The Case of Lady Broadstone

A THRILLING STORY OF LOVE, MONEY AND INTRIGUE.

by

Arthur Marchmont

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Dorrison, in dire need of money, goes to Broadstone and finds his cousin in the same fix. He conceives the idea of getting rid of Eva's brother, Jack, whose money will go to Eva.

"Cast-iron John" Petherly, a multi-millionaire, forces his daughter, Eva, to marry Lord Broadstone, exiling her lover, Don Stuart. Lord Broadstone had been married in America under an alias, and left his wife for dead, having tried to poison her. His cousin, Gilbert Dorrison, heir to the title, discovers she is living. Meanwhile, she has a son, and has inherited wealth. She goes to England to search for her husband. Dorrison, who is on the steamer, tries to marry her for her money, but she knows his intention and cleverly humiliates him.

Sadie, the first wife, discovers her husband is Lord Broadstone. Under the name of Margaret Hutchinson she gets a position as Eva's maid.

Jack, while visiting Eva, goes sailing with Dorrison. Sadie, through a field-glass, sees the boat capsize.

Jack was brought in dead. Sadie takes from his wrist a silk cord. Eva is ill from the shock. She sees Don at the funeral.

Sadie finds a book on poisons lying open in the library, and later finds arsenic in some candy her husband gave Eva. She keeps careful watch over Eva, being afraid of Dorison's intentions.

"Enough to make it hot for you. She hates you; and when she gets hold of the fact of that first marriage, you may be on it, she'll put you in the dock. She's converted me, anyway. I'm going to travel the safe and easy path of letting Eva learn the facts as to her position through a legal channel. I'm leaving to-night. I can catch the mail. I suppose I can have a trap to the station?"

"Do you mean she has frightened you away like that?"

"That's about the size of it, Bertram; and it will be your turn next." He had recovered much of his usual manner now, and picking up a time-table, turned over the pages coolly. "Of course, the mail can be stopped at Culham on signal and save me a cold ten-mile drive into Westchester," and he rang the bell. "Tell them about the trap, will you?"

"You don't really mean to go?"

"Never meant anything more seriously in my life."

"Tell Manton to get the brougham ready," said Broadstone to the servant who answered the bell. "Mr. Dorrison is going to London and will catch the mail at Culham. What time do you want it, Gilbert?"

"As soon as she's ready. The train passes just after eleven and we have to give ten minutes' notice. It's past ten now."

"Tell Manton at once;" and the servant hurried out. "By Jove, this sudden flitting startles me more than anything else, Gilbert. If you're scared away like this, what is there behind for me? What shall I do?"

"You'd better make a bolt of it, Bertram. If I were you I should get all I could out of Eva before she hears the truth, and go for a tour in America. As all that this devil of a woman, Hutchinson, wants is to separate you two so that she can handle all the golden eggs herself. By the way she knows enough to make it dangerous for you to have that syringe and the rest of it in the house. I'll take 'em with me if you like and pitch them out of the window on the way up to town. I shan't bother about my luggage as time's so short. Robertson can pack it and you send it on afterwards. I'll just go and get my hand-bag."

"But I want to talk to you, man. I say, don't do anything about letting Eva know until I've seen you. It mayn't be necessary after all, you know."

"You'll have to be devilish careful with that she-devil on the warpath. But I can't stop to talk now. Drive to Culham with me—we can talk on the way."

"All right. I'll go and get those things."

They went upstairs together, Dorrison lamenting pretty loudly the nuisance of a night journey to London. He went first to Lord Broadstone's room—which adjoined Eva's—and seeing Robertson there, spoke again of his hurry to catch the train and sent the valet to pack the few things on his dressing table into his smallest hand-bag.

Broadstone then gave him the small packet which was to be thrown from the carriage window, and this he thrust into an inner pocket of his coat.

On the way to the station, Broadstone did most of the talking—urging reasons after reason why nothing should be done for the present to let Eva know the truth. But Dorrison was so silent and absorbed that at length even Broadstone noticed his abstraction.

"Glad that woman must have frightened you, Gilbert. I've never seen you so upset before."

"I have ceased even to think of her. I shall be glad to get back to town. I was only weighing what you said; I won't do anything in a hurry, and I'll wait until I hear from you."

"Oh, you'll soon hear something."

"I've no doubt of that. Let's hope it will be good news."

"Don't see much chance. It was ill-luck that brought that woman across your path; not much good news about her."

"Oh, I don't know. It may be for the best, after all. We may have cause yet to be thankful she showed her claws in time."

"Here's the station. Shall I wait?"

"Just as you like—yes, you may as well."

They went in and gave the necessary order, and Dorrison spoke to the sleepy station-master casually about the train, asked what time he would reach London, whether the train was likely to be full, and other trifling matters.

The two men walked up and down until the train arrived; and the instant it reached the platform, before it had come to a standstill, Dorrison jumped into an empty first-class compartment.

"Tell 'em it's all right, Bertram," he said as he threw his bag on to the rack, laid his hat on the seat, and settled himself into a corner. "They hate having the mail kept. Write me soon;" and he drew up the window.

Broadstone spoke to the station-master, who signalled the guard. The latter had not even to leave his van. A flash of the lantern, a whistle from the engine, and as the train started Broadstone saw Dorrison sitting comfortably in his corner.

But the first jerk of the engine was scarcely felt before he was up again; and seizing his hat and bag, he took a railway key from his pocket, unlocked the door on the opposite side of the carriage, swung out into the darkness, and on long enough to lock the door, and dropped into the footway, where he lay down until the rest of the heavy coaches had lumbered past him.

Then with stealthy caution having looked in all directions to make sure that no one was about to see him, he crept across the line, climbed the fence, and hurried away through the night in the direction of Broadstone Towers.

"A clear and clean alibi at this end," he thought, "and no one can know what time I reach my chambers, thank Heaven."

Sadie had gone back to Eva very confident as the result of her interview with Dorrison. She had him now tight-bound in her power. In the face of the charge which she could now prove to the hilt if need were, he would never dare to open his lips about anything. And the plan she had formed was thus certain of success.

Broadstone would be glad enough to hold his tongue. Self-interest would keep him from giving any trouble. Now that the two men would be separated, the "camp sponge" was too paltry a coward to be feared—to be even taken into account, indeed. She had good cause to be more than satisfied, therefore, that she had been caught in the act of listening.

Eva was awake and asked her where she had been, and the two were speaking together when they heard the brougham.

"What can that be?" exclaimed Eva. "What's the time, dear?"

"Half-past ten—a little over. A carriage has driven away." Eva rang the bell and asked the servant what it was.

"Mr. Dorrison has been called away to London suddenly, my lady, and my lord has driven with him to Culham," was the reply.

"I wish he were never coming back again, Margaret," said Eva, when the servant had left the room.

"He may not be back, before we leave at any rate."

"Called away suddenly," said Margaret to herself, when she had bidden Eva good-night and was in her own room. "Have I frightened him so thoroughly? Or is there something behind?"

She turned the questions over and over in her mind, together with many others which they suggested. Was he the kind of man to be scared in this way? Instantaneous flight like this indicated a condition of mind bordering on panic. Was he a man to give way to panic? She found that hard to believe.

What reasons were there to send him flying off like this? He might have gone in order to concoct some other plan now that this one had failed; but why that same night? What could have passed between him and Broadstone after she had left, to cause him to take this step? She had told him to leave that night, it was true. But was he so cowed that he had obeyed her to the letter?

She held his life in her hands, and while those cords remained in her possession, he would be in momentary dread that she would make use of them. Was it impossible that he would make no attempt to get them back from her?

While she was thinking she heard the carriage return, and from the balcony she was able to see that only Lord Broadstone alighted from it. She watched him get out, speak a word to the coachman, and walk into the house; and then the brougham was driven round to the stables. She kept her eyes upon it until it was out of sight in the shrubbery which marked the approach to the stables from the drive.

"He is not in that, so he must have gone," she murmured to herself as she returned to her room. Then she gave a start. Her own act in watching to make sure that Dorrison was not in the carriage suggested a thought. Assuming that the start to the station was no more than a blind, and that he meant to return to the Towers secretly, where could he leave the train?

She had a time-table, and she looked up the train. The mail stopped at Culham on signal, and then again, at Westchester. It was timed to reach there at 11:20. Westchester was only ten miles—a little over an hour's drive and from two to three hours' walk. And that he would run the risk of hiring any sort of conveyance was out of the question.

Still, there was the bare possibility that he might make the attempt, and she would be prepared. She could not persuade herself that such a man would not make at least one desperate effort to regain possession of the evidence so deadly and dangerous as that which she had forced from him.

Sadie had meant to keep her night-watch in any case, and these thoughts and her genuine fear of Dorrison's cunning and courage would redouble her vigilance. She would act on the assumption that some sort of attempt would be made.

What would he do? If he had had the means at hand, when she held him at bay in the room below, he would have killed her. She knew that. She had read it in his face as clearly as though printed in bold type. If she gave him the chance that night he would do it—to regain those cords.

She, not Eva, was now the object of attack, and she laid her plans accordingly.

She lit a night-light and placed it so that the faint gleams would be thrown on the bed below the pillow, as if the inmate of the room did not like to be in darkness, but objected to the light on her face.

Next she got into the bed and tumbled the clothes about. After such a trying experience as that interview downstairs, any woman might be supposed to be a somewhat restless sleeper. Then after the most careful consideration, she made up a dummy figure with some clothes, and placed it between the sheets, altering it with a deft touch here and another there, until she was satisfied.

That done, she filled the sleeves of her nightdress and arranged them in a natural posture—one doubled up so that the arm was in the light and the wrist just beyond the circle, the other straying carelessly over the pillow.

The head gave her the most difficulty. But she had a braid of false hair, and, loosening it, she let some of it fall down within the circle of light and arranged the rest in a cluster over the spot where the face was supposed to be.

She did all the work with the most scrupulous care, and was well-satisfied with the result. The counterfeit was well enough made to deceive anyone in the excited state of mind such an enterprise as she anticipated would provoke.

Lastly, she arranged her own place of concealment—a screen at the foot of the bed. From here she commanded a view of the whole room, as well as of the window which opened from the balcony, while close to her hand was the switch of the electric light.

She was still wearing the black dress which she had adopted for her secret movements about the house, and now she covered her head with a hood which was so made that in a moment she could cover all her features, except her eyes.

She sat as still almost as a statue behind the screen, her revolver on her lap, listening intently for the least sound. She was not in the least afraid. She had naturally very stout nerves, and her life in Western America, and afterwards in Mexico, had rendered her quite cool in the presence of danger.

She knew that if her guess was right and Dorrison had planned to return to get that dangerous evidence, she might have to fight for her life. If he had meant merely to steal the two cords, he would not have gone to the trouble of that elaborate advertisement of his departure from the Towers. He wished to establish the proof of his absence should anything occur that night.

Much more than theft was contemplated.

And then, suddenly, the full purport of his secret return flashed upon her. He might have a double purpose. The proof that she had bought both poison and the means of administering it at Gregory's would be clear enough, if she were dead; and if both men swore that she was the first wife—as she had overheard Dorrison planning—the presumption would be that she had bought it to murder Eva.

His visit, therefore, threatened them both. If he succeeded in killing her, he meant to kill Eva. It would thus be an open inference that Sadie had murdered Eva and then committed suicide. Not a breath of suspicion would be wafted in his direction.

The consummate cunning of the scheme was worthy of the man; but if the need arose, he should pay for it with his life. If she had to use her weapon in defence of herself or Eva, she would not hesitate to take his life.

Instinctively her fingers tightened on the revolver, and, as she did so, she heard a sound—as of a boot grating on a stray pebble—on the balcony.

She rose and pushed back her chair silently, and stood staring through two holes she had made in the screen—ears and eyes strained and every nerve at full tension.

There was a long pause, then a slight sound, and a man's head and shoulders appeared at the window.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE DEAD OF NIGHT

The window which opened from the balcony into Sadie's room was an old-fashioned one, consisting of two large sashes, each having a number of comparatively small panes. Sadie had left the top sash open and drawn the blind up to the top as if to admit the air more freely.

This was all purposely done to make the entrance into the room easy. Except at need, she did not wish Eva to be disturbed, and for this reason the door of communication, near to which stood the head of the bed, was nearly closed.

The man on the balcony remained perfectly still for some moments, peering into the room. Then a glance showed him that the window was open, and he stooped to raise the lower sash.

Inch by inch, stealthily and almost noiselessly, he worked, pausing every time the window creaked, and only proceeding when he had satisfied himself that the sound had not been heard and no alarm caused. The task occupied some minutes, and when it was completed and he crouched to enter the room, Sadie rustled her dress and breathed the heavy sigh of a sleeper.

On the instant the man stopped just where he crouched, and a silence like the stillness of death followed. Then with another and fainter sigh, she began to breathe regularly, letting the sound die away gradually into silence again.

The trick was successful, and a few moments later he began to move slowly across the floor toward the bed, creeping on hands and knees.

When two or three feet from the bed he stopped, took something from his pocket, stole noiselessly into the circle of dim light cast by the night-light, and examined it.

Sadie saw it plainly. It was a hypodermic syringe. And for that instant she saw his face. It was Gilbert Dorrison, surely enough.

The pause was not more than a few seconds, half a minute at most; and then he crept to the side of the bed. She could hear his breathing now, and she was conscious of a weird curiosity as to how he would proceed with his grim task.

He had made no attempt to search for the cords. The reason was obvious. If he could silence Sadie, they were of no account. Even if he did not secure them, they were useless as evidence without her testimony. He deemed it safer to waste no time in any search, but to make sure of her silence. So she read his purpose.

As she had foreseen, his object was not robbery, but murder.

How he meant to accomplish it was also plain.

He stood up by the bed, and holding the deadly little syringe in his right hand, he made ready to clasp his left hand across her mouth, and so prevent any outcry.

But the position of the sleeper's head appeared to perplex him. It was covered by the tangle of the hair, and he began gently and deftly to draw it aside.

Sadie chose that moment to act.

She moved from her hiding-place, switched on the light, and covered him with the revolver.

"A single sound or movement other than as I tell you, and I shall fire," she said in a low tone, tense and threatening.

He reeled back, and gazed at her, open-mouthed and speechless.

"I was expecting you, and, as you see, am prepared, stand back against the wall there;" and she pointed across the room.

For an instant the thought of putting all to the hazard of a struggle with her crossed his mind. His life was in her hands in any case, and her silence was all in all to him. He hesitated and set his foot for a spring.

"You'd better not," she said calmly, reading his purpose and keeping her eyes on his. "I know how to use this. Go back!" and she made a step toward him.

Her courage beat him. Had she given a sign of fear or even of hesitation, he would have made the effort, desperate though it was. But he was afraid of her, and he slunk back to the wall.

Sadie shut the door leading to Eva's room, and he heaved a sigh of relief. He understood the action. She did not wish Eva to hear what was taking place, and therefore she might be willing to let him go and say nothing of this visit.

His confidence began to return immediately, and with it the capacity to think freely once more. He recalled her former condition—that everything was to be kept secret from Eva.

On her side, Sadie, having won the victory, was somewhat at a loss what use to make of it. Her real wish was that he should leave the house and continue his journey to London; but she had already threatened to denounce him if he was found at Broadstone in the morning, and he had returned in spite of that.

"I was hesitating whether to let you go, Mr. Dorrison, but I have decided that you are too dangerous," she said firmly. "I shall rouse the house, and you must answer all the charges against you."

"If she meant that she wouldn't stop to tell me so," was his thought. "Very well. I can't help myself. You have beaten me; do as you will," he answered; and after a pause added: "It will be best now to have the whole truth out."

"You admit you came here to kill me?"

For a second he hesitated; but, as an admission made now to her alone could easily be denied afterwards, he made it. "Yes; I came to get back what you forced from me."

"And that you killed Jack Petherby?" She took out the two pieces of cord as she spoke.

"You have said that before, and have those proofs, as you deem them."

With a smile of triumph she put them back in her pocket, as she replied: "If you had succeeded, you would have done the same to Eva, leaving it to be supposed that I had done it. I know your purpose."

He showed no surprise at this reading of his intentions. There was a pause and then he said, jerking his head toward the next room: "You do not wish her to know that she is not my cousin's wife, but it will have to come out some time." He spoke now with some of his customary nonchalance.

"That is the one thread on which your life hangs," declared Sadie, curtly.

"I'd rather lose it than be a pauper with a millstone like that Llewellyn girl round my neck. Do what you will." He was playing on her reluctance to bring matters to a crisis by calling up the house. "I can put up a pretty good answer to any charge you may make. The thread is much thicker than you say."

"You have admitted your guilt."

"To you alone, yes. But to others, no. Jack's death was an accident, and as for what you think you saw, you were mistaken. That's all. To-night I returned because I had forgotten some important papers. The house was locked, and I thought this was my cousin's room. I was going to wake him when you mistook me for a burglar." He could even laugh now as he shrugged his shoulders with an air of indifference.

Words and manner both angered her. "That decides me. You shall have the chance to explain if you can," she said, as she moved back to the bell. In doing this her eyes were for a second off his face, and he saw his chance to escape and darted through the window. Directly afterwards she heard him clamber hastily down one of the stanchions of the balcony and rush across the gravelled drive in headlong flight.

(To be Continued)

YOUNG HERO SAVES TRAIN.

Finding Washout, Boy Signals to Stop —Passengers Reward Him.

St. Paul, Minn.—Eugene Labbey, seventeen years old, saved train 2 on the Chicago & Northwestern Railway, from Olaha, from running into a washout near Mendota, Minn.

The danger point was behind a sharp curve in the track, and the lad ran for some distance before he reached a place where he could stop the train and prevent a possible loss of life.

The train was an hour late and running at high speed to make up time.

In appreciation of young Labbey's efforts the passengers in the dining car took up a collection, drew up a set of resolutions and forwarded a check to the boy.

NATION'S CENTRE AT WINDOW.

Exact Population Focus Determined at Hoosier Factory.

Bloomington, Ind.—Going Government announcement one better, the centre of population of the United States, has not only been placed in Bloomington, but has been so exactly located by Professor W. A. Gosghell, of the University of Indiana, that it now rests beneath one of the windows of a furniture factory in the northwest section of Bloomington.

Having taken up its abode here, after years at Columbus, Ind., the population centre is expected to remain one of the "assets" of Bloomington for some time.

20,000 AUTOS IN MISSOURI.

All Owners Notified by Secretary of State to Renew Licenses.

Jefferson City, Mo.—Twenty-thousand application blanks were sent out by the Secretary of State to owners of automobiles, upon which the latter will apply for State licenses.

No resident of the State will be exempt, or even a non-resident who proposes to operate an automobile in Missouri. There are 17,000 of the old licenses outstanding at the present time, all of which will have to be renewed.

Many Deer in the Adirondacks.

Albany, N. Y.—The game protectors of the Adirondacks report deer were never so plentiful, although it had been feared that, owing to severe weather last winter and great depth of snow, the suppl; would be diminished, as many deer die in winter from starvation.

Bridge Falls as Solons Argue.

Whitehouse, N. J.—While the board of Freeholders of Somerset and Hunterdon Counties were in joint session, deciding to get bids on a new bridge over the Lamington River, the old bridge collapsed.

More Eggs--Pullets Begin to Lay

Cold, Wet Spring Said to Have Set Back Laying Developments of Chickens.

Washington.—Relief from the prohibitive egg prices is in sight, the experts of the department of agriculture announce, in a special report on the subject, because the pullets all over the country have begun to lay. Poultry owners are said to be reporting a 50 per cent egg production.

The experts declare this is not due to the threatened egg boycott, but to natural conditions.

Great Damage Done by Floods in Texas

Galveston, Texas. — Below is a rough estimate to date of the toll of life and property taken by the great floods of the Brazos and Colorado Rivers and their tributaries in their sweep across this state:

Forty thousand square miles of territory have been laid waste.

Two hundred and thirty persons have been killed.

One hundred million dollars in property is lost.

Twenty-five cities, towns and villages have contributed to the death roll.

Thirty-eight other towns have been flooded, although without known loss of life.

Consolation for Srap Hangers

Senator Norris of Montana has introduced a bill for the relief of "strap-hangers" in street cars in the District of Columbia. His bill provides that any person entering a street car and not being provided with a seat shall be given a rebate check. Two of these checks will be good for one fare.

"I had a tough time delivering the mail yesterday," declared a postman.

"How was that?"

"Had a bulldog and a chunk of liver in the same delivery."

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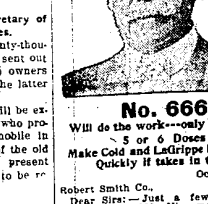

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