

The Pimlico Affair

By

Sterling Scott

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Prologue

London, January 1, 1869

Dr. Alfred Leach's mind climbed through the fog of his dream to realize that the persistent pounding that he heard was real and not part of his dream. Stretching, he swiveled his feet to the floor and into his slippers. He stood beside his bed. The pounding on the front door of his house resumed, this time accompanied by shouts. He could not discern the words of the woman's voice, but the panic in her appeal for his attention was clear.

He pulled on his dressing gown and glanced at the clock over the mantel – four in the morning. The fire had abated in the fireplace and the January chill had penetrated the house.

January first, it's New Year's Day.

"Just a minute! I'm coming," he shouted back at his unseen visitor as he stumbled down the stairs. He opened the door and the uninvited icy wind swept the equally uninvited middle-aged woman inside. He closed the door. "Who are you and what are you about at this time of the morning?"

"Dr. Leach, pardon my intrusion." The portly woman attempted to curtsy. "It's Mr. Bartlett," she answered the second part of his question. "Miss Adelaide thinks he's dead."

Dr. Alfred Leach now recognized the woman to be the servant of Mr. Edwin Bartlett and his fiancée Miss Adelaide de la Tremoille.

"When?"

"She woke me just now. I came over straight away – quick as I could."

"Wait here." Dr. Leach acquired a fresh quickness in his gait as he climbed the stairs. Throwing on his clothes, he returned to the foyer where his caller stood waiting. He opened the door. "Let's go."

As fortune favored them, a Hansom cab was passing by. Having just delivered a pair of late night partygoers to their home, the driver was happy to be flagged down. From memory, Dr. Leach provided the address, "Number Eighty-five Claverton Street." The house was little more than a quarter-mile away, but the ride was vastly preferred to walking in the cold wind blowing

off the Thames River. “Dead, you say, did you see him?” He finally asked for more details from the servant woman.

“Nay, only that she said: ‘I think Edwin is dead.’ That’s all I heard, and then I ran off to fetch ya.”

Edwin Bartlett had been his patient since the tenth of December. Like most everyone in the London suburb of Pimlico, he was a wealthy merchant. He had spared no expense as Dr. Leach had attended to him more than twenty times. However, there was nothing life threatening about his complaints of stomach ailments.

Arriving at the address, a woman opened the door as they approached the landing. Leach strode directly to the sitting room where Mr. Bartlett had been convalescing. There, he found the body and Miss Adelaide. Also in the room was another man. Dr. Leach did not wait for introductions before examining his patient.

“Is he dead?” Adelaide asked.

“Yes – yes, he is. Is this how you found him?”

“No, I awoke and came in to check on him.” She glanced in the direction of the adjoining room where Dr. Leach knew she customarily slept. “He was contorted, lying twisted on his side. I rolled him to his back, like he is now. But, he didn’t respond. He was cold to the touch, so I tried to get him to drink some brandy – to warm and revive him. But, it didn’t work.”

Alfred Leach noticed that the dead man’s shirt was wet and the alcohol smell of brandy permeated the air. “Were his eyes closed, as they are now?”

“No, they were open. I closed them.”

“I am Fredrick Doggert. I own this house.” The other man, tired of being ignored, introduced himself. “He was just like this when Miss Adelaide called me downstairs.”

Dr. Leach glanced at the clock on the mantel – it was half-past four in the morning. Adelaide stepped back and Mr. Doggert assisted with the examination of the body. Spontaneously, Adelaide’s mysterious words surfaced in the doctor’s memory. Only a week earlier she had said: “You must find a cure for Edwin, otherwise his friends will think that I am poisoning him.”

Could she have poisoned him?

Dr. Leach surveyed the room, noting several glasses, one half full of an amber colored liquid. On the mantel was a bottle of brandy, three quarters gone. “He’s been dead for several

hours. Miss Adelaide, I can find no cause for Edwin's death. I must notify the constable and the coroner. There will surely be a post-mortem examination to determine the cause of his death."

Dr. Leach watched the color drain from Adelaide's face.

Part One - Clara Chamberlain

Chapter 1: Carl Chamberlain

London, February, 1845

Henry Burridge did not look up from his papers when Mrs. Bernell entered his office. The governor of the Westminster Corrections Facility was attempting to balance the weekly expenditures. Addition was easy for him, but he would never admit that subtraction gave him fits. Mr. Burridge had been the Governor since the prison opened in 1834. At that time his wife, Elizabeth, had served as matron for the incarcerated women. However, she had died in 1840 and Mrs. Bernell had served in that post for the past five years.

The prison currently housed petty criminals - 300 men and 600 women. The much larger Millbank Penitentiary a mile to the southeast, on the Thames River, housed the more ardent criminals. Most of the men incarcerated in Westminster had been convicted of various acts of thievery, and had been sentenced for periods of two weeks to three months. A few were convicted of felonies and serving multiple year sentences. About half of the women were incarcerated for stealing or non-payment of debts while the other half had been convicted of lewd behaviour. This conviction implied they had been prostitutes.

The prison was located a half-mile south of the new Buckingham Palace – between Vauxhall Bridge Road and Bird Cage Walk.

“Yes?” Mr. Burridge put his pencil down and took his glasses off, but did not look up to acknowledge the matron’s presence.

“Sir, the new prisoners have arrived. There is one among them that you should see.”

“Indeed? Why?”

“I think that we have found what you have been searching for.” The forty-year-old woman did not explain. However, Henry knew what she was implying; Lord Folkston’s request for a special female companion may have just been satisfied.

He looked up to meet her gaze. “Indeed?” His voice did not hide his excitement. Lord Folkston had promised a handsome reward for a young woman that he could mold into his personal companion. “But, I thought we were receiving only male prisoners today.”

“Yes, sir, and that is what is so interesting. We received seven new men and they were promptly stripped for their bath. That is when Mr. Toller summoned me.” Norbert Toller was the master guard for the men. He would have been conducting his typical process of intimidation, humiliation, and introduction of the new inmates to prison life. “When I arrived, the bathing room was in an uproar. One of the men was not a man at all. Mr. Toller had corralled in one corner a nude young woman.” She swallowed. “Here is his, or her arrest paper.”

She stepped forward to place the single sheet on his desk. The prison Governor donned his glasses and studied the paper. Carl Chamberlain had been arrested for vagrancy and non-payment of debt. He had been sentenced by the Justice of the Peace to three months. His age was listed as eighteen.

“I see. No one knows that Carl Chamberlain is really a woman?”

“Apparently, that is the case, sir. I quickly isolated her from the others. I have her outside, if you care to inspect her.”

“Yes, bring her in.” This was indeed a golden opportunity. He now had, inside his prison, a young woman for which there was no record. He could simply wait three months and then return Carl Chamberlain’s discharge paper to the magistrate; he would never be heard from again. But, he could keep the woman indefinitely. She didn’t exist within the records.

Mrs. Bernell stepped to the door and gripped the arm of a shorthaired young woman. The matron thrust the woman inside and placed her a few feet from Henry’s desk. She was wearing the prison uniform of a white frilled cap and loosely fitting blue and white striped dress. She was not wearing shoes. Henry found her to be quite attractive, but could see that in scruffy, dirty male trousers and shirt she could be taken for a short, thin lad. Mrs. Bernell closed the office door.

“What is your name?” Henry asked.

The lass tugged at the dress she was wearing. Her expression changed from confusion to disgust as she pulled at the fabric. She looked down at what she must consider to be a ridiculous costume and said, “Carl Chamberlain.”

Henry Burridge grunted and then said, "I am the Governor of this prison. I see from your paper that you have been found guilty of vagrancy and non-payment of debt. Do you know what that means?"

"Uh, no sir, not really. I didn't steal nothing."

"I suppose that is true, that is not what this means. It means that you were living in a place that did not belong to you, and that you refused to pay your rent. Do you understand that?"

She shuffled her bare feet. She reeked of the kerosene treatment to kill the lice in her hair. "No. I was living in the same room me and my papa have lived in for years. A man came 'bout and shouted for money. I don't know noth'n 'bout that. Then a copper hauled me away."

"Your father, what is his name?"

"Ah, he is Henry Chamberlain."

"And, where is he?"

"In potter's field. He died a while back. Got hit in the head and fell into the sea. Drowned, he did."

"Who hit him in the head?"

"No one did. We were working on a fishing boat and he was hit by a boom."

"You are a fisherman?"

"Aye"

"Why don't you have any money to pay the rent?"

"I've... I have always been a bit light in the head, my papa says. I never learned 'bout things like money. With Papa dead, the boats wouldn't hire me no more. They say I'm too small and weak."

"What about your mother?"

"Ain't never had a mother."

"How old are you?"

"Every spring Papa picks one day and gives me a double heaping of meat. He says it is to celebrate my birthday. Last time he said I was eighteen years old."

"You have always lived as a boy?"

"Of course, I'm a boy. I ain't never been forced to wear no dress before." She again tugged at the fabric.

"Then, take it off and show me."

She glanced at Mrs. Bernell, who nodded. Then she released the buttons and let the fabric drop to the floor. Henry was transfixed by the smooth curves of the young woman. Her breasts were small and firm; they would defy gravity for many years. Her waist tapered delectably before flaring out to womanly hips. At the apex of her thighs was a triangle of curly hair somewhat darker in color than the chestnut hair on her head.

“Turn around.” She complied and Henry was rewarded with a view of her gorgeous bottom.

She completed her turn and once again faced Mr. Burrige. Henry picked up his thin birch cane. The purpose of the prison was to punish criminals, not simply to hold them. While whipping of women had been abolished several years ago, he still had frequent need of his cane upon the butts of delinquents. Yet, he had no intention of hurting this young woman – at least not now. He tapped the insides of her ankles until she opened her legs. With her feet spread more than a foot apart, he raised the tip of the cane to her crotch.

“Has anyone ever touched you here – before?”

The lass jumped back and clamped her thighs together. “No!”

“Don’t lie to me. You will be examined, so tell me the truth now. Has any man ever put anything between your legs?”

“I don’t know what you are talking about. I ain’t been naked since my last bath and that were near a year ago. No one ever touched me like that before.” She pointed at the cane in Henry’s hand.

“Hmmm, you have lived your entire life as a boy? Living with your father?”

“Aye, that’s what I said.”

“The truth of the matter, the reason we have such an interest in you, is that you are actually a girl. Boys do not have this empty space between their legs.” Henry pointed the tip of his cane to the girl’s pubis. “Boys have a protuberance there.” He cleared his throat before continuing. “Have you ever seen a man’s cock?”

The girl trembled. She looked to Mrs. Bernell and then out the window. Finally, very softly she answered, “Yes.”

“So, you do know that you are different?” She nodded and stared at the floor. “You, like all girls, have Antipode’s dwelling, or as some girls call it – a cunny.” He once again touched the tip of his cane to the dark curly hairs at the apex of her thighs. “I don’t know why, but your

father chose to raise you as a son instead of a daughter. But, from now on, you will be a girl. Do you understand?"

"NO!"

Henry replaced the cane and returned to his desk. "Well, these are the facts. Get dressed. It will take some getting used to, but you are, in fact, a girl and your name is now Clara. Say it."

The bewildered young woman whispered, "Clara," and then pulled the dress back on. She fumbled with the buttons – never taking her eyes away from Henry.

"This is Mrs. Bernell, the matron of this prison. She will take very good care of you." The Governor turned to the matron. "Take Clara to the asylum. Keep her isolated until we can establish a program for her." The far end of one wing of the prison was used to house the non-criminally insane. Once Clara was locked away there, no one would ever hear from her again. "Work on her diction," he instructed as they passed through the doorway.

Henry Burridge noted the current date on inmate Carl Chamberlain's arrest paper. He then filed it with the papers of the other prisoners to be released in three months. As far as the rest of the world was concerned, Carl had vanished.

The prison was a hundred yards south of the Wellington Barracks. This building housed the men and officers of Her Majesty's guard. It had long been the practice of these men to seek female comfort from the women in the prison. The women who had been convicted of prostitution had no objection when Mrs. Bernell paired them with the men. In addition to providing the prisoners a small reward, Mr. Burridge and Mrs. Bernell lined their own pockets. However, the Governor did use some of the money to improve the food for the general prison population. It was through the guard officers that Mr. Burridge had met Lord Folkston, and he had commissioned the prison governor to seek out one special woman for his private use.

Henry drafted a letter to Lord Folkston, informing him that a pure young woman had been acquired. Henry now had a woman who could be trained to the Lord's specifications and kept for as long as he wanted her.

* * * * *

Clara Chamberlain was confused, but did not resist as the strong woman led her away. Mrs. Bernell kept her left hand firmly grasping Clara's arm, just above the elbow. This immobilized the girl's right hand while her own right hand remained free to strike Clara should

she resist. But, she didn't resist. They descended the stairs to the cellar. From here, tunnels ran under the three branches of the prison.

Originally known as Tothill Fields Prison, a punishment facility was first constructed on a hill overlooking the River Thames in 1618. Following the construction of the new Westminster Corrections Facility a short distance to the west, the Tothill site became the home of the Westminster Cathedral.

The front of the new prison, the administration area, faced Willow Street. Like three leaves of a shamrock, the dormitories spread from the administration building to enclose the central yard. Each of the dormitories included three wings – each wing was three stories tall with each floor consisting of a large room filled with cots to house the prisoners. The dormitory to the left was for the men. The dormitory to the right, and the one directly across the yard from the administration building, housed the women. These two dormitories faced the Emmanuel Hospital and the area penned as 'Devil's Acre'. This low-lying area was prone to flooding and was considered to be London's center of poverty, vice, and crime. An additional structure between the women's dormitory and the men's dormitory was the asylum. The entire facility was ringed by a high brick wall.

Unlike the other large dormitory rooms, the asylum included several small rooms to isolate individual inmates who were too unruly to mix with the general population of the insane. The Westminster Corrections Facility did not house any violent or dangerous convicts or insane persons; these were incarcerated in the more formidable facilities.

Upon reaching the underground passage, Mrs. Bernell propelled Clara to the left. The shortest distance to the asylum was under the men's dormitory.

"Where are you taking me?" Clara became frightened as they entered the cramped darkness of the tunnel.

"No need to worry, my dear. This is only the shortest path to our destination. We will not be down here very long."

Once under the asylum, they climbed the stairs to the top floor. Mrs. Bernell directed Clara to a specially decorated room for the use of Lord Folkston's prize. Unlike the other rooms, this one had a comfortable bed, table, chair, and a wardrobe already filled with a variety of frocks. Her window looked over the brick wall toward the newly constructed Buckingham Palace.

“This is your room. You will be very well cared for. But, you must be attentive to your instructions. Failure to do as you are told, will lead to corporal discipline. Do you know what that means?”

“Uh, no, ma’am.”

“You will be spanked.”

Clara swallowed the lump that had formed in her throat.