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THE
CARBUNCLE
CLUE





THE
CARBUNCLE CLUE

A MYSTERY

BY
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HUME

AUTHOR OF
"THE MYSTERY OF A HANSON CAR," "MONSIEUR JUDAS," "THE
WHITE PRIOR," ETC.



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CHAPTER I.

THE MURDER IN GARRY STREET.

IN the month of July, '94, at 6.40, the Plymouth express was slowing down for Swindon Junction. Here the majority of the passengers alighted for a few minutes to stretch their legs, to refresh themselves, and to purchase the country editions of the London evening papers. Octavius Fanks, detective, bought the "Globe," "Westminster," and "Star," hastily swallowed a glass of wine at the buffet, and returned to the first-class smoking compartment which he had been fortunate enough to secure at Bristol. Here he settled himself in a corner to learn what events had taken place since his absence from the Metropolis. The perusal of the three newspapers afforded him ample food for reflection; he guessed that they would, from the harrowing shriek of Smiths' newsboys.

"'Orrid murder in Garry Street; mysterus crime in Westminster. Hextra speshill; arrist of th' murderer. Full details an' 'igh life revilations. 'Star,' 'Hecho,' 'Westminster.' 'Ere y'are, sir. Murder!'"

As a detective, Fanks was naturally interested in

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the announcement, and when the express moved out of the station he unfolded the "Star" and settled down to read full details of the crime. The report of the latest London tragedy was set forth with sensational headlines, as follows:—

"MYSTERIOUS MURDER IN WESTMINSTER CHAMBERS.

"ARREST OF A WELL-KNOWN MAN-ABOUT-TOWN.

"REVELATIONS IN HIGH LIFE.

"At twelve o'clock last night a dead man was discovered in the chambers of Mr. Gerald Conway, Garry Street, Westminster. Mr. Conway stated that he returned from the Curtain Theatre at midnight, and entered his library to see if there were any letters for him. Here he was astonished to see a man in evening dress, seated before the escritoire apparently asleep, with his head resting on his folded arms. Mr. Conway spoke to the intruder, but receiving no reply, shook him by the shoulder. To his horror, the body rolled off the chair on to the floor. The man was dead.

"At once Mr. Conway summoned his servant, Doolan, who was then in bed, and sent him for assistance. The doctor and the police arrived simultaneously, but as the former could do nothing, life being extinct, the latter took charge of the body. In his statement to the police Mr. Conway declared that he did not know the deceased.

"He returned from the theatre quite unprepared for the presence of anyone in his library, least of all a complete stranger. The deceased is a man of

medium height, dark-haired and clean-shaven, with blue eyes, and aquiline nose. He was in evening dress, but his pockets were empty, and there are no marks on his linen or clothes likely to reveal his identity. The deceased is nameless and unknown.

"Death was caused by a wound in the back, under the left shoulder-blade; evidently inflicted by a sharp weapon such as a dagger, a stiletto, or a slender sword. No weapon could be discovered by the police in the room. Mr. Conway stated that the door of his chambers was locked, and that the electric light was full on when he entered the library. How the deceased obtained admittance is a mystery, as Mr. Conway alone has the key which, at once, opens the street door and the door of his chambers. Mr. Conway refuses further information regarding his movements on the night. The servant Doolan sleeps in a distant room off the kitchen. He is slightly deaf, and states that he retired to bed at ten o'clock, as he had received his master's permission to do so. He heard no noise, and did not leave his room until summoned by Mr. Conway: he then entered the library, to find his master greatly disturbed, standing by the dead body. Doolan also denies all knowledge of deceased.

"So far as he knew, his master had no appointment to meet anyone in the library on that night. The sole clue likely to lead to the identification of the deceased is a thin gold bangle containing a small carbuncle which encircles the left wrist. The carbuncle is graven with the figure of a weasel. The name and identity of the dead man may be established by this carbuncle clue.

"As yet the affair is wrapped in mystery, and as Mr. Conway is singularly reticent on the subject, as also is his servant Doolan, the police can gain no information likely to lead to the arrest of the murderer.

"Latest details. At twelve o'clock to-day Mr. Conway was arrested on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of the man found in his chambers in Garry Street, Westminster. Mr. Conway is a nephew of Lord Batchwin."

Fanks carefully read this highly-coloured report from beginning to end. By way of a change he took up the "Westminster Gazette," and therein found a sketch of the life of the supposed murderer.

"Mr. Gerald Ancaster Conway, who has been arrested on suspicion of being concerned in the Garry Street murder, is a nephew of Lord Batchwin, and was educated at Eton and Oxford. He is thirty years of age, and in 1890 succeeded to the Barnleigh estates in Devonshire, on the death of his cousin, Mr. Horace Bennett, who died at Lima, Peru, some four years back. Mr. Conway is engaged to Miss Lena Darrel, the daughter of Mr. Michael Darrel, the well-known philanthropist. At present he is lodged in Holloway Gaol, bail being refused. The police are very reticent over the matter, and it is impossible to discover on what grounds Mr. Conway has been arrested. We therefore forbear to make any comment on the affair, until further facts are made public at the inquest, which takes place in a few days. Mr. Conway will be brought before the magistrate during the early part of next week. The whole circumstances of the case are most extraordinary, and are paralleled in

our opinion only by those of the Jarlchester Mystery, in which the Frenchman Guinaud, commonly known as Monsieur Judas, was concerned. We sincerely trust that the charge against Mr. Conway may prove to be unfounded. This is not the first time that the police have been over-zealous in arresting the wrong man. The affair is causing the greatest excitement, particularly in Clubland, where Mr. Conway is a well-known and prominent figure."

This was all the information obtainable, as the "Globe" supplied nothing new. Having mastered the case so far as he was able from these newspaper reports, Fanks closed his eyes, leaned back in his corner, and began to meditate. The fact that Conway was an intimate friend of his own interested him nearly in the affair; but apart from this personal concern, the mysterious aspect of the matter roused his professional instincts. Then and there he determined to gain permission from the Scotland Yard authorities to investigate the case.

The mention of the Jarlchester Mystery by the "Westminster" reminded him of the difficulties with which he had to contend in unravelling that tangle: when Monsieur Judas had been his adversary. The Chinese Jar affair had also proved hard of solution; but at the first glance it seemed as though this Garry Street murder would turn out to be the most difficult of all. Locked-up chambers; the sole key in the possession of the tenant, and in such chambers a dead man unknown to that tenant: these things were puzzling in the extreme. Fanks perceived that this was one of those criminal intricacies which are com-

monly supposed to exist only in detective novels; yet which occur in real life with a frequency which would appal the ordinary Londoner.

Fate is a better contriver of plots than your most experienced novelist; but consider the material with which she has to work. Every moment of Metropolitan life offers its particular problem for solution, and the few that are unravelled are as nothing in comparison with the countless enigmas that can never be solved. London is an eternal Sphinx who proposes endless riddles for the guessing of detective *Cædipuses*, but few give the correct answers.

The general public are acquainted with Octavius Fanks, the detective, by whose keen brain the majority of criminal problems have been solved; the polite world west of Trafalgar Square is intimate with Octavius Rixton, of an excellent Derbyshire family, who passes for a mere idler. Few know that Fanks and Rixton are one and the same person; an ignorance which the detective has found of infinite service to him in his profession. Rixton knows most of the secrets of the West-end, and sometimes he makes use of them in his professional capacity; thereby finding that a dual life is not without its advantages. His reasons for leading a double existence have been already explained to the public, so that in the present instance nothing need be said; save that Fanks in his detective skin was returning from the West country, where he had brought to justice a diamond thief.

"But the case was hardly worth leaving London for," ruminated Fanks, as the train drew towards Paddington; "a stupid, easy matter that a country

policeman could have dealt with. This affair in Garry Street is a problem. I hope it will be placed in my hands for solution. But it is just as likely that they have given it to that idiot of a Crate. Well, no matter. Since the case of the Chinese Jar he has entertained considerable regard for my opinion, so I'll have little difficulty in inducing him to let me handle the matter. Poor Conway; if I were not bound by my professional reputation to take up the case, I would do so on account of my friendship for him."

Fanks was well acquainted with Gerald Conway, although the latter only knew him as Rixton. To help his friend at this crisis, Fanks resolved to reveal himself in his true colours, and to make use of his professional skill in the matter. The idea was unpalatable, as he liked to keep his two selves widely apart; but in this instance the exigencies of the case demanded the admission. Moreover, as the conduct of the matter would lie mainly in the West-end, and would probably bring him into contact with people who knew him as Rixton, it was almost a necessity that he should take it up in his real name if he wished to preserve his secret. He could pose as an amateur detective, and thus account for his connection with the matter; besides which, his friendship with Conway would sufficiently explain his active interference.

"Yes," decided Fanks, beginning to collect his parcels as the train entered Paddington Station, "as Octavius Rixton I can attend to the matter, and see people on behalf of Conway. As Fanks I can make use of the information I gain as Rixton. Only Conway need know that I am a detective, and not

even he unless I choose; but I had better tell him, as it will give him more confidence in me, and hamper my movements less."

This matter being so decided, it will be necessary in the following chapters to call the detective by his true name of Rixton. As Rixton, amateur thief-catcher, he conducts the case, and hunts down the unknown murderer of the unknown victim. Henceforth Fanks is only known east of Trafalgar Square. Octavius Rixton he is now, and Octavius Rixton he will continue till the conclusion of the case.

At Bristol he entered the train as Fanks; at Paddington he left the station as Rixton, and, hastily bestowing himself and his luggage in a hansom, he drove to his chambers in Duke Street, St. James's. As the cab rolled through the brilliantly lighted streets, Rixton heard the strident and raucous voices of the newsboys still proclaiming the latest sensation—

"Arrest of the Garry Street murderer! 'Orrid rivilashuns! Myst'rous carbun'l clew! Hextra speshull!"

CHAPTER II.

WHAT MRS. PHORNEY HEARD.

As Rixton surmised, the case had been placed in the hands of Crate, but a representation to the proper authorities soon remedied this mistake: the more so as Crate recognised that the problem was beyond his powers to solve. Since the affair of the Chinese Jar, he had ceased to be envious of his brother officer, and contented himself with the simplest matters connected with criminal escapades. As he frankly admitted to his former rival, he pitied rather than envied him his task. Indeed, he hinted that by arresting Conway, the law had penetrated the mystery and concluded the case. Rixton differed altogether from this view of the affair.

"You make yourself easy, Crate," he said, quietly, "Conway will be standing free, and innocent, in a few weeks."

"And by your instrumentality the true criminal will be in goal?"

"Oh! I don't say that: I confess the matter is beyond me at present. I can say nothing until I see

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the room wherein the murder took place, and interview the owner of that room."

"Pooh! pooh! Conway admits that he alone has the key of his chambers, so without his aid the dead man could not have entered."

"And that very admission is to my mind a proof of Conway's innocence," said Rixton drily. "If he were guilty he could not afford to make so damaging a statement."

"Oh!" remarked Crate, after a pause, "I suppose you assume that Doolan admitted this unknown person, and then murdered him? Eh, Mr. Fanks?"

"I assume nothing of the sort. Doolan would hardly be such a fool as to murder a man and afterwards remain in the house with the damaging evidence of the dead body. There is one thing, Crate, which I wish to mention. Just now you called me 'Fanks.' In conducting this case I desire to be known as an amateur detective, Rixton."

"Your real name! Why?"

"Because my work will lie mostly in the West-end, where I cannot conceal my identity. I do not wish it to be known that I am connected with Scotland Yard. Therefore, when you call on me at Duke Street, or should you meet me while investigating this matter, you can address me as Rixton, and assume the lordly manner you affected towards me before I solved the mystery of the Chinese Jar."

"I thought you had forgiven me for that," said Crate, reddening.

"So I have: you now admit that I can do something. But as regards my change of name——"

"I understand, Mr. Rixton: your secret will be kept by me. But how do you intend to begin, and when?"

"At Garry Street, this instant," said Rixton, putting on his hat. "I have now secured the necessary authority to enable me to act. Good-bye, Crate. Should you wish to know how I succeed, look me up at Duke Street any evening between six and eight. I may require your assistance."

"All right, sir," replied Crate, and looked reverentially after the retiring form of his late enemy. He now idolized Fanks, and was as ready to praise, as formerly he had been to condemn him. "Oh, he'll find out the truth," said Crate, returning to his work; "he can see through a brick wall, he can. He'll start with the carbuncle clue and end with the assassin. But who the deuce can he be? I say this Mr. Conway."

A great many people, arguing the case on the same grounds, said the same thing; but Rixton was of the contrary opinion. He knew Gerald Conway too well to think him capable of so dastardly a crime; dastardly in the extreme, as the victim, having been stabbed in the back, must have been taken unawares. It was also impossible that Doolan should be guilty, seeing that he remained in the chambers to run the risk of being arrested red-handed. Yet these two men alone had access to the rooms, and alone could have admitted the third. Rixton owned himself puzzled by this feature of the case, yet he held firmly to the innocence of Conway and his servant. As to the identity of the guilty person, he could not even form an opinion.

"I must find out the name of the dead man," thought

Rixton, as he walked to Westminster; "learn his past career, and discover if it was to anybody's interest that he should be removed. I may then find out why he came to Conway's chambers, and who was with him during the visit. Firstly, I shall examine the room; secondly, interview Conway in Holloway Goal; then I shall be in a better position to form a theory."

He was not sanguine of the result as he turned into Garry Street, and found himself at Conway's chambers.

On entering the general hall of the house, Rixton found his further progress barred by an excited female, armed with a dustpan and a feather brush. An apron was pinned round her grey hair, another kept clean her dress of brown wincey, and over her ample shoulders she had draped a small shawl of Rob Roy tartan. This stout but not uncomely person was Mrs. Phorney, who looked after the chambers, and who had her dwelling in the basement, whence she had that moment emerged with a view to clean out and tidy up the ground-floor rooms. An odour of gin permeated the atmosphere as she advanced, showing that the late catastrophe had demanded frequent applications to Geneva.

"No, sir," said Mrs. Phorney, blocking the stairs, "you don't go up to get goose-flesh by looking at them rooms if I can help it. There's a chamber of 'orrors at Madame Toosod's if you wants your 'air to rise and your flesh to creep; but I beg as you won't go lowering the rents 'ere by putting gashley things in the noospapers."

"You don't recognise me, Mrs. Phorney?"

The woman bent forward, and then sat down on the lowest step of the stairs, where she flung her apron over her head, and rocked herself to and fro.

"I'm that upset, Mr. Rixtons, as I never knowed you," she moaned, from behind the apron. "Excuse me sitting, sir, but my blessed nerves are packthreads at this minute. Ah! well, I knew what was coming, for last week, when after a supper of sheep's trotters, I dreamed of snakeses; for snakeses," declared Mrs. Phorney, "is blood and merders."

Rixton was too well acquainted with Mrs. Phorney's eccentricities to object to her behaviour in the present instance. Moreover, knowing her to be garrulous and curious, he thought it possible that he might extract from her some fact likely to throw light on the mystery. To this end he pretended a friendly anxiety to learn the details, and refreshed Mrs. Phorney's memory with the fee of half-a-crown; all this purely as a sympathizing acquaintance.

"Thank you, sir," said the lady, rising to accept the gift. "It ain't the first as I've had from you, or from 'im, sir—pore, dear, young innocent as is now in a dunging a-clanking of 'is fetters."

"Then you think that Mr. Conway is innocent?"

"As an unborn hinfant, Mr. Rixtons. I 'eared the Habbey chimes, and then him a-climbing the stairs arter twelve."

"Oh, you did! Were you up at that time?"

"No, sir, I were in bed, and 'ad bin since ten; but I was wakeful with a bad cold as tickled my throat, and prevented sleepin'. Oh, I 'eard 'im."

"How do you know it was Mr. Conway?"

"I 'eard his step on these stonesses, sir," said Mrs. Phorney, tapping the pavement of the hall. "I knows all their steps, Mr. Rixtons. The ground-floor's a 'evy gent as walks like a' earthquake: the first-floorer being gouty tap-taps with 'is stick: but Mr. Conway's a light-'earted gent as runs up the stairs like a young 'un of eighteen. The third-floorer——"

"Never mind the third floor," said Rixton, interrupting the flow of Mrs. Phorney's speech. "You are sure that Mr. Conway came in at midnight?"

"With a 'op an' a skip an' a jump, Mr. Rixtons."

"Did you hear anyone else come in?"

Mrs. Phorney looked queerly at Rixton, and bit the top of her feather duster. "Well, I did 'ear a a strange step, sir—I 'eard two of 'em," she said, gravely.

"Indeed! At what time?"

"Both between eleving an' twelve, Mr. Rixtons."

"Didn't it occur to you to go upstairs and see who these strangers were?"

"Why, no, it didn't," said Mrs. Phorney, rubbing her nose; "both Mr. Conway an' the second-floorer 'ave people to see 'em. It wasn't none of my business to be pokin' and pryin', let alone a wish not to make my cold wuss. From a warm bed to a cold passige, Mr. Rixtons," concluded Mrs. Phorney, shaking her head, "you wouldn't do it yourself, sir."

"If you were in bed, how could you distinguish the steps?"

"My room's imejetly under the 'all door, sir: I can 'ear the oller eking of anyone who comes in."

"You thought, then, that some of the tenants had brought in friends?"

"I did, sir; an' why not?—youth is youth, 'owever you puts it. No one could 'ave got in without keyeses; and the four gentlemen who live 'ere 'ave a key each."

"A key for the street door, and one for their chambers, I suppose?"

"No, Mr. Rixtons, it's a Yale lock on that street door, sir, and the key as opens it opens the rooms of each; but," added Mrs. Phorney, with emphasis, "though the keyeses fits the front door, all keyeses don't fit all locks in the 'ouse. Only Mr. Conway could get into 'is rooms!"

"I know the Yale key," said Rixton, taking note of this information; "by the way, were the other tenants in on that night?"

"Only Mr. Madrazo, sir! the foreign gent as lives on the third floor. The ground is a M.P., and was at the 'Ouse; the first-floorer were visitin' 'is aunt in Briting, an' the second-floorer is, as you know, sir, pore dear Mr. Conway."

"Did Mr. Madrazo hear anything?"

"No, sir! 'E told the perlice as he didn't."

"Did you hear anything, Mrs. Phorney?" asked Rixton, looking sharply at her. "A scream, a struggle——"

"Not a scream, not a struggle," protested Mrs. Phorney. "I should 'ave bin out 'anging on to the nearest perliceman if I'd 'eard the merdering. But, lor bless you, Mr. Rixtons, my ears ain't mikerscopes. I can 'ear who comes in imejetly above my 'ead, but I can't 'ear up to the second floor."