

## CHAPTER LII - THE DEAD MAN'S PHOTOGRAPH

"HE is quite dead," said the doctor, with one finger on the man's pulse and another lifting his eyelid. "He is dead. I did not look for so speedy an end. It is not half an hour since I left him breathing peacefully. Did he show signs of consciousness?"

"No, sir; I found him dead."

"This morning he was cheerful. It is not unusual in these complaints. I have observed it in many cases of my own experience. On the last morning of life, at the very moment when Death is standing on the threshold with uplifted dart, the patient is cheerful and even joyous: he is more hopeful than he has felt for many months: he thinks--nay, he is sure--that he is recovering: he says he shall be up and about before long: he has not felt so strong since the beginning of his illness. Then Death strikes him, and he falls." He made this remark in a most impressive manner.

"Nothing remains," he said, "but to certify the cause of death and to satisfy the proper forms and authorities. I charge myself with this duty. The unfortunate young man belonged to a highly distinguished family. I will communicate with his friends and forward his papers. One last office I can do for him. For the sake of his family, nurse, I will take a last photograph of him as he lies upon his death-bed." Lord Harry stood in the doorway, listening with an aching and a fearful heart. He dared not enter the chamber. It was the Chamber of Death. What was his own part in calling the Destroying Angel who is at the beck and summons of every man--even the meanest? Call him and he comes. Order him to strike--and he obeys. But under penalties.

The doctor's prophecy, then, had come true. But in what way and by what agency? The man was dead. What was his own share in the man's death? He knew when the Dane was brought into the house that he was brought there to die. As the man did not die, but began to recover fast, he had seen in the doctor's face that the man would have to die. He had heard the doctor prophesy out of his medical knowledge that the man would surely die; and then, after the nurse had been sent away because her patient required her services no longer, he had seen the doctor give the medicine which burned the patient's throat. What was that medicine? Not only had it burned his throat, but it caused him to fall into a deep sleep, in which his heart ceased to beat and his blood ceased to flow.

He turned away and walked out of the cottage. For an hour he walked along the road. Then he stopped and walked back. Ropes drew him; he could no longer keep away. He felt as if something must have happened. Possibly he would find the doctor arrested and the police waiting for himself, to be charged as an accomplice or a principal.

He found no such thing. The doctor was in the salon, with letters and official forms before him. He looked up cheerfully.

"My English friend," he said, "the unexpected end of this young Irish gentleman is a very melancholy affair. I have ascertained the name of the family solicitors and have written to them. I have also written to his brother as the head of the house. I find also, by examination of his papers, that his life is insured--the amount is not stated, but I have communicated the fact of the death. The authorities--they are, very properly, careful in such matters--have received the necessary notices and forms: to-morrow, all legal forms having been gone through, we bury the deceased."

"So soon?"

"So soon? In these cases of advanced pulmonary disease the sooner the better. The French custom of speedy interment may be defended as more wholesome than our own. On the other hand, I admit that it has its weak points. Cremation is, perhaps, the best and only method of removing the dead which is open to no objections except one. I mean, of course, the chance that the deceased may have met with his death by means of poison. But such cases are rare, and, in most instances, would be detected by the medical man in attendance before or at the time of death. I think we need not---My dear friend, you look ill. Are you upset by such a simple thing as the death of a sick man? Let me prescribe for you. A glass of brandy neat. So," he went into the salle 'a manger and returned with his medicine. "Take that. Now let us talk." The doctor continued his conversation in a cheerfully scientific strain, never alluding to the conspiracy or to the consequences which might follow. He told hospital stories bearing on deaths sudden and unexpected; some of them he treated in a jocular vein. The dead man in the next room was a Case: he knew of many similar and equally interesting Cases. When one has arrived at looking upon a dead man as a Case, there is little fear of the ordinary human weakness which makes us tremble in the awful presence of death.

Presently steps were heard outside. The doctor rose and left the room--but returned in a few minutes.

"The croque-morts have come," he said. "They are with the nurse engaged upon their business. It seems revolting to the outside world. To them it is nothing but the daily routine of work. By-the-way, I took a photograph of his lordship in the presence of the nurse. Unfortunately--but look at it----"

"It is the face of the dead man"--Lord Harry turned away. "I don't want to see it. I cannot bear to see it. You forget--I was actually present when--"

"Not when he died. Come, don't be a fool. What I was going to say was this: The face is no longer in the least like you. Nobody who ever saw you once even would believe that this is your face. The creature--he has given us an unconscionable quantity of trouble--was a little like you when he first came. I was wrong in supposing that this likeness was permanent. Now he is dead, he is not in the least like you. I ought to have remembered that the resemblance would fade away and disappear in death. Come and look at him."

"No, no."

"Weakness! Death restores to every man his individuality. No two men are like in death, though they may be like in life. Well. It comes to this. We are going to bury Lord Harry Norland to-morrow, and we must have a photograph of him as he lay on his deathbed."

"Well?"

"Well, my friend, go upstairs to your own room, and I will follow with the camera."

In a quarter of an hour he was holding the glass against his sleeve.

"Admirable!" he said. "The cheek a little sunken--that was the effect of the chalk and the adjustment of the shadows--the eyes closed, the face white, the hands composed. It is admirable! Who says that we cannot make the sun tell lies?"

As soon as he could get a print of the portrait, he gave it to Lord Harry.

"There," he said, "we shall get a better print to-morrow. This is the first copy."

He had mounted it on a frame of card, and had written under it the name

once borne by the dead man, with the date of his death. The picture seemed indeed that of a dead man. Lord Harry shuddered.

"There," he said, "everything else has been of no use to us--the presence of the sick man--the suspicions of the nurse--his death--even his death--has been of no use to us. We might have been spared the memory--the awful memory--of this death!"

"You forget, my English friend, that a dead body was necessary for us. We had to bury somebody. Why not the man Oxbye?"