

# THE OLD MAN IN THE CORNER



## V.—THE MURDER OF MISS PEBMARSH.

BY THE BARONESS ORCZY.

### DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

<b>THE OLD MAN IN THE CORNER</b>	Who unravels the mystery to—	<b>SERGEANT EVANS</b> ... ..	A constable.
<b>THE LADY JOURNALIST</b> ... ..	Who relates it to the ROYAL readers.	<b>MISS LUCY PEBMARSH</b> ... ..	An old maid.
<b>LADY DE CHAVASSE</b> ... ..	A Society lady.	<b>MISS PAMELA PEBMARSH</b> ... ..	Her niece.
<b>SIR PERCIVAL DE CHAVASSE</b> ...	Her husband.	<b>JEMIMA GADD</b> ... ..	A servant.
		<b>MR. MILLER</b> ... ..	A greengrocer.
		<b>INSPECTOR ROBINSON</b> ... ..	A detective.

### CHAPTER I.

"You must admit," said the man in the corner to me one day, as I folded up and put aside my *Daily Telegraph*, which I had been reading with great care, "that it would be difficult to find a more interesting plot, or more thrilling situations than occurred during the case of Miss Pamela Pebmarsh. As for downright cold-blooded villainy, commend me to some of the actors in that real drama.

"The facts were simple enough: Miss Lucy Ann Pebmarsh was an old maid who lived with her young niece Pamela and an elderly servant in one of the small, newly-built houses not far from the railway station at Boreham Wood. The fact that she kept a servant at all, and that the little house always looked very spick and span, was taken by the neighbours to mean that Miss Pebmarsh was a lady of means; but she kept

very much to herself, seldom went to church and never attended any of the mothers' meetings, parochial teas, and other social gatherings for which that popular neighbourhood has long been famous.

"Very little, therefore, was known of the Pebmarsh household, save that the old lady had seen better days, that she had taken her niece to live with her recently, and that the latter had had a somewhat checkered career before she had found her present haven of refuge; some more venturesome gossips went so far as to hint—but only just above a whisper—that Miss Pamela Pebmarsh had been on the stage.

"Certain it is that that young lady seemed to chafe very much under the restraint imposed upon her by her aunt, who seldom allowed her out of her sight, and evidently kept her very short of money, for, in spite of

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Miss Pamela's obvious love of fine clothes, she had latterly been constrained to wear the plainest of frocks and most unbecoming of hats.

"All very commonplace and uninteresting, you see, until that memorable Wednesday in October, after which the little house in Boreham Wood became a nine days' wonder throughout newspaper-reading England.

"On that day Miss Pebmarsh's servant Jemima Gadd, went over to Luton to see a sick sister; she was not expected back until the next morning. On that same afternoon Miss Pamela—strangely enough—seems also to have elected to go up to town, leaving her aunt all alone in the house, and not returning home until the late train, which reaches Boreham Wood a few minutes before one.

"It was about five minutes past one that the neighbours in the quiet little street were roused from their slumbers by most frantic and agonised shrieks. The next moment Miss Pamela was seen to rush out of her aunt's house and then to hammer violently at the door of one of her neighbours, still uttering piercing shrieks. You may imagine what a commotion such a scene at midnight would cause in a place like Boreham Wood. Heads were thrust out of the windows; one or two neighbours in hastily-donned miscellaneous attire came running out; and very soon the news spread round like wildfire that Miss Pamela on coming home had found her aunt lying dead in the sitting-room.

"Mr. Miller, the local greengrocer, was the first to pluck up sufficient courage to effect an entrance into the house. Miss Pamela dared not follow him; she had become quite hysterical, and was shrieking at the top of her voice that her aunt had been murdered. The sight that greeted Mr. Miller and those who had been venturesome enough to follow him, was certainly

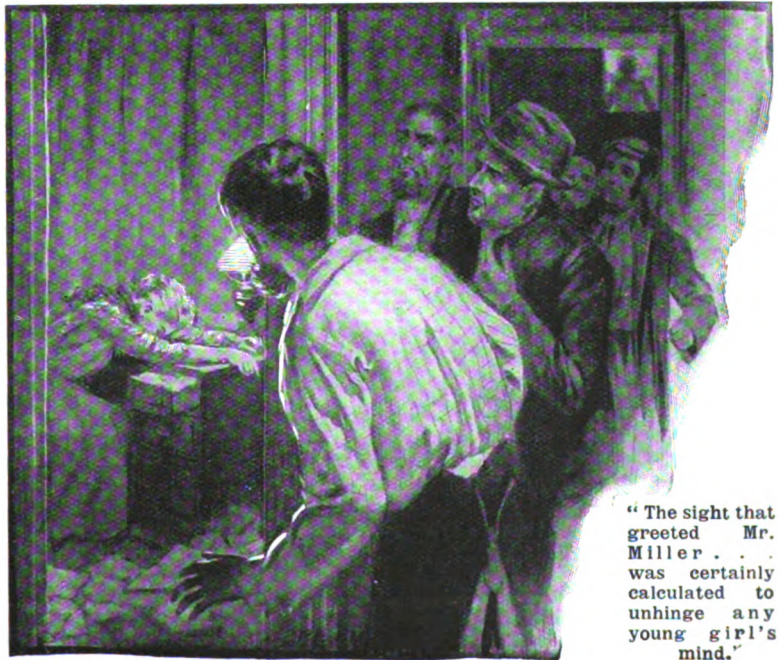
calculated to unhinge any young girl's mind.

"In the small bow-window of the sitting-room stood a writing-table, with drawers open and papers scattered all over and around it; in a chair in front of it, half sitting and half lying across the table, face downwards, and with arms outstretched, was the dead body of Miss Pebmarsh. There were sufficient indications to show to the most casual observer that, undoubtedly, the unfortunate lady had been murdered.

"One of the neighbours, who possessed a bicycle, had in the meanwhile had the good sense to ride over to the police station. Very soon two constables were on the spot; they quickly cleared the room of gossiping neighbours, and then endeavoured to obtain from Miss Pamela some lucid information as to the terrible event.

"At first she seemed quite unable to answer coherently the many questions which were being put to her; however, with infinite patience and wonderful kindness, Sergeant Evans at last managed to obtain from her the following statement:

"I had had an invitation to go to the theatre this evening; it was an old invitation, and my aunt had said long ago that I might accept it. When Jemima Gadd wanted to go to Luton, I didn't see why I should give up



"The sight that greeted Mr. Miller . . . was certainly calculated to unhinge any young girl's mind."

the theatre and offend my friend, just because of her. My aunt and I had some words about it, but I went. . . . I came back by the last train and walked straight home from the station. I had taken the latch-key with me, and went straight into the sitting-room; the lamp was alight, and—and—

"The rest was chaos in the poor girl's mind; she was only conscious of having seen something awful and terrible, and of having rushed out screaming for help. Sergeant Evans asked her no further questions then; a kind neighbour had offered to take charge of Pamela for the night, and took her away with her, the constable remaining in charge of the body and the house until the arrival of higher authorities."

## CHAPTER II.

"Although, as you may well suppose," continued the man in the corner after a pause, "the excitement was intense at Boreham Wood, it had not as yet reached the general newspaper-reading public. As the tragic event had occurred at one o'clock in the morning, the papers the following day only contained a brief announcement that an old lady had been found murdered at Boreham Wood under somewhat mysterious circumstances. Later on, the evening editions added that the police were extremely reticent, but that it was generally understood that they held an important clue.

"The following day had been fixed for the inquest, and I went down myself in the morning, for somehow I felt that this case was going to be an interesting one. A murder which at first seems absolutely purposeless always, in my experience, reveals, sooner or later, an interesting trait in human nature.

"As soon as I arrived at Boreham Wood, I found that the murder of Miss Pebmarsh and the forthcoming inquest seemed to be the sole subjects of gossip and conversation. After I had been in the place half-an-hour the news began to spread like wildfire that the murderer had been arrested; five minutes later the name of the murderer was on everybody's lips.

"It was that of the murdered woman's niece, Miss Pamela Pebmarsh.

"'Oh—oh!' I said to myself, 'my instincts have not deceived me: this case is indeed going to be interesting.'

"It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when I at last managed to find my way to the little police station, where the inquest was to be held. There was scarcely standing room,

I can tell you, and I had some difficulty in getting a front place from which I could see the principal actors in this village drama.

"Pamela Pebmarsh was there in the custody of two constables—she, a young girl scarcely five-and-twenty, stood there accused of having murdered, in a peculiarly brutal way, an old lady of seventy, her relative who had befriended her and given her a home."

The man in the corner paused for a moment, and from the capacious pocket of his magnificent ulster he drew two or three small photos, which he placed before me.

"This is Miss Pamela Pebmarsh," he said, pointing to one of these; "tall and good-looking, in spite of the shabby bit of mourning with which she had contrived to deck herself. Of course, this photo does not give you an idea of what she looked like that day at the inquest. Her face then was almost ashen in colour; her large eyes were staring before her with a look of horror and of fear; and her hands were twitching incessantly, with spasmodic and painful nervousness.

"It was pretty clear that public feeling went dead against her from the very first. A murmur of disapproval greeted her appearance, to which she seemed to reply with a look of defiance. I could hear many uncharitable remarks spoken all round me; Boreham Wood found it evidently hard to forgive Miss Pamela her good looks and her unavowed past.

"The medical evidence was brief and simple. Miss Pebmarsh had been stabbed in the back with some sharp instrument, the blade of which had pierced the left lung. She had evidently been sitting in the chair in front of her writing-table when the murderer had caught her unawares. Death had ensued within the next few seconds.

"The medical officer was very closely questioned upon this point by the coroner; it was evident that the latter had something very serious in his mind, to which the doctor's replies would give confirmation.

"'In your opinion,' he asked, 'would it have been possible for Miss Pebmarsh to do anything after she was stabbed. Could she have moved, for instance?'

"'Slightly, perhaps,' replied the doctor; 'but she did not attempt to rise from her chair.'

"'No; but could she have tried to reach the hand-bell, for instance, which was on the table, or—the pen and ink—and written a word or two?'

"'Well, yes,' said the doctor thoughtfully; 'she might have done that, if pen and ink, or

the hand-bell, were *very* close to her hand. I doubt, though, if she could have written anything very clearly, but still it is impossible to say quite definitely—anyhow, it could only have been a matter of a few seconds.

“Delightfully vague, you see,” continued the man in the corner, “as these learned gentlemen’s evidence usually is.

“Sergeant Evans then repeated the story which Pamela Pebmarsh had originally told him, and from which she had never departed in any detail. She had gone to the theatre, leaving her aunt all alone in the house; she had arrived home at one o’clock by the late Wednesday night train, and had gone straight into the sitting-room, where she had found her aunt dead before her writing-table.

“That she travelled up to London in the afternoon was easily proved; the station master and the porters had seen her go. Unfortunately for her *alibi*, however, those late ‘theatre’ trains on that line are always very crowded; the night had been dark and foggy, and no one at or near the station could swear positively to having seen her arrive home again by the train she named.

“There was one thing more; although the importance of it had been firmly impressed upon Pamela Pebmarsh, she absolutely refused to name the friends with whom she had been to the theatre that night, and who, presumably, might have helped her to prove at what hour she left London for home.

“Whilst all this was going on, I was watching Pamela’s face intently. That the girl was frightened — nay more, terrified — there could be no doubt; the twitching of her hands, her eyes dilated with terror, spoke of some awful secret which she dared not reveal, but which she felt was being gradually brought to light. Was that secret the secret of a crime—a crime so horrible, so gruesome, that surely so young a girl would be incapable of committing?

“So far, however, what struck everyone mostly during this inquest was the seeming purposelessness of this cruel murder. The old lady, as far as could be ascertained, had no money to leave, so why should Pamela Pebmarsh have deliberately murdered the aunt who provided her, at any rate, with the comforts of a home? But the police, assisted by one of the most able detectives on the staff, had not effected so sensational an arrest without due cause; they had a formidable array of witnesses to prove their case up to the hilt. One of these was Jemima Gadd, the late Miss Pebmarsh’s servant.

“She came forward attired in deep black,

and wearing a monumental crape bonnet crowned with a quantity of glistening black beads. With her face the colour of yellow wax, and her thin lips pinched tightly together, she stood as the very personification of puritanism and uncharitableness.

“She did not look once towards Pamela, who gazed at her like some wretched bird caught in a net, which sees the meshes tightening round it more and more.

“Replying to the coroner, Jemima Gadd explained that on the Wednesday morning she had had a letter from her sister at Luton, asking her to come over and see her some day.

“‘As there was plenty of cold meat in the ‘ouse,’ she said, ‘I asked the mistress if she could spare me until the next day, and she said yes, she could. Miss Pamela and she could manage quite well.’

“‘She said nothing about her niece going out, too, on the same day?’ asked the coroner.

“‘No,’ replied Jemima acidly, ‘she did not. And later on, at breakfast, Miss Pebmarsh said to Miss Pamela before me: “Pamela,” she says, “Jemima is going to Luton and won’t be back until to-morrow. You and I will be alone in the ‘ouse until then.”’

“‘And what did the accused say?’

“‘She says “All right, aunt.”’

“‘Nothing more?’

“‘No, nothing more.’

“‘There was no question, then, of the accused going out also, and leaving Miss Pebmarsh all alone in the house?’

“‘None at all,’ said Jemima emphatically. ‘If there ‘ad been I’d ‘ave ‘eard of it. I needn’t ‘ave gone that day. Any day would ‘ave done for me.’

“She closed her thin lips with a snap, and darted a vicious look at Pamela. There was obviously some old animosity lurking beneath that gigantic crape monument on the top of Jemima’s wax-coloured head.

“‘You know nothing, then, about any disagreement between the deceased and the accused on the subject of her going to the theatre that day?’ asked the coroner after a while.

“‘No, not about *that*,’ said Jemima curtly; ‘but there was plenty of disagreements between those two, I can tell you.’

“‘Ah? what about?’

“‘Money mostly. Miss Pamela was over-fond of fine clothes, but Miss Pebmarsh, who was giving ‘er a ‘ome and ‘er daily bread, ‘adn’t much money to spare

for fallalery. Miss Pebmarsh 'ad a small pension from a lady of the haristocracy, but it wasn't much—a pound a week it was. Miss Pebmarsh might 'ave 'ad a lot more if she'd wanted to.'

"'Oh?' qu-ried the coroner, 'how was that?'

"'Well, you see, that fine lady 'ad not always been as good as she ought to be. She'd been Miss Pamela's friend when they were both on the stage together, and pretty goings on, I can tell you, those two were up to, and ——'

"'That'll do,' interrupted the coroner sternly. 'Confine yourself, please, to telling the jury about the pension Miss Pebmarsh had from a lady.'

"'I was speaking about that,' said Jemima, with another snap of her thin lips. 'Miss Pebmarsh knew a thing or two about this fine lady, and she had some letters which she often told me that fine lady would not care for her 'usband or her fine friends to read. Miss Pamela got to know about these letters, an I she worried her poor aunt to death, for she wanted to get those letters and sell them to the fine lady for 'undreds of pounds. I 'ave 'eard 'er ask for those letters times and again, but Miss Pebmarsh wouldn't give them to 'er, and they was locked up in the writing-table drawer, and Miss Pamela wanted those letters, for she wanted to get 'undreds of pounds from the fine lady, and my poor mistress was murdered for those letters—and she was murdered by that wicked girl 'oo eat her bread and 'oo would 'ave starved but for 'er. And so I tell you, and I don't care 'oo 'ears me say it.'

"'No one had attempted to interrupt Jemima Gadd as she delivered herself of this extraordinary tale, which so suddenly threw an unexpected and lurid light upon the mystery of poor Miss Pebmarsh's death.

"'That the tale was a true one, no one doubted for a single instant. One look at the face of the accused was sufficient to prove it beyond question. Pamela Pebmarsh had become absolutely livid; she tottered almost as if she would fall, and the constable had to support her until a chair was brought forward for her.

"'As for Jemima Gadd, she remained absolutely impassive. Having given her evidence, she stepped aside automatically like a yellow waxen image, which had been wound up and had now run down. There was silence for awhile. Pamela Pebmarsh, more dead than alive, was sipping a glass of brandy and water, which alone prevented her from falling in a dead faint.

"'Detective Inspector Robinson now stepped forward. All the spectators there could read on his face the consciousness that his evidence would be of the most supreme import.

"'I was telegraphed for from the Yard,' he said in reply to the coroner, 'and came down here by the first train on the Thursday morning. Beyond the short medical examination the body had not been touched: as the constables know, we don't like things interfered with in cases of this kind. When I went up to look at deceased, the first thing I saw was a piece of paper just under her right hand. Sergeant Evans had seen it before and pointed it out to me. Deceased had a pen in her hand, and the ink bottle was close by. This is the paper I found, sir.'

"'And amidst a deadly silence, during which nothing could be heard but the scarcely-perceptible rustle of the paper, the inspector handed a small note across to the coroner. The latter glanced at it for a moment, and his face became very grave and solemn as he turned towards the jury.

"'Gentlemen of the jury,' he said, 'these are the contents of the paper which the inspector found under the hand of the deceased.'

"'He paused once more before he began to read, whilst we all in that crowded court held our breath to listen:

"'I am dying. My murderess is my niece, Pam——'

"'That is all, gentlemen,' added the coroner, as he folded up the note. 'Death overtook the unfortunate woman in the very act of writing down the name of her murderess.'

"'Then there was a wild, an agonised shriek of horror. Pamela Pebmarsh, with hair dishevelled and eyes in which the light of madness had begun to gleam, threw up her hands, and without a word, and without a groan fell down senseless upon the floor."

### CHAPTER III.

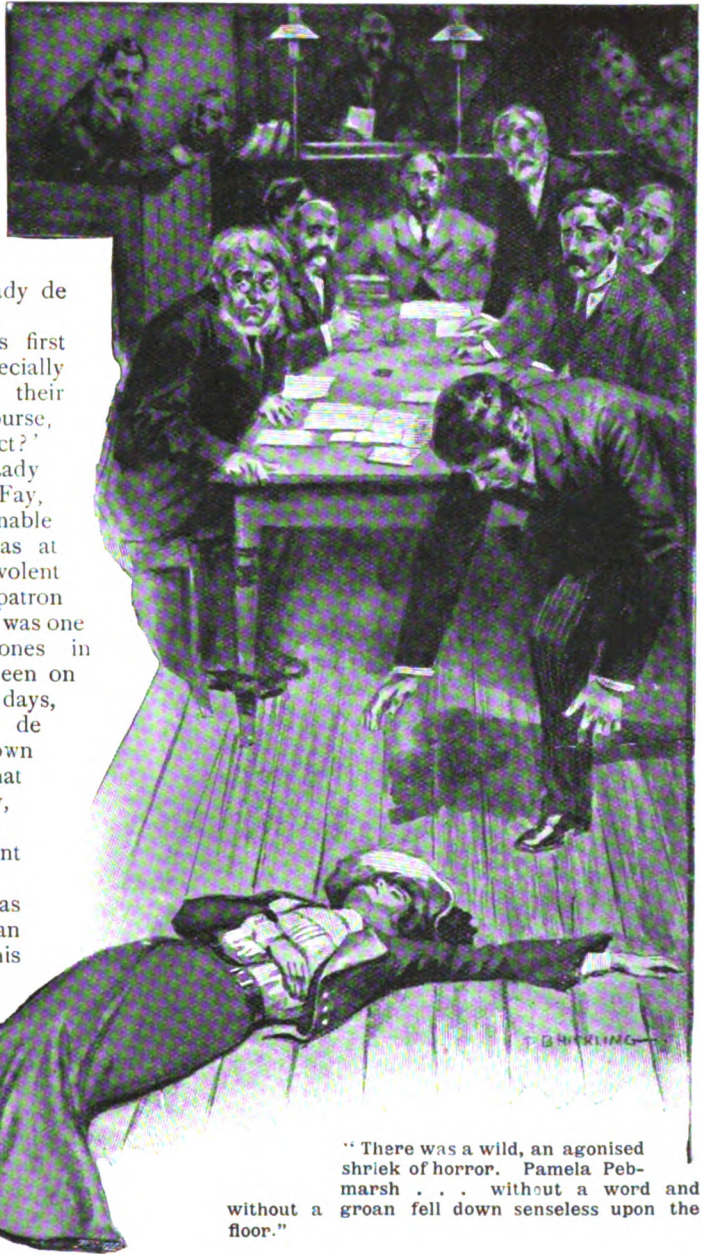
"'Yes,'" said the man in the corner with a chuckle, "there was enough evidence there to hang twenty people, let alone that one fool of a girl who had run her neck so madly into a noose. I don't suppose that anyone left the court that day with the slightest doubt in their minds as to what the verdict would be; for the coroner had adjourned the inquest, much to the annoyance of the jury, who had fully made up their minds and had their verdict pat on the tips of their tongues: 'Wilful murder against Pamela Pebmarsh.'

"But this was a case which to the last kept up its reputation for surprises. By the next morning rumour had got about that 'the lady of the aristocracy,' referred to by Jemima Gadd, and who was supposed to have paid a regular pension to Miss Pebmarsh, was none other than Lady de Chavasse.

"When the name was first mentioned, everyone—especially the fair sex—shrugged their shoulders and said: 'Of course, what else *could* one expect?'

"As a matter of fact, Lady de Chavasse, *née* Birdie Fay, was one of the most fashionable women in society; she was at the head of a dozen benevolent institutions, was a generous patron of hospitals, and her house was one of the most exclusive ones in London. True, she had been on the stage in her younger days, and when Sir Percival de Chavasse married her, his own relations looked somewhat askance at the showy, handsome girl who had so daringly entered the ancient county family.

"Sir Percival himself was an extraordinarily proud man—proud of his lineage, of his social status, of the honour



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of his name. His very pride had forced his relations, had forced society to accept his beautiful young wife, and to Lady de Chavasse's credit be it said, not one breath of scandal as to her past life had ever become public gossip. No one could assert that they *knew* anything derogatory to Birdie Fay before she became the proud baronet's wife. As a matter of fact, all society asserted that Sir

Percival would never have married her and introduced her to his own family circle if there had been any gossip about her.

"Now suddenly the name of Lady de Chavasse was on everybody's tongue. People at first spoke it under their breath, for everyone felt great sympathy with her. She was so rich, and entertained so lavishly. She was very charming, too; most fascinating in her

ways; deferential to her austere mother-in-law; not a little afraid of her proud husband; very careful lest by word or look she betrayed her early connection with the stage before him.

"On the following day, however, we had further surprises in store for us. Pamela Pebmarsh, advised by a shrewd and clear-headed solicitor, had at last made up her mind to view her danger a little more coolly and to speak rather more of the truth than she had done hitherto.

"Still looking very haggard, but perhaps a little less scared, she now made a statement which, when it was fully substantiated, as she stated it could be, would go far towards clearing her of the terrible imputation against her. Her story was this: On the memorable day in question, she did go up to town, intending to go to the theatre. At the station she purchased an evening paper, which she began to read. This paper in its fashionable columns contained an announcement which arrested her attention; this was that Sir Percival and Lady de Chavasse had returned to their flat in town at 51, Marsden Mansions, Belgravia, from "The Chase," Melton Mowbray.

"De Chavasse,' continued Pamela, 'was the name of the lady who paid my aunt the small pension on which she lived. I knew her years ago, when she was on the stage, and I suddenly thought I would like to go and see her, just to have a chat over old times. Instead of going to the theatre, I went and had some dinner at Slater's, in Piccadilly, and then I thought I would take my chance, and go and see if Lady de Chavasse was at home. I got to 51, Marsden Mansions, about eight o'clock, and was fortunate enough to see Lady de Chavasse at once. She kept me talking some considerable time; so much so, in fact, that I missed the 11 from St. Pancras. I only left Marsden Mansions at a quarter to eleven, and had to wait at St. Pancras until twenty minutes past midnight.'

"This was all reasonable and clear enough, and, as her legal adviser had subpoenaed Lady de Chavasse as a witness, Pamela Pebmarsh seemed to have found an excellent way out of her terrible difficulties, the only question being whether Lady de Chavasse's testimony alone would, in view of her being Pamela's friend, be sufficient to weigh against the terribly overwhelming evidence of Miss Pebmarsh's dying accusation.

"But Lady de Chavasse settled this doubtful point in a way least expected by

anyone. Exquisitely dressed, golden-haired, and brilliant complexioned, she looked strangely out of place in this dusty little village court, amidst the local dames in their plain gowns and antiquated bonnets. She was, moreover, extremely self-possessed, and only cast a short, very haughty, look at the unfortunate girl whose life probably hung upon that fashionable woman's word.

"'Yes,' she said sweetly in reply to the coroner, 'she was the wife of Sir Percival de Chavasse, and resided at 51, Marsden Mansions, Belgravia.'

"'The accused, I understand, has been known to you for some time?' continued the coroner.

"'Pardon me,' rejoined Lady de Chavasse, speaking in a beautifully modulated voice, 'I did know this young—hem—person, years ago, when I was on the stage, but, of course, I had not seen her for years.'

"'She called on you on Wednesday last at about nine o'clock?'

"'Yes, she did, for the purpose of levying blackmail upon me.'

"'There was no mistaking the look of profound aversion and contempt which the fashionable lady now threw upon the poor girl before her.'

"'She had some preposterous story about some letters which she alleged would be compromising to my reputation,' continued Lady de Chavasse quietly. 'These she had the kindness to offer me for sale, for a few hundred pounds. At first her impudence staggered me, as, of course, I had no knowledge of any such letters. She threatened to take them to my husband, however, and I then—rather foolishly, perhaps—suggested that she should bring them to me first. I forget how the conversation went on, but she left me with the understanding that she would get the letters from her aunt, Miss Pebmarsh, who, by the way, had been my governess when I was a child, and to whom I paid a small pension in consideration of her having been left absolutely without means.'

"And Lady de Chavasse, conscious of her own disinterested benevolence, pressed a highly-scented bit of cambric to her delicate nose.

"'Then the accused did spend the evening with you on that Wednesday?' asked the coroner, while a great sigh of relief seemed to come from poor Pamela's breast.

"'Pardon me,' said Lady de Chavasse, 'she spent a little time with me. She came about nine o'clock.'

"'Yes. And when did she leave?'

"'I really couldn't tell you—about ten o'clock, I think.'

"'You are not sure?' persisted the coroner. 'Think, Lady de Chavasse,' he added earnestly, 'try to think—the life of a fellow-creature may, perhaps, depend upon your memory.'

"'I am indeed sorry,' she replied in the same musical voice. 'I could not swear without being positive, could I? And I am not quite positive.'

"'But your servants?'

"'They were at the back of the flat—the girl let herself out.'

"'But your husband?'

"'Oh! when he saw me engaged with the girl he went out to his club, and was not yet home when she left.'

"'Birdie! Birdie! won't you try and remember?' here came in an agonised cry from the unfortunate girl, who thus saw her last hope vanish before her eyes.

"'But Lady de Chavasse only lifted a little higher a pair of very prettily-arched eyebrows, and having finished her evidence she stepped on one side and presently left the court, leaving behind her a faint aroma of violet sachet powder, and taking away with her, perhaps, the last hope of an innocent fellow-creature.'

#### CHAPTER IV.

"'But Pamela Pebmarsh?' I asked after a while, for he had paused and was gazing attentively at the photograph of a very beautiful and exquisitely-gowned woman.

"'Ah, yes, Pamela Pebmarsh,' he said with a smile. 'There was yet another act in that palpitating drama of her life—one act—the *dénouement* as unexpected as it was thrilling. Salvation came where it was least expected—from Jemima Gadd, who seemed to have made up her mind that Pamela had killed her aunt, and yet who was the first to prove her innocence.'

"'She had been shown the few words which the murdered woman was alleged to have written after she had been stabbed. Jemima, not a very good scholar, found it difficult to decipher the words herself.'

"'Ah, well, poor dear,' she said after a while, with a deep sigh, 'er'andwriting was always peculiar, seen' as 'ow she wrote always with 'er left 'and.'

"'Her left hand!!!' gasped the coroner, while public and jury alike, hardly liking to credit their ears, hung upon the woman's thin lips, amazed, aghast, puzzled.

"'Why yes!' said Jemima placidly.

'Didn't you know she 'ad a bad accident to 'er right 'and when she was a child, and never could 'old anything in it? 'er fingers were like paralysed; the ink-pot was always on the left of 'er writing-table. Oh! she couldn't write with 'er right 'and at all.'

'Then a strange revulsion of feeling came over everyone there.

"'Stabbed in the back, with her lung pierced through and through, how could she have done, dying, what she never did in life?'

"'Impossible!'

"'The murderer, whoever it was, had placed pen and paper to her hand, and had written on it the cruel words which were intended to delude justice and to send an innocent fellow-creature—a young girl not five-and-twenty—to an unjust and ignominious death. But, fortunately for that innocent girl, the cowardly miscreant had ignored the fact that Miss Pebmarsh's right hand had been paralysed for years.

"'The inquest was adjourned for a week,' continued the man in the corner, "which enabled Pamela's solicitor to obtain further evidence of her innocence. Fortunately for her, he was enabled to find two witnesses who had seen her in an omnibus going towards St. Pancras at about 11.15 p.m., and a passenger on the 12.25 train who had travelled down with her as far as Hendon. Thus, when the inquest was resumed Pamela Pebmarsh left the court without a stain upon her character.

(*At this point try to solve the mystery yourselves.*—Ed.)

"'But the murder of Miss Pebmarsh has remained a mystery to this day—as has also the secret history of the compromising letters. Did they exist or not? is a question the interested spectators at that memorable inquest have often asked themselves. Certain is it that failing Pamela Pebmarsh, who might have wanted them for purposes of blackmail, no one else could be interested in them except Lady de Chavasse.'

"'Lady de Chavasse!' I ejaculated in surprise. Surely you are not going to pretend that that elegant lady went down to Boreham Wood in the middle of the night in order to murder Miss Pebmarsh, and then to lay the crime at another woman's door?'

"'I only pretend what's logic,' replied the man in the corner with inimitable conceit; 'and in Pamela Pebmarsh's own statement, she was with Lady de Chavasse at 51, Marsden Mansions, until eleven o'clock, and there is no train from St. Pancras to Boreham Wood between eleven and twenty-five minutes



past midnight. Pamela's *alibi* becomes that of Lady de Chavasse, and is quite conclusive. Besides, that elegant lady was not one to do that sort of work for herself."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Do you mean to say you never thought of the real solution of this mystery?" he retorted sarcastically.

"I confess——" I began a little irritably.

"Confess that I have not yet taught you to think logically, and to look at the beginning of things."

"What do you call the beginning of this case, then?"

"Why! the compromising letters, of course."

"But," I argued.

"Wait a minute!" he shrieked excitedly, whilst with frantic haste he began fidgeting, fidgeting again at that eternal bit of string.

"These did exist, otherwise why did Lady de Chavasse parley with Pamela Pebmarsh? Why did she not order her out of the house then and there if she had nothing to fear from her?"

"I admit that," I said.

"Very well; then, as she was too fine, too delicate, to commit the villainous murder of which she afterwards accused poor Miss Pamela, who was there sufficiently interested in those letters to try and gain possession of them for her?"

"Who, indeed?" I queried, still puzzled, still not understanding.

"Aye! who but her husband," shrieked the funny creature, as with a sharp snap he broke his beloved string in two.

"Her husband!" I gasped.

"Why not? He had plenty of time, plenty of pluck. In a flat it is easy enough to overhear

conversations that take place in the next room—he was in the house at the time, remember, for Lady de Chavasse said herself that he went out afterwards. No doubt he overheard everything—the compromising letters, and Pamela's attempt at levying blackmail. What the effect of such a discovery must have been upon the proud man I leave you to imagine—his wife's social position ruined, a stain upon his ancient name, his relations pointing the finger of scorn at his folly.

"Can't you picture him, hearing the two women's talk in the next room, and then resolving at all costs to possess himself of those compromising letters? He had just time to catch the 10 train to Boreham Wood.

"Mind you, I don't suppose that he went down there with any evil intent. Most likely he only meant to buy those letters from Miss Pebmarsh.

What happened, however, nobody can say but the murderer himself.

"Who knows? But the deed done, imagine the horror of a refined, aristocratic man face to face with such a crime as that.

"Was it this terror, or merely rage at the girl who had been the original cause of all this, that prompted him to commit the final villainy of writing out a false accusation and placing it under the dead woman's hand? Who can tell?

"Then, the deed done, and the *mise-en-scène* complete, he is able to catch the last train—11.23—back to town. A man travelling alone would pass practically unperceived.

"Pamela's innocence was proved, and the murder of Miss Pebmarsh has remained a mystery, but if you will reflect on my conclusions you will admit that no one else—*no one else*—could have committed that murder, for no one else had a greater interest in the destruction of those letters."



"Can't you picture him, hearing the two women's talk in the next room?"