

# The MYSTERY of MARY

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delicate tinting of her face, the dainty line of cheek and chin and ear, the sweep of her dark lashes, and the ripple of her brown hair, as he tried to converse easily with her, as an old friend might.

At length the Judge turned to the girl and said: "Miss Remington, you remind me strongly of a young woman who was in my office this afternoon."

The delicate color flickered out of the girl's face entirely, leaving even her lips white, but she lifted her dark eyes bravely to the kindly blue ones, and with sweet dignity baffled the questioned recognition in his look.

"Yes, you are so much like her that I would think you were—her sister perhaps, if it were not for the name," Judge Blackwell went on. "She was a most interesting and beautiful young lady." The old gentleman bestowed upon the girl a look that was like a benediction. "Excuse me for speaking of it, but her dress was something soft and beautiful, like



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yours, and seemed to suit her face. I was deeply interested in her, although until this afternoon she was a stranger. She came to me for a small matter of business, and after it was attended to, and before she received the papers, she disappeared! She had removed her hat and gloves, as she was obliged to wait some time for certain matters to be looked up, and these she left behind her. The hat le covered with long, handsome plumes of the color of rich cream in coffee."

Young Dunham glanced down at the cloth of the girl's gown, and was startled to find the same rich creamy coffee tint in its silky folds; yet she did not show by so much as a flicker of an eyelash that she was passing under the keenest inspection.

"Why should she want to disappear?" The question was asked coolly and with as much interest as a stranger would be likely to show.

"I cannot imagine," said the old man speculatively. "She apparently had health and happiness, if one may judge from her appearance, and she came to me of her own free will on a matter of business. Immediately after her disappearance, two well-dressed men entered my office and inquired for her. One had an intellectual head, but looked hard and cruel; the other was very handsome—and disagreeable. When he could not find the young lady, he laid claim to her hat, but I had it locked away. How could I know that man was her friend or her relative? I intend to keep that hat until the young woman herself claims it. I have not had anything happen that has so upset me in years."

"You don't think any harm has come to her?" questioned the girl.

"I cannot think what harm could, and yet—it is very strange. She was about the age of my dear daughter when she died, and I cannot get her out of her mind. When you first appeared in the doorway you gave me quite a start. I thought you were she. If I can find any trace of her, I mean to investigate this matter. I have a feeling that that girl needs a friend."

"I am sure she would be very happy to have a friend like you," said the girl, and there was something in the eyes that were raised to his that made the Judge's heart glow with admiration.

"Thank you," said he warmly. "That is most kind of you. But perhaps she has found a better friend by this time. I hope so."

"Or one as kind," she suggested in a low voice.

The conversation then became general, and the girl did not look up for several seconds; but the young man on her right, who had not missed a word of the previous tete-a-tete, could not give attention to the story Mrs. Blackwell was telling, for pondering what he had heard.

The ladies now left the table, and though this was the time that Dunham had counted upon for an acquaintance with the great judge who might hold a future career in his power, he could not but wish that he might follow them to the other room. He felt entire confidence in his new friend's ability to play her part to the end, but he wanted to watch her, to study her and understand her, if perchance he might solve the mystery that was ever growing more intense about her.

As she left the room his eyes followed her. His hostess, in passing behind his chair, had whispered:

"I don't wonder you feel so about her. She is lovely. But please don't

be grudge her to us for a few minutes. I promise you that you shall have your innings afterwards."

Then, without any warning and utterly against his will, this young man of much experience and self-control blushed furiously, and was glad enough when the door closed behind Mrs. Bowman.

Miss Remington walked into the drawing room with a steady step, but with a rapidly beating heart. Her real ordeal had now come. She cast about in her mind for subjects of conversation which should forestall unsafe topics, and intuitively sought the protection of the Judge's wife. But immediately she saw her hostess making straight for the little Chippendale chair beside her.

"My dear, it is too lovely," she began. "So opportune! Do tell me how long you have known Tryon?"

The girl caught her breath and gathered her wits together. She looked up shyly into the pleasant curious eyes of Mrs. Bowman, and a faint gleam of mischief came into her face.

"Why—" Her hesitation seemed only natural, and Mrs. Bowman decided that there must be something very special between these two. "Why, not so very long, Mrs. Bowman—not as long as you have known him." She finished with a smile which Mrs. Bowman decided was charming.

"Oh, you sly child!" she exclaimed, playfully tapping the round cheek with her fan. "Did you meet him when he was abroad this summer?"

"Oh, no, indeed!" said the girl, laughing now in spite of herself. "Oh, no; it was after his return."

"Then it must have been in the Adirondacks," went on the determined interlocutor. "Were you at—?" But the girl interrupted her. She could not afford to discuss the Adirondacks, and the sight of the grand piano across the room had given her an idea.

"Mr. Dunham told me that you would like me to play something for you, as your musician friend has failed you. I shall be very glad to, if it will help you any. What do you care for? Something serious or something gay? Are you fond of Chopin, or Beethoven, or something more modern?"

Scentsing a possible musical prodigy, and desiring most earnestly to give her guests a treat, Mrs. Bowman exclaimed in enthusiasm:

"Oh, how lovely of you! I hardly dared to ask, as Tryon was uncertain whether you would be willing. Suppose you give us something serious now, and later, when the men come in, we'll have the gay music. Make your own choice, though I'm very fond of Chopin, of course."

Without another word, the girl moved quietly over to the piano and took her seat. For just a moment her fingers wandered carelessly over the keys, as if they were old friends and she were having an understanding with them, then she began a Chopin Nocturne. Her touch was firm and velvety, and she brought out a bell-like tone from the instrument that made the little company of women realize that the player was mistress of her art. Her graceful fingers and lovely head, with its simple ripples and waves of hair, were more noticeable than ever as she sat there, controlling the exquisite harmonies. Even Mrs. Blackwell stopped fanning and looked interested. Then she whispered to Mrs. Bowman: "A very sweet young girl. That's a pretty piece she's playing." Mrs. Blackwell was sweet and commonplace and old-fashioned.

Mrs. Parker Bowman sat up with a pink glow in her cheeks and a light in her eyes. She began to plan how she might keep this acquisition and exploit her among her friends. It was her delight to bring out new features in her entertainments.

"We shall simply keep you playing until you drop from weariness," she announced ecstatically, when the last wailing, sobbing, soothing chord had died away; and the other ladies murmured, "How delightful!" and whispered their approval.

The girl smiled and rippled into a Chopin Valse, under cover of which those who cared to could talk in low tones. Afterwards the musician dashed into the brilliant movement of a Beethoven Sonata.

It was just as she was beginning Rubinstein's exquisite tone portrait, Kamenhol-Ostrow, that the gentlemen came in.

Tryon Dunham had had his much desired talk with the famous judge, but it had not been about law.

They had been drawn together by mutual consent, each discovering that the other was watching the young stranger as she left the dining room. "She is charming," said the old man, smiling into the face of the younger. "Is she an intimate friend?"

"I—I hope so," stammered Dunham.

"That is, I should like to have her consider me so."

"Ah!" said the old man, looking deep into the other's eyes with a kindly smile, as if he were recalling pleasant experiences of his own. "You are a fortunate fellow. I hope you may succeed in making her think so. Do you know, she interests me more than most young women, and in some way I cannot disconnect her with an occurrence which happened in my office this afternoon."

The young man showed a deep interest in the matter, and the judge told the story again, this time more in detail.

They drew a little apart from the rest of the men. The host, who had been warned by his wife to give young Dunham an opportunity to talk with the judge, saw that her plans were succeeding admirably.

When the music began in the other room the judge paused a moment to listen, and then went on with his

"There is a freight elevator just opposite that left door of my office, and somehow I cannot but think it had something to do with the girl's disappearance, although the door was closed and the elevator was down on the cellar floor all the time, as nearly as I can find out."

The young man asked eager questions, feeling in his heart that the story might in some way explain the mystery of the young woman in the other room.

"Suppose you stop in the office tomorrow," said the judge. "Perhaps you'll get a glimpse of her, and then gear me out in the statement that she's like your friend. By the way, who is making such exquisite music? Suppose we go and investigate. Mr. Bowman, will you excuse us if we follow the ladies? We are anxious to hear the music at closer range."

The other man rose and followed.

The girl did not pause or look up as they came in, but played on, while the company listened with the most rapt and wondering look. She was playing with an empressment which would not fail to command attention.

Tryon Dunham, standing just behind the judge, was transfixed with amazement. That this delicate girl could bring forth such an entrancing volume of sound from the instrument was a great surprise. That she was so exquisite an artist filled him with a kind of intoxicating elation—it was as though she belonged to him.

At last she played Liszt's brilliant Hungarian Rhapsody, her slender hands taking the tremendous chords and octave runs with a precision and rapidity that seemed inspired. The final crash came in a shower of liquid jewels of sound, and then she turned to look at him, her one friend in that company of strangers.

He could see that she had been playing under a heavy strain. Her face looked weary and flushed, and her eyes were brilliant with feverish excitement. Those eyes seemed to be pleading with him now to set her free from the kindly scrutiny of these good-hearted, curious strangers. They gathered about her in delight, pouring their questions and praises upon her.

"Where did you study? With some great master, I am sure. Tell us all about yourself. We are dying to know, and will sit at your feet with great delight while you discourse."

Tryon Dunham interrupted these disquieting questions, by drawing his watch from his pocket with apparent hasty remembrance, and giving a well feigned exclamation of dismay.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Bowman; it is too bad to interrupt this delightful evening," he apologized; "but I'm afraid if Miss Remington feels that she must take the next train, we shall have to make all possible speed. Miss Remington, can you get your wraps on in three minutes? Our carriage is probably at the door now."

With a look of relief, yet keeping up her part of dismay over the lateness of the hour, the girl sprang to her feet, and hurried away to get her wraps, in spite of her protesting hostess. Mrs. Bowman was held at bay with sweet expressions of gratitude for the pleasant entertainment. The great black picture hat was settled becomingly on the small head, the black cloak thrown over her gown, and the gloves fitted on hurriedly to hide the fact that they were too large.

"And whom did you say you studied with?" asked the keen hostess, determined to be able to tell how great a guest she had harbored for the evening.

"Oh, is Mr. Dunham calling me, Mrs. Bowman? You will excuse me for hurrying off, won't you? And it has been so lovely of you to ask me—perfectly delightful to find friends this way when I was a stranger."

She hurried toward the stairway and down the broad steps, and the hostess had no choice but to follow her.

The other guests crowded out into the hall to bid them good-by and to tell

her how much they had enjoyed the music. Mrs. Blackwell insisted upon kissing the smooth cheek of the young musician, and whispered in her ear: "You play very nicely, my dear. I should like to hear you again some time." The kindness in her tone almost brought a rush of tears to the eyes of the weary, anxious girl.

CHAPTER III.

Dunham hurried her off amid the good-bys of the company, and in a moment more they were shut into the semi-darkness of the four-wheeler and whirled from the too hospitable door.

As soon as the door was shut, the girl began to tremble.

"Oh, we ought not to have done that!" she exclaimed with a shiver of recollection. "They were so very kind. It was dreadful to impose upon them. But—you were not to blame. It was my fault. It was very kind of you."

"We did not impose upon them!" he exclaimed peremptorily. "You are my friend, and that was all that was claimed. For the rest, you have certainly made good. Your wonderful music! How I wish I might hear more of it some time!"

The carriage paused to let a trolley pass, and a strong arc-light beat in upon the two. A passing stranger

peered curiously at them, and the girl shrank back in fear. It was momentary, but the minds of the two were brought back to the immediate necessities of the occasion.

"Now, what may I do for you?" asked Dunham in a quiet, business-like tone, as if it were his privilege and right to do all that was to be done. "Have you thought where you would like to go?"

"I have not been able to do much thinking. It required all my wits to act with the present. But I know that I must not be any further trouble to you. You have done more already than anyone could expect. If you can have the carriage stop in some quiet, out-of-the-way street where I shall not be noticed, I will get out and relieve you. If I hadn't been so frightened at first, I should have had more sense than to burden you this way. I hope some day I shall be able to repay your kindness, though I fear it is too great ever to repay."

"Please don't talk in that way," said he protestingly. "It has been a pleasure to do the little that I have done, and you have more than repaid it by the delight you have given me and my friends. I could not think of leaving you until you are out of your trouble, and if you will only give me a little hint of how to help, I will do my utmost for you. Are you quite sure you were followed? Don't you think you could trust me enough to tell me a little more about the matter?"

She shuddered visibly.

"Forgive me," he murmured. "I see it distresses you. Of course it is unpleasant to confide in an utter stranger. I will not ask you to tell me I will try to station and get you a ticket to somewhere. Have you any preference? You can trust me not to tell anyone where you have gone, can you not?" There was a kind rebuke in his tone, and her eyes, as she lifted them to his face, were full of tears.

"Oh, I do trust you!" she cried, distressed. "You must not think that but—you do not understand."

Then she added suddenly: "But I cannot buy a ticket. I have no money with me, and I—"

"Don't think of that for an instant. I will gladly supply your need. A little loan should not distress you."

"But I do not know when I shall be able to repay it," she faltered, "unless—she hastily drew off her glove and slipped a glittering ring from her finger—"unless you will let this pay for it. I do not like to trouble you so but the stone is worth a good deal."

"Indeed," he protested, "I couldn't think of taking your ring. Let me do this. It is such a small thing. I shall never miss it. Let it rest until you are out of your trouble, at least."

"Please!" she insisted, holding out the ring. "I shall get right out of this carriage unless you do."

"But perhaps some one gave you the ring, and you are attached to it."

"My father," she answered briefly, "and he would want me to use it this way." She pressed the ring into his hand almost impatiently.

"I will keep it until you want it again," he said kindly.

"You need not do that, for I shall not claim it," she declared. "You are at liberty to sell it. I know it is worth a good deal."

"I shall certainly keep it until I am sure you do not want it yourself," he repeated. "Now let us talk about this journey of yours. We are almost at the station. Have you any preference as to where you go? Have you friends to whom you could go?"

She shook her head.

"There are trains to New York every hour almost."

"Oh, no!" she gasped in a frightened tone.

"And to Washington often."

"I should rather not go to Washington," she breathed again.

"Pittsburgh, Chicago?" he hazarded. "Chicago will do," she asserted with relief. Then the carriage stopped before the great station ablaze with light and throbbing with life.

He hurried her through the station and up to the ladies' waiting room, where he found a quiet corner and a large rocking-chair, in which he placed her so that she might look out of the great window upon the panorama of the evening street, and yet be thoroughly screened from all intruding glances by the big leather and brass screen of the "ladies' bootblack."

He was gone fifteen minutes, during which the girl sat quietly in her chair, yet alert, every nerve strained. At any moment the mass of faces she was watching might reveal one whom she dreaded to see, or a detective might place his hand upon her shoulder with a quiet "Come with me."

When Dunham came back, the nervous start she gave showed him how tense and anxious had been her mind. He studied her lovely face under the great hat, and noted the dark shadows beneath her eyes. He felt that he must do something to relieve her. It was unbearable to him that this young girl should be adrift, friendless, and apparently a victim to some terrible fear.

Drawing up a chair beside her, he began talking about her ticket.

"You must remember I was utterly at your mercy," she smiled sadly. "I simply had to let you help me."

"I should be glad to pay double for the pleasure you have given me in allowing me to help you," he said. "Just at that moment a boy in a blue

uniform planted a sole-leather suitcase at his feet, and exclaimed: "Here you are, Mr. Dunham. Had a fierce time findin' you. Thought you said you would be by the elevator door."

"So I did," confessed the young man. "I didn't think you had time to get down yet. Well, you found me anyhow, Harkness."

The boy took the silver given him, touched his hat, and sauntered off.

"You see," explained Dunham, "it wasn't exactly the thing for you to be traveling without a bit of baggage. I thought it might help them to track you if you really were being followed. So I took the liberty of phoning over to the chamberlain and telling the boy to bring down the suitcase that I left there yesterday. I don't exactly know what's in it. I had the man pack it and send it down to me, thinking I might stay all night at the club. Then I went home, after all, and forgot to take it along. It probably hasn't anything very appropriate for a lady's costume, but I'll see that it's changed."

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