

# A Story of Mystery

## *Who is Guilty?*

by Phillip Wolf, M.D., New York: Cassell & Co.

Capt. Travers, of the British Army, on furlough for the purpose of restoring the health he had lost in India, found himself detained at Cyprusville by a special attraction in the form of Miss Oriana Gower, to whom he had been presented by his friend, Dr. Dubois. On the day the story opens, they were to go, all of them, including Miss Gower's uncle, Mr. Morris, with whom she was living, to visit some people in the neighborhood; but suddenly, about the time they were to start, Miss Gower asked to be excused, pleading illness. "That is no excuse for you," Dr. Dubois said to Capt. Travers. "Morris also refused to go, but he gives a more honest reason. The truth is the people we are going to see are honored unexpectedly with the visit of a man whom Morris and his niece dislike. Why, I don't know or care. This man is Mr. Hugo Addison, who has returned from a long pleasure voyage in his yacht, after he and his yacht were supposed to have been lost at sea; and he is the real cause why Morris and Miss Gower do not accompany us."

"But she is really ill, Doctor," said Travers.

"She will recover," was the dry answer.

"Poor little thing," Travers continued, "it worries me awfully!"

"You will recover, too," the Doctor replied.

They both received a hearty welcome at their journey's end from the host and his guests, and gay words and gayer laughter defied clouds and piping winds. The Doctor avoided the tempting snares that were set for him, but the moody and helpless Captain was appropriated by a vivacious blonde, who, though pretty, only wearied him. "I am so glad you have come," she said, "your friends have kept you so secluded that I thought I should never see you." Capt. Travers observed that he had returned from India with the malaria of that climate in his blood, and seclusion was what he needed. "Yes," the pretty blonde answered, "but they might have amused you with some company—though, I suppose, under the circumstances, they would find it difficult." Capt. Travers ventured to ask why. "Don't you really know?" said the blonde. "Forgive me, then! Your seclusion has been complete. I really fear we shall not be able to enjoy the yacht voyage after all, it does so look like rain. And they say Mr. Addison's yacht is such a great curiosity. He has been away a year. All his friends mourned his death, supposing he had been drowned. You don't know him, do you?" Capt. Travers remarked that he had not had that honor. "Of course not," said the blonde. "How absurd to ask! But I know you will like him; he is such a perfect gentleman, and so chivalrous. I'm so glad you have come!"

"Miss Gower is ill," Capt. Travers responded, "and at first I had no intention of coming without her."

“I didn’t know she was invited,” said the blonde, with a little spiteful, cattish purr. “One can see that you are not curious,” she added.

While the Captain was suffering this martyrdom, the Doctor was quietly walking about the lawn, and at length crept away by a little path to enjoy a cigar in solitude, when he was confronted by a man with russet-colored side-whiskers and moustache who had evidently been running. “Pardon me,” he gasped, “but can you tell me if Miss Gower is here?” The Doctor replied that she was at her home. “I have been there,” the man declared, “but was told that she had gone out.”

“She is not here!” said the Doctor with a shrug.

The man paused irresolutely; then, frowning, he murmured, “It will be too late, too late!” And turning on his heel, disappeared.

“A madman,” said the Doctor, puffing away the incident in a cloud of smoke. The morning wore away, the afternoon was half spent, and still the yacht did not arrive.

Then a storm arose, and the rain poured down in sheeted masses; but it was soon over, and then there was a cry of “Max! Max!” as a tall figure with strongly-marked features appeared upon the scene.

“That is Max Newton, Mr. Addison’s servant and devoted friend,” said a lady, in answer to an inquiry from Capt. Travers.

“You didn’t come up through the storm, surely?” said one of the party.

“I obeyed orders,” the newcomer replied; “which were that the yacht should reach here by a certain time. I have lost three hours from the storm.”

“Is your master aboard?” it was asked.

“No,” said Max, “he had an appointment in the village; he said he would meet me here.” But Mr. Addison had not come. The afternoon passed away, and still he was absent. There must be something wrong, they decided; and so a Mr. Ascham, accompanied by Dr. Dubois and Capt. Travers, started for Mr. Addison’s residence, Lesbia Villa, not far distant, to solve the mystery.

The house was a quaint one of many gables, angles, verandas, and miniature roofs, built on a terrace, and surrounded by many acres of lawn, orchard and garden. It was cheerless, nevertheless, and perfect silence brooded over everything. They paused at length before a massive oak door, rich with curious carvings. Mr. Ascham raised the heavy knocker, but the slow and solemnly reverberating blows brought no response. “None but the dead would fail to hear that clatter,” said Capt. Travers, impatiently.

“Have a little patience, Travers,” answered the Doctor. “And while waiting, admire the sunset in the ocean yonder.” The Captain faced the dazzling west for a few moments in silence.

“It is beautiful,” he exclaimed, “By Jove! You can see twilight conquering the light.” Mr. Ascham was growing alarmed. They left the veranda, and stood in the pathway, looking up at the house.

“All the windows are closed, on this side at least,” said the Doctor. “We have had our walk for nothing.”

The Captain left his companions, disappearing around an angle of the building, and in a moment returned, with a startled face, and the words, “There is a window open on that side, and, by Jove! I don’t like the appearance of things.” Beneath the open window to which he directed attention was a flower-bed, and the flowers were crushed down as if by some heavy body falling upon them. “Look here!” cried the Captain, pointing to a mass of ivy that had been pulled from the wall, “What do you call that stuff on the bruised leaves?”

“Blood!” the Doctor calmly responded. “It would be wiser to summon the authorities.”

“Hang the authorities,” said the impetuous Captain, and, grasping the ivy, he made a leap into the room through the window. In a brief space he reappeared with a horrified face. “A dead body, Doctor!” he said. “Dead and covered with blood!” And thereby hangs the tale and the vital query, “Who Is Guilty?”

It was the body of Mr. Hugo Addison. The Doctor stooped down beside it for a moment, raised the stiff head, gently dropped it, and then rose to his feet. “We are too late,” he said. “He has been dead some six hours, and died from a pistol bullet in his brain.”

“Suicide, perhaps,” suggested Capt. Travers.

“Suicide?” repeated the calm Doctor. “Impossible! The wound is from behind and above. He was murdered, Captain, brutally murdered.”

It was speedily arranged that the Doctor and Mr. Ascham should notify the authorities and that Capt. Travers should remain at the house. That latter slowly paced up and down the veranda, thinking of Miss Gower and her possible reasons for disliking Mr. Addison. Suddenly he heard a strange sound like a footfall. He listened and it was repeated. “I am not mistaken this time,” he said to himself; “somebody is cautiously walking in the dead man’s room. His shoes creak like patent leather. Now he is stopping; now he is walking again; now he is opening a drawer. I wonder if I couldn’t creep around and get a peep at him as he comes out.” Capt. Travers dropped to his hands and knees and moved cautiously forward. At an angle of the wall, he glanced toward the lawn, and a figure stood there with upturned, intent face—the face of a handsome man, with russet colored beard. The figure waited an instant and then quickly disappeared. A few minutes later there was a muffled report like a pistol. “A fine face and manly figure for a murderer,” thought the Captain; “but I shall know it again.” He turned to the door, and again the footsteps were audible. It occurred to him to stretch his arms across the doorway as a bar to anyone coming out. Soon the pattering footsteps came closer; the cause passed so near to him that he could feel its breath. Then there was a rustling of garments. He grasped the fleeting object. There

was a slight struggle, and it escaped, leaving him with only a gauzy something in his hand—a woman’s silken scarf.

The officers arrived shortly, and Capt. Travers hastened away, to appear as the clock struck 10 at Mr. Morris’, where he was cordially welcomed by his host, by Miss Gower, and by his friend the Doctor. Once alone with the latter, he said, “tell me of Miss Gower.”

“Are you in love with her?” asked the Doctor.

“Deeply, irrevocably,” the Captain admitted frankly, “though I have never told her so—in words.”

“So much the better, Travers,” said the Doctor. “As a friend, I should advise you to pack your trunk and vanish into space. Question me.”

“Is Miss Gower really ill?” Travers inquired.

“You shall hear,” the Doctor said, and he proceeded to relate that Miss Gower had shut herself in her room, refusing admittance even to her maid, from 10 in the morning to 3 in the afternoon; that at the latter hour she had asked for a glass of wine and a biscuit, and again retired; that her maid had become anxious and forced her way into the room, only to find her mistress lying senseless on the floor, dressed and with a bonnet on her head, as if she intended to take a walk. “I entered about this time,” continued the Doctor, “The exact cause of this insensibility I could not discover, but I learned that our fair friend was accustomed to taking bromide of potassium for her very nervous spells; and in the present instance I know that she was under the influence of opium.”

“Are you sure—” began the excited Captain.

“I’m sure of nothing,” said the Doctor. “I have given you my advice, and answered your question. Get rid of your malaria and love at the same time. Good night.”

Sleep that night was an enemy that Capt. Travers could not conquer; he tossed about in his bed hour after hour, with a vague but painful feeling of impending horror—of a whirlpool of evil that was going to attract him within the dangerous circle, treat him as a toy, and then swallow him forever.

The famous detective, Mr. Sharpe, took hold of the matter of Mr. Addison’s murder, and soon settled upon a “theory.” The crime had been committed by a woman, he contended; and it did not take him long to arrive at the further conclusion that the woman was Miss Oriana Gower. There were many circumstances, it had to be allowed, to justify such a belief. The discovery of a pistol and a handkerchief, both marked “G.D.” only served to confirm the detective’s opinion. That was a trick to throw suspicion on an innocent person, a probable enemy or the real murderer, he said. It was learned that there was a certain Geoffrey Draper in the neighborhood, who had once been a friend of the dead man; but on inquiry, he was not to be found; he had recently left the village, it seemed. Possibly he might be the mysterious “G.D.” It looked very much so, when it

was further ascertained that a veiled woman, or women, had been in the habit of visiting him at all hours of the day and night; and that on a late occasion he had quarreled hotly with such a person. The servant had heard the woman say, "You must not risk it; I love you and you've run enough danger for me." Next a kiss was heard; and then Draper said, "I'll risk anything to bring you happiness, my dear."

Capt. Travers made bold to say, "Your theory is stretching to a dangerously thin condition, is it not, Detective Sharpe?"

"It seems so," the detective granted. "But I still think it is strong enough to hold the guilty party—or parties. If Mr. G.D. is a fool, so much the worse for him. He disappeared at a very unfortunate moment, if he is innocent."

"And if he is innocent," said the Captain, "he did a very foolish thing; for I saw him gazing anxiously up towards the house in which the murdered man's body lay." Altogether, Mr. Sharpe was sorely bewildered; but his reputation was at stake, and he must not fail.

As soon as he could conveniently do so, Capt. Travers placed in the hands of Miss Gower's maid, Miss Percy, the silken scarf which had come into his possession so strangely the evening of the murder. "Pardon me," he said to her, "but I found this little thing near the house to-day. Perhaps it belongs to you."

"It belongs to Miss Gower," said the maid, "and disappeared mysteriously yesterday. With your permission I'll take it in her name."

"Of course," laughed the Captain nervously. "If it is hers!"

"It is hers," Miss Percy assured him, "and there is not another like it in the country."

Miss Percy was a very bright and attractive young woman, and interested in Dr. Dubois in particular a great deal. He even allowed himself to stroke her hair, to put his arm around her waist, to kiss her pink and not unwilling lips. But this did not prevent the gallant physician from having a theory, a scientific theory, about the murder, and it was opposed to that of Detective Sharpe. "Your supposition as to the cause of Mr. Addison's death," said he to the latter, "is entirely wrong. Let me inform you the bullet was fired in the man's brain *after* he was dead. He died of poison of some kind." This dazed Mr. Sharpe, and he consented to defer his proposed arrest of Miss Gower until further investigation should be made. Further investigation only served, however, to make things look blacker for Miss Gower. It was learned, mainly from Mrs. Newton, that she was in fact the dead man's adopted sister, that they were to have been married, that they quarreled and parted, and that at the time of his murder he was about to change the will in which he had left her all his fortune.

It was Miss Percy who finally unraveled the mystery and proved all the theories to be wrong. There had been no murder at all. The late Mr. Addison had squandered a fortune and was deeply in debt, was insane, and hated Miss Gower wildly because he could not make a mistress of her. To save himself from exposure, he committed suicide, and with diabolical malice he sought to

revenge himself at the same time upon the one woman who had so bravely resisted him by taking poison, and with his own lips directing that at a certain time after death he should be shot in the head with a pistol he had formerly given Miss Gower, but which was then in his possession, in order to make it appear that she had murdered him; and his tool for carrying out this infamous plot was Max Newton. Miss Percy had visited the room where the murdered man lay for the purpose of securing some papers which the deceased had left, as she had learned from Newton, who was her uncle and in love with her, to blast Miss Gower's name as a virtuous woman and deepen the suspicion of murder against her. And the man who Capt. Travers had seen standing guard while Miss Percy explored the house was Geoffrey Draper; and Geoffrey was in fact Geoffrey Draper Gower, Miss Oriana's brother. As to Miss Gower's use of opium, the drug had been given her by Miss Percy to ease the great agony she was suffering on account of this wretched conspiracy. And when the truth was all made plain Capt. Travers and Miss Gower were married, and Miss Gower's brother and Miss Percy went and did likewise.

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