THE FATAL REQUEST OR FOUND OUT

By A. L. Harris Author of "Mine Own Familiar Friend," etc.

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CHAPTER XXII.—Continued.

Before he could reply the housemaid put in another word.

"Begging your pardon for speaking, after being told to hold my tongue, but it's something beginning with a 'B'—as I saw it myself in a prayer book I came across accidental."

"So that is how you came by your information," said her master. "Something beginning with a 'B,' is it? Suppose you let me see the book?"

"Which I intended to have showed it to you at the first," she said, fumbling in her pocket and producing the well worn little volume, which she was about to hand to her master, when—

A sudden dart—a long arm stretched out, and a powerful hand wrested it from her.

"This is my property," exclaimed the owner, sternly. "The same writ ten within may be mine or another's. but so long as I choose to keep it a secret—secret it shall remain."

"This is most extraordinary conduct" exclaimed Mr. Ferrers "most extraordinary! Under the circumstances, only one course is open to me. It is impossible that a barrister under my roof one who has obtained admittance under a false name, and absolutely refuses any explanation. I must, therefore,"—assuming his severest expression, while the young man seemed to hold his breath as he waited for the sentence to be pronounced upon him—"I must, therefore, discharge you at once, and with a month's wages in lieu of the ordinary notice."

It was all up.

"When—when am I to leave?" inquired Ted, with eyes fixed upon the floor and heart beating furiously.

This question seemed to take the person to whom it was addressed unawares.

"When!" he answered; "why—oh, as soon as you can; or"—with a slightly more lenient tone, as he reflected that, after all, as the fellow himself said, there might be reasons, not necessarily bad, for the concealment—"you can remain until to-morrow, if you like."

Victory! Another night, which was all he required.

He could scarcely prevent himself from showing some signs of exultation. Ah! perhaps by this time to-morrow the situation might be changed. He might be the judge, and another—

"Stay one moment." Mr. Ferrers continued.

This time he addressed the woman Perkins, who had reached the door.

"As I have also a strong objection to persons who pry into other people's concerns and interfere with their private property, you may as well take a month's notice at the same time. That will do, you can go."

The biter was bit. She had not a word to say for herself. She had succeeded in revenging her spite upon him who had despised her attractions and regarded her overtures with disdain, but had done it at the expense of a good situation. Moreover, the man whose disgrace she had hoped to secure laughed in her face as he passed her.

CHAPTER XXIII.

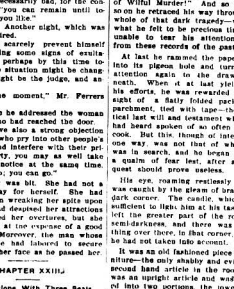
The Envelope With Three Seals.

It was twelve o'clock on Friday night. The clock in the hall below had struck the hour. Another half hour ticked slowly by, and at the end of that time a door in the upper part of the house was opened softly and by imperceptible degrees.

The room within was in darkness and the figure of the man who cautiously emerged was barely visible in the general gloom.

He crept lightly on his stockinged feet past the doors of the rooms on the upper floor, and begun to descend the staircase.

It was much in his favor the stairs being so well and so massively constructed, that there was no startling or sudden cracks or reports from the feet which trod them secretly in the dead of night. And so he made his way slowly and safely to the floor on which the room was situated into which he was minded to penetrate. After careful and noiseless search, he succeeded in laying his hand upon a candle and a box of matches, which, earlier in the evening, he had secreted conveniently, but out-of-the-way corner.



"This is my property!"

He struck a match, and, lighting the candle, advanced towards the door of the apartment into the lock of which he inserted his duplicate key.

He entered and closed the door behind him without, however, completely shutting it.

He put his candle down on the written table while he considered what was to be done next. The waste paper basket first attracted his attention as being at once the nearest and the easiest object on which to exercise his powers of investigation.

It was about a quarter full of torn fragments, which he promptly emptied out upon the table. A rapid and cursory examination was sufficient to prove that these were of no importance. So he swept them back into their original receptacle.

The next thing to be done must be to tackle the written table. Is it possible to be accomplished? Shocking to relate he proceeded from his pocket nothing less than—a bunch of skeleton keys!

Yes, he felt great disappointment one after another of the drawers upon the right hand proved to be empty. He turned his attention to those on the left.

He put his hand to one and pulled out the tightly wedged contents. He spread it open; yes, it was a nowspaper—some months old. What could be the reason for preserving it? A sudden thought—he looked at the date and then—Yes, there it was on the side sheet. "Terrible Railway Accident! Train Dashed from Dover wrecked and partially consumed!" There was a full account of that disaster, with the most intense details of all the horrors—a recollection of which returned to him, made cold as he scanned the column. He replaced the first, and took down another and another.

"Further details—number of bodies found—distressing scenes—the inquest—the verdict—mysterious discovery with regard to a first class passenger—foul play suspected! Verdict of Wilful Murder!" And so on and so on he retraced his way through the whole of that dark tragedy—saw what he felt to be precious time, but unable to tear his attention away from these records of the past.

At last he rammed the paper back into its place holes and turned his attention again to the drawer beneath. When it at last yielded to his efforts, he was rewarded by the sight of a flatly folded packet of parchment, tied with tape—the identical "will and testament which he had heard spoken of so often by the dead. But this, though of interest in one way, was not that of which he was in search, and he began to feel a qualm of fear lest, after all, his quest should prove useless.

His eye, roaming restlessly about, was caught by the glare of brass in a dark corner. The candle, which was sufficient to light him at his task, still left the greater part of the room in semi-darkness, and there was something there, in that corner, which he had not taken into account.

It was an old fashioned piece of furniture—the only shabby and evidently second hand article in the room. It was an upright article and was divided into three portions, the two outer containing drawers and the upper being shut in with doors, which were fitted with a beam back and fastenings.

It was old and much scratched, and had apparently seen considerable service. It must have been a good article originally. He took the candle in his hand and, crossing the room, inspected it closely. "There is a look about it"—holding the candle up higher—"as though it might have a secret attached to it. It looks"—with a sudden inspiration—"as though it might be trusted to keep a secret." He put the candle upon the mantelpiece close by and again proceeded his hurried investigations. "I shall soon be able to pass muster as an experienced housebreaker at the rate" he reflected to himself, with grim irony, as the lock turned traitor, and the door, swinging open, revealed a number of drawers within, each garnished with a lock and brass handle. Which should he attack first? Much time had already been wasted, and at that moment, as though in answer, the clock on the mantelpiece chimed three, while the clock in the hall without repeated the hour after it.

"I will try the third first," he said, and inserted one of his skeleton keys into the lock. This drawer—the third in order from the top—on being opened showed itself, strangely enough, to contain three articles, all of a widely different character.

These were a large and bulky envelope, a tolerably large and small bottle of colorless fluid. The young man could not repress an exclamation of surprise and joy, which he let fall upon these.

"The secret he had been in search of so long lay ready to his hand—the proofs of the crime were there waiting for him to come and take them. He knew it, and yet hesitated. The shock of this discovery seemed to paralyze his hand, so that for an instant it was unable to stretch forth and take possession of what he believed would make him master of a man's fate.

At last he put out his hand, which trembled as he did so, and took up the revolver. It was a six-chamber revolver, and a glance showed that one any of the chambers had been discharged.

A fierce, hungry look came over his face as he noticed this, and, laying the weapon down, he searched for something which he always carried about him—the conical shaped bullet which he had discovered in the stuffing of the fourth carriage from the engine. He dropped it into the empty chamber which it fitted exactly.

"Proof number one!" he said, with grim irony. He felt the dreadful thirst for blood return upon him with all its former strength. He laid the revolver down and took up the smaller bottle. What was this, and what bearing has this on the case upon the matter? He removed the stopper and inhaled the contents carefully. A strong and penetrating odor of bitter almonds greeted him. Prussic acid, beyond doubt! What did this point to? There seemed but one answer—Suicide—Suicide! A means of escape for the case of detection presenting itself. He replaced the stopper and placed the bottle by the side of the revolver, and took up the third and last article. This was the envelope which he mentioned. It was large and thick and sealed in one but three places. On it, in place of an inscription, was written the strange words: "To be burned, unopened, after my death."

"To be burned, unopened, after his death!—what did that mean? Why, if it were to be burned, unopened, had he put himself to the pains of writing it? For that the envelope contained the completed copy of the "true narrative and confession of the strange tragedy" he had not the least doubt. But why had he described it as the strange tragedy? Cowardly and deceitful it might well be—but why strange?

"At any rate, so far from its being burned, unopened," he said, aloud, "I will now myself—"

He took the letter in one hand and, with the other he was about to break the seals, when a voice cried:

"Stop!"

(To be continued.)

Doctors Answer a Good Thing.

Congressman John Sharp Williams tells of a man in Mississippi who is a hypochondriac of the first order. This festivitiating fellow is a source of never-ending amusement to his fellow townsmen. It was of this man that the following conversation took place in answer to a question as to how the sick man was getting on, that he complained that he was feeling somewhat better.

"Mr. Williams says that the hypochondriac was one day telling a friend of his efforts to regain his old-time health. He ran over the list of doctors whom he had consulted. Where upon the friend remarked:

"Well, old man, I must say that you appear to have lots of faith in doctors."

"Certainly I have," replied the sick man. "Don't you think the doctors would be foolish if they should continue like me die?" — Colorado Springs Gazette.

Long Lines of Kings.

Through Japan be the first country to enter the circle of world powers, the emperor surpasses all sovereigns in the length of his religious descent, according to the London Chronicle. He is the hundred and twenty-second member in direct, unbroken descent of his family who has sat on the throne of Japan. The ancestry of the house was in Japanese legend, a god-dess of the sun, and contemporary with Nebuchadnezzar, 600 years before the Christian era. On the other hand, the Romanoffs have been royal only since 1601, when they succeeded to the sovereignty of the then extinct house of Rurik. Some of our European rulers, Kiaz Edward can go back to Cerdic, the first of the Saxon burgs to 952 A. D. and the Hohenzollerns to the eleth century, but as kings only.

Why It Wasn't Legal.

In the New York Law School at a recent lecture on the making of wills the case of a woman in one of Rider Haggard's books was cited. This woman had a man's will inscribed in her arm, and she had the will was held regular and legal because it had been written on her person.

After giving this practical illustration, the professor called on John Smith to explain.

"Is a will so inscribed regular and legal in your opinion?"

"No," answered Smith.

"Why not?" asked the professor.

"Because it's a sale game," replied Smith.

The professor was angry enough to order Smith out of the room, but the class laughed so much that he decided to overlook the student's flippancy.

IT PAYS TO BE HONEST.

New York Lawyer Proves This by Good Story.

Ex-Judge Mayer and a party were discussing various maxims at the Republican club the other night when Col. Henry Clay Piercy of the House of Delegates said:

"Well, Judge, do you really believe honesty is the best policy?"

"I'll answer that question by a story," replied the judge. "When I was practicing law in a country town I called on a resident one day in the interests of a client. I said to the man:

"'Do you own a large black dog with white spots?'

"He looked at me quizzically, and then said:

"'Oh, yes; that dog is merely a stray canine that occasionally strolls into my yard. You're the tax assessor, aren't you?'

"'No, I'm only a lawyer. I came to tell you that a client of mine had accidentally shot and killed the big dog and authorized me to pay the owner $25 damages. But as the animal has no owner, why, of course there's nothing to pay. Good morning!'—New York Times.

1901—1904.

Nekoma, Ill., April 18th.—Away back in 1901 Mr. Albert E. Larson of this place was suffering with Kidney disease and backache. The pain he was called upon to endure was very great and rendered his life almost a burden to him. He heard of Doddd's Kidney Pills and began to use them and almost at once he began to get better. He had been unable to work but Dodd's Kidney Pills soon made him able to work again. He used the remedy till he was completely cured. He says he has grown stronger year by year since he got rid of his old complaint.

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Looked That Way.

Teacher—All birds are bipeds—that is, that have two feet.

Tommy—The ducks aln't.

Teacher—Oh yes; the duck has two feet.

Tommy—No, ma'am. I'll bet they are oara.

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