

*Hanged By the Neck*  
by William Russell

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I.

I AM about to lift the veil of mystery which for ten years has shrouded the murder of Mary Ware; and though I lay bare my own weakness, or folly, or what you will, I do not shrink from the un veiling. No hand but mine can perform the task. There was, indeed, a man who might have done this better than I; but he wrapped himself in silence, and went his way.

I like a man who can hold his tongue.

On the corner of Crandall and Clarke streets stands a dingy-brown frame-house, which, judging from its obsolete style of architecture, must have been built a century ago. It has a very cocked-hat air about it—an antique, unhappy look. It is now tenanted by an incalculable number of German families; but at the time of which I write it was a second-rate boarding-house of the more respectable sort, and rather largely patronized by poor but honest literary men, tragic actors, and pretty ballet-girls.

My apartments on Crandall Street were opposite this building, to which my attention was directed, soon after taking possession of the rooms, by the discovery of the following facts: First, that a very charming *blonde* lodged on the second floor front of “over the way,” and sang like a canary-bird every morning; second, that her name was Mary Ware; third, that she had two lovers—short allowance for a *danseuse*. If ever poetry and pathos took human shape it was christened Mary Ware. She was one of Beauty’s best thoughts. I can not tell if her eyes were black or hazel; but her hair was bronze-brown, silken and wavy, and her mouth the perfection of tenderness. Her form was rich in those perfect curves which delighted the old Greek masters. I write this with no impure thought. But when she lay in her little room, stark and lifeless and horrible, the glory faded from her face, then I stooped down and kissed her, but not till then. How ghastly she looked! Eyes with no light in them, lips with no breath on them—white, cold, dead!

Mary Ware was a finer study to me than her lovers. One of them was commonplace enough—well-dressed, well-made, handsome, shallow. Nature manufactures such men by the gross. He was a lieutenant, in the navy I think, and ought to have been on the sea, or in it, instead of working ruin ashore. The other was a man of different mould. His character, like his person, had rough lines to it. Only for the drooping of his eyelids, and a certain coarseness about the mouth, he would have been handsome, in spite of those dark, deep-sunken eyes. His frame would have set an anatomist wild—tall, deep-chested, knitted with muscles of steel. “Some day,” said I, as I saw him stalk by the house one evening, “he will throw the little Lieutenant out of that second-story window.” It would have been a wise arrangement.

From the time I left off short jackets women have perplexed me. I have discovered what woman is not, but I have never found out what she is. I can not tell to this day which of

those two men Mary Ware loved, or if she loved either. The flirtation, however, was scandal enough for the entire neighborhood; but little did the gossips dream of the tragedy which was being acted under their noses.

This affair had continued for several months, when it was reported that Mary and Julius Kenneth were affianced. The Lieutenant was less frequently seen in Clarke Street; and Julius waited upon Mary's footsteps with a humility and tenderness strangely out of keeping with his rough nature. Mrs. Grundy was somewhat appeased. Yet, though Mary went to the Sunday concerts with Julius Kenneth, she still wore the Lieutenant's roses in her bosom!

If I could only meet with an unenigmatical woman!

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## II.

I was awakened one morning by several quick, nervous raps on my room door. The noise startled me from a most appalling dream.

"Oh, Sir!" cried a voice on the landing, "there's been a dreadful murder done across the street! They've murdered Mary Ware!"

"I will get up." That was all I said. I looked at my watch. It was nine o'clock. I had overslept myself; but then I sat up late the night before.

I dressed myself hastily, and, without waiting for breakfast, pushed my way through the crowd that had collected in front of the house, and passed up stairs unquestioned to the scene of the tragedy. When I entered the room there were six people present—a tall, slim gentleman, with a professional air, evidently a physician; two policemen; Adelaide Woods, an actress; Mrs. Marston, the landlady; and Julius Kenneth. In the centre of the chamber, on the bed, lay the body of Mary Ware. The face of the corpse haunted me for years afterwards with its bloodless lips, the dark streaks under the eyes, and the long silk hair streaming over the pillow. I stooped over her for a moment, and turned down the counterpane, which was drawn up closely to her chin.

"There was that across her throat  
Which you had hardly cared to see!"

At the head of the bed sat Julius Kenneth, bending over the icy hand which he held in his own. He seemed to be kissing it. The gentleman in black was conversing in undertones with Mrs. Marston, who wrung her hands every other moment and glanced toward the body. The two policemen were examining the doors, closets, and windows of the premises. There was no fire in the air-tight stove, but the room was suffocatingly close. I opened a window and leaned against the casement to catch the fresh air. The physician approached me. I muttered something to him.

“Yes,” he began, “the affair looks very mysterious, as you remark. Never saw so little evidence of any thing. Thought at first ’twas a case of suicide: door locked, key on the inside, room in perfect order; but then we find no instrument with which the subject could have inflicted that wound on the neck. Party must have escaped by the window. But how? The windows are at least thirty feet from the ground. It would be impossible for a person to jump that distance without fracturing a limb, even if he could clear the iron railing below. Unpleasant things to jump on, those spikes.....Must have been done with a sharp knife. The party meant to make sure work of it. The carotid cleanly severed. Death in about a hundred seconds.”

The medical man went on in this hideous style for ten minutes, during which time Kenneth did not raise his lips from Mary’s hand. I spoke to him; but he only shook his head in reply. I understood his grief; and on returning to my room I wrote him a note, the purport of which will be shown hereafter.

The *Evening Mirror* of that day contained the following article:

“MURDER IN CLARKE STREET.—This morning, at eight o’clock, Mary Ware, the well-known *danseuse*, was found murdered in her bed, at her late residence on the corner of Clarke and Crandall streets. There was but one wound on the body—a fearful gash on the neck, just below the left ear. The deceased was dressed in a ballet-costume, and was evidently murdered immediately after her return from the theatre, by some person or persons concealed in the room. On a chair near the bed lay several fresh bouquets, and a long cloak which the deceased was in the habit of wearing over her dancing dress on coming home from the theatre at night. The perfect order of the apartment, and the fact that the door was locked on the inside, have induced many to believe that the poor girl killed herself. But we can not think so. That the door was fastened on the inner side proves nothing, excepting that the murderer was hidden in the chamber. That the room gave no evidence of a struggle is also an insignificant fact. Two men, or even one strong man, grappling suddenly with the deceased, who was a very slight woman, would have prevented any great struggle. No weapon whatever was discovered on the premises. We give below all the material testimony elicited by the coroner’s inquest. It explains nothing.

“*Harriet Marston* deposes: I keep a boarding-house at 131 Clarke Street. The deceased has boarded with me for the past two years. Has always borne a good character. I do not think she had many visitors; certainly no male visitors except a Lieutenant King, and Mr. Kenneth, to whom she was engaged. I do not know when Lieutenant King was last at the house; not within three days, I am confident. Deceased told me that he had gone away forever. I did not see her last night when she returned from the theatre. The hall-door is never locked; each of the boarders has a latch-key. The last time I saw the deceased was just before she went to the theatre, when she requested me to call her at eight o’clock, as she had promised to walk out with ‘Jules,’ meaning Mr. Kenneth. I knocked at the door eight or ten times, and received no answer. I then grew frightened, and called one of the boarders, Adelaide Woods, who helped me to force the lock. The key fell out on the inside as we pressed against the door. Mary Wares was lying on the bed with her throat

cut. The quilt and the strip of carpet beside the bed were covered with blood. She was not undressed. The room presented the same appearance it does now.

“*Adelaide Woods* deposes: I am an actress. I occupy a room next to that of the deceased. It was about eleven o’clock when she came home; she stopped ten or fifteen minutes in my chamber. The call-boy of the Olympic usually accompanied her home from the theatre. I let her in. Deceased had misplaced her night-key. I did not hear any noise in the night. The partition between our rooms is quite thick; but I do not sleep heavily, and should have heard any unusual noise. Two weeks ago deceased told me that she was to be married to Mr. Kenneth in June. She and Mr. Kenneth were in the habit of taking walks before breakfast. The last time I saw them together was yesterday morning. I assisted Mrs. Marston in breaking open the door. [Describes position of the body, etc., etc.]

“Here the call-boy was summoned, and testified to accompanying the deceased home on the night of the murder. He came as far as the steps with her. The door was opened by a woman. Could not swear it was Miss Woods, though he knows her by sight. The night was very dark, and there was no lamp burning in the entry.

“*Julius Kenneth* deposes: I am a machinist. I reside at No.— Forsyth Street. I have been acquainted with the deceased for eighteen months. We were engaged to be married. [Here the witness’s voice failed him.] The last time I saw her was yesterday morning, on which occasion we walked out together. I did not leave my room last evening. I was confined to the house by a cold all day. A Lieutenant King used to visit the deceased frequently. It created considerable talk in the neighborhood. I did not like it, and requested her to break off the acquaintance. Deceased told me yesterday morning that Lieutenant King had been ordered to some foreign station, and would trouble me no more. Deceased had engaged to walk with me this morning at eight o’clock. When I reached Clarke Street I first learned that she had been murdered. [Here the witness, overcome by his emotion, was permitted to retire.]

“*Dr. Underhill* deposes: [This witness was very voluble and learned, and had to be suppressed several times by the coroner. We give his testimony in brief.] I was called in to view the body of the deceased. A deep wound on the throat, two inches below the left ear, severing the left common carotid and the internal jugular vein, had been inflicted by some sharp instrument. Such a wound would produce death almost immediately. The body bore no other marks of violence. The deceased must have been dead several hours, the rigor mortis having already supervened. On a second examination, with Dr. Rose, the deceased was found to be *enceinte*.

“*Dr. Rose* corroborated the above testimony.

“The night-watchmen and several other people were examined, but their statements threw no light on the case. The situation of Julius Kenneth, the lover of the unfortunate girl, excites the deepest commiseration. The deceased was nineteen years of age. Who the criminal is, and what could have led to the perpetration of the cruel act, are mysteries which, at present, threaten to baffle the sagacity of the police.”

I could but smile on reading all this solemn nonsense. After breakfast the next morning I made up my toilet with extreme care, and presented myself at the sheriff's office. Two gentlemen who were sitting with him at a table started to their feet as I announced myself. I bowed to the sheriff very calmly and said,

*"I am the person who murdered Mary Wares!"*

Of course I was instantly arrested. The *Mirror* of that evening favored me with the following complimentary notice:

"THE CLARKE STREET HOMICIDE: FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS: MORE MYSTERY.—The person who murdered the ballet-girl in Clarke Street on the night of the 3d inst. surrendered himself to the sheriff this morning. He gave his name as Paul Pyne, and resides opposite the scene of the tragedy. He is of medium height, and well made; has dark, restless eyes, and chestnut hair; his face is unnaturally pale, and by no means improved by the Mephistophelian smile which constantly plays upon his lips. Notwithstanding his gentlemanly address, there is that about him which stamps him villain. His voluntary surrender is not the least mysterious feature of this mysterious *affaire*; for, had he preserved silence, he would have escaped detection beyond a doubt. He planned and executed the murder with such skill that there is little or no evidence against him save his own confession, which is inexplicable enough. He acknowledges the crime, but stubbornly refuses to enter into details. He expresses a desire to be hanged immediately! How he entered the room, and by what means he left it after committing the heinous deed, and why he brutally murdered a woman with whom, as it is proved, he had no previous acquaintance, are enigmas which still perplex the public mind, and will not let curiosity sleep. These facts, however, will probably be brought to light during the trial. In the mean time the greatest excitement reigns throughout the city."

At four o'clock that afternoon the door of my cell turned on its hinges, and Julius Kenneth stood face to face with me. I ought to have cowered in the presence of that injured man, but I did not. I was cool, satanic; he feverish and terrible.

"You got my note?" I said.

"Yes; and I have come here as you requested."

"You know, of course, that I have refused to reveal the circumstances connected with the murder? I wished to make the confession to you alone."

He turned his eyes on mine for a moment, and said, "Well?"

"But even to you I will assign no reason for having committed this crime. It was necessary that Mary Wares should die. I decided that she should die in her chamber; and to that end I purloined her night-key."

Julius Kenneth fixed his eyes on me.

“On Wednesday night, after Mary Wares had gone to the theatre, I entered the hall-door by means of the key, and stole unobserved into her chamber, and secreted myself under the bed, or in that small clothes-press near the stove—I forget which. Some time between eleven and twelve o’clock she returned; and as she lighted the gas I caught her by the waist, pressed a handkerchief saturated with chloroform over her mouth, and threw her on the bed. When she had ceased to struggle, and I could use my hand, I made a deep incision in her throat. Then I smoothed the bedclothes, and threw my gloves and the handkerchief into the stove. I am afraid there was not fire enough to burn them!”

Kenneth walked up and down the cell in great agitation; then he suddenly stopped and sat down on the bed.

“Are you listening? I then extinguished the light and proceeded to make my escape from the room, which I did in so simple a manner that the police, through their very desire to discover wonderful things, will never find it out, unless indeed *you* betray me. The night, you will remember, was remarkably foggy; it was so thick indeed that it was impossible to see a person at four yards’ distance. I raised the window-sash cautiously and let myself out, holding on by the sill until my feet touched on the left-hand blind of the window beneath, which swung back against the house and was made stationary by the catch. By standing on this—my arms are almost as long as yours—I was able to reach the tin water-spout of the adjacent building, and by that I descended to the sidewalk.”

Kenneth glared at me like some ferocious animal.

“On gaining the street,” I continued, “I found that I had thoughtlessly brought the knife with me—a long, slim-bladed knife. I should have left it in the room. It would have given the whole thing the appearance of suicide. I threw the knife—”

“Into the river!” exclaimed Kenneth, involuntarily.

And then I smiled.

“How did you know it was I!” he shrieked.

“It was as plain as day,” I returned, coolly. “Hush, they will hear you on the corridor. I knew it the moment I saw you sitting by the bed. First, because you shrunk instinctively from the corpse though you seemed to caress it. Your grief throughout was clumsily done, Sir; it was too melodramatic. Secondly, when I looked into the stove I saw a handkerchief partly consumed, and then I instantly remembered the faint, peculiar smell which I had observed in the room before the windows were opened. Thirdly, when I went to the window, I noticed that the paint was scraped off the iron brackets which held the spout to the adjoining house. The spout had been painted three days previously; the paint on the brackets was thicker than anywhere else, and had not dried. On looking at your

feet, which I did when I spoke to you, I remarked that the leather on the inner side of both your boots was slightly chafed.”

“If you intend to betray me—” and Kenneth thrust his hand in his bosom. He had a pistol there.

“That I am *here* proves that I intend nothing of the kind. If you will listen patiently, you shall learn why *I* acknowledge the crime, why *I* would bear the penalty. I believe there are vast, intense sensations from which we are shut out by the fear of a certain kind of death. This pleasure, this ecstasy, this something which I have striven for all my life, is known only to the privileged few—innocent men, who, through some oversight of the law, are *hanged by the neck*. Some men are born to be hanged, some have hanging thrust upon them, and some (as I hope to do) achieve hanging. For years and years I have watched for such a chance as this. Worlds could not tempt me to divulge your guilt any more than worlds could have tempted to commit your crime. A man’s mind and heart should be at ease to enjoy, to the utmost, this delicious death. Now you may go.”

And I turned my back on him. Kenneth came to my side and placed his heavy hand on my shoulder—that red right hand which all the tears of the angels could not wash white. It made me shudder.

“I shall go far from here,” he said, hurriedly. “I can not, I *will not*, die now. They dishonored me. Mary was to have been my wife, so she would have hidden her shame! She is dead. When I meet *him* then I shall have done with life. I shall not die till then. And you?—they will not harm you, you are a maniac!”

The cell door closed on Julius Kenneth.

I bite the blood into my lips with vexation when I think what a miserable failure I made of it. Three stupid friends who had played cards with me at my room on the night of the murder proved an *alibi*. I was literally turned out of the Tombs, for I insisted on being executed. Then it was maddening to have all the papers call me “a monomaniac.” I a monomaniac! I like that! What was Pythagoras, and Newton, and Fulton, and Stephen branch?

But I kept my peace; and impenetrable mystery shrouded the murder of Mary Ware.

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### III.

Three years ago, in a broad daylight, a man was shot dead on Broadway. A hundred eyes saw the deed. I went to the man’s funeral. They buried him with military honors. So much for Lieutenant King!

The first gray light of dawn straggled through the narrow window of the cell, and drove the shadows into the farther corner, where Julius Kenneth lay sleeping. A summer morning was breaking on the city.

In cool green woods millions of birds stirred in their nests, waiting for the miracle of morning; the night-trains dashed through quiet New England towns; innumerable shop-boys took down innumerable shutters; the milkmen shrieked; the clocks struck; doors opened and closed; the glamour of sleep was broken, and all the vast machinery of life was put in motion.

But to the man in jail it was as if these things were not.

As he lay there, slumbering in the increasing light, the carpenters in the prison-yard were raising a wooden platform, with two hideous black uprights supporting a horizontal beam, in the centre of which was a small iron pulley. The quick sound of the hammers broke in on his dreams, if he had any. He turned restlessly once or twice, and pushed the hot pillow from him. Then he opened his eyes and saw the splendid blue sky through the window.

He listened to the hammers. He knew what the sound meant. It was his last day on earth. *Vive la bagatelle!* He would have more sleep; so he closed his eyes again.

At six o'clock the jailer brought him his breakfast, and he devoured it like an animal. An hour afterward two attendants dressed him in a melancholy suit of black, and arranged his tangled hair. At ten the chaplain of the prison entered the cell.

"Would his poor friend," he said, approaching the wretch, "turn, in this last, sad hour, to Him whose mercy, like the heaven, spanned all things? Would he listen for a while to the teachings of One whose life and death were two pure prayers for mankind? Would he have, at this awful moment, such consolation as he, a humble worker in God's vineyard, could give him?"

"No: but he would have some brandy."

The unscientific beast! I could pity him—not that he was to be hanged, but because he was not in the state of mind to enjoy the ecstatic sensations which I am convinced result from strangulation. The chaplain remained with the man, and the man yawned.

The ponderous bell of the City Hall sounded a boisterous alarm of fire, and St. Paul's modestly struck eleven, as the High Sheriff, with a drawn sword in his hand, paused at the foot of the scaffold, while the prisoner, followed by the indefatigable chaplain, complacently mounted the rough deal steps which lead to—can any body tell me where? To the top of the scaffold. Quite right!



I shall not forget that insensible, stony face, as I saw it for a moment before the black cap screened it from the crowd. Why did they hide his face? I should like to have studied the convulsive workings of those features.

In the stillness of that June night they took the body away in a pine coffin and buried it somewhere. I don't know where. I have not the slightest idea where they bury that sort of man.

*Harper's Weekly* [New York, NY], April 23, 1859  
*Burlington [VT] Daily Times*, April 26, 1859

It was later published in the collection *Strange Stories of a Detective; or, Curiosities of Crime* by William Russell (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1863).