

THE DEAD PASSENGER.

The midnight train was due to start in five minutes. The night was bitterly cold, a hard frost having set in shortly after dusk.

His restless eyes had fixed themselves on the entrance to the platform, and a moment later, without any cheery "This way, sir" he silently, and in a manner which even at that time struck Mr. Yorke as peculiar, held up his arm as a signal.

The ride was without incident until, five minutes after passing through Goodridge tunnel, the shout of a man, instantly followed by another, which might have been the echo of the former, but that it was a distinctly different voice, interrupted the monotonous rattle of the train, and the driver shut off steam in response to a summons by the communication cord.

Mr. Yorke's momentary view of the lady of the bath chair was sufficient to enable him to identify her as the victim of this midnight horror. The wraps were easily recognizable. Looking closer, he imagined there was very little blood about for a mutilation so terrible, and stooping to touch the hand, in spite of the protest of the tall passenger, he found something which aroused his journalistic instincts to their fullest activity—something which exasperated him strangely when all his exertions failed to find one. Obviously there was no medical man living near.

Mr. Yorke next turned to the tall passenger, introduced himself as a newspaper man. The tall man who had been scowling blackly over Mr. Yorke's intervention, looked greatly relieved upon hearing that gentleman's profession, and readily consented to give his version of the matter for publication.

"That's right, Mr. Gresswell," said the guard, with bloodless lips. "Well, just tell this gentleman about it," rejoined the passenger, sharply, and in a tone of annoyance.

"How did you know it was this gentleman's compartment from that distance?" interjected Mr. Yorke. "Of course, he didn't know till he got there," put in Mr. Gresswell, hastily.

"No, of course he didn't know till I got there," repeated the guard. "I suppose, looking back now it all over, it would have been wiser to have stopped the train, but we were slackening down our speed passing Evesham Woods, as we always do, and the carriage was not far from my van, so I started out to turn the handle. The lady fell out just as I was about to reach the door. With another step I could have prevented the accident."

"Did she fall out backwards or face foremost?" asked the journalist. "Oh! backwards, sir," was the answer. "No, I think you're wrong, guard," again interposed Mr. Gresswell, with a snap. "Let me think a moment," said the guard, placing a shaking hand to his clammy brow. "Yes, she fell face foremost, of course. I can see her now."

In the meantime the tall passenger—or, as the guard called him, Mr. Gresswell—told the journalist the story he desired to have published. His wife, he said, had suffered from a painful illness, which he specified, and had been under the care of Dr. Steinway, of Victoria street. He was taking her down to the seaside at her own wish. Certain suspicions which had been forming in Mr. Yorke's mind took definite shape from the moment of this lame explanation. If he now became an apparently more sympathetic listener, it was by dint of the simulation which discretion suggested as a cloak to the hostility which began to take possession of him.

"My wife rose to see it was raining," proceeded Mr. Gresswell, "and looked out of the window. An obvious lie, reflected Mr. Yorke, for the person who was lifted into the carriage in the helpless condition of this invalid could not rise and go to the window unassisted. But he said nothing. "As I looked around," continued the bereaved husband, "I saw her falling forward. I clutched at her, just caught the edge of her dress, and it came away in my grasp as she disappeared through the door which had been so negligently left unfastened. Here is the piece of material which was left in my grasp, and here is the place from which it was rent."

that he was treading upon the heels of a murderer. He was not surprised that there had been no feminine cry of terror. He felt confident that the lady had not met her death on the line at all, but that she had been murdered and then thrown in front of the express train, in order that her body might not remain available for the proof of the guilty means which had compassed her death. For when he had suddenly stooped down and touched the lifeless hand a minute or two after the alarm had been given it was cold and stiff. It had been held in the grasp of health for some hours.

Hence his chagrin at the absence of medical evidence to prove this all-important point. By the time the country doctor arrived the co-dicers of the body and the rigor mortis were symptoms quite compatible with death in the manner the tall passenger related. The bitter coldness of the night, said Dr. Truefit, would have led him to expect similar appearances about the corpse even had he arrived considerably earlier. Nor did the doctor's inspection of the scene where the mutilated body had been found suggest to him any want of reconciliation between that which he saw and that which he had been told by Mr. Gresswell. He saw no occasion, he said, to conduct any necropsy before the Coroner's inquest was held.

Mr. Yorke rapidly wrote out a guarded report of the incidents of the night, scribbled a letter of instructions to a colleague in London, and prepared the packet containing these two manuscripts for carriage by the next train. His next step was to telegraph to Superintendent James, the head of the railway company's police, to send down his smartest detective. Upon the arrival of Inspector Waring events began to move rapidly. Gresswell, truculent and abusive, was arrested; the Coroner was communicated with, and a post-mortem examination was ordered. The inspector, like the journalist, felt confident that he was upon the trail of a diabolical murder.

But both, as events proved, were wrong. They had discovered a crime, but it was not murder, as the post-mortem examination subsequently proved by showing that death had been due to natural causes. The whole story came out when the guard was arrested. "Murder!" he repeated wildly, when the charge was made in the station master's office at the terminus. "No, before God, it wasn't murder. I'll make a clean breast of it. Listen! Gresswell has been the curse of my existence. I once placed myself in his power by a foolish act, which I committed at his instigation. I gave him the slip in Brisbane, came to England and had worked faithfully for the company and forgotten his evil face almost until one day I met him near the Elephant and Castle. I haven't known a happy moment since. Jail would be a relief, so long as it helps me to keep out of his way. He was at me two weeks before he could get me to consent to go in for this thing with him. He lent me a book—I forget the title now, but I've got it at home with his name in it to prove what I say. It was about a murder, and the agony of the murderer when he came to dispose of the body."

"Gresswell used to discuss this story with me. He brought every conversation around to the one topic, the stupidity of the murderer in not seeing that the corpse, so far from being in the way, was really a valuable possession. He illustrated this by saying that his wife was dying rapidly; that he expected to make thousands out of her body. How?" I asked, and then he went on to explain that if he threw the body out of the train and proved that she fell out through the company's negligence, there would be a grand haul for compensation. I resented being asked to join in this scheme. I told him it filled me with horror. But he talked me down. It was not so much the share of the gain he promised me. On my oath it wasn't. But he seems to have a control over me. I can't explain it, but if he wanted to make me put my arm on the line in front of a goods train, I believe he could do it. He said there was nothing horrible in the affair; that I was as sentimental as a school girl, and that, as far as mutilation of the body was concerned, his wife had always intended to leave her corpse to some hospital for the dissecting room. In short, the villain got me to agree to be a party to his scheme, and then he hurried me along so fast I could never put the break on. He got me to explain spots where there were no dwellings, and, therefore, no doctors; he got me to lock the carriage for him, and to give him the signal when the express was approaching, and he got me to prove that the carriage door was not secured through negligence on the part of the company's servants. He drilled me thoroughly and—well, you know what's happened!" —Black and White.

On Scientific Principles. "Say, Jimmie does your ma hit hard when she licks?" "You bet she does!" "Mine don't—so very—but she hits a often in the same place!" Lady Randolph Churchill, according to gossip, is tattooed with a snake around one arm. The operation took place during her visit to India.

Information for the Teacher. The teacher was asking questions—teachers are quite apt to ask questions, and they sometimes receive curious answers. This question was as follows: "Now, pupils, how many months have twenty-eight days?" "All of them, teacher," replied the boy on the front seat.

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AYLONNA.

"It is finished! Congratulate me, doctor!" cried a joyous voice as I entered the room, and arose from the table, upon which lay a violin and bow and a pile of neatly arranged music sheets, and came toward me with extended hand. "I put in the last note ten minutes ago."

"Yes," I grumbled, noting his unattractively brilliant eyes and a flush upon his thin cheek which I did not like to see there, "and put yourself in bed again for a week more."

"Speak plainly, doctor," he said, calmly. "I demand as my right that you tell me the whole truth, without equivocation or evasion."

"Well," I replied, desperately, feeling myself forced into a corner, "if you must know, Victorien, you have a form of heart disease which is considered incurable. At the same time, if you guard yourself from excitement, adopt regular hours, avoid shocks, and—"

"Live the life of an oyster or a clam," interrupted Victorien, "you promise me a few years more. Is that it?"

"Yes," I said, "you may even attain old age, my boy. But these wild flurries—this sonata which is to send your name thundering down the ages, though for my own part I don't understand what you're driving at, and—"

"Stop there, doctor," exclaimed Victorien, in a tone so stern and harsh that I stared at him in amazement. "It is enough of life is left me to perform this sonata at the concert, on the 16th of this month. I shall have accomplished my ambition. The world will recognize a master, and she—"

"his voice caught in his throat, and for a moment he bowed his head upon the table before him.

"Tell me, Victorien," I asked, "does she really understand your genius? Does she really respect and love you as you deserve to be loved?"

He bent his head upon his hand for a moment, and when he raised it again there was an expression, a smile—I know not what to call it—that glorified his wan features. "I do not care!" he said, proudly. "I love her. I have devoted my genius to her. I shall make her famous, because I shall dedicate my work to her. Why, doctor, see—"

and he hurriedly turned over the sheets upon his table until he found the one he sought, which I saw was the title page of his great composition. It read thus:

AYLONNA. Sonata Appassionata, Par Julie Victorien.

"I know my composition will live," he continued. "And it is no touch of egotism which causes me to say so. I know I have done a great work, but I have done it wholly for her sake. Even if she never so much as grants me her hand to kiss, I have been well repaid in the knowledge that I have toiled and suffered for her dear sake—oh my love! my love! My queenly Aylonna! My peerless one!"

He rested his head upon the table and sobbed aloud in what I recognized, as a physician, was sheer physical weakness. I managed to quiet his unhealthy excitement by asking him to play those parts of his sonata which were arranged for the violin.

He sprang up at once, and even with the tears glistening on his lashes, put his violin beneath his chin and began to play. I love music, though I am no inroad critic of technique; but I listened to that marvelous performance until I grew entranced.

"Oh!" I cried, as the last strain wailed away into silence, "that is surely one of the greatest compositions ever written. Why, my dear Victorien, it is certain to make you famous."

"But what will she say?" he murmured, laying aside the violin. "It is all for her." "If she does not adore you, Victorien, she is worse than a fool," I replied with conviction. "No, no!" he murmured sadly, "she does not understand me; she does not care for—"

He hesitated a moment, then he brought out a package from a drawer of the table, "I have written her a letter telling her my love, and I have enclosed a copy of the sonata. Do you—don't you think, doctor," he looked at me with his wistful expression that moved me to the heart, "that she might care for me after all?"

"I haven't a doubt of it," I said positively, though I was far from believing my own words; for I knew the shallowness of Aylonna Rivers' nature. "Have patience my boy, or you will not be able to play your sonata at all."

"The sixteenth of the month is not far off," he murmured, gathering up his papers, "and then we shall see. I will play it, I tell you, alive or dead."

"Yes," said I, "then we shall see. Alive, you will make a hit; dead—"

I shrugged my shoulders smiling. On the afternoon of the sixteenth I was with Victorien, feeling that the concert which was to take place on that evening would be the crisis of his life. I knew that, in his state of health, the strong excitement he was about to undergo in the performance of his sonata must be perilous, and I had resolved to be at hand to aid him should he require, as was only too probable, my professional skill.

"Doctor," he said, pausing before me, "I have put my fate to the test, as I told you I meant to do."

"The concert—"

"No, I meant Aylonna's decision," he answered, feverishly. "I asked her to write me to day. To tell me if she will accept my love and the homage of my sonata. Oh! Doctor, it—"

"Hark!" I interrupted, "there is the post-man's whistle. A letter for you."

"Yes," he cried, as he picked up the letter which fell through the slit in the door. "From her! I know her writing." He pressed his lips to the perfumed envelope, then stood, hesitating.

He tore it open, glanced at the half-dozen lines traced upon the sheet; then with such an expression as I hope never to see upon mortal face again, he silently handed the letter to me. It ran:

"Dear Mr. Victorien: I cannot say how highly flattered I am by the dedication of your beautiful sonata to me. Mr. Anson Gray, to whom I am to be married on our return from our trip abroad, unites with me in thanks and most sincere regards."

"As wicked and bitter a letter as ever was penned," I burst out, angrily. Then I arose hurriedly and went over to where Victorien sat in his chair, with his chin upon his chest and his hand dangling at either side. A glance told me the truth. He was dead.

I had loved the poor boy, as the old and world-worn live the young and innocent, and for a moment the callous composure of the hardened practitioner gave way, and I wept over him in deep sorrow. Then I called in assistance, and we laid him upon his bed and loved him decently. When we finished our mournful task the clock struck 7, and I remembered that Victorien's sonata was the second number on the programme, and that some notification should be given of what had happened to the managers of the concert.

Directing the attendants to remain beside the body during my absence, hastened away and reached the concert hall just as the hands of the great clock before the building marked 8.30. I hurriedly entered the hall but paused, amazed and doubting my own ears and eyes, at the entrance, for from the orchestra rang the opening chords of the Sonata Aylonna.

Yes, there could be no question of it. Those weird lovely strains had never yet ceased to haunt my brain. And who was he that stood there, with the violin at his shoulder, drawing strains from the senseless instrument that held the vast audience breathless, spellbound, wondering? Who but Julio Victorien? Yes, by heaven! Victorien himself! Victorien ghastly as death, with large eyes staring straight before him, playing as if without care or heed of any one. At length the marvelous sonata was done. Without salutation or recognition of those before whom he had played, the performer glided away, when, awakening from their stupor, the audience burst into thunderous applause and demanded the reappearance of the violinist. He was nowhere to be found. Nor had any one seen him leave the building.

In something approaching a nightmare I hurried back on the room where I had left the mortal remains of Julio Victorien and found the two attendants sitting upon either side of the bed, where I had left them. And there, as I left it, lay the body of my poor friend.

During the ride back from the concert hall I had recovered somewhat of my ordinary composure, and was thus able to question the two watchers in terms of professional usage. They had nothing to tell me, except that about 8.30 they had been startled by a loud, sharp sound, which on examination proved to have proceeded from the violin case belonging to the dead man. On opening the case it was found that every string on the instrument had snapped.

When I came to look over my poor friend's effects I discovered a copy of the Aylonna Sonata in his handwriting, but so blotted, torn and defaced as to be wholly indecipherable. Whether Aylonna Rivers—now Mrs. Anson Gray—has preserved hers I do not know.

Protection for Newsboys. A new woman movement which was started recently in Worcester, Mass., has been scorching by the municipal authorities. During the hard times of the past year or so a great many girls started in the business of selling newspapers on the streets, and in danger of being driven out of the business. It has just been determined not to allow girls to sell papers on the streets, because of the physical hardships and discomforts, and of the evil influences to which they are exposed.

Adding Insult to Injury. Old Lady—That parrot I bought of you used dreadful language. Bird Dealer—Ah, mum, you should be wery careful what you sez afore it; it's astonishing how quick them birds pick up anything.

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