

Literature.org:

[Authors](#)  
[Contact](#)

[The Law and the Lady](#)

[Wilkie Collins](#)

This Book:

[Contents](#)  
[Previous Chapter](#)  
[Next Chapter](#)

## Chapter 30 - The Indictment Of Mrs. Beaully

---

I STARTED to my feet, and looked at Miserrimus Dexter. I was too much agitated to be able to speak to him.

My utmost expectations had not prepared me for the tone of absolute conviction in which he had spoken. At the best, I had anticipated that he might, by the barest chance, agree with me in suspecting Mrs. Beaully. And now his own lips had said it, without hesitation or reserve! "There isn't the shadow of a doubt: Mrs. Beaully poisoned her."

"Sit down," he said, quietly. "There's nothing to be afraid of. Nobody can hear us in this room."

I sat down again, and recovered myself a little.

"Have you never told any one else what you have just told me?" was the first question that I put to him.

"Never. No one else suspected her."

"Not even the lawyers?"

"Not even the lawyers. There is no legal evidence against Mrs. Beaully. There is nothing but moral certainty."

"Surely you might have found the evidence if you had tried?"

He laughed at the idea.

"Look at me!" he said. "How is a man to hunt up evidence who is tied to this chair? Besides, there were other difficulties in my way. I am not generally in the habit of needlessly betraying myself--I am a cautious man, though you may not have noticed it. But my immeasurable hatred of Mrs. Beaully was not to be concealed. If eyes can tell secrets, she must have discovered, in my eyes, that I hungered and thirsted to see her in the hangman's hands. From first to last, I tell you, Mrs. Borgia-Beaully was on her guard against me. Can I describe her cunning? All my resources of language are not equal to the task. Take the degrees of comparison to give you a faint idea of it: I am positively cunning; the devil is comparatively cunning; Mrs. Beaully is superlatively cunning. No! no! If she is ever discovered, at this distance of time, it will not be done by a man--it will be done by a woman: a woman whom she doesn't suspect; a woman who can watch her with the patience of a tigress in a state of starvation--"

"Say a woman like Me!" I broke out. "I am ready to try."

His eyes glittered; his teeth showed themselves viciously under his mustache; he drummed fiercely with both hands on the arms of his chair.

"Do you really mean it?" he asked.

"Put me in your position," I answered. "Enlighten me with your moral certainty (as you call it)--and you shall see!"

"I'll do it!" he said. "Tell me one thing first. How did an outside stranger, like you, come to suspect her?"

I set before him, to the best of my ability, the various elements of suspicion which I had collected from the evidence at the Trial; and I laid especial stress on the fact (sworn to by the nurse) that Mrs. Beaully was missing exactly at the time when Christina Ormsay had left Mrs. Eustace Macallan alone in her room.

"You have hit it!" cried Miserrimus Dexter. "You are a wonderful woman! What was she doing on the morning of the day when Mrs. Eustace Macallan died poisoned? And where was she during the dark hours of the night? I can tell you where she was \_not\_--she was not in her own room."

"Not in her own room?" I repeated. "Are you really sure of that?"

"I am sure of everything that I say, when I am speaking of Mrs. Beaully. Mind that: and now listen! This is a drama; and I excel in dramatic narrative. You shall judge for yourself. Date, the twentieth of October. Scene the Corridor, called the Guests' Corridor, at Gleninch. On one side, a row of windows looking out into the garden. On the other, a row of four bedrooms, with dressing-rooms attached. First bedroom (beginning from the staircase), occupied by Mrs. Beaully. Second bedroom, empty. Third bedroom, occupied by Miserrimus Dexter. Fourth bedroom, empty. So much for the Scene! The time comes next--the time is eleven at night. Dexter discovered in his bedroom, reading. Enter to him Eustace Macallan. Eustace speaks: 'My dear fellow, be particularly careful not to make any noise; don't bowl your chair up and down the corridor to-night.' Dexter inquires, 'Why?' Eustace answers: 'Mrs. Beaully has been dining with some friends in Edinburgh, and has come back terribly fatigued: she has gone up to her room to rest.' Dexter makes another inquiry (satirical inquiry, this time): 'How does she look when she is terribly fatigued? As beautiful as ever?' Answer: 'I don't know; I have not seen her; she slipped upstairs, without speaking to anybody.' Third inquiry by Dexter (logical inquiry, on this occasion): 'If she spoke to nobody, how do you know she is fatigued?' Eustace hands Dexter a morsel of paper, and answers: 'Don't be a fool! I found this on the hall table. Remember what I have told you about keeping quiet; good-night!' Eustace retires. Dexter looks at the paper, and reads these lines in pencil: 'Just returned. Please forgive me for going to bed without saying good-night. I have overexerted myself; I am dreadfully fatigued. (Signed) Helena.' Dexter is by nature suspicious. Dexter suspects Mrs. Beaully. Never mind his reasons; there is no time to enter into his reasons now. He puts the ease to himself thus: 'A weary woman would never have given herself the trouble to write this. She would have found it much less fatiguing to knock at the drawing-room door as she passed, and to make her apologies by word of mouth. I see something here out of the ordinary way; I shall make a night of it in my chair. Very good. Dexter proceeds to make a night of it. He opens his door; wheels himself softly into the corridor; locks the doors of the two empty bedrooms, and returns (with the keys in his pocket) to his own room. 'Now,' says D. to himself, 'if I hear a door softly opened in this part of the house, I shall know for certain it is Mrs. Beaully's door!' Upon that he closes his own door, leaving the tiniest little chink to look through; puts out his light; and waits and watches at his tiny little chink, like a cat at a mouse-hole. The corridor is the only place he wants to see; and a lamp burns there all night. Twelve o'clock strikes; he hears the doors below bolted and locked, and nothing happens. Half-past twelve--and nothing still. The house is as silent as the grave. One o'clock; two o'clock--same silence. Half-past two--and

something happens at last. Dexter hears a sound close by, in the corridor. It is the sound of a handle turning very softly in a door--in the only door that can be opened, the door of Mrs. Beaulieu's room. Dexter drops noiselessly from his chair onto his hands; lies flat on the floor at his chin, and listens. He hears the handle closed again; he sees a dark object flit by him; he pops his head out of his door, down on the floor where nobody would think of looking for him. And what does he see? Mrs. Beaulieu! There she goes, with the long brown cloak over her shoulders, which she wears when she is driving, floating behind her. In a moment more she disappears, past the fourth bedroom, and turns at a right angle, into a second corridor, called the South Corridor. What rooms are in the South Corridor? There are three rooms. First room, the little study, mentioned in the nurse's evidence. Second room, Mrs. Eustace Macallan's bedchamber. Third room, her husband's bedchamber. What does Mrs. Beaulieu (supposed to be worn out by fatigue) want in that part of the house at half-past two in the morning? Dexter decides on running the risk of being seen--and sets off on a voyage of discovery. Do you know how he gets from place to place without his chair? Have you seen the poor deformed creature hop on his hands? Shall he show you how he does it, before he goes on with his story?"

I hastened to stop the proposed exhibition.

"I saw you hop last night," I said. "Go on!--pray go on with your story!"

"Do you like my dramatic style of narrative?" he asked. "Am I interesting?"

"Indescribably interesting, Mr. Dexter. I am eager to hear more."

He smiled in high approval of his own abilities.

"I am equally good at the autobiographical style," he said. "Shall we try that next, by way of variety?"

"Anything you like," I cried, losing all patience with him, "if you will only go on!"

"Part Two; Autobiographical Style," he announced, with a wave of his hand. "I hopped along the Guests' Corridor, and turned into the South Corridor. I stopped at the little study. Door open; nobody there. I crossed the study to the second door, communicating with Mrs. Macallan's bedchamber. Locked! I looked through the keyhole. Was there something hanging over it, on the other side? I can't say--I only know there was nothing to be seen but blank darkness. I listened. Nothing to be heard. Same blank darkness, same absolute silence, inside the locked second door of Mrs. Eustace's room, opening on the corridor. I went on to her husband's bedchamber. I had the worst possible opinion of Mrs. Beaulieu--I should not have been in the least surprised if I had caught her in Eustace's room. I looked through the keyhole. In this case, the key was out of it--or was turned the right way for me--I don't know which. Eustace's bed was opposite the door. No discovery. I could see him, all by himself, innocently asleep. I reflected a little. The back staircase was at the end of the corridor, beyond me. I slid down the stairs, and looked about me on the lower floor, by the light of the night-lamp. Doors all fast locked and keys outside, so that I could try them myself. House door barred and bolted. Door leading into the servants' offices barred and bolted. I got back to my own room, and thought it out quietly. Where could she be? Certainly in the house, somewhere. Where? I had made sure of the other rooms; the field of search was exhausted. She could only be in Mrs. Macallan's room--the one room which had baffled my investigations; the only room which had not lent itself to examination. Add to this that the key of the door in the study, communicating with Mrs. Macallan's room, was stated in the nurse's evidence to be missing; and don't forget that the dearest object of Mrs. Beaulieu's life (on the showing of her own letter, read at the Trial) was to be Eustace Macallan's happy wife. Put these things together in your own mind, and you will know what my thoughts were, as I sat waiting for events in my chair, without my telling you. Toward four o'clock, strong as I am, fatigue got the better of me. I fell asleep. Not for long. I awoke with a start and looked at my watch. Twenty-five minutes past four. Had she got back to her room while I was asleep? I hopped to her door and listened. Not a sound. I softly opened the door. The room was empty. I went back again to my own room to wait and watch. It was hard work to keep my eyes open. I drew up the window to let the cool air refresh me; I fought hard with exhausted nature, and exhausted nature won. I fell asleep again. This time it was eight in the morning when I awoke. I have goodish ears, as you may have noticed. I heard women's voices talking under my open window. I peeped out. Mrs. Beaulieu and her maid in close confabulation! Mrs. Beaulieu and her maid looking guiltily about them to make sure that they were neither seen nor heard! 'Take care, ma'am,' I heard the maid say; 'that horrid deformed monster is as sly as a fox. Mind he doesn't discover you.' Mrs. Beaulieu answered, 'You go first, and look out in front; I will follow you, and make sure there is nobody behind us.' With that they disappeared around the corner of the house. In five minutes more I heard the door of Mrs. Beaulieu's room softly opened and closed again. Three hours later the nurse met her in the corridor, innocently on her way to make inquiries at Mrs. Eustace Macallan's door. What do you think of these circumstances? What do you think of Mrs. Beaulieu and her maid having something to say to each other, which they didn't dare say in the house--for fear of my being behind some door listening to them? What do you think of these discoveries of mine being made on the very morning when Mrs. Eustace was taken ill--on the very day when she died by a poisoner's hand? Do you see your way to the guilty person? And has mad Miserrimus Dexter been of some assistance to you, so far?"

I was too violently excited to answer him. The way to the vindication of my husband's innocence was opened to me at last!

"Where is she?" I cried. "And where is that servant who is in her confidence?"

"I can't tell you," he said. "I don't know."

"Where can I inquire? Can you tell me that?"

He considered a little. "There is one man who must know where she is--or who could find it out for you," he said.

"Who is he? What is his name?"

"He is a friend of Eustace's. Major Fitz-David."

"I know him! I am going to dine with him next week. He has asked you to dine too."

Miserrimus Dexter laughed contemptuously.

"Major Fitz-David may do very well for the ladies," he said. "The ladies can treat him as a species of elderly human lap-dog. I don't dine with lap-dogs; I have said, No. You go. He or some of his ladies may be of use to you. Who are the guests? Did he tell you?"

"There was a French lady whose name I forget," I said, "and Lady Clarinda--"

"That will do! She is a friend of Mrs. Beaulieu's. She is sure to know where Mrs. Beaulieu is. Come to me the moment you have got your information. Find out if the maid is with her: she is the easiest to deal with of the two. Only make the maid open her lips, and we have got Mrs. Beaulieu. We crush her," he cried, bringing his hand down like lightning on the last languid fly of the season, crawling over the arm of his chair--"we crush her as I crush this fly. Stop! A question--a most important question in dealing with the maid. Have you got any money?"

"Plenty of money."

He snapped his fingers joyously.

"The maid is ours!" he cried. "It's a matter of pounds, shillings, and pence with the maid. Wait! Another question. About your name? If you approach Mrs. Beaulieu in your own character as Eustace's wife, you approach her as the woman who has taken her place--you make a mortal enemy of her at starting. Beware of that!"

My jealousy of Mrs. Beaulieu, smoldering in me all through the interview, burst into flames at those words. I could resist it no longer--I was obliged to ask him if my husband had ever loved her.

"Tell me the truth," I said. "Did Eustace really--?"

He burst out laughing maliciously, he penetrated my jealousy, and guessed my question almost before it had passed my lips.

"Yes," he said, "Eustace did really love her--and no mistake about it. She had every reason to believe (before the Trial) that the wife's death would put her in the wife's place. But the Trial made another man of Eustace. Mrs. Beaulieu had been a witness of the public degradation of him. That was enough to prevent his marrying Mrs. Beaulieu. He broke off with her at once and forever--for the same reason precisely which has led him to separate himself from you. Existence with a woman who knew that he had been tried for his life as a murderer was an existence that he was not hero enough to face. You wanted the truth. There it is! You have need to be cautious of Mrs. Beaulieu--you have no need to be jealous of her. Take the safe course. Arrange with the Major, when you meet Lady Clarinda at his dinner, that you meet her under an assumed name."

"I can go to the dinner," I said, "under the name in which Eustace married me. I can go as 'Mrs. Woodville.'"

"The very thing!" he exclaimed. "What would I not give to be present when Lady Clarinda introduces you to Mrs. Beaulieu! Think of the situation. A woman with a hideous secret hidden in her inmost soul: and another woman who knows of it--another woman who is bent, by fair means or foul, on dragging that secret into the light of day. What a struggle! What a plot for a novel! I am in a fever when I think of it. I am beside myself when I look into the future, and see Mrs. Borgia-Beaulieu brought to her knees at last. Don't be alarmed!" he cried, with the wild light flashing once more in his eyes. "My brains are beginning to boil again in my head. I must take refuge in physical exercise. I must blow off the steam, or I shall explode in my pink jacket on the spot!"

The old madness seized on him again. I made for the door, to secure my retreat in case of necessity--and then ventured to look around at him.

He was off on his furious wheels--half man, half chair--flying like a whirlwind to the other end of the room. Even this exercise was not violent enough for him in his present mood. In an instant he was down on the floor, poised on his hands, and looking in the distance like a monstrous frog. Hopping down the room, he overthrew, one after another, all the smaller and lighter chairs as he passed them; arrived at the end, he turned, surveyed the prostrate chairs, encouraged himself with a scream of triumph, and leaped rapidly over chair after chair on his hands--his limbless body now thrown back from the shoulders, and now thrown forward to keep the balance--in a manner at once wonderful and horrible to behold. "Dexter's Leap-frog!" he cried, cheerfully, perching himself with his birdlike lightness on the last of the prostrate chairs when he had reached the further end of the room. "I'm pretty active, Mrs. Valeria, considering I'm a cripple. Let us drink to the hanging of Mrs. Beaulieu in another bottle of Burgundy!"

I seized desperately on the first excuse that occurred to me for getting away from him.

"You forget," I said--"I must go at once to the Major. If I don't warn him in time, he may speak of me to Lady Clarinda by the wrong name."

Ideas of hurry and movement were just the ideas to take his fancy in his present state. He blew furiously on the whistle that summoned Ariel from the kitchen regions, and danced up and down on his hands in the full frenzy of his delight.

"Ariel shall get you a cab!" he cried. "Drive at a gallop to the Major's. Set the trap for her without losing a moment. Oh, what a day of days this has been! Oh, what a relief to get rid of my dreadful secret, and share it with You! I am suffocating with happiness--I am like the Spirit of the Earth in Shelley's poem." He broke out with the magnificent lines in "Prometheus Unbound," in which the Earth feels the Spirit of Love, and bursts into speech. "The joy, the triumph, the delight, the madness! the boundless, overflowing, bursting gladness! the vaporous exultation not to be confined! Ha! ha! the animation of delight, which wraps me like an atmosphere of light, and bears me as a cloud is borne by its own wind.' That's how I feel, Valeria!--that's how I feel!"

I crossed the threshold while he was still speaking. The last I saw of him he was pouring out that glorious flood of words--his deformed body, poised on the overthrown chair, his face lifted in rapture to some fantastic heaven of his own making. I slipped out softly into the antechamber. Even as I crossed the room, he changed once more. I heard his ringing cry; I heard the soft thump-thump of his hands on the floor. He was going down the room again, in "Dexter's Leap-frog," flying over the prostrate chairs.

In the hall, Ariel was on the watch for me.

As I approached her, I happened to be putting on my gloves. She stopped me; and, taking my right arm, lifted my hand toward her face. "Was she going to kiss it? or to bite it?" Neither. She smelt it like a dog--and dropped it again with a hoarse chuckling laugh.

"You don't smell of his perfumes," she said. "You \_haven't\_ touched his beard. \_Now\_ I believe you. Want a cab?"

"Thank you. I'll walk till I meet a cab."

She was bent on being polite to me--now I had \_not\_ touched his beard.

"I say!" she burst out, in her deepest notes.

"Yes?"

"I'm glad I didn't upset you in the canal. There now!"

She gave me a friendly smack on the shoulder which nearly knocked me down--relapsed, the instant after, into her leaden stolidity of look and manner---and led the way out by the front door. I heard her hoarse chuckling laugh as she locked the gate behind me. My star was at last in the ascendant! In one and the same day I had found my way into the confidence of Ariel and Ariel's master.