The Accidental Murderess

A Short Tale by Eugenia Mooney

Miss Hermione Tandy was the youngest daughter of a fortuitous gentleman known as Mr. Hollingsworth Tandy residing near the area of Hyde Park in London. The father, in his concern for the welfare of his youngest child, had endeavoured to exert a great deal of paternal authority by removing her acquaintance - an artful miscreant for whom she had developed an unhealthy attachment. In furtherance of this act, he took it upon himself to visit the docks and speak with said miscreant, whereupon he discovered the man was married and in a rage attacked him, pushing him into the river. Expecting him to be shaken up (and hence warned), he turned his back and walked away - though there were many repeated cries for help. In the darkness of mid-night, Miss Tandy left her home, seemingly undetected, to meet her lover. This evening she was followed by her father, who concealed himself by the docks and waited. She too waited for some time, but her lover did not show himself. Reaching out from the shadows, her father grabbed her by the arm, frightening the girl. In the dark she could not make out the figure, thinking only of harm to her person and grabbed a large hook, which lay upon a nearby crate. Swinging the hook with much fortitude, she struck the figure again and again until it fell to the ground into a dark puddle. Shouting histrionically, she loudly exclaimed that someone had attempted to defile her (lest there be a dockworker or officer in the area). Led on by giddy and headstrong passion, she returned home.

Waking to a knock against her bedroom door she quickly splashed water on her face, dressed and headed down into the sitting room; shocked to find two constables asking her mother questions regarding the whereabouts of her husband. Miss Tandy was then in turn asked of her father's whereabouts; answering in a matter-of-fact way she had no idea as he frequently stayed out 'till all hours. Apparently satisfied, the constables left, stating they would be back should they require anything further. Her mother, pale and gaunt, said not one word.

Miss Tandy commented on her mother's health and promptly left on the pretext of visiting the chemist to purchase a scrip. Instead, she made her way to the docks expecting to confront her lover. Several dockworkers greeted her ungraciously. Upon asking the whereabouts of her lover, one man stated he had heard of a young man drowned in the river, deliberately killing himself after taking the life of a wealthy man just that night previous. Overcome with grief her pain became almost physically unbearable; she thought that if she were dead, there would be an end to her misery. Putting her mind to procuring a "horrid dose", she went 'round the chemists on her way home that afternoon.

At breakfast the following morning, she conveyed some poison into her teacup while her mother was otherwise occupied. After a sip, the young woman complained of bitterness and asked for the honey. Her mother, having already sweetened her own tea, forced a smile and exchanged cups – getting up and reaching for the honey jar herself. Miss Tandy's intentions having miscarried, determined to make the best of the situation.
Some hours later her mother complained of labouring under a disorder of the stomach and asked her daughter to visit the chemist for a powder. Miss Tandy returned home to find her mother in a very grave state on the

settee with the two constables ‘round once again. They requested she sit as they had news and the outcome being quite unpleasant. They regaled the horrifying details of her father’s death; how he was found in a pool of his own blood, having been beaten to death with a large grappling hook. In shock, she fainted to the floor, waking sometime later to a cold compress applied by one of the constables. They suggested bed rest and her mother to be committed for treatment at a sanatorium. Miss Tandy convinced them otherwise; she had sinister plans for her mother. Upon their departure, she mingled powders from the chemist with the remainder of the “horrid dose” administering it to her mother who swallowed it without suspicion. Determined to do the job effectually, she put some likewise into her mother’s water-gruel and had the serving maid feed her with the nasty concoction.

A short time after her mother had taken the fatal potion, she found herself prodigiously disordered and the serving maid in the interim drank off what gruel was left becoming likewise much affected and soon afterwards died. Such wickedness had overtaken the girl who pretended great sorrow at seeing her mother in pain and asked where the disorder lay. Her mother told her in the bowels, and that the pains increased more than she was able to bear. Upon this, she told her mother that she imagined it was the gripes and poured her another draught. Her unhappy mother, ignorant of the cause of the disorder, readily accepted the medicine, and drank off a large glass of it.

The barbarity of the circumstance was extremely shocking - she knew the hot quality of the elixir and the terrible effects it would produce. Her mother had already taken more than a sufficient amount of fiery poison to deprive her of life. No sooner had she drunk the cruel remedy, than she fell from the chair in violent agony, swelling like a horrid, fœtid toad. She lay in the most lamentable torture for the space of a fortnight without relief. Miss Tandy dispatched the housekeeper to retrieve a physician from Central London, but in vain, for her mother’s body swelled to such a degree that it burst upon his arrival, and she died a most shocking spectacle to behold.

The persons who were witnesses of this horrid catastrophe were not at a loss to find the orchestrator of it; they immediately accused the unnatural daughter with the murder, and immediately called for the police. When the constables arrived the servants and doctor were all strictly questioned, in order to discover whether any of them were privy to the affair, but not the least cause of suspicion appeared among them. As to Miss Tandy, she treated any accusations with contempt and did not show the least bit of remorse for what she had done. Upon searching the home, they discovered the dead body of the serving maid in the coal cellar and in Miss Tandy’s bedroom a little dressing-box was discovered containing a small quantity of an unusual white paste. When asked the intended use of the composition, she answered that it was only a paste to clean her jewels. While examining it more closely, the constable described what might be a scent of almonds – a distinct sign of Arsenic. After further inquiry and protestation, Miss Tandy was taken into custody.

Upon arriving at the Gaol, Miss Tandy had achieved a fever pitch of wickedness; making jest of what ought to have struck her dumb with horror. When carried before the magistrate, she insisted she had received the paste as a present from an admirer (of which she claimed to have many).

At the time of her trial a company of spectators had gathered, who with some difficulty were kept from assaulting her. Barristers assured the crowd she would pay for the atrocious crimes, which had enraged their just resentments.

During the proceeding when asked how she could perpetrate such cruel deeds, she responded that she did not think there was any crime in dispatching a cross old fellow out of the world who was the only barrier to her happiness, and that the maid and her mother were purely accidental in her attempts upon herself. When she was told of the dangerous situation she was in, and how she ought to prepare for the worst, she said that life and death in her present circumstances were equal and that the event of her trial should be of little concern. Thus, without paying any regard for her future state, she passed her time in an indolent and thoughtless manner.

Soon afterward, she was found guilty and executed. Her behaviour before her execution was indiscreet, filled with mental maladies and in her dying declaration, claiming not to know or believe that she caused her father an injustice nor did she administer the powders and pastes to which the death of her mother and serving maid had been ascribed.

So ends the sad tale of Miss Hermione Tandy, The Accidental Murderess.