

# The Mystery of Lord Blackwood

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The gas lamps of Grosvenor Square hissed like discontented serpents as Detective Arthur Pendleton ascended the marble steps of Blackwood House. A liveried footman, face pale as wax, ushered him into a lamplit study where the air was thick with beeswax, old paper, and a sharper, metallic scent.



By the immense oak desk, in a pool of lamplight and dark ink, lay the body of Lord Alistair Blackwood. His eyes were wide with terminal surprise. Kneeling beside him was a man with a physician's bag, who looked up with a grave expression. "The heart, at a glance," said Dr. William Vance, his voice low. "But the glance, Arthur, is seldom the whole story."

Pendleton grunted, lighting his pipe. The smoke curled, mingling with the room's tension. His analytical gaze swept the scene: the overturned inkwell, the undisturbed papers, a single, empty crystal tumbler on the desk. "Where is Lady Blackwood?"



As if summoned, a figure appeared in the doorway, shrouded in black silk. Lady Eleanor Blackwood was a study in controlled grief, her face a porcelain mask. "Detective," she said, her voice steady. "My husband was working late. I heard nothing until the butler's cry."

"Was he in the habit of drinking alone, Lady Blackwood?" Pendleton asked, gesturing with his pipe stem toward the solitary glass.

"Brandy, before bed. One glass. Always from that decanter." Her eyes flickered to the sideboard, where a cut-glass decanter sat three-quarters full.



Pendleton moved to the desk. Among the papers was a ledger, its entries meticulous. But one line, for a payment to a 'V. Crane,' was violently scratched out. He also noted a faint, sweet, almond-like scent clinging to the rim of the tumbler—a scent that made Dr. Vance, now examining it, stiffen.

"Prussic acid," Vance whispered, meeting Pendleton's eyes. "Minute traces. Not enough to be the direct cause, but... a whisper of poison."

The plot thickened from accident to potential murder. Pendleton's mind raced. The staged natural

death, the hidden poison, the scratched ledger. "Doctor," he murmured. "A heart may be stopped by shock as easily as by disease. What if the poison was not to kill, but to induce a violent spasm?"

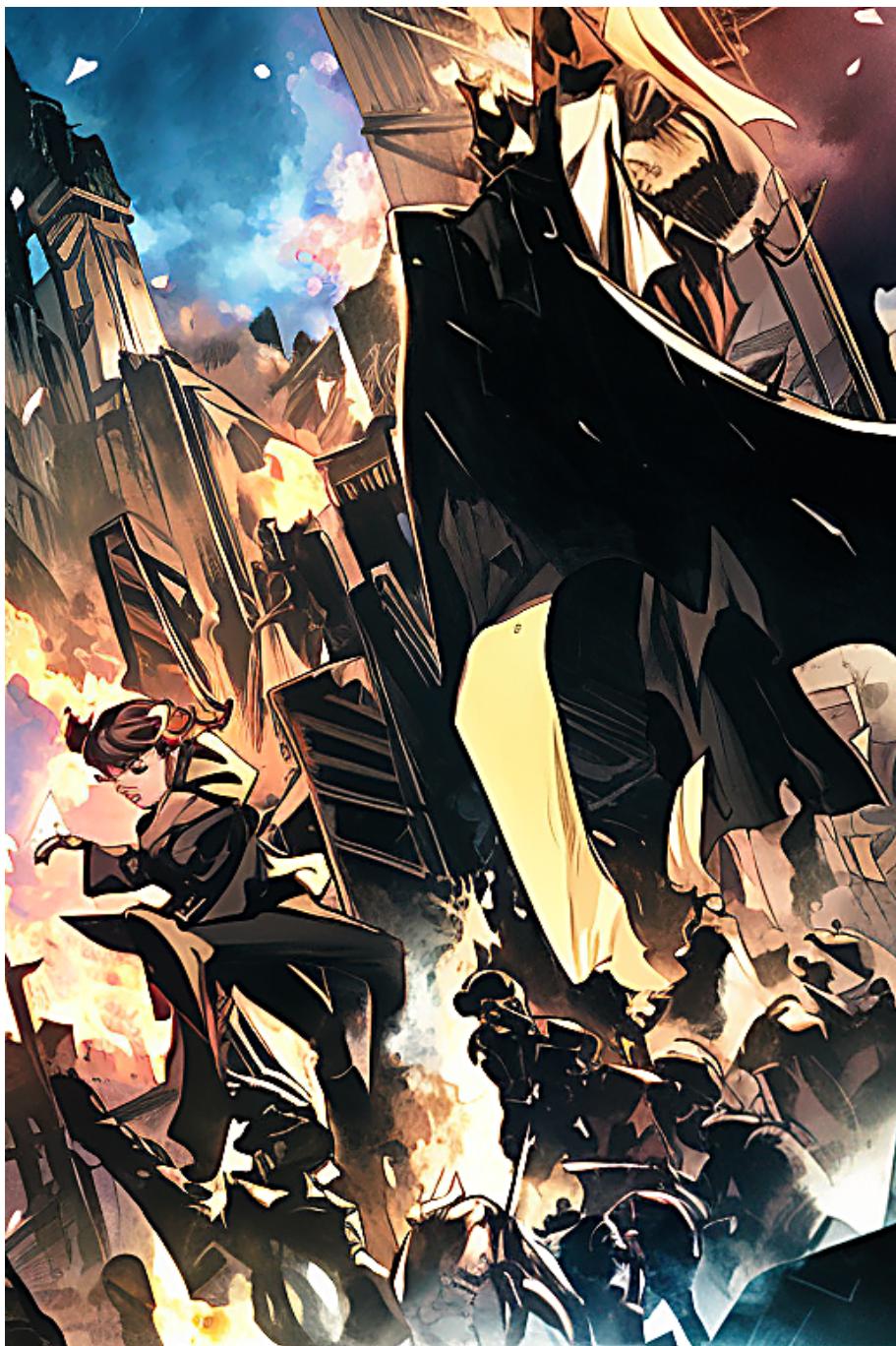


Their quiet conference was interrupted by Lady Blackwood's return. She held a small, locked journal. "I found this hidden in his dressing room. I do not have the key." Her delivery was too smooth, the discovery too convenient. Pendleton took it; the lock was simple, and with a pick from his waistcoat, it yielded.

The final entry was damning: \*"V. Crane threatens exposure. The financial ruin would be public. E. must never know. I cannot see another way out.\*" It pointed to suicide, a man poisoning himself to

mimic a heart attack and spare his family shame.

But Pendleton saw the flaw. "The ink," he stated, pointing to the journal, then to the great spill on the floor. "The same violet-black shade. This entry was written recently. Yet the pen on the desk is clean, and the inkwell here is overturned and dry. Where did he write this final confession?"



A profound silence fell. Lady Blackwood's mask finally cracked, a tremor in her clasped hands. Pendleton turned his piercing gaze upon her. "The journal was planted. The ink spill was staged to explain the absence of wet ink on the desk pen. You wrote this entry, Lady Blackwood, after his body was discovered. 'V. Crane' is a fiction. The real poison was in the decanter, a slow, weakening

agent, and the shock of a confrontation tonight-perhaps over this very ledger-provided the final, fatal trigger."

She did not crumble, but her defiance turned to a cold, weary acknowledgment. Dr. Vance let out a slow breath, the supportive physician now a witness to a chilling deduction. The case, it seemed, had found its tragic heart in the study's lamplight.