

The Leavenworth Case

By

Anna Katharine Green

Web-Books.Com

The Leavenworth Case

1. A Great Case	3
2. The Coroner's Inquest.....	9
3. Facts And Deductions	12
4. A Cuts.....	27
5. Expert Testimony.....	32
6. Side-Lights.....	38
7. Mary Leavenworth	42
8. Circumstantial Evidence	47
9. A Discovery.....	59
10. Mr. Gryce Receives New Impetus	65
11. The Summons.....	72
12. Eleanores.....	77
13. The Problem	81
14. Mr. Gryce At Home	87
15. Ways Opening	96
16. The Will Of A Millionaire	102
17. The Beginning Of Great Surprises.....	105
18. On The Stairs.....	113
19. In My Office.....	118
20. Trueman! Trueman! Trueman!	123
21. A Prejudice	127
22. Patch-Work	133
23. The Story Of A Charming Woman	146
24. A Report Followed By Smoke.....	153
25. Timothy Cook.....	160
26. Mr. Gryce Explains Himself	166
27. Amy Belden.....	175
28. A Weird Experience.....	179
29. The Missing Witness.....	187
30. Burned Paper	190
31. Thereby Hangs A Tale.....	195
32. Mrs. Belden's Narrative	203
33. Unexpected Testimony.....	222
34. MR. GRYCE RESUMES CONTROL.....	226
35. Fine Work.....	240
36. Gathered Threads	248
37. Culmination.....	253
38. A Full Confession	259
39. The Outcome Of A Great Crime	270

1. A Great Case

"A deed of dreadful note."
--Macbeth.

I HAD been a junior partner in the firm of Veeley, Carr & Raymond, attorneys and counsellors at law, for about a year, when one morning, in the temporary absence of both Mr. Veeley and Mr. Carr, there came into our office a young man whose whole appearance was so indicative of haste and agitation that I involuntarily rose at his approach and impetuously inquired:

"What is the matter? You have no bad news to tell, I hope."

"I have come to see Mr. Veeley; is he in?"

"No," I replied; "he was unexpectedly called away this morning to Washington; cannot be home before to-morrow; but if you will make your business known to me----"

"To you, sir?" he repeated, turning a very cold but steady eye on mine; then, seeming to be satisfied with his scrutiny, continued, "There is no reason why I shouldn't; my business is no secret. I came to inform him that Mr. Leavenworth is dead."

"Mr. Leavenworth!" I exclaimed, falling back a step. Mr. Leavenworth was an old client of our firm, to say nothing of his being the particular friend of Mr. Veeley.

"Yes, murdered; shot through the head by some unknown person while sitting at his library table."

"Shot! murdered!" I could scarcely believe my ears.

"How? when?" I gasped.

"Last night. At least, so we suppose. He was not found till this morning. I am Mr. Leavenworth's private secretary," he explained, "and live in the family. It was a dreadful shock," he went on, "especially to the ladies."

"Dreadful!" I repeated. "Mr. Veeley will be overwhelmed by it."

"They are all alone," he continued in a low businesslike way I afterwards found to be inseparable from the man; "the Misses Leavenworth, I mean--Mr. Leavenworth's nieces; and as an inquest is to be held there to-day it is deemed proper for them to have some one

present capable of advising them. As Mr. Veeley was their uncle's best friend, they naturally sent me for him; but he being absent I am at a loss what to do or where to go."

"I am a stranger to the ladies," was my hesitating reply, "but if I can be of any assistance to them, my respect for their uncle is such----"

The expression of the secretary's eye stopped me. Without seeming to wander from my face, its pupil had suddenly dilated till it appeared to embrace my whole person with its scope.

"I don't know," he finally remarked, a slight frown, testifying to the fact that he was not altogether pleased with the turn affairs were taking. "Perhaps it would be best. The ladies must not be left alone----"

"Say no more; I will go." And, sitting down, I despatched a hurried message to Mr. Veeley, after which, and the few other preparations necessary, I accompanied the secretary to the street.

"Now," said I, "tell me all you know of this frightful affair."

"All I know? A few words will do that. I left him last night sitting as usual at his library table, and found him this morning, seated in the same place, almost in the same position, but with a bullet-hole in his head as large as the end of my little finger."

"Dead?"

"Stone-dead."

"Horrible!" I exclaimed. Then, after a moment, "Could it have been a suicide?"

"No. The pistol with which the deed was committed is not to be found."

"But if it was a murder, there must have been some motive. Mr. Leavenworth was too benevolent a man to have enemies, and if robbery was intended----"

"There was no robbery. There is nothing missing," he again interrupted. "The whole affair is a mystery."

"A mystery?"

"An utter mystery."

Turning, I looked at my informant curiously. The inmate of a house in which a mysterious murder had occurred was rather an interesting object. But the good-featured and yet totally unimpressive countenance of the man beside me offered but little basis for

even the wildest imagination to work upon, and, glancing almost immediately away, I asked:

"Are the ladies very much overcome?"

He took at least a half-dozen steps before replying.

"It would be unnatural if they were not." And whether it was the expression of his face at the time, or the nature of the reply itself, I felt that in speaking of these ladies to this uninteresting, self-possessed secretary of the late Mr. Leavenworth, I was somehow treading upon dangerous ground. As I had heard they were very accomplished women, I was not altogether pleased at this discovery. It was, therefore, with a certain consciousness of relief I saw a Fifth Avenue stage approach.

"We will defer our conversation," said I. "Here's the stage."

But, once seated within it, we soon discovered that all intercourse upon such a subject was impossible. Employing the time, therefore, in running over in my mind what I knew of Mr. Leavenworth, I found that my knowledge was limited to the bare fact of his being a retired merchant of great wealth and fine social position who, in default of possessing children of his own, had taken into his home two nieces, one of whom had already been declared his heiress. To be sure, I had heard Mr. Veeley speak of his eccentricities, giving as an instance this very fact of his making a will in favor of one niece to the utter exclusion of the other; but of his habits of life and connection with the world at large, I knew little or nothing.

There was a great crowd in front of the house when we arrived there, and I had barely time to observe that it was a corner dwelling of unusual depth when I was seized by the throng and carried quite to the foot of the broad stone steps. Extricating myself, though with some difficulty, owing to the importunities of a bootblack and butcher-boy, who seemed to think that by clinging to my arms they might succeed in smuggling themselves into the house, I mounted the steps and, finding the secretary, by some unaccountable good fortune, close to my side, hurriedly rang the bell. Immediately the door opened, and a face I recognized as that of one of our city detectives appeared in the gap.

"Mr. Gryce!" I exclaimed.

"The same," he replied. "Come in, Mr. Raymond." And drawing us quietly into the house, he shut the door with a grim smile on the disappointed crowd without. "I trust you are not surprised to see me here," said he, holding out his hand, with a side glance at my companion.

"No," I returned. Then, with a vague idea that I ought to introduce the young man at my side, continued: "This is Mr. ----, Mr. ----, --excuse me, but I do not know your name," I said inquiringly to my companion. "The private secretary of the late Mr. Leavenworth," I hastened to add.

"Oh," he returned, "the secretary! The coroner has been asking for you, sir."

"The coroner is here, then?"

"Yes; the jury have just gone up-stairs to view the body; would you like to follow them?"

"No, it is not necessary. I have merely come in the hope of being of some assistance to the young ladies. Mr. Veeley is away."

"And you thought the opportunity too good to be lost," he went on; "just so. Still, now that you are here, and as the case promises to be a marked one, I should think that, as a rising young lawyer, you would wish to make yourself acquainted with it in all its details. But follow your own judgment."

I made an effort and overcame my repugnance. "I will go," said I.

"Very well, then, follow me."

But just as I set foot on the stairs I heard the jury descending, so, drawing back with Mr. Gryce into a recess between the reception room and the parlor, I had time to remark:

"The young man says it could not have been the work of a burglar."

"Indeed!" fixing his eye on a door-knob near by.

"That nothing has been found missing--"

"And that the fastenings to the house were all found secure this morning; just so."

"He did not tell me that. In that case"--and I shuddered--"the murderer must have been in the house all night."

Mr. Gryce smiled darkly at the door-knob.

"It has a dreadful look!" I exclaimed.

Mr. Gryce immediately frowned at the door-knob.

And here let me say that Mr. Gryce, the detective, was not the thin, wiry individual with the piercing eye you are doubtless expecting to see. On the contrary, Mr. Gryce was a portly, comfortable personage with an eye that never pierced, that did not even rest on you. If it rested anywhere, it was always on some insignificant object in the vicinity, some vase, inkstand, book, or button. These things he would seem to take into his confidence, make the repositories of his conclusions; but as for you--you might as well be the steeple on Trinity Church, for all connection you ever appeared to have with him or

his thoughts. At present, then, Mr. Gryce was, as I have already suggested, on intimate terms with the door-knob.

"A dreadful look," I repeated.

His eye shifted to the button on my sleeve.

"Come," he said, "the coast is clear at last."

Leading the way, he mounted the stairs, but stopped on the upper landing. "Mr. Raymond," said he, "I am not in the habit of talking much about the secrets of my profession, but in this case everything depends upon getting the right clue at the start. We have no common villainy to deal with here; genius has been at work. Now sometimes an absolutely uninitiated mind will intuitively catch at something which the most highly trained intellect will miss. If such a thing should occur, remember that I am your man. Don't go round talking, but come to me. For this is going to be a great case, mind you, a great case. Now, come on."

"But the ladies?"

"They are in the rooms above; in grief, of course, but tolerably composed for all that, I hear." And advancing to a door, he pushed it open and beckoned me in.

All was dark for a moment, but presently, my eyes becoming accustomed to the place, I saw that we were in the library.

"It was here he was found," said he; "in this room and upon this very spot." And advancing, he laid his hand on the end of a large baize-covered table that, together with its attendant chairs, occupied the centre of the room. "You see for yourself that it is directly opposite this door," and, crossing the floor, he paused in front of the threshold of a narrow passageway, opening into a room beyond. "As the murdered man was discovered sitting in this chair, and consequently with his back towards the passageway, the assassin must have advanced through the doorway to deliver his shot, pausing, let us say, about here." And Mr. Gryce planted his feet firmly upon a certain spot in the carpet, about a foot from the threshold before mentioned.

"But--" I hastened to interpose.

"There is no room for 'but,'" he cried. "We have studied the situation." And without deigning to dilate upon the subject, he turned immediately about and, stepping swiftly before me, led the way into the passage named. "Wine closet, clothes closet, washing apparatus, towel-rack," he explained, waving his hand from side to side as we hurried through, finishing with "Mr. Leavenworth's private apartment," as that room of comfortable aspect opened upon us.

Mr. Leavenworth's private apartment! It was here then that it ought to be, the horrible, blood-curdling it that yesterday was a living, breathing man. Advancing to the bed that was hung with heavy curtains, I raised my hand to put them back, when Mr. Gryce, drawing them from my clasp, disclosed lying upon the pillow a cold, calm face looking so natural I involuntarily started.

"His death was too sudden to distort the features," he remarked, turning the head to one side in a way to make visible a ghastly wound in the back of the cranium. "Such a hole as that sends a man out of the world without much notice. The surgeon will convince you it could never have been inflicted by himself. It is a case of deliberate murder."

Horrified, I drew hastily back, when my glance fell upon a door situated directly opposite me in the side of the wall towards the hall. It appeared to be the only outlet from the room, with the exception of the passage through which we had entered, and I could not help wondering if it was through this door the assassin had entered on his roundabout course to the library. But Mr. Gryce, seemingly observant of my glance, though his own was fixed upon the chandelier, made haste to remark, as if in reply to the inquiry in my face:

"Found locked on the inside; may have come that way and may not; we don't pretend to say."

Observing now that the bed was undisturbed in its arrangement, I remarked, "He had not retired, then?"

"No; the tragedy must be ten hours old. Time for the murderer to have studied the situation and provided for all contingencies."

"The murderer? Whom do you suspect?" I whispered.

He looked impassively at the ring on my finger.

"Every one and nobody. It is not for me to suspect, but to detect." And dropping the curtain into its former position he led me from the room.

The coroner's inquest being now in session, I felt a strong desire to be present, so, requesting Mr. Gryce to inform the ladies that Mr. Veeley was absent from town, and that I had come as his substitute, to render them any assistance they might require on so melancholy an occasion, I proceeded to the large parlor below, and took my seat among the various persons there assembled.

2. The Coroner's Inquest

"The baby figure of the giant mass
Of things to come."
--Troilus and Cressida.

FOR a few minutes I sat dazed by the sudden flood of light greeting me from the many open windows; then, as the strongly contrasting features of the scene before me began to impress themselves upon my consciousness, I found myself experiencing something of the same sensation of double personality which years before had followed an enforced use of ether. As at that time, I appeared to be living two lives at once: in two distinct places, with two separate sets of incidents going on; so now I seemed to be divided between two irreconcilable trains of thought; the gorgeous house, its elaborate furnishing, the little glimpses of yesterday's life, as seen in the open piano, with its sheet of music held in place by a lady's fan, occupying my attention fully as much as the aspect of the throng of incongruous and impatient people huddled about me.

Perhaps one reason of this lay in the extraordinary splendor of the room I was in; the glow of satin, glitter of bronze, and glimmer of marble meeting the eye at every turn. But I am rather inclined to think it was mainly due to the force and eloquence of a certain picture which confronted me from the opposite wall. A sweet picture--sweet enough and poetic enough to have been conceived by the most idealistic of artists: simple, too--the vision of a young flaxen-haired, blue-eyed coquette, dressed in the costume of the First Empire, standing in a wood-path, looking back over her shoulder at some one following--yet with such a dash of something not altogether saint-like in the corners of her meek eyes and baby-like lips, that it impressed me with the individuality of life. Had it not been for the open dress, with its waist almost beneath the armpits, the hair cut short on the forehead, and the perfection of the neck and shoulders, I should have taken it for a literal portrait of one of the ladies of the house. As it was, I could not rid myself of the idea that one, if not both, of Mr. Leavenworth's nieces looked down upon me from the eyes of this entrancing blonde with the beckoning glance and forbidding hand. So vividly did this fancy impress me that I half shuddered as I looked, wondering if this sweet creature did not know what had occurred in this house since the happy yesterday; and if so, how she could stand there smiling so invitingly,--when suddenly I became aware that I had been watching the little crowd of men about me with as complete an absorption as if nothing else in the room had attracted my attention; that the face of the coroner, sternly intelligent and attentive, was as distinctly imprinted upon my mind as that of this lovely picture, or the clearer-cut and more noble features of the sculptured Psyche, shining in mellow beauty from the crimson-hung window at his right; yes, even that the various countenances of the jurymen clustered before me, commonplace and insignificant as most of them were; the trembling forms of the excited servants crowded into a far corner; and the still more disagreeable aspect of the pale-faced, seedy reporter, seated at a small table and writing with a ghoulish avidity that made my flesh creep, were each and all as fixed an element in the remarkable scene before me as the splendor of the surroundings which made their presence such a nightmare of discord and unreality.

I have spoken of the coroner. As fortune would have it, he was no stranger to me. I had not only seen him before, but had held frequent conversation with him; in fact, knew him. His name was Hammond, and he was universally regarded as a man of more than ordinary acuteness, fully capable of conducting an important examination, with the necessary skill and address. Interested as I was, or rather was likely to be, in this particular inquiry, I could not but congratulate myself upon our good fortune in having so intelligent a coroner.

As for his jurymen, they were, as I have intimated, very much like all other bodies of a similar character. Picked up at random from the streets, but from such streets as the Fifth and Sixth Avenues, they presented much the same appearance of average intelligence and refinement as might be seen in the chance occupants of one of our city stages. Indeed, I marked but one amongst them all who seemed to take any interest in the inquiry as an inquiry; all the rest appearing to be actuated in the fulfilment of their duty by the commoner instincts of pity and indignation.

Dr. Maynard, the well-known surgeon of Thirty-sixth Street, was the first witness called. His testimony concerned the nature of the wound found in the murdered man's head. As some of the facts presented by him are likely to prove of importance to us in our narrative, I will proceed to give a synopsis of what he said.

Prefacing his remarks with some account of himself, and the manner in which he had been summoned to the house by one of the servants, he went on to state that, upon his arrival, he found the deceased lying on a bed in the second-story front room, with the blood clotted about a pistol-wound in the back of the head; having evidently been carried there from the adjoining apartment some hours after death. It was the only wound discovered on the body, and having probed it, he had found and extracted the bullet which he now handed to the jury. It was lying in the brain, having entered at the base of the skull, passed obliquely upward, and at once struck the medulla oblongata, causing instant death. The fact of the ball having entered the brain in this peculiar manner he deemed worthy of note, since it would produce not only instantaneous death, but an utterly motionless one. Further, from the position of the bullet-hole and the direction taken by the bullet, it was manifestly impossible that the shot should have been fired by the man himself, even if the condition of the hair about the wound did not completely demonstrate the fact that the shot was fired from a point some three or four feet distant. Still further, considering the angle at which the bullet had entered the skull, it was evident that the deceased must not only have been seated at the time, a fact about which there could be no dispute, but he must also have been engaged in some occupation which drew his head forward. For, in order that a ball should enter the head of a man sitting erect at the angle seen here, of 45 degrees, it would be necessary, not only for the pistol to be held very low down, but in a peculiar position; while if the head had been bent forward, as in the act of writing, a man holding a pistol naturally with the elbow bent, might very easily fire a ball into the brain at the angle observed.

Upon being questioned in regard to the bodily health of Mr. Leavenworth, he replied that the deceased appeared to have been in good condition at the time of his death, but that,

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

