

The Arrest of Captain Vandaleur

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One soft spring day in April I received a hurried message from Miss Cusack asking me to see her immediately.

It was a Sunday, I remember, and the trees were just putting on their first green. I arrived at the house in Kensington Park Gardens between four and five o'clock, and was admitted at once into the presence of my hostess. I found her in her library, a large room on the ground floor fitted with books from wainscot to ceiling, and quite unlike the ordinary boudoir of a fashionable lady.

'It is very good of you to come, Dr Lonsdale, and if it were not that my necessities are pressing, you may be sure I would not ask you to visit me on Sunday.'

'I am delighted to render you any assistance in my power,' I answered; 'and Sunday is not quite such a busy day with me as others.'

'I want you to see a patient for me.'

'A patient?' I cried.

'Yes; his name is Walter Farrell, and he and his young wife are my special friends; his wife has been my friend since her school-days. I want you to see him and also Mrs Farrell. Mrs Farrell is very ill—another doctor might do for her what you can do, but my real reason for asking you to visit her is in the hope that you may save the husband. When you see him you may think it strange of me to call him a patient, for his disease is more moral than mental, and is certainly not physical. His wife is very ill, and he still loves her. Low as he has sunk, I believe that he would make an effort, a gigantic effort, for her sake.'

'But in what does the moral insanity consist?' I asked.

'Gambling,' she replied, leaning forward and speaking eagerly. 'It is fast ruining him body and soul. The case puzzles me,' she continued. 'Mr Farrell is a rich man, but if he goes on as he is now doing he will soon be bankrupt. The largest fortune could not stand the

drain he puts upon it. He is deliberately ruining both himself and his wife.'

'What form does his gambling take?' I asked.

'Horse racing.'

'And is he losing money?'

'He is now, but last year he unfortunately won large sums. This fact seems to have confirmed the habit, and now nothing, as far as we can tell, will check his downward career. He has become the partner of a bookmaker, Mr Rashleigh—they call themselves "Turf Commission Agents". They have taken a suite of rooms in Pall Mall, and do a large business. Disaster is, of course, inevitable, and for the sake of his wife I want to save him, and I want you to help me.'

'I will do what I can, of course, but I am puzzled to know in what way I can be of service. Men affected with moral diseases are quite out of an ordinary doctor's sphere.'

'All the same it is in your power to do something. But listen, I have not yet come to the end of my story. I have other reasons, and oddly enough they coincide. I know the history of the man whom Walter Farrell is in partnership with. I know it, although at present I am powerless to expose him. Mr Rashleigh is a notorious swindler. He has been in some mysterious way making enormous sums of money by means of horse-racing, and I have been asked to help the Criminal Investigation Department in the matter. The fact of poor Walter Farrell being in his power has given me an additional incentive to effect his exposure. Had it not been for this I should have refused to have anything to do with the matter.'

'What are Rashleigh's methods of working?' I asked.

'I will tell you. I presume you understand the principles of horse-racing?'

'A few of them,' I answered.

'Mr Rashleigh's method is this: He poses as a bookmaker in want of capital. He has had several victims, and Mr Farrell is his last. In past cases, when he secured his victim, he entered into partnership with him, took a place in the West End, and furnished it luxuriously. One of the Exchange Telegraph Company's tape machines which record the runners, winners, and the starting prices of the horses was introduced. As a matter of course betting men arrived, and for a time everything went well, and the firm made a good business. By degrees, however, they began to lose—time after time the clients backed

winner for large sums, and Rashleigh and his partner finally failed. They were both apparently ruined, but after a time Rashleigh reappeared again, got a fresh victim, and the whole thing went on as before. His present victim is Walter Farrell, and the end is inevitable.'

'But what does it mean?' I said. 'Are the clients who back the horses really conspirators in league with Rashleigh? Do you mean to imply that they make large sums and then share the profits with Rashleigh afterwards?'

'I think it highly probable, although I know nothing. But here comes the gist of the problem. In all the cases against this man it has been clearly proved that one client in particular wins to an extraordinary extent. Now, how in the name of all that is marvellous does this client manage to get information as to what horse will win for certain? and if this were possible in one case, why should he not go and break the ring at once?'

'You are evidently well up in turf affairs,' I replied, laughing, 'but frauds on the turf are so abundant that there is probably some simple explanation to the mystery.'

'But there is not,' she replied, somewhat sharply. 'Let me explain more fully, and then you will see that the chances of fraud are well-nigh at the vanishing point. I was at the office myself one afternoon. Walter Farrell took me in, and I closely watched the whole thing.'

'It was the day of the Grand National, and about a dozen men were present. The runners and jockeys were sent through, and were called out by Mr Farrell, who stood by the tape machine; then he drew the curtain across. I made some small bets to excuse my presence there. The others all handed in their slips to him with the names of the horses they wished to back. The machine began clicking again, the curtain was drawn round it, and I will swear no one could possibly have seen the name of the winner as it was being printed on the tape. Just at the last moment, one of the men, a Captain Vandaleur—I know of him well in connection with more than one shady affair—went to the table with a slip, and handed it in. His was the last bet.'

'The curtain was drawn back, and on Captain Vandaleur's slip was the name of the winning horse backed for five hundred pounds. The price was six to one, which meant a clear loss to Walter Farrell and Mr Rashleigh of three thousand pounds. The whole transaction was

apparently as fair and square as could be, but there is the fact; and as the flat-racing season is just beginning, if this goes on Walter Farrell will be ruined before Derby Day.'

'You say, Miss Cusack, that no communication from outside was possible?'

'Certainly, no one entered or left the room. Communication from without is absolutely out of the question.'

'Could the sound of the clicking convey any meaning?'

She laughed.

'Absolutely none. I had at first an idea that an old trick was being worked—that is, by collusion with the operator at the telegraph office, who waited for the winner before sending through the runners and then sent the winning horse and jockey last on the list. But it is not so—we have made enquiries and had the clerks watched. It is quite incomprehensible. I am, I confess, at my wits' end. Will you help me to save Walter Farrell?'

'I will try, but I am afraid my efforts will be useless; he would resent my interference, and very naturally.'

'His wife is ill; I have told her that you will call on her. She knows that I hope much by your influence over her husband.'

'I will certainly visit Mrs Farrell, but only as an ordinary doctor goes to see a patient.'

'I believe you will do the rest when the time comes,' she answered.

I made no reply. She took out her watch.

'The Farrells live not ten doors from here,' she said. 'Will you visit Mrs Farrell now? Walter will in all probability be at home as it is Sunday afternoon. Ask to see Mrs Farrell; I will write my name on your card, and you will be admitted immediately.'

'And am I to come back and tell you the result?' I asked.

'As you please. I shall be very glad to see you. Much depends on what you do.'

I saw by the expression on Miss Cusack's face how intensely in earnest she was. Her enthusiasm fired mine.

'I will go at once,' I said, 'and hope that luck may be with me.'

I left the house, and a few moments later was ringing the bell of No. 15 in the same road. A butler in livery opened the door, and on enquiring for Mrs Farrell I was admitted immediately. I sent up my card, and a moment later a quiet-looking woman tripped downstairs, came to my side, and said in a gentle, suppressed sort of voice—

'My mistress is in bed, doctor, but she will be pleased to see you. Will you follow me? Come this way, please.'

I followed the maid upstairs, we passed the drawing-room floor, and went up to the next storey. Here I was ushered into a large and luxuriously furnished bedroom. In a bed drawn near one of the windows where she could see the setting sun and some of the trees in Kensington Gardens, lay the pretty girl whom I was asked to visit. She could not have been more than nineteen years of age. Her brown hair lay tossed about the pillow, and her small, smooth, unlined face made her look more child than woman. A hectic spot burned on each of her cheeks, and when I touched her hand I knew at once that she was in a feverish and almost dangerous condition.

'So Florence Cusack has sent you, Dr Lonsdale,' was her remark to me.

'I am Dr Lonsdale. What can I do for you, Mrs Farrell?'

'Give me back my strength.'

The maid withdrew to a distant part of the room. I made the ordinary examination of the patient. I asked her what her symptoms were. She described them in a few words.

'I have no pain,' she said, 'but this intolerable weakness increases day by day. It has come on most gradually, and no medicines give me the least relief. A month ago I was well enough to go out, and even walk; then I found myself too tired even to drive in a carriage, then I was too weary to come downstairs, then too prostrate to sit up. Now I stay in bed, and it tires me even to speak. Oh! I am tired of everything,' she added; 'tired of life, tired of—' her eyes filled with tears—'tired of misery, of misery.'

To my dismay she burst into weak, hysterical crying.

'This will never do,' I said; 'you must tell me all, Mrs Farrell. As far as I can see, you have no active disease of any sort. What is the matter with you? What is consuming your life?'

'Trouble,' she said, 'and it is hopeless.'

'You must try to tell me more.'

She looked at me, dashed away her tears, and said, with a sudden spurt of spirit which I had scarcely given her credit for—

'But has not Florence Cusack told you?'

'She has certainly said something.'

'Ah, then you do know all; she said she would speak to you. My husband is downstairs in the smoking-room: go and see him—do

what you can for him. Oh! he will be ruined, ruined body and soul. Save him! do save him if you can.'

'Do not excite yourself,' I said. I rose as I spoke, and laid my hand with a slight pressure on hers. 'You need not say any more. Between Miss Cusack and me your husband shall be saved. Now rest in that thought. I would not tell you a thing of this kind lightly.'

'Oh! God bless you,' murmured the poor girl.

I turned to the maid, who now came forward.

'I will write a prescription for your mistress,' I said, 'something to strengthen and calm her at the same time. You must sit up with her tonight, she is very weak.'

The maid promised. I left the room. The bright eyes of the almost dying girl followed me to the door. As I stood on the landing I no longer wondered at Miss Cusack's attitude in the matter. Surely such a case must stir the depths of the most callous heart.

I went downstairs, and unannounced entered the smoking-room. A man was lying back in a deep leather chair, near one of the windows. He was a dark, thin man, with features which in themselves were refined and handsome; but now, with the haggard lines round the mouth, in the deeply set, watchful, and somewhat narrow eyes, and in a sort of recklessness which was characterized by his untidy dress, by the very set of his tie, I guessed too surely that Miss Cusack had not exaggerated the mental condition of Mr Walter Farrell in the very least. With a few words I introduced myself.

'You must pardon this intrusion, Mr Farrell. I am Dr Lonsdale. Miss Cusack has asked me to call and see your wife. I have just seen her; I want to say a few words to you about her.'

He looked anxious just for a moment when I mentioned his wife's name, but then a sleepy indifference crept into his eyes. He was sufficiently a gentleman, however, to show me the ordinary politeness, and motioned me to a chair. I sat down and looked full at him.

'How old is Mrs Farrell?' I said, abruptly.

He stared as if he rather resented the question; then said, in a nonchalant tone—

'My wife is very young, she is not twenty yet.'

'Quite a child,' I said.

'Do you think so?'

'Yes, little more than a child—just on the verge of life. It seems very sad when the young must die.'

I would not have made use of this expression to an ordinary man, but I wanted to rouse and startle Farrell. I did so effectually. A veil seemed to drop from his eyes; they grew wide awake, restless, and agonized. He drew his chair close to mine, and bent forward.

‘What do you mean? Surely there is not much the matter with Laura?’

‘No active disease, and yet she is dying. I am sorry to tell you that, unless a complete change takes place immediately, she can scarcely live another week.’

Farrell sprang to his feet.

‘You don’t mean that!’ he cried, ‘my wife in danger! Dr Lonsdale, you are talking nonsense; she has no cough, she complains of nothing. She is just a bit lazy—that is what I tell her.’

‘She has no strength, Mr Farrell, and without strength we cannot live. Something is eating into her life and draining it away. I will be perfectly frank with you, for in a case of life and death there is no time, nor is it right, to stand on ceremony. Your wife is dying because her heart is broken. It remains with you to save her; the case is in your hands.’

‘Now what do you mean?’

‘You know what I mean. She is unhappy about you. You must understand me.’

He turned very white.

‘And yet I am doing all that man can for her,’ he said. ‘She expects me to smile always and live as a butterfly. Men have troubles and anxieties, and mine are—’

‘Pretty considerable, I should say,’ I continued.

‘They are. Has Florence Cusack been talking to you about me?’

‘I am not at liberty to answer your question.’

‘You have answered it by not denying it. Florence and Laura are a pair of fools, the greatest fools that ever walked the earth.’

‘You do not really think that.’

‘I do think it. They want a man to do the impossible—they want a man to withdraw when— There, Dr Lonsdale, you are a man and I can talk to you. I cannot do what they want.’

‘Then your wife will die.’

He began to pace up and down the room.

‘I suppose you know all about my connection with Rashleigh?’ he said, after a moment.

I nodded.

'Well, then you see how I am placed. Rashleigh is hard up just now; I cannot desert him in a moment like the present. We hope to recoup ourselves this very week, and as soon as such is the case I will withdraw from the business. Will that content you?'

'Why not withdraw at once?'

'I cannot; nothing will induce me to do so. It is useless our prolonging this discussion.'

I saw that I should do harm instead of good if I said anything further, and, asking for a sheet of paper, I wrote a prescription for his wife. I then left the house to return to Miss Cusack.

The moment I entered her library she came eagerly to meet me.

'Well?' she said.

'You are right,' I answered, speaking now with great impulse and earnestness. 'I am altogether with you in this matter. I have seen Mrs Farrell and I have had an interview with Farrell. The wife is dying. Nay, do not interrupt me. She is dying unless relief comes soon. I had a long talk with Farrell and put the case plainly to him. He promises to withdraw from Rashleigh's firm, but not until after this week. He sticks to this resolve, thinking that he is bound in honour to support Rashleigh, whose affairs he believes are in a critical condition. In all probability before the week is up Mrs Farrell will die. What is to be done?'

'There is only one thing to be done, Dr Lonsdale—we must open Walter Farrell's eyes. We must show him plainly that he is Mr Rashleigh's dupe.'

'How can we do that?'

'Ah! there comes the crux of the whole situation. The further I go, the more mysterious the whole thing appears. The ordinary methods which have served me before have failed. Look here.'

She pointed to a page in the book of newspaper cuttings which lay by her side.

'Through channels I need not detail, I have learned that this is a communication of one of the gang to another.'

I took the book from her hands, and read the following words:

'No mistake. Sea Foam. Jockey Club.'

'Gibberish!' I said, laying the paper on the table.

'Apparently,' she answered; 'but Sea Foam is Captain Halliday's horse entered for the City and Suburban race to be run on the 21st—that is next Wednesday—at Epsom. For five continuous hours

I have worked at those few words, applying to them what I already know of this matter. It has been of no good.'

'I am scarcely surprised to hear you say so. One would want second sight to put meaning into words like those.'

'Something must be done, and soon,' she said. 'We must expose this matter on Wednesday. I know that Walter Farrell has lost heavily this month. There is not an hour to be lost in trying to save Laura. We must keep up her courage until Wednesday. On Wednesday the whole fraud must be discovered, and her husband liberated. You will help me?'

'Certainly.'

'Then on Wednesday we will go together to Mr Rashleigh's office. You must bet a little to allay suspicion—a few sovereigns only. You will then see him for yourself, and—who knows?—you may be able to solve the mystery.'

I agreed to this, and soon afterwards took my leave.

I received a note from Miss Cusack on Tuesday evening, asking me to lunch with her on the following day. I went. The moment I entered her presence I was struck, and almost startled, by her manner. An extraordinary exaltation seemed to possess her. The pupils of her eyes were largely dilated, and glowed as if some light were behind them. Her face was slightly flushed, and her conversation was marked by an unusual vivacity and sparkle.

'I have been very busy since I saw you last,' she said, 'and I have now every hope that I shall succeed. I fully believe that I shall save Walter Farrell today from the hands of one of the cleverest scoundrels in London,' she said, as we crossed the hall, 'and consign the latter to penal servitude.'

I could not help being much impressed by the matter-of-fact sangfroid with which Miss Cusack spoke the last words. How was she going to obtain such big results?

'Have you no fear of personal rudeness or violence?' I asked.

'None whatever—I have made all arrangements beforehand. You will soon see for yourself.'

We partook of lunch almost in silence. As I was returning to Miss Cusack's library afterwards I saw, seated in the hall, a short, squarely built, but well-dressed man.

'I shall be ready in a few moments, Mr Marling,' she said to him. 'Is everything prepared?'

'Everything, miss,' he replied.

Very soon afterwards we took our seats in Miss Cusack's brougham, and she explained to me that our companion was Inspector Marling, of Scotland Yard, that he was coming with us in the role of a new client for Messrs Rashleigh and Farrell, and that he had made all necessary preparations.

We drove rapidly along Knightsbridge, and, going into Piccadilly, turned down St James's Street. We stopped at last opposite a house in Pall Mall, which was to all appearance a private one. On either side of the door were brass plates bearing names, with the floor of the occupant engraved beneath. On one of the plates were the words, 'Rashleigh and Farrell, Third Floor.' Miss Cusack pressed the bell corresponding to this plate, and in a few moments a quietly dressed man opened the door. He bowed to Miss Cusack as if he knew her, looked at Marling and me with a penetrating glance, and then admitted us. We went upstairs to the third landing, though before we reached it the deep voices of men in the commission agent's suite of rooms fell on our ears. Here we rang again, and after what seemed a long delay the door, which was hung with a heavy velvet curtain on the inner side, was slowly opened. Farrell stood before us.

'I thought it must be you,' he said, the colour mounting into his thin face. 'Come inside; we are rather a large party, as it is an important race day.'

As I entered I looked round curiously. The room was thronged with a smartly dressed crowd of men and women who were lounging about in easy-chairs and on couches. The carpet was a rich Turkey pile, and the decorations were extravagantly gorgeous. At one side of the room near the wall stood a table upon which was a small gas lamp, several slips of paper, and a *Ruff's Racing Guide*. At the further end of the room, set back in a recess, stood the tape machine, which intermittently clicked and whirred while a long strip of paper, recording news automatically, unrolled from the little wheel and fell in serpentine coils into a wastepaper basket beneath.

At one glance I saw that, when the curtain that hung from a semicircular rod above it was drawn, no one in the room could possibly read what the wheel was printing on the tape.

'Let me introduce you to Captain Vandaleur, Dr Lonsdale,' said Miss Cusack's voice behind me.

I turned and bowed to a tall, clean-shaven man, who returned my salutation with a pleasant smile.

'You are, I presume, interested in racing?' he said.

'I am in this particular race,' I answered, 'the City and Suburban. I am anxious to make a small investment, and Miss Cusack has kindly introduced me to Mr Rashleigh for the purpose.'

'What particular horse do you fancy?' he asked.

'Lime-Light,' I replied, at a venture.

'Ha! an outsider; well, you'll get twenties,' and he turned away, for at that moment the runners for the first race began to come through. Farrell stood by the tape and called them out. Several of the men present now went to the table and wrote their fancies on the slips of paper and handed them to Farrell. Vandaleur did not bet.

I watched the whole proceeding carefully, and certainly fraud of any kind seemed out of the question.

Miss Cusack was evidently to all appearance evincing the keenest interest in the proceedings, and betted pretty heavily herself, although the horse she selected did not turn out the winner. Another race followed, and then at 3.30 the runners and jockeys for the great race came through. Heavy bets were made on all sides, and at 3.40 came the magic word 'Off', to signify that the race had started.

Farrell now instantly drew the curtain round the glass case of the instrument, while the bets continued to be made. Some were very heavy, running to hundreds of pounds. In a few moments the machine began clicking and whirring again, probably announcing the name of the winning horse.

'Have you all made your bets, gentlemen?' said Farrell.

'One moment,' cried Vandaleur, going to the table and writing out a slip. 'It's a poor chance, I know; but nothing venture, nothing win. Here goes for a monkey each way Sea Foam—and chance it.'

He crossed the room and handed Farrell the slip.

'All right, Vandaleur,' he replied, 'plunging heavily as usual. Now then, anyone else want to bet? I am going to draw back the curtain.'

No one answered. Farrell's face was pale, and an unmistakable air of nervousness pervaded him. Everyone pressed eagerly forward in order to be as close as possible to the instrument. Each man craned and peered over the other's shoulder. Farrell snatched back the curtain, and a shout of 'Sea Foam first!' rang through the room.

I looked at Miss Cusack. She was still standing by the table, and bending over the chimney of the gas-lamp. At this instant she turned and whispered a few words to Inspector Marling. He left the room

quietly and unnoticed in the buzz of conversation that ensued.

Sea Foam's price was twenty to one, and Vandaleur had therefore scored £12,500.

I went up to Farrell, who was standing near the tape machine. I saw drops of perspiration on his forehead, and his face was like death.

'I am afraid this is a heavy blow to you,' I said.

He laughed with an assumption of nonchalance, then he looked me in the face and said slowly, 'It is. Vandaleur is invariably lucky.'

He had scarcely spoken the words before Inspector Marling reappeared. His face betrayed that something exciting was about to happen. What it was I could not guess. The next moment he had crossed the room, and going straight up to Vandaleur laid his hand on his shoulder, and said in a loud voice that rang through the room—

'Captain Vandaleur, I arrest you for conspiracy, and for fraudulently obtaining money by means of a trick.'

If a thunderbolt had fallen it could hardly have caused greater consternation.

Vandaleur started back.

'Who are you? What do you mean?' he cried.

'I am Inspector Marling, of Scotland Yard. Your game is up; you had better come quietly.'

The room was now in the utmost confusion. Two other men had made a dash for the door, only to fall into the arms of two officers who were waiting for them outside. Farrell, with an ashen face, stood like one struck dumb.

'For God's sake explain it all,' he said at last.

'Certainly,' answered Miss Cusack; 'it is simply this: You have been a dupe in one of the most daring and subtle frauds ever conceived. Come this way, I will show you everything.'

As she spoke she led the way from the room and up the stairs which led to the fourth floor. We all followed her and entered a room which was over the one we had just left. It was barely furnished as an office, and to our utter surprise it contained another tape machine, which was working like the one below.

'Dr Lonsdale,' said Miss Cusack, 'you remember the advertisement? "No mistake. Sea Foam. Jockey Club."'

'Perfectly,' I answered.

'When Jockey Club is mentioned in connection with horse-racing, one would naturally suppose that *the* Jockey Club was meant,' she continued. 'That was what puzzled me so long. But there is another kind of Jockey Club. Look here.' She pointed to an open box containing several small bottles, and took one out. Removing the glass stopper, she handed it to me.

'Do you recognize that scent?' she asked, as I sniffed at it.

'Perfectly,' I replied. 'Jockey Club, isn't it? Still, I feel in utter bewilderment.'

'Now I will explain what it means, and you will all, gentlemen, see how abilities can be used for the purposes of crime.'

She went across to a little square deal table that stood in the corner, and moved it aside. Behind one of the legs which had effectually concealed it was what appeared to be an ordinary piece of gas-pipe that passed through the floor. The upper end of it was open and was fitted with a screw for a nut.

'Now see, all of you,' she cried, 'this pipe communicates with the lamp on the table in the room below. When the gas is turned off downstairs there is a free passage. The man who keeps this office, and who, I fear, has contrived to escape, is in league with Captain Vandaleur, and both are, or rather were, in league with Rashleigh. These three scoundrels had a code, and this was their code. As soon as the winner came through, and the machine up here communicated the fact to the man in this room, a certain scent corresponding to a certain horse was sent down through the gas-pipe.

'In this case Jockey Club corresponded to Sea Foam. By means of this spray pump the vapour of the scent was passed down through the pipe to the lamp in the room below. Captain Vandaleur had only to bend over the chimney to get the scent, and write out the name of the horse which it corresponded to.'

To express our unbounded astonishment and our admiration for Miss Cusack's clever solving of the mystery would require more space than I have at my disposal. As to poor Farrell, his eyes were completely opened; he looked at us all with a wild stare, and the next moment I heard him dashing downstairs.

'But how did you discover it? What made you think of it?' I said to Miss Cusack some hours later.

'Ah! that is my secret. That I cannot explain to you, at least not yet,' was her reply.

Rashleigh and Vandaleur have been arrested, and both are now undergoing the punishment they so richly deserve. Farrell has learned his lesson: he has given up horse racing, and Mrs Farrell has recovered her strength, and also her youth and beauty.