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The Detective's Dream.

I should say here that the Rev. John Fenwick was as meek and gentle a man as any I have ever met. The murder of his son had affected him very deeply indeed, and though he tried to bear up with humble resignation to what he termed the Divine will, it was plain to see that he was crushed. His two daughters were no less affected, for they had been passionately attached to their brother. It certainly was very terrible that the young fellow who was the pride and light of that quiet home should have been so barbarously deprived of his life. The death of those we love under any circumstances is hard to bear; but how much harder it is when some loved one falls a victim to crime. My own sympathies were very fully aroused in this sad case, and, necessarily, I did all that I could to avoid as far as possible causing the heart wounds of the weeping relatives from bleeding afresh. Therefore I very carefully refrained from letting fall the slightest hint as to the direction in which my suspicions had turned.

My position was a delicate and an unpleasant one. People wondered why I lingered there, when they were all convinced that the murderer was in some other part of the country; and it was more than hinted that I was not only losing all chance of solving the mystery, but every hour's delay on my part rendered the criminal more secure against capture. Even poor Mr. Fenwick himself failed to appreciate the situation, and when several days had passed, and the murderer was not discovered, though I still lingered, he said to me:—

"Mr. Donovan, this mystery will, I fear, remain unsolved until the secrets of all hearts shall be known. My poor dear boy can never be recalled to life, nor will my sorrow ever entirely depart. But I have no revengeful feelings, and I am willing to believe that the wickedness of the individual who has thus wrecked the happiness of my home will bring its own punishment. I am therefore content to leave him in the hands of Heaven, and in God's good time I trust I may meet my boy where there will be no more sin and no parting."

I ventured to point out to him that, however charitable and Divine-like such a course as he seemed disposed to adopt might be, it was not one that justice could take. The laws were framed to protect men, and punish those who did evil. In this case a terrible crime had been committed, and the law would not be satisfied until the criminal had been brought before its solemn and august tribunal, and after fair and just trial, had been awarded his due punishment.

"But," argued Mr. Fenwick, "you do not expect to find the criminal dwelling amongst us, do you? We are a simple and homely people, and yet full of human failings, but I think we have all too high a regard for the sanctity of human life to barbarously destroy it. And who possibly in this little community could have cherished ill-will against my poor boy?"

I told him that I could not discuss the points he raised, nor give answer to his questions, but I emphasized the fact that very frequently indeed in criminal cases it was the unexpected that happened, and that in this instance the evil-doer might be found ultimately to be very much nearer to the scene of the tragedy than was thought likely just then.

To this suggestion Mr. Fenwick took exception. He said it seemed to reflect seriously on some of his own parishioners, and he exclaimed, with the fervor of true piety, as he turned his tearful eyes to Heaven:—

"I declare that, smitten cruelly though I am, I cannot bring my mind to think evil of a living soul amongst my flock. I would rather that this deed should go unpunished for ever and ever than that I, a poor, frail mortal, should do a wrong even in unuttered thought to one of my fellow-creatures. We here have dwelt in loving harmony for years. We have been a united family, with me, their pastor, as the head. With the help of God I have humbly endeavored to teach these my children their duty to their neighbors, no less than their duty to the God who made them, and though they may have been wayward and fretful at times I will not, dare not, believe that one of them could be capable of this great wrong. No, sir, the slayer of my son is not amongst us. He is wandering over the earth, the brand

of Cain upon his brow, and though he may escape man's justice, he must some day answer to his offended Maker, and in God's hands I am content to leave the matter."

I did not pursue the subject further with Mr. Fenwick, for he was so earnest, so sincere in his convictions, that it would have hurt his feelings had I insisted that he was possibly wrong, and he would have been inexpressibly shocked indeed if I had put into words my suspicions that the murderer of his son was actually a member of the household.

It was impossible to think that the lad's father or sisters had done the deed. Who else, then, was there? I found that the servants, all together, outdoors and indoors numbered seven. This number included a coachman and two gardeners, one of the latter being a mere boy. There was a chambermaid and a parlormaid, whose ages respectively were about nineteen and twenty-two. They were sisters, and seemed highly respectable girls. The cook was a woman of about fifty-four, and had been in Mr. Fenwick's service for a long time; and finally, there was a woman familiarly called "Nance," who occupied the position of nurse. She was turned sixty, and had been with her employer for upward of thirty years, and had nursed his children in their infancy.

I found great difficulty in selecting any member of his household as likely to have committed the crime. Indeed, I confess frankly that, as far as the women are concerned, I put them on one side, so to speak, as being out of the calculation. I was thus thrown back on the three men. The coachman, as I was informed, had been ten years at the parsonage. He was a steady-going, respectable fellow, middle-aged, and with a mild, kindly manner. The gardener was a man of about sixty, likewise an old servant, and his assistant, who also helped in the stable, was a youth of about seventeen.

Even with these facts and details I could not abandon the feeling I had that the circumstances pointed strongly to a member of the household having committed the deed. Nor did I despair of ultimately solving the mystery.

I had on several occasions closely examined the ground where the crime was carried out in the somewhat vague hope, perhaps, that it would yield up a sign or give me a clue. But it did neither, until one day, as I was strolling over the very spot where the poor young man was probably stricken down, my eye was attracted by a glittering something lying in a crevice between two of the stones forming the top of the wall that ran round the garden.

Stooping down and examining the spot, I discovered a finger ring set with a ruby in the centre of a circle of pearls. It was easy to understand how this had not been found before. It was lying in a narrow channel formed by the mortar having worked out from between the stones. A ray of sunlight happened to strike the facets of the ruby just as I passed, hence the reason that my attention was drawn to it, and, as I picked it up and examined it, I could not resist a feeling that the ring would afford me a clue, though in what way I could not even then suggest. My first impulse was to make some inquiries amongst the young ladies in the house, if they recognized the ring. On second thought I resolved not to do so just then.

I had now been in the district for a week, and I made up my mind to depart in a couple of days more unless I saw good reason to delay. The next morning after finding the ring I resolved to stroll about the moor near by. It was a very beautiful morning, and I felt that I wanted to be alone and think over the case which was puzzling me. The sun was shining brilliantly, the air was soft and balmy, and the larks made joyous melody as they soared upward. I wandered on for some distance along the road that led, as I understood, right across the moor. The place was indeed a wilderness in which nature held undisputed sway; and the westerly winds blew, sweeping the hollows, tossing the bog cotton, and making tuneful melody in the rushes. Occasionally a crow flew by and uttered a plaintive cry that somehow sounded unusually melancholy in that desolate region.

Presently I plunged down into a deep depression, at the bottom of which a plank bridge spanned a bog stream. So restless, so silent, so lonely was this spot that I threw myself down on a knoll of springy turf, and fell to dreaming, and the subject of my dream I need but say was the murder of young Fenwick. I did not like to feel myself beaten, and yet it did seem to me then as if the matter was likely to remain an unsolved mystery. From waking dreams I passed to sleeping ones, and I thought that I was haunted by a strange being, half woman and half snake, whose eyes, glittering deadly and cruel, never left me. Turn which way I would those dreadful eyes met mine, and it seemed to me as if a mocking voice rang in my ear and cried:—

"And the watcher watched. You are defeated."

I awoke with a start. How long I slept I know not, but perhaps a couple of hours. I heard real voices, and looking up I beheld two women coming toward where I was lying. My movement attracted them and one showed signs of fear and distress, and clung to her companion. The companion was the nurse, Nance from the parsonage; the other I had never seen

before, but as soon as I looked at her her face and eyes, through some strange cause, recalled that hybrid creature of my dream. Perhaps this was merely an association of ideas due to the suddenness of my awakening and beholding two women in that lonely region.

Seeing that Nance recognized me I rose and advanced toward her, but the other woman glared at me in a strange way, and placed her companion between herself and me. She was well dressed, but looked wild and frenzied. She was tall and her face sallow; but she had regular features, and at some period must have been good-looking. As I neared them she seemed to get more alarmed and confused, and I heard her say to Nance:—

"Take me away. I hate that man. I hate him."

In an instant it flashed across my mind that this woman was insane, and then, in spite of myself, she shaped herself into the very creature of my dreams, and I mentally exclaimed:—

"That woman is the murderess of Roger Fenwick."

As I advanced I spoke to Nance, making some commonplace remark about the morning. But the other woman seemed in no way calmed; on the contrary she grew more excited. Her lips quivered, her eyes blazed, and there was an expression of half-rage, half-terror in her face.

"I am afraid my unexpected meeting with you, Nance, has alarmed that lady," I remarked.

"Yes," answered Nance, somewhat disconcerted. "She is an invalid and very nervous."

"Send him away," whispered the woman, but, hearing the words, I bade Nance good-morning, and passed on.

On reaching the parsonage, I sought an interview with Mr. Fenwick, and after some preliminary conversation I produced the ruby pearl ring I had found in the wall, and, handing it to him, I asked:—

"Have you ever seen that ring before, Mr. Fenwick?"

He took it from me, examined it, and I saw a troubled expression spread over his face.

"Where did you get it?" he asked.

"May I ask you to kindly answer my question first?" I said.

"Yes," he said, "I have seen the ring before."

"Where?"

"In the possession of my wife."

"Your wife!" I cried in amazement, for it was the first time I had heard his wife mentioned. I thought, indeed, he was a widower.

"Yes, I gave it to her years and years ago."

"Is your wife still living?"

"She is."

"Where?"

"Here in this house." He became very much affected, and it was some moments before he could go on. "I am sorry to say," he continued, "that my wife is a chronic invalid."

"In charge of Nance, the nurse," I remarked.

"Well—yes. Nurse looks after her in the daytime. She is my second wife."

"Was your son Roger her son?"

"No."

"Do not think me impertinently curious, Mr. Fenwick, but will you tell me the nature of the malady from which your wife suffers?"

"Yes, I will. She suffers from hopeless mental derangement. It has been a sore affliction to us, but we have bowed to the divine will."

"Is she harmless?"

"Oh, yes, quite. She has a very remarkable delusion. She believes she is half-snake and half-woman."

I fairly staggered as I heard this, and for a moment or two I almost doubted the evidence of my own senses.

"What is the matter?" asked he, as he noticed that I was upset.

"Not much," I answered. "I am startled a little by a very remarkable coincidence, that is all. I must ask you another question, Mr. Fenwick, and it is a painful one. Did your wife bear any malice against her stepson?"

"I must answer you truthfully," he replied. "She did."

"Why?"

"Nay, it is impossible to say. It was a phase of her madness. But I have heard her say that his presence always used to cause her excruciating agony in the chest. Of course that was all nonsense, but we humoured her so far that when he was here we endeavoured, as far as possible, to keep her from seeing him."

"Did she wear that ring constantly?"

"She did."

"Have you missed it lately from her finger?"

"I have not."

I here told Mr. Fenwick where I had found the ring, and then he suddenly fell back on to a sofa, and covering his face with his hands, he wept.

"I see it all now," he moaned, "I see it all. This unhappy and strangely afflicted woman has, in a moment of uncontrollable passion, slain my dear boy. All that was before so dark and mysterious is now made clear. God pity us; God be with us."

I was deeply moved myself. I could not help being so, for it was one of the strangest and most painful cases I had ever been mixed up in. Careful inquiry and

(Continued on Page 5.)

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