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The Marathon Mystery

A Story of Manhattan

By BURTON E. STEVENSON

Author of "The Holladay Case"

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iron?" asked Simmonds.

"As soon as he struck the blow, I think he— he threw it down. I remember hearing it fall!"

"Yes—here it is," said Godfrey triumphantly, and fished it out from under a chair which stood near the wall.

"But see, Simmonds, it's not a bar, it's a pipe."

Simmonds examined it. It was an ordinary piece of iron piping about fifteen inches in length.

"Her story seems to be straight," he said in an undertone to Godfrey.

"What do you think about it?"

"I think she's perfectly innocent of any crime," answered Godfrey, with conviction. He had his doubts as to the absolute straightness of her story, but he concluded to keep them to himself.

"Well, there's nothing more to be learned out here," remarked Simmonds, after another glance around.

"Suppose we take a look at the other room," and he led the way toward the inner door."

It was an ordinary bedroom of moderate size and with a single closet, in which a few soiled clothes were hanging. The bed had been lain upon, and evidently by a person fully dressed, for there were marks of muddy shoes upon the counterpane, fresh marks as of one who had come in during the evening's storm. An empty whisky bottle lay on a little table near the bed.

"I guess Thompson was a boozier," observed Simmonds.

"Yes," agreed Godfrey, "his face showed that pretty plainly."

"Well, the man we're after ain't in here; we'll have to search the house."

"Can't we let Miss Croydon go home? She won't run away—I'll answer for that. Besides, there's nothing against her."

Simmonds pondered a minute.

"Yes, I suppose so," he said at last. "Of course she'll have to appear at the inquest. Do you know her address?"

"Yes; 21 East Sixty-ninth street."

Simmonds jotted it down in his notebook.

"All right," he said. "You'd better take her down to her cab."

"I'll see her down to her cab. What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to quiz the janitor and then search the house. Maybe the other fellow hasn't had a chance to get away yet. I wonder what's going on out there?" he added as they returned together to the other room.

They could hear a commotion of some sort in the hall, the hum of many voices, the shuffling of many feet.

The commotion swelled to an uproar as Simmonds opened the door and closed it quickly behind him. Godfrey heard his voice raised in angry expostulation, and he chuckled grimly to himself as he turned to Miss Croydon.

He gazed at her with interest, searchingly, pondering how best to surprise her secret—at the bent head, with its crown of dark hair, shadowed by a little velvet hat; at the rounded arms, the graceful figure.

He paused yet a moment, looking at her, at the slender hands, the little ear, and he pictured to himself what her training had been, how she had been fenced away from the rough places of the world, the unpleasant things of life. Certainly she could never have committed such a crime as this or even connived at it.

Yet she had lied—deliberately and distinctly she had lied. She had told him that she had never before seen the dead man. She had told Simmonds just the opposite. Which was the truth? Doubtless the first. Her first impulse would be to speak the truth. Afterward, at leisure for a moment, she had mastered her agitation, had thought out the lie, and had uttered it with surprising calmness.

"May I see you to your cab, Miss Croydon?" he asked.

"To my cab?" she repeated, half rising. "I may go, then? I am free? You have not?"

"Betrayed you?" he finished as she stopped suddenly. "No, I don't intend to. Whether you know the man you order or not, I don't for an instant believe you killed him."

"Oh, I didn't!" she cried. "I did my best to save him. But it was done so quickly. I didn't understand until too late."

"Nevertheless," continued Godfrey evenly, "I think you're wrong in trying to protect the scoundrel who did."

The color faded suddenly from her face.

"To protect him?" she faltered.

"I'm sure you know him. You could place him in the hands of the police if you wished to do."

The door opened and a man came in—a keen faced man of middle age, who nodded to Godfrey and threw a quick, penetrating glance at his companion. Behind him the clamor burst out anew; various heads appeared in the doorway, various eager faces sought to peer into the room, but the newcomer calmly closed the door and assured himself that it was locked. He looked at Godfrey again, then expectantly at the girl.

"Miss Croydon," said Godfrey, "this

is Coroner Goldberg, whose duty it is to investigate this affair, and who may wish to ask you some questions."

"Only a few at present," began the coroner in a voice soft and deferential, as only he knew how to make it. How often, with that voice, had he led a witness on and on to his own ruin! "You were the only witness of this tragedy. I believe, Miss Croydon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you acquainted with the murderer?"

"No, sir."

"But you could identify him if the police succeed in capturing him?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"You have already given Mr. Simmonds a description of him?"

"Yes, sir; as well as I could."

"And told him the whole story?"

"Yes, sir—the whole story."

"Except one detail, I believe. You did not explain how you came to be in this room. Will you tell me that?"

"I do not think it concerns the police, sir."

"You would better let me judge of that; if it does not concern the police, I promise you it shall go no further. I persist," continued Goldberg, "because I think that perhaps the story may help us to identify this man."

"It won't," said Miss Croydon, "but I will tell you—briefly, this man claimed to have certain papers which concerned our family. We had never

seen, against the advice of my sister."

"Then your sister knew you were coming?"

"Oh, yes; and tried to dissuade me."

Goldberg nodded, still looking at her.

"That is all at present," he said. "Of course I shall have to summon you as a witness at the inquest."

She bowed without replying.

"One thing more," said Goldberg. "Did he have the papers? Did he give them to you?"

"No," she answered quickly. "He had no papers. He was lying."

"Then that is all," repeated the coroner. "You'd better see her to her cab, Mr. Godfrey," he added, with a little smile. "She'll need an escort."

She rose from her chair and dropped over her face a heavy veil which she had raised about her hat. Godfrey opened the door for her and followed her through. She shrank back from the mob which charged down upon her as soon as she appeared on the threshold, but Godfrey sprang forward quickly to her rescue. In a moment they were down the stairs and at the door of the cab.

"Miss Croydon," he said, leaning toward her as she took her seat, "do me the favor to deny yourself to all callers tonight."

"I shall," she agreed instantly.

CHAPTER III.

GODFREY glanced at his watch. It was after 9 o'clock. The rain had almost ceased, but the wind was still high. He turned back to the building and found the janitor sitting just inside the door. He had endured the ordeal of inquisition by police and reporters and was rather limp.

After all, Godfrey told himself, he had as yet only half the story; he must get every detail from this man, and he saw that it would be necessary to proceed delicately, for his companion's temper was evidently badly ruffled.

"Well," he began at last, "you look as though those fellows had about worn you out, Mr.—"

"Higgins is my name," said the janitor. "Simon Higgins."

"Oh, yes, I remember now."

They sat together for a moment in silence, listening to the tramp of feet in the halls overhead, the opening and closing of doors, the subdued murmur of voices. At the stair foot, beyond the elevator, they caught a glimpse now and then of a policeman pacing back and forth.

"They're searchin' th' house," observed Higgins at last, with a grimace of disdain. "I turned th' keys over t' them. Much they'll find!"

"Nobody there, eh?" It was not really a question. It seemed more a sign of polite interest on Godfrey's part.

"I ought t' know. I told 'em they wasn't nobody there. Ain't I been here all evenin' cent fer that minute I run

across th' street? Nobody in nor out, 'cept th' girl, not since 7 o'clock. That was about th' time that there Thompson come in too drunk t' stand. He'd never 'a' got home in th' world by hisself, but they was a feller with him, a-holdin' him up."

Godfrey was listening with strained attention. There were many questions he wished to ask, but he dared not interrupt.

"Well, we got him upstairs between us. An' then, when I went through his pockets, I couldn't find his key, an' I had t' come down an' git mine afore I could git his door open. We laid him on his bed an' left him there, a-snoorin' like a hog. That feller who was with him was certainly a good sort. He set down here t' talk t' me awhile—it was

rainin' so hard he couldn't go—an' he said he'd run across Thompson down at Pete Magraw's place on Sixth avenue. Thompson was treatin' everybody an' actin' like a fool generally. Then he got bad an' started t' clean out th' saloon, an' Pete was goin' t' call a cop, but this feller said he'd bring him home, an' so he did."

Higgins stopped to take breath, and Godfrey ventured to put a question.

"Did you know him?"

"No, I never seed him afore."

"What sort of a looking fellow was he?"

"A good lookin' feller, well dressed—no bum, I ken tell y' that. He was short an' heavy set, with a little black mustache that turned up at th' ends."

Godfrey's heart gave a sudden leap—so Miss Croydon had told the truth after all!

"And then what happened?" he asked. "I suppose this fellow went away?"

"Oh, yes; he stayed here talkin' quite awhile—he started t' go onct or twice, but th' rain was too bad. But about 8 o'clock he said he couldn't stay no longer, rain r' no rain, an' was jest buttonin' up his coat when a cab drove up an' a woman got out. She had a thick veil on so's I couldn't see her face, but from her style I judged she was a high flier. She come up t' me an' she says, 'I want t' go t' apartment fourteen—Mr. Thompson.' 'Madam,' says I, 'I wouldn't if I was you.' 'Why,' she asked, quick like, 'ain't he there?' 'He's there,' says I, 'but he ain't in no condition t' see a lady.' 'Never mind,' says she, 'I'll go up.' 'All right,' says I, 'I'll be back in a minute.' I added t' my friend, 'No,' he says, 'I can't wait; I must be goin' an' he started toward th' door. 'Well, good night,' I says, an' stepped into th' car an' started it."

"I showed her th' door o' fourteen, an' she knocked. I was waitin' at th' elevator, fer I knowed Thompson was too dead drunk t' hear her an' I'd have t' take her down ag'in; when blessed if th' door didn't open an' in she walked. 'Well, sir, I was so dumfounded I couldn't believe my own eyes! But in she went an' I come on down, tryin' t'

figger it out. It was mebbe ten minutes later that I heard a pistol shot an' I knowed in a minute what'd happened. That drunken brute had got too familiar, an' she'd put a bullet in him; though," he added reflectively, "why she'd go t' his room at all is more'n I kin see."

"Was there only one shot?" asked Godfrey.

"Only one," answered the janitor, "but it sounded like a small cannon. It didn't come from no sech little popgun as that which Mr. Simmonds picked up in th' corner. I rushed up th' stairs an' threw open th' door—"

"Wasn't it locked?"

"No; an' that's funny, too," he added, "fer I remember hearin' the lock snap after th' girl went in. Somebody must 'a' thrown it back ag'in. Mebbe th' girl did it, tryin' t' git out, an' Thompson got a-hold of her an' then she let him have it."

Godfrey nodded, with an appreciation seemingly very deep.

"That's it, no doubt," he said. "I see you're a close reasoner, Mr. Higgins."

"Why," said Higgins, with a smile of self satisfaction, "I allers have been able t' put two an' two t'gether. They's one thing, though, I can't explain. As I was rushin' up th' steps, I heard th' openin' an' shuttin' of a door."

"Ah," said Godfrey thoughtfully. "And there was no one in the hall?"

"Not a soul; not a soul in sight."

"Are you sure of that?"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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"Do me the favor to deny yourself to all callers tonight."