

**THE LADY FROM
NOWHERE: A
DETECTIVE STORY**

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The Lady From Nowhere: A Detective Story by Fergus Hume

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FERGUS HUME

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THE
LADY FROM NOWHERE

A DETECTIVE STORY

BY
W
FERGUS HUME ✓

AUTHOR OF "THE MYSTERY OF A HANSON CAB," ETC.



BRENTANO'S
31 UNION SQUARE, NEW YORK

1900

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THE LADY FROM NOWHERE

CHAPTER I

THE TRAGEDY OF THE STRANGE ROOM

ON the night of July 24th, in the year 1896, between the hours of eleven and twelve, Grangebury, a little-known suburb of London, was wrapped in slumber, as became a respectable neighbourhood whose inhabitants retired regularly shortly after sunset. Not that they had done so on this particular night, for the unusual excitement of a lecture on Dickens, delivered in the tiny Town Hall, had kept them from their beds later than was customary. At a quarter to eleven, a stream of instructed pleasure-seekers, discussing lecture and lecturer, filled the narrow streets; but gradually the crowd diminished until highways and byways were left deserted, save by watchful policemen and vagrant cats. The lamps were then extinguished by order of an economical municipality, the few lights still twinkling from the upper windows of various houses disappeared, and the little town lay

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under moon and stars as silent and almost as lonely as the spell-bound cities in eastern fables.

Every now and then the footsteps of policemen making their rounds, could be heard echoing along the streets, and sometimes an official lantern would be flashed into dark corners to search out possible burglars or homeless beggars. But no thieves or vagabonds could be discovered ; for, on the whole, Grangebury, being a comparatively new suburb, was free from such criminal pests, and the police force there, under the command of Mr. Inspector Lackland had a very easy time. There was nothing on this night to indicate any ending to this Arcadian Age of security and innocence ; yet, shortly after eleven o'clock a yawning policeman, leaning against a convenient wall, heard a word cried aloud which told him of crime and danger. The word was "Murder !"

"Murder !" repeated the constable, looking up and down the street.

"Murder !" shrieked the voice again ; and then there came the sound of running feet, cries for help, and the quick panting of an exhausted creature. Before the policeman could decide in which direction to move, a dishevelled woman, screaming and gesticulating, came at full speed round the corner, and almost fell into his arms. Her face was pearly white in the moonlight, her eyes were filled with

TRAGEDY OF THE STRANGE ROOM 3

terror, and an almost continuous cry issued from her open mouth without any motion of the lips.

"'Ere! 'ere, wot's this?" said the policeman, seizing the flying creature by the arm. "Wot d'ye mean, screeching out murder like a loonatic? Come now!"

Trembling violently, the woman grappled with the policeman, shrieking the while, and evidently beside herself with terror. Not being gifted with brains, the officer of the law shook her vigorously to brighten her intellect; and she wavered limply in his grasp like a dummy figure.

"Murder!" she whimpered, clawing and clutching at the man. "Lord! it's awful! Ugh! Ugh! I've seen her dead!"

"Seen 'oo dead?" demanded the policeman, stolidly.

"My lodger! Dead! Strangled! Ugh! Ugh!" cried the woman, breathlessly, raising her voice higher at each word. "A corpse in the Yellow Room! Paradise Row! Come and see—come and— Oh, poor soul!" and she fell to wringing her hands again, quivering and panting.

"Wait a bit!" said the jack-in-office, bound by red-tapeism, "the police station is just roun' th' corner. Kim up an' see th' Inspector!"

"I—I—I am innocent!" gasped the woman, hanging back. "Neither 'Tilda nor I laid a finger on her."

"'Oo said y' did?" retorted the man, suspiciously; and, for his own protection he recited an official formula, "Wot y' say now 'ull be used in hevidence agin y'. Kim up, I tell y'." And, grasping her arm, he hurried her fighting and crying round the near corner, and into a red-brick building, over the door of which was a lamp inscribed "Police Station."

In a stuffy room, rendered almost unbearable by the heat of the flaring gas, two men were talking earnestly together, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour. The one in uniform was a burly, red-faced martinet known in Grangebury as Inspector Lackland. He was too completely hemmed in by red tapeism to count for much; but the other in plain clothes was Absolom Gebb, well known in Scotland Yard as a capable detective, but not so infallible as the miracle-monger of fiction. It was Gebb who brought home the theft of Lady Daleshire's diamonds to herself; who proved Dr. Marnier to be guilty of poisoning his wife, in spite of strong evidence to the contrary; who solved nine out of every ten criminal problems submitted to him, and who was the terror of all evil-doers. This tall, lean man with his clean-shaven face and black, observant eyes was an enthusiast in his profession, and loved to ponder over and follow out the intricacies of criminal mysteries. At the present moment he was conversing with Lackland about a recent Anarchist conspiracy, and