

# THE MARATHON MYSTERY

A STORY OF MANHATTAN.

BY BURTON E. STEVENSON

Author of "The Holladay Case," "Cadets of Gascony," Etc.

"Not a thing except some loose smoking tobacco. There's one thing about the clothing though—have you noticed? It's all summer clothing; see these linen trousers, now?"

Godfrey nodded, with drawn brows.

"What's this?" he asked suddenly, holding up a swart object, shaped like a clam-shell, and halving in the same way along the sharp edge.

"I don't know. A curlo picked up at sea somewhere, perhaps. I have a theory that Thompson was a sailor."

"Why?"

"Well, the bag in the first place—only a sailor would carry his clothes that way. Then, put your head down in it, and, under the tobacco, you'll smell the salt."

Godfrey sniffed and nodded again.

"Let's take a look at the inside of Mr. Thompson's curlo," he said, and inserted the blade.

A twist and the sides unclosed. Simmonds sprang back with a sharp cry of surprise as he saw what lay within, and even Godfrey's heart gave a sudden leap.

For there, coiled thrice upon itself, lay the copper, with venomous, triangular head.

Then, in an instant, Godfrey smiled. "It's not alive," he said. "Don't you see it's some marvelous kind of nut?"

Simmonds approached cautiously and took another look.

"A nut?" he repeated. "A nut? Well? That beats me!"

And well it might, for in every detail the form was perfect. Godfrey looked at it musically.

"This may give us a clew," he said. "I shouldn't imagine a nut like this grows in many parts of the world. Though, of course, a sailor might pick it up anywhere—from another sailor, in a slop-shop, even here in New York, perhaps."

He closed the shell together again and placed it in the bag, stuffing the rest of the clothing in after it.

"Thompson had no very exalted idea of cleanliness," he remarked. "His clothing needs a visit to the laundry. And this is all?"

"Yes—he'd rented his furniture from a store down the street. He had to pay his rent in advance because he had so little baggage. That receipt's the only thing that's got his name on it—no, yes, there's a letter tattooed on his left arm, but it's not a T—it's a J."

"Which goes to show that his name wasn't Thompson. I think you're right, Simmonds, in putting him down as a sailor. I thought so last night—in fact, I've already got two men making a tour of the docks trying to find someone who knew him."

"Have you?" said Simmonds, smiling. "That's like you. There's another curious thing, though, about the clothing he had on."

"What is that?"

"Some of it's marked with one initial, some with another. Not one piece is marked with his."

"That is queer," commented Godfrey; "but it isn't half so queer as another thing. Why should a sailor, a drunkard, without a decent suit of clothes, rent an apartment that costs him forty dollars a month, when he could get a room for a dollar a week down on the Bowery, his natural stamping ground?"

Simmonds nodded helplessly.

"That's so," he said.

"Unless," added Godfrey, "he thought he had to have some such place to work from. He could hardly have asked Miss Croydon to meet him in a Bowery lodging house."

"No," agreed Simmonds; "but he needn't have blown in forty dollars, either. He could 'a' got a nice room most anywhere uptown for five a week."

A tap at the door interrupted him.

"Come in," he called.

The door opened and the coroner's clerk entered.

"Mr. Goldberg sent the exhibits back to you," he said, holding out a parcel to Simmonds.

Simmonds opened it and took out a pocket-book, a pipe, a knife, and some silver money.

"All right," he said, and signed a receipt.

Godfrey waited until the door closed, then he rose and came over to Simmonds's side.

"There's something here that might help us," he said, picking up the pocket-book. "Those clippings—why, they're not here!"

Simmonds smiled drily.

"That's another thing I wanted to tell you. The clippings have been removed."

"Removed? By whom?"

"That's a question. They were removed some time between the moment we looked at them and the moment the coroner took charge."

Godfrey stared at him with startled eyes.

"You remember," Simmonds continued, "that after we looked at the pocket-book, I put it back in Thompson's pocket."

"Yes—I saw you do that."

"Then they went into the bedroom, and had a look around, leaving the body alone—"

"With Miss Croydon," said Godfrey, completing the sentence.

Precisely. Goldberg arrived a minute or two later. Then he and I searched the body again. When he opened the pocket-book there was nothing in it except the receipt."

Godfrey sat down again in his chair. The inference was obvious, irresistible. The clippings had been removed by Miss Croydon—they were the papers she had risked so much to get possession of. Simmonds and he had the secret under their hands and had missed it! It was not a pleasant reflection.

His thoughts flew back to Miss Croydon, and he found himself again admiring her. To have taken the clippings demanded a degree of bravery, of self control, amounting almost to callousness. It seemed incredible that she should have dared approach the body, open the coat.

Then he remembered her half-fainting attitude when he had returned from the inner room. At the time, he had thought the collapse natural enough. Now, it took on a new meaning.

"There's another thing," continued Simmonds, after a moment. "Here's the piece of pipe we found on the floor. Do you know where it came from?"

"No—I was going to look that up."

"It came from the radiator. The connections were defective and a plumber was replacing them. This is a piece of pipe he had removed and left lying behind the radiator. He remembers it distinctly. Do you recall the position of the radiator?"

"Yes: it's against the wall opposite the bedroom door."

"Exactly. Then the person coming from that door must have crossed the

room to get it. More than that, he must have hunted for it or known it was there, because it was in the shadow behind the radiator. It couldn't be seen unless one looked for it—I've tried it."

Godfrey paused to consider.

"Did you give these points to Goldberg?" he asked.

"No, I didn't think it would help matters any; besides, I didn't want to put Miss Croydon on her guard."

"Of course—though all this doesn't actually implicate her."

"No; but it shows she knows more than she's told us," said Simmonds doggedly. "I don't think she's been square with us."

Godfrey did not permit any trace of his inward perturbation to appear on his countenance; nevertheless he was seriously disturbed. He had hoped that no one but himself would suspect Miss Croydon's lack of frankness. He felt a certain irritation against her—she should have been more careful; she should have foreseen that the clippings would be traced to her. She was relying too much on his forbearance.

Godfrey did not permit any trace of his countenance; nevertheless he was seriously disturbed. He had hoped that no one but himself would suspect Miss Croydon's lack of frankness. He felt a certain irritation against her—she should have been more careful; she should have foreseen that the clippings would be traced to her. She was relying too much on his forbearance.

"Well, the bag in the first place—only a sailor would carry his clothes that way. Then, put your head down in it, and, under the tobacco, you'll smell the salt."

Godfrey sniffed and nodded again.

"Let's take a look at the inside of Mr. Thompson's curlo," he said, and inserted the blade.

A twist and the sides unclosed. Simmonds sprang back with a sharp cry of surprise as he saw what lay within, and even Godfrey's heart gave a sudden leap.

For there, coiled thrice upon itself, lay the copper, with venomous, triangular head.

Then, in an instant, Godfrey smiled. "It's not alive," he said. "Don't you see it's some marvelous kind of nut?"

Simmonds approached cautiously and took another look.

"A nut?" he repeated. "A nut? Well? That beats me!"

And well it might, for in every detail the form was perfect. Godfrey looked at it musically.

"This may give us a clew," he said. "I shouldn't imagine a nut like this grows in many parts of the world. Though, of course, a sailor might pick it up anywhere—from another sailor, in a slop-shop, even here in New York, perhaps."

He closed the shell together again and placed it in the bag, stuffing the rest of the clothing in after it.

"Thompson had no very exalted idea of cleanliness," he remarked. "His clothing needs a visit to the laundry. And this is all?"

"Yes—he'd rented his furniture from a store down the street. He had to pay his rent in advance because he had so little baggage. That receipt's the only

thing that's got his name on it—no, yes, there's a letter tattooed on his left arm, but it's not a T—it's a J."

"Which goes to show that his name wasn't Thompson. I think you're right, Simmonds, in putting him down as a sailor. I thought so last night—in fact, I've already got two men making a tour of the docks trying to find someone who knew him."

"Have you?" said Simmonds, smiling. "That's like you. There's another curious thing, though, about the clothing he had on."

"What is that?"

"Some of it's marked with one initial, some with another. Not one piece is marked with his."

"That is queer," commented Godfrey; "but it isn't half so queer as another thing. Why should a sailor, a drunkard, without a decent suit of clothes, rent an apartment that costs him forty dollars a month, when he could get a room for a dollar a week down on the Bowery, his natural stamping ground?"

Simmonds nodded helplessly.

"That's so," he said.

"Unless," added Godfrey, "he thought he had to have some such place to work from. He could hardly have asked Miss Croydon to meet him in a Bowery lodging house."

"No," agreed Simmonds; "but he

needn't have blown in forty dollars, either. He could 'a' got a nice room most anywhere uptown for five a week."

A tap at the door interrupted him.

"Come in," he called.

The door opened and the coroner's clerk entered.

"Mr. Goldberg sent the exhibits back to you," he said, holding out a parcel to Simmonds.

Simmonds opened it and took out a pocket-book, a pipe, a knife, and some silver money.

"All right," he said, and signed a receipt.

Godfrey waited until the door closed, then he rose and came over to Simmonds's side.

"There's something here that might help us," he said, picking up the pocket-book. "Those clippings—why, they're not here!"

Simmonds smiled drily.

"That's another thing I wanted to tell you. The clippings have been removed."

"Removed? By whom?"

"That's a question. They were removed some time between the moment we looked at them and the moment the coroner took charge."

Godfrey stared at him with startled eyes.

"You remember," Simmonds continued, "that after we looked at the pocket-book, I put it back in Thompson's pocket."

"Yes—I saw you do that."

"Then they went into the bedroom, and had a look around, leaving the body alone—"

"With Miss Croydon," said Godfrey, completing the sentence.

Precisely. Goldberg arrived a minute or two later. Then he and I searched the body again. When he opened the pocket-book there was nothing in it except the receipt."

Godfrey sat down again in his chair. The inference was obvious, irresistible. The clippings had been removed by Miss Croydon—they were the papers she had risked so much to get possession of. Simmonds and he had the secret under their hands and had missed it! It was not a pleasant reflection.

His thoughts flew back to Miss Croydon, and he found himself again admiring her. To have taken the clippings demanded a degree of bravery, of self control, amounting almost to callousness. It seemed incredible that she should have dared approach the body, open the coat.

Then he remembered her half-fainting attitude when he had returned from the inner room. At the time, he had thought the collapse natural enough. Now, it took on a new meaning.

"There's another thing," continued Simmonds, after a moment. "Here's the piece of pipe we found on the floor. Do you know where it came from?"

"No—I was going to look that up."

"It came from the radiator. The connections were defective and a plumber was replacing them. This is a piece of pipe he had removed and left lying behind the radiator. He remembers it distinctly. Do you recall the position of the radiator?"

"Yes: it's against the wall opposite the bedroom door."

"Exactly. Then the person coming from that door must have crossed the

grim smile, "is mighty forbearing in a yellow journalist!"

What further tests there were to be of his forbearance not even he suspected!

## CHAPTER I

### A CHANGE OF LODGINGS.

As a matter of course, the affair at the Marathon created a great public sensation. The papers overflowed with details, theories, suggestions to the police, letters from interested readers. Many of the latter were quite certain that they could quickly solve the mystery, but unfortunately private business demanded their whole attention. Meanwhile the stupidity of the detective force was disgraceful to the city; let the guilty parties be arrested without further delay, whatever their position. It was remarkable how few accepted the simple theory which Simmonds had propounded: all of them chose to discern something deeper, more intricate, more mysterious, and Miss Croydon incurred much oblique reference. This, for the most part, took the form of scathing, even hysterical polemics against the degeneration of American society, the greatest peril threatening the health and prosperity of the republic. At it was with Rome, so would it be with America; luxury, sensuality, a moral code growing ever more lax, could have only one result.

No doubt these vigorous correspondents enjoyed themselves and imagined that society quivered in consternation under the castigation. Certainly they formed a source of exquisite amusement to the readers of the papers.

It has long been a habit of mine, when any particularly abstruse crime, in my opinion, is before the public, to pin my faith to the Record. Its other features I do not admire, but I knew that Jim Godfrey was its expert in crime, and even since my encounter with him in the Holliday case, I have entertained the liveliest admiration of his acumen and audacity. If a mystery was possible of solution, I believed that he would solve it, so it was to the Record I turned now, and read carefully every word he wrote about the tragedy.

It is difficult for me to explain, even to myself, the interest with which I followed the case. I suppose most have a fondness, more or less unrealized, for the unique and mysterious, and we all of us revolt some times against the commonplaces of every day existence. We had been having a protracted siege of unusually hard work at the office, and I was a little run down in consequence. I felt I needed some distraction, and found it in "The Traveller's Suite."

"Delaney—I want all the information obtainable concerning the history of the Croydon family, to which Mrs. Richard Droy and Grace Croydon belong."

This was the reply:

"Gustave Croydon, notary and money lender, No. 17 Rue d'Antin, Paris, received a letter from a young daughter about 1878 to Beckenham, just south of London, England. Why he removed from France not known. Rue d'Antin has been completely rebuilt within last thirty years and only person there now who remembers Croydon is an old notary named Fabre, who has an office at the corner of Rue St. Augustin. He has vague memory that Croydon left France to avoid criminal prosecution of some sort."

"Croydon bought small country place near Beckenham and lived there quietly in semi-retirement. Fortune apparently not