

# The Bloomfield Times.

FRANK MORTIMER,  
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## Dr. Spencer's Crime.

BY CLARA AUGUSTA.

I WAS sitting alone in my office, half dozing over an interminable article on defective nutrition in the last *Medical Review*.

The fire in the grate was low, the night was stormy, and the clock was on the stroke of eleven. I was just about to turn off the gas and retire, for being a bachelor I slept in a room connected with my office, when there was a pull at my bell.

I started up suddenly, for this was something new. Middlebury was a decorous sort of a place, and people usually managed to be taken sick at seasonable hours.

Old Mrs. Jerome had been threatening to die for the past five years, and at every visit I paid her she informed me solemnly that when the decisive moment did come she desired me to be present. But as nothing ailed the old lady beyond now and then indigestion from too much high living, I had never yet been called upon to be present at her death.

Now, I thought, it must be that Mrs. Jerome is going.

I took up my night-lamp and went to the door. A strong gust of damp, sleety wind early extinguished the light, but shading with my hand I dimly discerned the form of a woman.

"Come in," said I, holding open the door, but she declined with a gesture of impatience.

"You must come out?" she replied, in sharp, imperative tone, "and be quick about it."

I put on my overcoat without demur, unlocked the surgery door, and stepped out into the storm. As I did so, the woman laid a firm hand on my arm, and putting her face close to mine, said:

"Dr. Lockwood, can you keep a secret?"

"I think so, madam."

"Swear it."

"Is this secret of yours of professional character? That is, is it anything you wish to confide to me as a medical man?"

"It is."

"Very well, then, I swear it!"

"That is right. A man respects another, though why he should, is a mystery, but most men's mouths are running over with them."

"Whither are you taking me, and for what purpose?"

"To Clifton House, to see the mistress."

I started. Clifton House was the old mansion recently taken by Dr. Spencer, a stranger to every one in Middlebury. Dr. Spencer was a tall, dark, rather distinguished-looking man, who had hung out his sign in the village only a few doors above mine, but as yet he had got no practice. He was unsocial in the extreme. He avoided his neighbors persistently, and when he did speak, he was not likely to attempt prolonging the conversation.

He had a wife, it is said, but no one ever saw her. She was an invalid; and a Miss Melrose—a friend of the family—preluded the establishment, and sat at the head of the table.

Miss Melrose was very beautiful, and won the admiration of all who visited at Clifton House, by her grace of manner and her fascinating conversation.

"As we walk along," said my companion, "let me explain to you just what it is necessary you should know. My mistress is ill."

"I beg your pardon—is it Mrs. Spencer, or Miss Melrose?"

She laughed bitterly.

"Miss Melrose! I would stab her to the heart sooner than own her for a mistress! My mistress is a lady; noble, loyal, and of gentle birth. It is an honor to any one to serve my mistress."

"And she is ill? How long since?"

"Ever since she married him—curse him!" she muttered in a fierce undertone; "but I must not get excited. I must tell my story, or rather hers. Two years ago through the desire of her dying father, whom she loved passionately, Alicia Herndon became James Spencer's wife. Before that she was a healthy, blooming girl—immediately after the marriage she began to fail. Do you see anything singular in that sir?" she asked keenly.

"Not necessarily."

Let me enlighten you further. Dr. Spencer at one time was engaged to Miss Lucille Melrose, but he broke the engagement and married my mistress instead. Miss Melrose was poor as Job's turkey; Miss Herndon was an heiress. And Dr. Spencer was deeply in debt and hard pressed by his creditors. Do you see any thing singular in that?"

"Perhaps. Go on."

"When my mistress married Spencer, she was only seventeen, and she had been taught to obey her father in everything. She was a gentle affectionate child, and it would have been easy for Spencer to have won her love. But he did not care for that, it was her money he wanted. It paid his debts, it bought him fast horses, it set his table with costly dishes, and it put it in his power to keep Miss Melrose robbed like a queen. And all this time my mistress has been slowly but surely failing. And look you, Dr. Lockwood, I believe that she is not dying of disease, but of—" She lowered her voice to a whisper as she spoke the word, "poison!"

"Impossible! This is a grave charge—"

"Of poison given her by her husband, who at her death will have sole control of all her property, and be free to marry Miss Melrose! There is no time to explain to you in detail the one-thousand-and-one circumstances which have led me to this belief, for we are almost at the door. It is never the case that both Spencer and Miss Melrose are out of the house at the same time, or I should have called another physician before; but to-night they are called away by the death of Miss Melrose's sister, and will not be back until to-morrow. With the consent of my mistress I came for you, and oh, Dr. Lockwood, I pray you save my dear mistress! I nursed her when her mother died and left her a helpless infant—all through her babyhood and her innocent youth she was like an own child to me! and now to see her fading hourly before my eyes! Good Heaven! if I knew beyond all doubt that he was guilty; his life should pay the forfeit!"

I was already beginning to feel a strong interest in this Mrs. Spencer, although I had never seen her, and began to take it for granted that she was a much-abused woman, and like her old nurse I was inclined to feel a keen animosity for Dr. Spencer, as a man who had inflicted serious wrongs upon a defenceless woman.

Mrs. Spencer received me in her chamber. It was on the second floor, and was furnished with with exquisite elegance. Everything in the room bespoke the taste and delicacy of the occupant. The warm air was fragrant with the faint odor of heliotrope, and glancing around I saw the purple blossoms and green leaves in an al-

baster case on the ledge of the south window.

She was a woman, who, once seen, could never be forgotten. I have met in my life many beautiful women but never one so lovely.

She was tall and slight, with purely oval face, large, liquid eyes, and a dash of hectic in her cheeks, which is never seen in any person's countenance while in perfect health.

She received me as I now know she did everything, gracefully, and though there was a slight embarrassment in her manner when I spoke of her illness, she answered my professional inquiries without hesitation.

As for myself, I laid aside all false delicacy, and questioned her plainly as to her symptoms. Mrs. Hurd, her nurse, remained in the room, and added many little important items of information.

When she spoke of her husband it was with a sort of hopeless sadness which distressed me greatly.

Not a breath of suspicion against him in her answers to my questions, and I felt sure that at present she knew nothing of what Mrs. Hurd had such serious apprehensions. I was glad that it was so, for with her finely-strung organism it might have produced serious results.

I made my examination of the patient as close as I could, and drew my own conclusions. I could have sworn that Mrs. Spencer daily swallowed arsenic in small quantities, and the deadly drug was telling fearfully upon a constitution never very robust.

She said in answer to my questions, that she had had no physician except her husband. He had thought himself better acquainted with her case, and, therefore, better qualified to treat it. He never left medicine with her to take; he always brought it himself fresh from his office, and administered it personally.

There was little enough that I could do in such a case. Anxious to do everything, the very circumstances of the affair left me nearly powerless.

A charge of such a grave nature, of course, I could not make against Dr. Spencer without the amplest proof. If I hinted a suspicion every one would at once set it down to professional prejudice; and if I could not substantiate my statement, the doctor could make me pay dearly for such a slander uttered against him.

The only dependence seemed to be in Mrs. Hurd. To her I unbosomed myself freely. I told her, without reserve, that I believed Dr. Spencer was killing his wife by slow poison, and besought her to be constantly on the watch to save the victim, and to discover some proof by which we could fasten his guilt upon him.

She smiled grimly, and promised obedience. I gave her a powerful antidote for the poison I suspected and went home, strangely perturbed and anxious in mind. I did not sleep that night, and all the next day I was in a high fever of excitement. A ring at the bell made me tremble—a step on the gravel outside my office stopped my breath. I hardly knew what I expected to hear, and yet felt sure that before I slept I should hear something.

And now I must tell the story as it was told to me.

Dr. Spencer returned home the morning after my visit to Clifton House. He looked wretchedly, the old nurse said, and appeared unusually gloomy and depressed. Miss Melrose came with him, and was decorously sad over the death of her sister. Women of her stamp always mourn to perfection. They never overdo nor underdo the thing as women with feelings are likely to do.

Dr. Spencer came at once to his wife's chamber. He thought she looked ill, and prescribed a cordial at once, saying he would go and fetch it.

"You are always ordering cordials for her," said Mrs. Hurd, musingly. "Why not take something yourself? You look like a ghost!"

He eyed her keenly, but replied, composedly:

"I think I will take some of the cordial myself; for I do not feel quite well. Alicia, dear, shall I bring it here and drink your health?"

Mrs. Spencer smiled sadly in assent—she never disputed her husband—and he went out. Presently he returned with two glasses. Both contained liquid, colorless and inodorous. Mrs. Hurd was watching him with her heart in her throat; for, as she told me, she felt that a decisive moment had come. There was something in the gray pallor on the doctor's rigid face that told her of a desperate purpose in the man's soul.

He lifted the glass on the right of the tray, and gave it to his wife.

"Drink it, dear," he said; "it is a panacea for all evils. I also, am going to take a glass of it!" and he pointed to the glass still on the tray.

Mrs. Spencer accepted it, and was putting it to her lips when Mrs. Hurd interposed:

"If you will bring a tumbler of water, doctor; Mrs. Spencer complains that the cordial leaves a bad taste in her mouth. And my old bones are so full rheumatism that it kills me to go down stairs."

The doctor turned and bent on her a look as if he would read her thought and through. But she kept her face impassive. If he had any suspicions, her manner quieted them, and putting down the glass he left the room.

Then Mrs. Hurd changed the position of the glasses.

When he came back, and he was absent only a moment, the nurse stood just where he had left her, and Mrs. Spencer was lying back in her chair with closed eyes.

Again he lifted the glass; this time it was the one he had designed for himself, and placed it at the lips of his wife. She drank the contents, swallowed a little of the water he had brought her, and thanked him in her sad sweet way.

"Now for my own cordial," said he, with affected gayety. "I indulge myself in something a little stronger," and, as he spoke, he tossed off the mixture.

"It made me stone cold to my fingers' ends to see him do it," said Mrs. Hurd, in relating the circumstance to me; "but Heaven is my witness I felt not a single twinge of conscience. I argued like this. If it was simple cordial, as he had said, it would do him no harm. If it was poison, his blood would be on his own head."

He went to bed a half-hour afterward, complaining of fatigue. In the morning they found him dead!

I was called to the post mortem examination, and we discovered in the stomach of the deceased a sufficient quantity of one of the deadliest poisons known to modern science to kill a half dozen men.

My brother physicians agreed that the man was insane, and had probably taken the drug in one of his unsettled fits of mind. I did not dispute them, but, even before Mrs. Hurd told me her story, I had my own theory in regard to his death. There was no public exposure however. Mrs. Hurd and I agreed that it would benefit no one to make the wretched affair public and we kept our own counsel.

Miss Melrose, in spite of my conviction that she had been an active party to the conspiracy against Mrs. Spencer's life, I could not help pitying. Such a miserable, worn, and haggard face as hers I have never seen, and when they buried Dr. Spencer, she was confined to her chamber with brain fever.

I attended her in that illness, but though she recovered her health, she was never herself again. She was a harmless maniac, whose delight was in gathering flowers and decorating the doctor's grave with them.

She is living still, and she still gathers flowers and lays them on that grave, singing to herself, meanwhile, a sort of low incan-

tation, which no one ever pretends to understand.

Not until Mrs. Spencer had been many years my wife, and faithful Mrs. Hurd slept under the violets, did Alicia ever know of the perfidy of her first husband.

## How I Got Invited to Dinner.

MY getting the better of my wife's father is one of the richest things on record.

I'll tell you how it was. You must know that he is monstrous stingy; the complaint seems to run in the family, and everybody round our parts used to notice that he never by any chance asked any body to dine with him. So one day, just for a chuck of fun, I said to Jeddy Downkins—a dreadful nice feller is Jeddy—"I'll bet you a penn'orth of shoe strings gainst a row of pins that I get old Ben Merkins that's my wife's father, to ask me to dinner."

"Yeon get eout," said Jeddy; "why you might as well try to coax a cat into a shower bath, or get moonbeams eout of coveumbers."

"Well," said I, I'm going to try.

And try I did, and I'll tell you how I went to work.

Just as old Ben was sitting down to dinner, at one o'clock, I rushed up to the house at a high pressure pace, red hot in the face, with my coat tails in the air, and my eyes rollin' about like billiard balls in convulsions. Rat-tat-tat—ding-a-ling-a-ling. I kicked up an awful rumpus, and in a flash out came old Ben himself. I had struck the right minnit; he had a napkin under his chin and carvin knife in his hand. I smelt the dinner as he opened the door.

"O, Mr. Merkins," said I, "I am tarnation glad to see you. I feared you moughtn't be at home—I'm almost out of breath. I'm come to tell you I can save you a thousand dollars!"

"A thousand dollars!" roared the old man; and I defy a weasel to go "pop" quicker than his face burst into smiles. "A thousand dollars! Yeon don't say so! du tell!"

"Oh," said I, "I see you are just havin' dinner now. I'll go an' dine myself, and then I'll come back and tell you all about it."

"Nonsense," said he; "don't go away; come in and sit down, and enjoy yourself like a good fellow, and have a snack with me. I am anxious to hear what you have to say."

I pretended to decline, sayin' "I'd come back;" but I had thoroughly stirred up the old chap's curiosity, and it ended by his fairly pullin' me into the house, and I made a rattlin' dinner of pork and beans.

I managed for some time to dodge the main pint of his inquiry. At last I finished eating, and there was no further excuse for delay; besides old Ben was gettin' fidgety.

"Come neow," said he, "no more preface. About that thousand dollars come let it out."

"Well, I'll tell you what," said I, "yeou have a darter, Misery Ann, to dispose of in marriage, am't yeou."

"What's that got to do with it?" interrupted he.

"Hold your proud steeds—don't run off the track—a great deal to do with it," said I "Neow answer my question."

"Well," said he "I have."

"And you intend when she marries to give her \$10,000 for a portion?"

"I do," he said.

"Well, neow, here's the pint I'm comin' taw. Let me have her and I'll take her with \$8,000; and 2,000 from 10,000, according to simple subtraction just leaves 1,000 and that will be clean profit—saved as slick as a whistle!"

The next thing I knew, there was a rapid interview going on between old Ben's foot and my coat-tails—and I am inclined to think the latter got the worst of it.