

The Marathon Mystery

A Story of Manhattan

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CHAPTER XXVII

THOMAS led the way through the hall and up the stairs. "Which room will you look at first, sir?" he asked.

"Let us see Mr. Tremaine's room first."

"Very well, sir," said Thomas, and opened a door and stood aside to let us pass.

There was nothing at all extraordinary about the room. It was large, well lighted, well ventilated, well furnished—just the sort of bedroom one would naturally expect to find in a luxurious country house.

Godfrey cast a glance about it; then he went to one of the windows, opened it and stepped out upon the balcony. He walked along the balcony to the end where the heavy creepers were, took a look at them and finally came back to the window.

"That's all," he said, as he stepped through into the room. "Of course I didn't expect to find anything here; our friend is much too clever to be caught napping that way. Thomas, I suppose this table is just where it was when Mr. Tremaine had the room?"

"Yes, sir."

Godfrey sat down at it, measuring the distance from it to the window.

"Lester," he said, "I wish you'd go out and come up the walk and see if you can see me sitting here."

"I ran down the stairs and did as he directed, but could catch not a glimpse of him."

"Well?" he called down, coming to the open window.

"I can't see you at all," I said.

"I thought so. Come up again."

He was sitting again at the table when I opened the door.

"Now, take a look at it, Lester," he said. "You'll see that the table is so far away from the window that it's

quite impossible for any one on the ground outside to see the person sitting at it. Yet Drysdale stated distinctly that he saw Tremaine sitting at the table writing when he came back from that mysterious walk. What would you argue from that?"

"That Tremaine had moved the table nearer to the window."

"And why should he do that?"

"To get a better light, perhaps," I ventured.

"He might have done it in the daytime, to get a better light, but at night he would get a much worse one over there by the window than here. The lights, you'll observe, hang from the center of the ceiling."

"Then he did it," I said, "in order that he might be seen from outside."

"That's it. Not only that he might be seen, but that Drysdale might see him. I wonder if this is the kind of paper he wrote on?"

"We keep a supply of it in all the guest rooms, sir," volunteered Thomas.

Godfrey took it up and looked at it. It was a plain white line of good quality, with the word "Edgemere" embossed in blue at the top. There were also on the table pens, an inkstand and two or three blotters. He turned the blotters over, but only one of them showed any sign of having been used, and the marks on it were very faint, yet they seemed to interest Godfrey. He bent over them with puzzled face. Then he got out a little magnifying glass and studied them again.

"Lester," he said, at last, "I wish you'd take a look at this," and he pushed the blotter and glass toward me. "What do you make of it?"

I gazed through the glass at the marks, but for a moment could make nothing of them. Then they resolved themselves into a string of letters marching backward, fairly distinct at one end, but fading away to nothingness at the other.

"Somebody seems to have been scribbling a lot of disconnected letters on a piece of paper," I said, at last. "I can't make out any words. The letters seem to be mostly B's and G's—yes, and here's an L."

"Thomas," said Godfrey, "will you go down and ask Mr. Delroy if he has a sample of Mr. Tremaine's handwriting, and, if so, if he will let us see it for a moment?"

Thomas went out instantly and I looked at Godfrey in surprise.

"You think those marks have some value?" I asked.

"I don't know," he answered, "but in an investigation of this kind no point is too small to be important. We've got to examine everything, weigh everything, pile up every little atom of evidence, if we expect to tip the scale in our direction. It's very probable that Tremaine never made these marks at all; even if he did, they probably have no significance. But in any event it won't do any harm to make sure; and, besides, I'd like to see a sample of his handwriting, just for its own sake—the handwriting of a man like that ought to be interesting. Ah, here is Thomas."

"Here's a letter, sir," said Thomas. Godfrey opened it and glanced at the contents.

"He's a good penman," he said; "see, Lester," and he handed me the sheet. "But it's quite a different hand from the one on the blotter—much broader and more masculine—just such a hand as one would naturally expect a man like Tremaine to write."

He explained it again for a moment, then folded it up and handed it back to Thomas.

"Perhaps Mr. Delroy will want it again," he said.

"Now, let us see Mr. Drysdale's room."

As he got up from the table I noticed that he still held the blotter in his hand, and I saw him place it carefully in an inner pocket. After all, then, he did attach some importance to it.

The room which had been occupied by Drysdale was the counterpart of Tremaine's, but it was in great disorder. An open trunk stood in the middle of the floor, with clothing strewn about it; the bed had not been made.

"We were ordered not to do anything toward setting this room to rights," explained Thomas apologetically, "till the coroner sent us word we might. He ain't sent no word yet."

It was evident that Drysdale had been packing very hastily when he was interrupted by the arrival of the officers. The clothing which was in the trunk had been crammed in carelessly—though, of course, that might have been done by the coroner after searching it.

"Drysdale evidently didn't spend much time in bed that night," observed Godfrey and indicated a pile of cigarette stubs heaped high on an ash tray on the table. "He must have had some knotty problem to wrestle with to need so many."

He walked slowly about the room, looking at everything keenly, but touching nothing. He stood gazing at the bed for a long time. Then he turned again to the table.

"Here's the diary," he said, picking up a little book which lay there. "So Heffebower didn't get it. Well, I guess I'd better see he doesn't have another chance."

He weighed it in his hand, and I could see how it tempted him. Perhaps here lay the very key which he had been seeking in vain! But in a moment he slipped it unopened into his pocket.

"A man is a fool to make promises," he observed, with a wry smile, and sat down at the table. "Hello, what's this?" he added suddenly, and, stooping, he fished from the wastebasket beside him the fragments of a cane.

It was a cane certainly of at least ordinary strength, and yet it had been broken into half a dozen pieces and buried into the basket.

Whistling softly to himself, Godfrey surveyed it a moment; then he bent over the basket and examined the remainder of its contents piece by piece. There were scraps of letters, a torn envelope, a crumpled sheet of paper—

He sprang to his feet with a cry of triumph and waved it in the air. "I've found it!" he cried, his face beaming. "I've found it, Lester!"

"Found what?" I questioned, more and more astonished, for Godfrey was usually master of his emotions.

"Ah, Lester," he continued more calmly as he smoothed it out carefully on the table, "this takes a lot of conceit out of me. Had I been really clever I'd have deduced the existence of this message long before I entered the room. As it is, it's luck—pure luck! I'm glad to win on any terms, but I'd rather win by scientific deduction. C. Auguste Dupin would have come straight upstairs, walked straight to that basket and selected unerringly this sheet of paper; he would have known that it was there, while I—well, one can only do one's best, and this point was a little too fine for me. Take a look at it."

It was a sheet of the ordinary Edgemere note paper. Across it two lines were written:

Be at the pergola at 9. If I am late wait for me.

"Well," I faltered, "well—"

"Oh, don't you see, Lester, it's the key to the whole problem? It's the light we've been looking for—with our eyes shut. And to think that instead of coming straight here for it I should have stumbled about in the dark for so long! It's the only possible explanation, and yet I didn't think of it. It was inevitable from the first, and yet I couldn't see it. It disgusts me with myself—it's what I get for being so cocked up over finding that bottle down there. Even after I saw that blotter I didn't guess it."

He had taken out a card, and as he spoke he wrote a rapid sentence on it.

"Here," he said to Thomas, "take this to Miss Croydon at once, please."

—Bring or send us your JOB WORK; we do it nicely. We do it quickly.

CHAPTER XXVIII

I WAS conscious, in a dim way, that the end was at hand, that we were about to penetrate the mystery. Indeed, I already had a vague inkling of the truth—too vague to be put into words, too obscure to be discerned clearly. I was trembling with eagerness. I endeavored to string upon a common thread the bits of evidence which had come to Godfrey so important—the bottle, the scratches on the wall, the coat rack, the broken cane, the note; but for the life of me I could see no connection between them. Yet I knew there must be or Godfrey would not now be walking up and down the room with a face so beaming, so triumphant.

"Miss Croydon will see you at once, sir," announced Thomas from the threshold, and we followed him to the farther end of the corridor, where he tapped at a door. A voice bade us enter.

She was standing by a window, looking out across the waters of the bay, and she did not turn for an instant—not, indeed, until Godfrey had closed the door carefully behind him. I have seen few women more regal, more magnificent, yet there was about her—in her face, in the droop of her figure—such an air of utter misery, of exquisite suffering, that, after the first moment, one forgot to admire her in the desire to be of service.

"You wished to see me?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Yes, Miss Croydon," replied Godfrey, more gently perhaps than he had intended to speak. "This is Mr. Lester," he added, "who has been engaged to defend Mr. Drysdale."

She acknowledged the introduction with the faintest of bows.

"I hope Mr. Lester will be successful," she said, in the coldest of tones. One would have thought her a mere chance acquaintance of my client.

I saw Godfrey looking at her with searching eyes, and his face hardened.

"We mean to be successful," he said curtly. "You may as well ask us to sit down, Miss Croydon, because our business here will take some time, and I am sure it will tire you to stand."

"Really," she began; then her eyes met his, burning with meaning. "Oh, very well," she said faintly and sank into the chair nearest her.

"Now, Miss Croydon," Godfrey continued in the same coldly imperative tone, "I intend to speak to you bluntly and directly. We have beaten about the bush too long already. I see that you are not inclined to deal frankly with us. You have not been frank with us from the first. You have sought to blind us, to throw us off the track. Therefore I shall tell you what we already know in order that you may realize how useless it is for you to try to hold us off. We're going to see that the guilty man is punished, not for this crime alone, but also for that other one at the Marathon, of which you were the only witness. You shall not be permitted to keep him from justice a day longer. In the first place, we know that this man Tremaine inveigled your sister into a schoolgirl elopement and marriage; she was rescued from him; she thought him dead; she married Delroy; came to New York; Tremaine followed her and attempted the extortion of blackmail; you met him at the Marathon; while you were talking Thompson interfered before the officers arrived. You did not know Thompson, but you saw Simmons and me take out his pocketbook. You heard me read a line or two from one of a packet of clippings we found there, and while we were in the bedroom you took those clippings from the body and hid them under the edge of the carpet."

She breathed a long sigh and sat erect again.

"Ah," she said, with a little smile, "I was beginning to fear you, all that seemed so supernatural. But now I see where your information came from."

"It is correct, then?" asked Godfrey.

"Yes," she answered. "Yes."

Godfrey leaned back in his chair, with a long sigh of relief. He had won the battle.

"Miss Croydon," he said, "I'm going to reward you for your frankness by telling you something which I had intended to keep secret awhile longer, just to punish you. Your sister never was the wife of Tremaine and has nothing whatever to fear from him. He has no hold on her at all. She has never been anybody's wife but Mr. Delroy's."

She stared at him with widely opened eyes, her hands clasped above her heart.

"Oh, if it were really so!" she cried. "If it were really so!"

"It is so," repeated Godfrey, and took a little yellow envelope from his pocket. "Read this." And he unfolded a sheet of paper and held it toward her.

She took it with trembling hand and read the message written upon it, but seemingly without understanding it.

"It is a cable," he explained, "from the Record's correspondent at Dieppe. Your pardon, Lester," he added, with a fleeting smile; "I forgot to show it to you on the trip out. Please read it aloud, Miss Croydon."

"The widow of Victor Charente," she read in a low voice, "died here Feb. 21, 1901. Had never married again."

She looked up, her brows still knitted.

"Well?" she asked.

"Well," said Godfrey, "Victor Charente is the real name of Tremaine. He married that girl many years before he met your sister. She was his legal wife. Your sister never was. She was never the legal wife of any one except Richard Delroy."

She understood now, and the glad tears burst forth unrestrained. Indeed, she made no effort to restrain them, but only rocked back and forth, pressing the message against her heart.

"Thank God!" she sobbed. "Thank God!" And then she started up from her chair. "I must tell her," she said, "at once. If you knew how she has suffered! She must not be left in that cruel position an instant longer."

"Very well," agreed Godfrey. "We will wait for you here."

She disappeared through a door at the farther end of the room, but in a moment came softly back again.

"She is asleep," she said. "I will



Your sister never was the wife of Tremaine.

wait until she wakes. What a joyful awakening it will be! And she sat down again. She wiped away her tears, but her eyes were still shining. Godfrey gazed at her with a face full of emotion.

"Now, Miss Croydon," he began, "you've told me that my theory's correct, but there are three or four points I should like you to help me clear up, if you will."

"I shall be glad to if I can," she answered, and smiled at him, her eyes brimming again. "You've lifted such a load from me, Mr. Godfrey, that I'd do almost anything to show my gratitude."

Why, looking at her, did his face change—soften, harden? Why did his hands tremble so? It was over in an instant; yet I had caught a glimpse of his secret. I understood.

"It was nothing," he said. "I was glad to do it. I was deeply pleased when that message came this morning."

"You've been kinder to me than I deserve," she said; and I more than half agreed with her. How, with his eyes before her, could she fail to understand? Perhaps she did understand. I was never sure.

"In the first place, then, Miss Croydon," he went on, in a different tone, "how did your father succeed in getting your sister away from Tremaine?"

"They had gone to Paris," she answered, "and in two or three days Edith had awakened from her dream. She saw something in the man which terrified her, and she wrote a pitiful letter to father, and they went over to Paris at once and finally succeeded in buying the girl back. Father paid him 50,000 francs, I believe. Perhaps it was the fact that he knew he was not really Edith's husband, that he himself had committed a crime, which made him take it. He agreed to leave the country, and in the following December he wrote father that in a ship called the Centaur. He said he intended to buy a plantation at Martinique and make that his home. In February we learned that the Centaur had been lost, with all on board. After eight years it seemed certain that he was dead, and Edith felt free to marry again."

"Was Mr. Delroy informed of this early indiscretion?"

"Certainly, and forgave it, as any good man would."

"Pardon me for asking the question, Miss Croydon; but it was necessary. When was it you first learned that Tremaine was still alive?"

"One night nearly two months ago Edith brought his letter to me. She was wild, distracted, ready to kill herself—that is what I have feared every day since. She loves Mr. Delroy, Mr. Godfrey, and yet she believed herself the wife of another man. He demanded that she meet him in that apartment house. I knew she could not bear such a meeting, and yet he must be seen. I offered to go in her stead. I had some wild idea of appealing to his better nature, of persuading him—"

She stopped, silenced by her own emotion.

"That, of course, would not have altered the fact that your sister was his wife," observed Godfrey.

"No. That was the terrible part of it; nothing could alter that. There must, of course, be a separation, but we thought we would solve that problem after we had settled the other. So I went. He opened the door for me. I had never seen him, and I confess his appearance and manner were not at all what I expected. He did not look in the least like a scoundrel, or did he act like one. He listened to me with attention and seeming respect. He even appeared moved. Oh, I know now what a hypocrite he was. I know that he was laughing at me; that he was planning something deeper, more villainous. I had brought \$1,200 with me—all that we could gather together at that moment—and I pressed it upon him, urging him to take it and go away and we would send him more. He pretended to refuse the money, to protest that that was not in the least what he wanted, but I compelled him to take it. And just as I was hoping that I had prevailed with him the door of the bedroom opened and a horrible drunken man staggered out.

"Well, Vic," he cried, "so this is the gal, is it? She's a likely piece. I wouldn't give her up, Vic, no, not for ten thousand—"

"Go back to bed, you drunken brute!" cried Tremaine, and took him roughly by the arm.

"But the other shook him off."

"Don't lay your hands on me, Vic!" he cried. "Don't dare lay your hands on me!"

"I saw a very devil spring into Tremaine's face. He looked about him for some weapon and picked up a piece of pipe that lay beside the radiator. Thompson saw the action and lurched heavily toward him.

"Goin' to use that on me, Vic? he asked. 'You'd better try it.' And he

made a pass at Tremaine and tried to snatch the pipe away. 'You try it on me, I'll blow your game like I did once before down at Sydney.'

"He struck at Tremaine again, but the latter sprang away and in an instant had brought the pipe down upon his head. Thompson fell like a log; then that fiendish look flashed into Tremaine's face for a second time; he snatched out a revolver; I dimly understood what was coming—indeed, I had my own revolver in my hand, and I fired at him, but my shot went wild, while his—"

She stopped and buried her face in her hands, overcome for the moment by the terrible spectacle her words had evoked.

She controlled herself by an effort, took down her hands—

"He put his pistol away and stepped over very close to me."

"Miss Croydon," he said rapidly, "it will be well for you to say you did not know me. I have committed no crime; he was the aggressor; what I did was done in self defense. One thing more—your sister has nothing to fear from me; I shall never bother her again; I promise you that."

"He was gone in an instant, and then the janitor came and you and the detectives—"

Godfrey nodded thoughtfully.

"That supplies the motive, Lester," he said. "I have felt that my explanation of the crime was not quite adequate. But it was not only desire for revenge that urged Tremaine on; it was also the knowledge that Thompson knew of his first marriage and threatened with a word to wreck his plans a second time."

"Yes," I agreed and sat silent, pondering the story.

"Why did you take the clippings, Miss Croydon?" asked Godfrey after a moment.

"From what you read of them I suspected how vitally they concerned my sister. That was a secret, I felt, which must be kept at any hazard. It was done without consideration, on the spur of the moment, or I should never have had the courage to do it at all."

"And why did you hide them under the carpet?"

"She laughed outright. The load was lifted. She was fast becoming her usual self."

"I had a wild idea that you were going to search me. I saw that loose place in the carpet the instant I arose with the clippings in my hand. Once I had put them there I had no chance at all to get them again."

Godfrey nodded.

"You tried to get them the day after the inquest, didn't you?"

"Yes; but the janitor was so afraid of me that he wouldn't even let me go upstairs."

"And there weren't any papers?"

"No; that was a lie. I saw I must invent one—that I must offer some explanation of my presence there."

"Did Tremaine keep his promise?"

"Not to bother my sister? Yes; he mentioned it again only to assure me that the past was dead—that he would never revive it."

"But how could you admit his presence in the room?"

"How could we prevent it? It was Mr. Delroy who brought him. We weren't strong enough to tell him the whole story."

"You mean you told him part of it?"

"There has been a virtual separation ever since Mr. Tremaine appeared."

Godfrey paused reflectively.

"Why were you so agitated," he continued finally, "when you were asked to identify Jimmy the Dude at the inquest?"

"Because I did identify him."

"You did?"

"Yes—as the man I had seen talking to the janitor in the lower hall. Let me explain, Mr. Godfrey. When I was asked suddenly for a description of the murderer, I was taken aback; I endeavored to think, to collect myself—and I remembered the man I had passed in the hall. Without stopping to consider—wishing only to disarm suspicion—I described him roughly as I remembered him. When I was confronted with him at the inquest next day, I instantly realized what I had done—I had implicated an innocent man—and it turned me a little faint for a moment."

"Had you ever met him?"

"Met him?" she repeated in surprise. "Why, no."

"But he seemed to know you."

"Oh—and she laughed again—"I had a letter from him next day, a letter filled with gratitude, touching even. It seems that my sister and I had helped his family—a mother and sister—without knowing it while he was away—"

"At King Sing. He's the most expert burglar in New York, but he's got his good points too. Witness his taking Thompson home that night."

"Yes; he wanted to do anything he could to help me. I intend to look up Jimmy."

"Do. If you can reform him the New York police force will be mighty grateful."

"I'm going to try," she said. And I rather envied Jimmy.

Godfrey leaned back in his chair, with a sigh of satisfaction.

"I think that clears up that affair pretty well," he said, "and that brings us to the second and more serious one. And first, Miss Croydon, I want to ask you if you think it was just the right thing to let them march Jack Drysdale off to prison when a single word from you might have saved him?"

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"FROM me?" repeated Miss Croydon blankly. "A single word from me? I do not understand you, Mr. Godfrey."

"Do you mean to say," demanded Godfrey with emphasis, "that you do not know where Mr. Drysdale was Monday night; that you were not yourself the cause of his leaving the house?"

She was staring at him with distended eyes.

"I can't!" she repeated hoarsely after a moment. "Mr. Godfrey, I will tell you something of which I had determined never to speak. When he left the house that evening he deliberately broke an appointment he had made with me—an appointment he had prayed for. He had happened to hear Mr.

Tremaine make certain proposals to me. In short—she hesitated and then proceeded steadily with raised head—"I may as well tell the whole truth. Since the evening of that first tragedy Mr. Tremaine has been persecuting me with his attentions. At the time I thought them merely insulting; I see now that he may have been in earnest."

"I don't in the least doubt that he was in earnest," agreed Godfrey. "Mr. Drysdale, then, overheard him ask you to be his wife?"

"Yes; just that."

"But he also heard you refuse, no doubt?"

"Oh, yes," she said, smiling and coloring a little, "he heard me refuse in the most positive way, but my refusal provoked Mr. Tremaine to an intemperance of language which Mr. Drysdale resented and which he thought I should have resented too. He demanded that I explain to him Mr. Tremaine's position, and I promised to do so on the very evening he—he stayed away from the house. His staying away offended me deeply."

Godfrey had listened with intent eyes and a quick nod from time to time.

"There is only one point lacking," he said. "Did Tremaine know of your intention to tell Drysdale the story?"

"Yes; he even charged me with that intention."

"Ah, he had listened at a keyhole probably."

"He said that Mr. Drysdale himself had told him. I might add, Mr. Godfrey, that I met Mr. Drysdale and the officers in the hall that morning as they were going away, and I implored him to tell them where he had been. He answered me with such insult and contempt that I thought he must be mad."

"And no wonder! You were playing at cross purposes. I presume, then, that it was not you who wrote Mr. Drysdale this note?" and he handed her the crumpled sheet of paper he had fished from Drysdale's wastebasket.

She took it with trembling hand; already beginning to suspect, perhaps, what it contained.

"Be at the pergola at 9," she read. "If I am late, wait for me, G. I certainly never wrote any such note as that, Mr. Godfrey. Where did it come from?"

"Is it in your handwriting?"

"Why, yes," she answered, looking at it more closely. "That is, it is something like. Oh! I begin to see!" she cried, and I saw her seized with a sudden convulsive shuddering.

"Yes," said Godfrey, "it was a pretty plot. This note lured him from the house and kept him away until the storm came up and he was forced to abandon the hope of meeting you. He concluded that you were playing with him. When he returned to the house he found that you had spent the evening with Tremaine. Afterward, in his room, he did a number of violent and foolish things. Finally he determined to go away. He started to pack his belongings—and then, in the hall, you, as he thought,