved slowly. The gray Winter's morning had broadened into daylight when Miss Alice Travers awakened. She rather wondered that the lady, who suffered greatly from insomnia, had not called her. In the meanwhile, one of the commercials, who was dressing, was engaged in a vigorous search for a boot, and feeling his hand come in contact with something slimy on the floor, sprang upright—his hand was covered with blood. Miss Travers drew back the curtains. Mrs. Mervyn lay quite still. She was dressed in a crimson dressing-gown, profusely trimmed with lace; a heavy furlined mantle was thrown over her. As Miss Travers touched her, involuntarily a sharp cry broke from her lips, which instantly aroused all the occupants of the car.

“Good God! she is dead!” cried the girl, excitedly.

Right through the heart of the dead woman ran a sharp, slender poniard, which had been driven into the flesh right up to the hilt. Apparently she had died without a struggle; the expression of her face was perfectly calm. Conductor, porter, passengers, all gathered around. Horror was imprinted upon the spectators' faces; each one regarded the other with suspicion; a terrible crime had been committed in their midst, and who was the murderer? The conductor at once telegraphed to the police at Toronto, and Mr. Rathbon was so overcome by the terrible circumstance that he was seized with violent convulsions, his cries and groans adding not a little to the horror of the scene.

“Would you like me to telegraph to your friends?” Mr. Carter inquired of Miss Travers, who had appeared quite stunned by the shock.

“I have no friends on this side of the Atlantic. I am an orphan, and entirely alone in the world.”

Carter was a kind-hearted, chivalrous fellow. He was deeply touched by the poor girl's forlorn position.

“You must allow me for the time to assume the place of a friend,” he said, earnestly. “My mother and sister live in Toronto. They are the warmest-hearted people in the world, and they will be glad to show you every kindness.”

Two detectives boarded the train at Parkdale, a suburb of Toronto. Orders were given that no one should leave the car before it had been thoroughly searched. The negro porter, nearly beside himself with hysterical excitement, shouted voluble protestations of innocence; the sick man lay in a deathlike lethargy of exhaustion. There was not an inch of the Pullman that was not thoroughly examined, as well as the personal effects of the passengers, which mostly consisted of toilet-bags, shawl-straps and railway-rugs, and the most diligent scrutiny failed to reveal the slightest [clue] to the mystery. There was no trace of a struggle; the bedclothes were not even disarranged. On the arrival of the train at Toronto, the body of the murdered woman was removed to a hotel in the vicinity of the Union Station, where an inquest was immediately held, the passengers, still under police surveillance, being all required to attend.

Miss Travers was the first witness. She had been Mrs. Mervyn's companion for nearly a year. The orphan daughter of an English clergyman, she had come to the United States in search of employment, and in answer to an advertisement for a traveling-companion had applied to Mrs. Mervyn, at that time boarding at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, New York. The relations between them had always been of the most pleasant description. Mrs. Mervyn appeared to be wealthy, was extremely liberal, but her companion had no idea from what sources her employer's income was derived. Her habits were regular; she made no acquaintances; wrote few letters, and always posted them herself; scarcely ever received one. She was excessively reticent, never alluded to her past, and never spoke of friends or connections. She was very nervous and suspicious; the witness fancied that she was haunted by a constant dread; had suspected that Mrs. Mervyn indulged in opium, but was not positive of the fact; was of the opinion that the murder must have been committed for

purposes of robbery. There was a small leather satchel, of which Mrs. Mervyn always took charge herself, missing. A number of costly rings were missed from the dead woman's fingers. Under her dress the lady always wore a necklace. She herself had assured Miss Travers that the ornaments were paste, and valuable only for the associations attached to them, but from their size and lustre the witness had concluded that they were valuable jewels. Had slept soundly all night; could form no suspicion of any one.

The conductor and porter gave testimony that they had passed through the car frequently during the night; had seen nothing to arouse suspicion. It would be impossible for any one to enter the car without their knowledge. The negro's frantic excitement drew suspicion upon him, but from the evidence given by the conductor and train-hands, it seemed quite impossible that he could have been the author of the crime.

Miriam Somers had awakened once during the night; had looked out, and fancied that the curtains of Mrs. Mervyn's section moved; saw a tall form dressed in a cloak like the one she had seen on that lady; had naturally concluded that it was the lady herself; could not be positive that it was not a dream; had not heard Miss Travers move all night.

John Barnes, servant to Mr. Rathbon, deposed that twice during the night he had risen to see if his master required his services, and each time, finding that gentleman sleeping quietly, had returned to his rest; had heard nothing to alarm him during the night; had often seen the two ladies at the Windsor Hotel, where he was stopping with his master; had heard the servants remark that the English lady must be very rich; was himself well known in Montreal; had relatives there; had been employed in the General Hospital for three years; had been in his present position three months; had been engaged by Mr. Rathbon because that gentleman's former attendant was ill, and obliged to return to England; his employer had made many friends in Montreal; when free from pain was very sociable; was a kind and liberal master.

There were no papers or letters in Mrs. Mervyn's trunks that could furnish the slightest [clue] to her identity. If suspicion touched any one, it was Miss Travers, but nothing could be proved against her. A verdict of murder against some person or persons unknown was brought in. Later, it was found out that the sum of \$10,000 was lodged to Mrs. Mervyn's credit in the Bank of Montreal, but the most searching inquiries failed to obtain any information regarding her antecedents or connections.

Miss Travers found herself a stranger in a strange land, utterly desolate under most trying circumstances. During the terrible ordeal she behaved with great courage, but when it was over, she began really to feel the effects of the shock. Her bewilderment was illuminated by flashes of consternation. She found herself without power to anticipate, much less decide, what was to come next. In this emergency young Carter showed himself a true friend. He brought his mother to visit the desolate girl, and the old lady invited Miss Travers to make her own house her home as long as it suited her to do so.

## Chapter II

It had been Alice Travers's intention at once to seek a new situation. When she announced her determination, Mrs. Carter, a kind, motherly soul, who had taken a violent fancy to the English girl, made her a proposal. Since her daughter's marriage, the old lady had decided upon making her home with her son in Montreal. She was in delicate health, and required a good deal of attention—would Miss Travers remain as her companion? She would be treated in all respects like a daughter.

For two years Alice lived in the Carters' pleasant home, and in the serenity of a tranquil existence somewhat recovered from the effect of the tragic occurrences of the past. Frank Carter, who from the first had been greatly attracted by the gentle girl, had decided upon asking her to become his wife, when a new character appeared upon the scene, abruptly shattering the young man's hopes of happiness and molding the fate of Alice in a fashion directly opposed to anything that she had ever imagined.

A French capitalist, who had come to Canada for the purpose of finding profitable investments, had business relations with Frank Carter, and in that way established a sort of intimacy with the family.

This Léon de Léry was said to have made an enormous fortune in South America. He brought excellent letters of introduction, and being an accomplished man of the world, clever, brilliant, fascinating, was much courted by both English and French society in Montreal. The surprise of his friends was very great when it was announced that the French millionaire was about to marry Mrs. Carter's companion. The engagement was a short one, and the turn of Fortune's wheel, which suddenly elevated the penniless English girl to a lofty pinnacle of worldly success, seemed very extraordinary. M. de Léry was the most ardent of lovers, the most indulgent and considerate of husbands. Alice's new existence appeared like a fairy tale; she had only to form a wish, instantly to have it realized.

"I am a genuine Cinderella. Shall I awaken some day to find myself in the ashes?" she once exclaimed, merrily. Then the first frown which she had yet seen darkened her husband's brow.

"The true philosophy is to accept the good of the moment," he replied, somewhat coldly.

A few days, after hunting in a cabinet belonging to her husband for an account which she wished to settle, Mme. De Léry found a ring. She carried it to the light and examined it curiously. She turned white as ashes. It was a ruby of great size, and exactly like one worn constantly by Mrs. Mervyn. She sought her husband, crying, impulsively:

"Léon, the sight of this ring has quite upset me. Is it yours?"

De Léry stretched out his hand for the jewel.

"Certainly."

Then, as he listened to her explanations, he smiled indulgently.

“Your imagination has played you a trick, little wife. It would require keener eyes than yours to detect differences in stones of equal size and weight.”

Alice was silent. An unpleasant impression still lingered on her mind.

Mme. de Léry's grand ball was decidedly the social event of the season; indeed, it was said that so splendid an entertainment had never before been given in Montreal. The blonde English beauty of the hostess was heightened by her exquisite Parisian toilet. Her husband regarded her with an air of satisfied pride.

“My queen, you only require the glimmer of jewels to render you perfect.”

He opened a jewel-case, and clasped a necklace of sparkling diamonds around her slender throat.

“Many an aristocratic dame in Europe would sell her soul for such diamonds as those!” he exclaimed, proudly.

Alice grew white to the lips; a convulsive shudder shook her from head to foot; it was on her lips to say that she hated diamonds, the recollections connected with them were so unpleasant; but it seemed such an ungracious manner in which to receive the princely gift, that she retained sufficient self-control to keep silent.

In the preoccupation which her duties as hostess entailed upon her, Mme. de Léry failed to notice the absence of her husband from the room. Later, when the guests had departed, looking around the deserted rooms, still odorous with flowers and brilliant with lights, she remembered that she had not seen him since early in the evening. None of the servants could give any information concerning him. Tired and perplexed, the lady retired to her own room. As she was replacing her jewels in their case, she found, pinned to the satin lining, a tiny scrap of paper, containing the following lines:

DEAREST ALICE: Fate, which no man can control, obliges me to leave you. If I should not return within a week, never waste a thought on me. I do not blame myself for having sought your love; I have made you happy, and have endeavored to secure your future. For your own sake as well as mine, I earnestly conjure you to make no effort to penetrate the mystery of my disappearance. Trust nobody but the Carters, who will be good friends to you. Believe me, dear, I have loved you truly since the first moment my eyes rested upon your sweet face. Yours, L. DE L.”

At first Alice utterly failed to realize the situation. Her first idea was that a practical joke was intended; but that was so entirely at variance with her husband's character, that she instantly dismissed the suspicion. The strangeness of it all smote her heart with a deeper pang than the hour's horror had yet given her. She had suddenly come to a dead pause. Past and future were dissociated by this dreadful event. Had her husband suddenly been

stricken with madness? Was it a cruel hoax? An instinctive longing for some one to stand by her in this emergency came over the forlorn and desolate creature. Early next morning she sought Mrs. Carter. Days freighted with pain and anxiety passed on, but time brought no solution of the mystery. M. de Léry's conduct was inexplicable. His pecuniary affairs were in perfect order. Should he never return, his wife would be handsomely provided for.

Perhaps a month later, Frank Carter visited New York on business. While there, he was thrown into contact with a clever American detective, who was at the time much elated by the capture he had lately made of a gang of "crooks," the most skillful criminals, he declared, who had ever entered the United States.

"Old countrymen, all of them," he insisted. "We don't produce that kind here. If it had not been for a woman's jealousy we should never have caught them at all. We missed the leader, the sharpest crook it has ever been my fortune to hear of. When he found he was trapped, he just disappeared as though he had sunk into the earth. He belonged to a good English family, and had had a university education. He trained a band of criminals, forgers, counterfeiters, burglars, and reigned over them like a king. Devil Dick he was called, because he seemed to have the devil's own luck. He had a positive genius for what actors term 'making up,' and the cool audacity of the fellow was something marvelous. Once, dressed as a workman, with his basket of tools on his arm, he walked into the Capitalists' Bank in New York, and throwing the basket upon the floor, stood upon it, coolly swooping off \$5,000 before the teller's eyes, and disappeared before the bank official had recovered from his consternation. You must have heard of the Pullman-car murder, committed between Montreal and Toronto? It made a great sensation."

"I happened to be on the very car."

"Then you will be interested in hearing that we have at last found a [clue] to the mystery. Mrs. Mervyn had for years been a member of this very gang. I believe myself that she was Devil Dick's lawful wife; she certainly was the only one who ever ventured to defy his authority. He was a handsome fellow, irresistible with women and with a decided weakness for a pretty face, and his wife was furiously jealous. A very clever robbery had been carried out at the Hôtel de Callière, in Paris. The Duchesse de Callière was robbed of diamonds worth \$80,000. The jewels were given into this woman's keeping, and after a violent quarrel with her husband she disappeared with them. He tracked her all over the world. You remember the invalid Mr. Rathbon? That was no less than Devil Dick himself. His presence in Montreal was signaled by a series of the most daring and successful burglaries. Devil Dick punished his wife's treachery, and recovered possession of the jewels. The conductor and one of the train-hands were members of his gang. The jewels once secured, they passed them to a confederate outside, at one of the way-stations. We caught five of these fellows; they all deserve hanging, but I don't know if they will get it. I have a conviction that we will never take Devil Dick alive. Handsome fellow, isn't he?"

As Carter looked down upon the photograph, he turned pale and sick. In the delicate, almost effeminate features, the languid, supercilious smile, he instantly recognized Léon de Léry.

He never told Alice of the discovery he had made; he knew it would only add to her pain. The following Spring, when the ice on the St. Lawrence broke up, a body, recognized by the watch and the clothes as being that of M. de Léry, was brought to the surface by the Spring freshets. So Devil Dick was reverently buried, wept and mourned for as though he had been the best of men. Even after Alice became Frank Carter's happy wife, she still cherished a tender memory of her first love.

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