

### The Poisoner

I have already published one of the manuscripts which were left to me by my grand-uncle, Dr. David Monroe, and, as it has been received more or less favorably by a few readers, I am now setting forth another. The quantity of papers which were left in the black strong-box of Dr. Monroe is very great, but as most of them are long I must limit myself to the shorter ones.

These manuscripts practically cover the whole of Dr. Monroe's career from his entrance into medical school to his death. Many and varied are the wondrous stories and remarks of the doctor; but I must keep most of them concealed from the world for fear of offending people and families of high degree.

The place in which the action of the following paper took place was in London, a short time before the beginning of the twentieth century. Dr. Monroe had left Germany and was gaining an extensive and well-known practice in the great English metropolis. The following is a copy of Dr. Monroe's original manuscript. In a few places the words of the original have become illegible, and in others, pieces have become removed from the edges of the yellow sheets; and in such places I have inscribed words which I think were those which had been obliterated.

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It was a night in the month of December, when one has the desire that he be allowed to stay indoors before his cheery fire without being disturbed. Rain had fallen heavily all day long in a cold, sleety down-pour, and after slackening at dusk it had been substituted by a dense fog with a chilly drizzle seeping through the heavy banks of rolling vapor.

I sat before the fire-place in my office puffing complacently on an excellent cigar, wishing that I might go to bed undisturbed. I had always taken pride in furnishing my private room with the best of materials, so that the thick carpet and heavy, silken curtains gave the room an air of cheer indeed. For a young man my practice was spreading wonderfully, and I felt very secure on that dreary night of December many weary years ago.

Suddenly the front-door bell rang shrilly, and then I could hear my servant quietly unlatching the door.



He asked who was there and was answered in a heavy voice.

"Is Doctor Monroe at home?" questioned the voice.

"Yes," answered Tedsel, my valet, "Did you wish to see him? Come in."

After a few low murmurings my office door was opened by Tedsel, and the man of the heavy voice was shown into the room. He was of middle height, with dark hair and an exceedingly plump figure. A small mustache nestled under his nose. He spoke.

"My name is Kennedy, your honor, servant in the house of Lady Artenwall." (At this juncture I may say that I have changed the names of several people because of the danger of involving people of great families).

"Well," I answered rather testily, for I saw that my quiet evening was about to be spoiled, "no doubt you want something."

He laughed, and it was in a very curious way that he did so, for instead of his mirth coming in one continuous laugh it came in jerks. "Sickness! Injury! Yes! Both! But, to be serious, there is sickness at the house and I was instructed to fetch you. The car is waiting outside. Would you please come as quickly as possible?"

I did not answer, but going to my ward-robe donned a heavy overcoat as the weather was very raw. Picking up my medical bag and hat I followed Kennedy out of the house after instructing my man not to wait up for me. As we passed under the front door light I was astonished to see that my companion's face was pale with what seemed to be terror.

We entered a luxurious limousine and were driven by a chauffeur in and out the twisting streets of London until I lost all sense of direction. At length we stopped, and getting out I saw that we were in front of a stately mansion. The whole front was dark with the exception of a colored light shining through the front door and a lighted window on the third floor. Spacious, dark grounds surrounded the house on all sides. Rain dripped from the eaves of the great, grey, stone building. Gloom and depression seemed to be everywhere.

We entered through the front door, and I looked about in a wide hall furnished with rich hangings and old antiques. Having given my hat and coat to a silent domestic I followed my conductor up a broad stair-case.



Dismal thoughts obscured my now suspicious intellect as we climbed up through that wicked house. I could almost feel the presence of unearthly beings brushing by me on their way down to the pits of hell. There they stood, grinning and gumming at me through withered lips. Shrugging my shoulders as if to throw off these weird marauders I glanced around. We had now reached the third floor and were proceeding along one of the passages that led from the stairs.

Finally we stopped at a low door. Here my companion signalled me to enter alone, and at the same time he wrung his hands as if in anguish. I entered. The door closed noiselessly.

I stood in a large, dome-shaped chamber lighted by a red, shaded lamp which threw the room into a melancholy and mournful twilight. Fantastic shadows loomed threateningly on the walls. Dust-covered furniture of a long dead and forgotten age was about the chamber. A tall form stood beside an old bed with rich but decayed curtains drawn around it. A large clock standing in one corner tolled the hour—eleven o'clock. I held my breath in suspense. In the distance I could hear the various towered clocks of the city tolling, tolling, tolling. This picture still haunts me as a dream in the early hours before dawn. The tall form then turned and approached me, at the same time placing his finger to his lips as a sign for silence.

"You are undoubtedly Dr. Monroe," he said stealthily.

"Considering the caution and secrecy with which I have been brought here," I responded ironically, "it would seem that there has been murder here."

My companion nodded slowly and darkly. He was in truth a dark man, broad of shoulder and slender of limb. His countenance was thin and his black eyes luminous. He seemed to be about thirty years of age.

He now spoke, "The old lady in the bed yonder is Lady Artenwall, one of the last of a long race. I am her nephew, Thane Darsingham. Perhaps you have heard of me?"

I had heard of him, notorious fiend that he was. Ruthless, sinister, but alluring he was feared by all. Parents with young and attractive daughters blanched at his approach. He ruined families for the sport of it, fleeing at conscience. Many young men thinking they were



gentlemen of the world had died directly or indirectly by his hand. But his family was of high degree and his wealth great so that he was denied entrance into society nowhere.

"I have heard rumors of you, Mr. Darsingham," I remarked evenly. "I suppose that you are Lady Artenwall's heir?"

Darsingham laughed mockingly and returned, "I do happen to be her heir. Isn't it curious that I should be getting a physician to keep her from dying?" He seemed to be greatly amused by this, and the dark room grated with his obnoxious mirth. "But, come over," he resumed suavely, "and see what ails her ladyship."

I approached the bed's side and perceived an old, wrinkled woman lying in what seemed to be a state of coma. Her skin was stretched tightly over her emaciated face. Reaching out I took up her hand to feel her pulse, but to my horror there was no beat. She was dead and cold and had been for hours.

I turned to Darsingham and cried in a fearful voice, "What do you mean by taking me to see a corpse! There has been foul work here! See the agony on the poor wretch's countenance—more than likely, poison!"

The demoniacal grin left Darsingham's features, and he spoke seriously though his words had a horrible import. "Yes, Lady Artenwall is dead, for you see I killed her."

"You!" I cried, amazed at his boldness.

"Keep quiet and listen," he ordered with an evil gleam in his eyes. "I poisoned her a few hours ago. I want you to remove all traces of the poison. A few months ago I was told by a doctor that it could not be done, but you, who are clever, must be able to do so. But come, I have something to show you."

He led me to one wall of the room, and after touching some mechanism, a door, ingeniously hidden, opened and there inside was a small room lighted by a reflection from some invisible source. To my terror I perceived that it was a torture chamber modelled after the dungeons of old. A small furnace stood at one side, and, hung on the wall around it, there were numerous branding irons obviously fashioned to be used on human bodies. Flaying knives, scourges, and other terrible implements were scattered about. In one corner lay the dreaded porous vest of the Chinese; near it lay a headman's block. Chilled to the



heart I looked around further and saw two masked attendants standing with folded arms, eyes gleaming ferociously from the holes in their masks.

I turned to my evil and flagitious companion and spoke hoarsely, "Fiend, for the time you hold the high hand. I submit."

"Good!" ejaculated my villainous captor. The door closed and we came back to the bed. "Now to work and leave not a single trace of murder in that body. And further, if you so much as mention this affair—" Here he pointed towards that frightful chamber beyond the wall.

Very fearfully I set about a task which I knew was impossible, but I endeavored to appear busy so that I might have time to plan some way of escaping from the villainous monster who was my captor. Once I turned around and inquired of Darsingham what would happen if I failed in covering the crime.

He answered with a fleering uplift of his lips, "Don't fail!"

I kept busily taking instruments from my case and putting them away and making, all the while, a very industrious clatter. My companion came over to my side and watched. In a short while he began to grow suspicious. Laying an iron-strong hand on my shoulder he spun me around and asked harshly, "So! You think that you can fool me. But I shall take care that you fool nobody after tonight."

Snatching at any chance of escape I cried out, "Listen, there is someone on the stairs." And what was my amazement when I actually did hear footsteps.

Darsingham's face grew ashen with fury. He made a movement towards the door, but before he could attain his goal the door banged open and Kennedy, the butler, stumbled in followed by two policemen. My heart raced with relief as I saw their blue uniforms. But now something else was happening which claimed my attention. The butler's face was contorted with mental agony. Turning to Darsingham, who now stood quietly by, he said, "Master, even though I did swear loyalty to you and even though you own me, body and soul, yet I couldn't help doing this. She haunted me, I tell you, she haunted me." Here his voice rose to a scream, and he pointed to the bed of death. He turned to the officers and spoke, "Take your man. I saw Darsingham poison Lady Artenwall."

To my wonder he moved from the police-officers and drew himself erect expectantly. I was marvelling at this action when I noticed that Darsingham's right hand was in his coat pocket. I sprang forward but too late! Flame spurted through Darsingham's coat and the butler fell to the floor, a bullet in his heart.

Darsingham turned savagely on me and fired again, striking me in the thigh, felling me. A third report rang out before the amazed policemen could interfere, and Darsingham, killed by his own hand, sank to the carpet.

This case was hushed up by the authorities because of the high connections of the family involved, but my readers can believe my version of the story of this inhuman crime. And again I may say, as I have mentioned before, that the names used in this manuscript have been changed from the original ones. I do this to hide from honest people the identity of such an abnormal beast as Thane Darsingham.

—J. D. MacD., '33

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The love of praise howe'er concealed by art  
Reigns more or less, and glows in every heart.

—Young

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The intelligent man finds almost everything ridiculous, the sensible man hardly anything.—Goethe.

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Silence is as deep as Eternity; speech is as shallow as time.—Carlyle.

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The best heads the world ever knew were well read, and the best heads take the best places.—Emerson.

