

# **The Thing Beyond Reason**

A COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL—THE STORY OF THE STRANGE  
ADVENTURE THAT LED LEXY MORAN TO A HOUSE  
OF TRAGEDY AND MYSTERY IN THE  
SUBURBS OF NEW YORK

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

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## **The Thing Beyond Reason**

The house was very quiet to-night. There was nothing to disturb Miss Alexandra Moran but the placid ticking of the clock and the faint stir of the curtains at the open window. For that matter, a considerable amount of noise would not have troubled her just then. As she sat at the library table, the light of the shaded lamp shone upon her bright, ruffled head bent over her work in fiercest concentration. She was chewing the end of a badly damaged lead pencil, and she was scowling.

“No!” she said, half aloud. “Won’t do! It can’t be ‘fix’; but, by jiminy, I’ll get it if it takes all night!”

She laid down the pencil and sat back in the chair, with her arms folded. Though her present difficulty concerned nothing more serious than a crossword puzzle, an observer might have learned a good deal of Miss Moran’s character from her manner of dealing with it. The puzzle itself, with its neat, clear little letters printed in the squares, would have been a revelation that whatever she undertook she did carefully and intelligently—and obstinately.

She was a young little thing, only twenty-three, and quite alone in the world, but not at all dismayed by that. Her father had died some three years ago, and, instead of leaving the snug little fortune she had been taught to expect, he had left nothing at all; so that at twenty she had had her first puzzle to solve—how to keep alive without eating the bread of charity.

It was no easy matter for a girl who was still in boarding school, but she had done it. She had come to New York and had found a post as nursery governess, and later as waitress in a tea room, and then in the art department of an enormous store. She had gained no tangible profit from these three years, she had no balance in the bank, but that did not trouble her. She had learned that she could stand on her own feet, that she could trust herself; and with this knowledge and the experience she had had, and her quick wits and splendid health, she felt herself fully armed against the world. Indeed, she had not a care on earth this evening except the crossword puzzle.

“It must be ‘tocsin,’” she said to herself. “There’s something wrong with the verticals. It can’t be ‘fix,’ and yet—”

The telephone bell rang. Still pondering her problem, Lexy went across the room.

“Is Miss Enderby there?” asked a man’s voice.

“She’s out,” answered Lexy cheerfully.

“No!” said the man’s voice. “She can’t—I—for God’s sake, where’s Miss Enderby?”

“She’s out,” Lexy repeated, startled. “She went to the opera with her mother and father.”

“Who are you?”

“I’m Mrs. Enderby’s secretary.”

“Look here! Didn’t Miss Enderby say anything? Isn’t there any sort of message for me?”

“Nothing that I know of. The servants have gone to bed, but I’ll ask them, if it’s anything important.”

“No!” said the voice. “Don’t! No, never mind! Good-by!”

“That’s queer!” said Lexy to herself, as she walked away from the instrument, and then she dismissed the matter from her mind. “None of my business!” she thought, and returned to her puzzle.

Suddenly an inspiration came.

“It is ‘fix’!” she cried. “And it’s not ‘tocsin,’ but ‘toxins’! Hurrah!”

This practically completed the puzzle, and she began to fill in the empty squares with the peculiar satisfaction of the crossword enthusiast. It was perfect, now, and she liked things to be perfect.

As she leaned back, with a contented sigh, the clock struck twelve.

“Golly! I didn’t realize it was so late!” she reflected. “Queer time for any one to ring up!”

She frowned again. Her special problem solved, she began to take more interest in other affairs; and the more she thought of the telephone incident, the more it amazed her. Caroline Enderby wasn’t like other girls. The mere fact of a man’s telephoning to her at all was strange and indeed unprecedented.

“And he was badly upset, too,” thought Lexy. “He asked if she left a message for him. Think of Caroline Enderby leaving a message for a man!”

She began to feel impatient for Caroline’s return.

“I’ll tell her when we’re alone,” she thought; “and she’ll have to explain—a little, anyhow.”

Lexy wanted an explanation very much, because she was fond of Caroline, and very sorry for her.

Mrs. Enderby was a Frenchwoman of the old-fashioned, conservative type, with the most rigid ideas about the bringing up of a young girl, and her husband—Lexy had often wondered what Mr. Enderby had been before his marriage, for now he was nothing but a grave and dignified echo of his wife. Between them, they had educated Caroline in a disastrous fashion. She had never even been to school. She had had governesses at home, and when a male teacher came in, for music or painting lessons, Mrs. Enderby had always sat in the room with her child. Caroline never went out of the house alone. She was utterly cut off from the normal life of other girls. She was a gentle, lovely creature—a little unreal, Lexy had thought her, at first; and she, at first, had been afraid of Lexy.

Mrs. Enderby had advertised for a secretary, and Lexy had answered the advertisement. Mrs. Enderby had wanted personal references, and Lexy had supplied them, some five or six, of the highest quality. Mrs. Enderby had investigated them with remarkable thoroughness, and had asked Lexy many questions. Indeed, it had taken ten days to satisfy her that Miss

Moran was a fit person to come into her house, and Lexy had lived under her roof and under her eagle eye for a month before she was allowed to be alone with Caroline. After that first month, however, Mrs. Enderby had made up her mind that Lexy was to be trusted, and the thin pretext of “secretary” was dropped.

Mrs. Enderby suffered from a not uncommon form of insomnia. She could not sleep at convenient hours—at night, for instance—but could and did sleep at very inconvenient hours during the day; and what she wanted was not a secretary, but a companion for her daughter during these hours.

She realized, too, that even the most strictly brought up *jeune fille* needed some sort of youthful society, and in Lexy she had found pretty well what she wanted—a well mannered, well bred young woman of unimpeachable honesty. So she had permitted Lexy and Caroline to go shopping alone, and sometimes to a *matinée* or to a tea room. She asked them shrewd questions when they came home, and their answers satisfied her perfectly. They had never even spoken to a man!

“And yet,” thought Miss Moran, “somehow Caroline has been carrying on with some one, without even me finding out! I didn’t know she had it in her!”

Lexy yawned mightily. She was growing very sleepy, but not for worlds would she go to bed until she had seen Caroline. She lay down on the divan, her hands clasped under her head, and let all sorts of little idle thoughts drift through her mind. Now and then a taxi went by, but this street in the East Sixties was a

very quiet one. The house was so very still, and there was nothing in her own young heart to trouble her. Her eyes closed.

She was half asleep when the sound of Mrs. Enderby's voice in the hall brought her to her feet. It was a penetrating voice, with a trace of foreign accent, and it was not a voice that Lexy loved. She went out of the library into the hall.

"Did you enjoy—" she began politely, and then stopped short. "But where's Caroline?" she cried.

"Caroline? But at home, of course," answered Mrs. Enderby.

"At home? Here?"

"But certainly! She had a headache. At the last moment she decided not to go with us. You were not here when we left, Miss Moran."

"I know," murmured Lexy. "I had just run out to the drug store; but—"

"She went directly to bed," Mrs. Enderby continued. "I thought, however, that she would have sent for you during the course of the evening."

"Oh, I see!" said Lexy casually.

At heart, however, she was curiously uneasy. Mr. Enderby stopped for a moment, to give her some kindly information about the opera they had heard. Then he and his wife ascended the stairs, followed by Lexy; and with every step her uneasiness grew. She was sure that Caroline would have sent for her if she had been in the house.

Mrs. Enderby paused outside her child's door.

"The light is out," she said. "She will be asleep. I shall not disturb her. Good night, Miss Moran!"

"Good night, Mrs. Enderby!" Lexy answered, and went into her own room.

She gave Mrs. Enderby twenty minutes to get safely stowed away; then she went out quietly into the hall, to Caroline's room. She knocked softly; there was no answer. She turned the handle and went in; the room was dark and very still. She switched on the light.

It was as she had expected—the room was empty. Caroline was not there.

## II

Lexy's first impulse was to close the door of that empty room, and to hold her tongue. It seemed to her that it would be treachery to Caroline to tell Mrs. Enderby. She and Caroline were both young, both of the same generation; they ought to stand loyally together against the tyrannical older people.

"Because, golly, what a row there'd be if Mrs. Enderby ever knew she'd gone out!" Lexy thought.

That was how she saw it, at first. Caroline had pretended to have a headache so that she would be left behind, and would get a chance to slip out alone. It was simply a lark. Lexy had known such things to happen often before, at boarding school; and the unthinkable and impossible thing was for one girl to tell on another.

"She'll be back soon," thought Lexy, "and she'll tell me all about it."

So she went into Caroline's room, to wait. It was a charming room, pink and white, like Caroline herself. Lexy turned on the switch, and two rose-shaded lamps blossomed out like flowers. She sat down on a *chaise longue*, and stretched herself out, yawning. On the desk before her was Caroline's writing apparatus, a quill pen of old rose, an ivory desk set, everything so dainty and orderly; only poor Caroline had no friends, and never had letters to write or to answer.

“I wonder who on earth that was on the telephone,” Lexy reflected. “It *was* queer—just on the only night of her life when she’d ever gone out on her own. And he sounded so terribly upset! It *was* queer. Perhaps—”

She was aware of a fast-growing oppression. The influence of Caroline’s room was beginning to tell upon her. Caroline didn’t understand about larks. She wasn’t that sort of girl. Quiet, shy, and patient, she had never shown any trace of resentment against her restricted life, or any desire for the good times that other girls of her age enjoyed. The more Lexy thought about it, the more clearly she realized the strangeness of all this, and the more uneasy she became.

When the little Dresden clock on the mantelpiece struck one, it came as a shock. Lexy sprang to her feet and looked about the room, filled with unreasoning fear. One o’clock, and Caroline hadn’t come back! Suppose—suppose she never came back?

Lexy dismissed that idea with healthy scorn. Things like that didn’t happen; and yet—what was it that gave to the pink and white lamplit room such an air of being deserted?

“Why, the photographs are gone!” she cried.

She noticed now for the first time that the photographs of Mr. and Mrs. Enderby in silver frames, which had always stood on the writing desk, were not standing there now.

She turned to the bureau. Caroline’s silver toilet set was not there. She made a rapid survey of the room, and she made sure of her suspicions. Caroline had gone deliberately, taking with her all the things she would need on a short trip.

“I’ve got to tell Mrs. Enderby now,” she thought. “It’s only fair.”

She went out into the corridor, closing the door behind her, and turned toward Mrs. Enderby’s room. She was very, very reluctant, for she dreaded to break the peace of the quiet house by this dramatic announcement. She hated anything in the nature of the sensational. Level-headed, cool, practical, her instinct was to make light of all this, to insist that nothing was really wrong. Caroline had gone, and that was that.

“There’s going to be such a fuss!” she thought. “If there’s anything I loathe, it’s a fuss.”

And all the time, under her cool and sensible exterior, she was frightened. She felt that after all she was very young, and very inexperienced, in a world where things—anything—things beyond her knowledge—might happen.

She knocked upon the door lightly—so lightly that no one heard her; and she had to knock again. This time Mrs. Enderby opened the door.

“Well?” she asked, not very amiably.

“I thought I ought to tell you—” Lexy began; and still she hesitated, moved by the unaccountable feeling that this might be treachery to Caroline.

“Tell me what?” asked Mrs. Enderby. “Come, if you please, Miss Moran! Tell me at once!”

“Caroline’s gone.”

The words were spoken. Lexy waited in great alarm, wondering if Mrs. Enderby would faint or scream.

The lady did neither. She came out into the corridor, shutting the door of her room behind her, and her first word and her only word was:

“Hush!”

Then she glanced about her at the closed doors, and, taking Lexy’s arm in a firm grip, hurried her to Caroline’s room. Not until they were shut in there did she speak again.

“Now tell me!” she said. “Speak very low. You said—Caroline has gone?”

“Yes,” said Lexy. “I came in here after you’d gone to bed, and—you can see for yourself—the bed hasn’t been slept in. She’s taken her things—her brush and comb and—”

“And she told you—what?”

“Me? Why, nothing!” answered Lexy, in surprise. “I didn’t see her. I haven’t seen her since dinner.”

“But you know,” said Mrs. Enderby. “You know where she has gone.”

She spoke with cool certainty, and her black eyes were fixed upon Lexy with a far from pleasant expression.

Lexy looked back at her with equal steadiness.

“Mrs. Enderby,” she said, “I *don’t* know.”

Mrs. Enderby shrugged her shoulders.

“Very well!” she said. “You do not know exactly where she has gone. *Bien, alors!* You guess, eh?”

“No,” answered Lexy, bewildered. “I don’t. I can’t.”

“She has spoken to you of some—friend?”

Seeing Lexy still frankly bewildered, Mrs. Enderby lost her patience.

“The man!” she said. “Who is the man?”

“I never heard Caroline speak of any man,” said Lexy.

She spoke firmly enough, and she was telling the truth; but she remembered that telephone call, and the memory brought a faint flush into her cheeks. Mrs. Enderby did not fail to notice it.

“Listen!” she said. “There is one thing you can do—only one thing. You can hold your tongue. Tell no one. Let no one know that Caroline is not here. You understand?”

“But aren’t you going to—”

“I am going to do nothing. You understand—nothing. There is to be no scandal in my house.”

“But, Mrs. Enderby!”

“Hush! No one must know of this. To-morrow morning I shall have a letter from Caroline.”

“Oh!” said Lexy, with a sigh of genuine relief. “Oh, then you know where she’s gone!”

"I?" replied Mrs. Enderby. "I know nothing. This has come to me from a clear sky. I have always tried to safeguard my child. I—"

She paused for a moment, and for the first time Lexy pitied her.

"It is the American blood in her," Mrs. Enderby went on. "No French girl would treat her parents so; but in this country— She has gone with some fortune hunter. To-morrow I shall have a letter that she is married. 'Please forgive me, *chère Maman,*' she will say. 'I am so happy. I, at nineteen, and of an ignorance the most complete, have made my choice without you.' That is the American way, is it not? That is your 'romance,' eh? My one child—"

Her voice broke.

"No more!" she said. "It is finished. But—attend, Miss Moran! There must be no scandal. No one is to know that she is not here."

She turned and walked out of the room. Lexy sank into a chair.

"I don't care!" she said to herself.

"She's wrong—I know it! It's not what she thinks. Caroline's not like that. Something dreadful has happened!"

### III

It seemed perfectly natural to be awakened in the morning by Mrs. Enderby's hand on her shoulder, and to look up into Mrs. Enderby's flashing black eyes. Lexy had gone to sleep dominated by the thought of that masterful woman. She vaguely remembered having dreamed of her, and when she opened her eyes—there she was.

"Get up!" said Mrs. Enderby in a low voice. "Go into Caroline's room. When Annie comes with the breakfast tray, take it from her at the door. I have told her that Caroline is ill with a headache. You understand?"

"Yes, Mrs. Enderby," answered Lexy.

She sprang out of bed and began to dress, filled with an unreasoning sense of haste. It wasn't a dream, then—it was true. Caroline had gone, and there was something Lexy must do for her. She could not have explained what this something was, but it oppressed and worried her. She could not rid herself of the feeling that she was not being loyal to Caroline.

"And yet," she thought, "I had to tell Mrs. Enderby she wasn't there. I suppose I ought to have told her about that telephone call, too, but I hate to do it! I know Caroline wouldn't like me to; and what good can it do, anyhow? Whoever it was, he didn't know where she was. It was the queerest thing—a man asking, 'For God's sake, where's Miss Enderby?' when she wasn't here! No, Mrs. Enderby is wrong. Caroline hasn't just gone away of

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