

## LIKE A GREEK TRAGEDY.

Abe Cronkite Describes the Murder of Old Mrs. Dovener and the Conviction of Her Stepson of the Crime.

Judge Josiah Marcellus took an old bachelor's impersonal delight in the sight of youth and beauty, and so, when Miss Needham's card was brought into him, he saw her at once and greeted her heartily. 'I thought you were to remain in Europe for another year, Helen,' he said.

'So mamma and I planned when we sailed last fall; but directly I heard the awful news about Malcolm Dovener, I insisted on returning.'

'Ah, I hoped you had put him from your mind as well as from your heart.'

'From neither,' cried the girl passionately. 'I can never forgive myself for having quarrelled so foolishly with him. Knowing his high-strung, sensitive nature I might have foreseen that he would be wild and reckless and thus lay himself open to any charge malice should contrive against him—even to that terrible charge of which he has been convicted.'

'Most people think he was mercifully treated,' replied the Judge. 'At least he has ample time for repentance, and there is always the hope of pardon after a few years.'

'Repentance, pardon?' repeated Helen. 'I tell you he is innocent! Malcolm Dovener, Malcolm Dovener who would never harm a fly—the cowardly, brutal assassin of that helpless, old woman, his stepmother? Never, never! He is innocent, a martyr to his own sorrows, a victim to my own coldness of heart; and I have come back for the one express purpose of vindicating and freeing him!'

'Then you might better have stayed away,' said the Judge firmly. 'While I do not, in general, interest myself in criminal cases, still, out of my intimate knowledge of all the persons and circumstances, I followed this trial closely; and my only surprise was that the jury did not bring in a verdict of murder in the first degree. Why, there was practically no defence. You will say, of course, that the time was cruelly short; but Dovener made no application for delay when the District Attorney as in my judgement it was his duty to do, moved for a trial at the first opportunity. Come, my child, you must not be emotional; let me recapitulate the facts for you, they are few, but direct, convincing. What in brief, were they? Sebastian Dovener died, leaving a foolish lie behind him, like many another old man who has taken to himself a second wife. He left all his property to his relict for life; and at her death to be divided between his two children, Malcolm and Gertrude. The three, as you know, continued to live together in the old homestead. One morning, about two months ago, the widow was found dead in her bed. She had been smothered with the pillows—no difficult task, for she was weakhearted and asthmatic; but the autopsy showed that great strength had been used.'

'Now, what did the police find? First, of course, that Malcolm and his sister were the only persons benefited. Secondly, that the young man and his stepmother bickered over the allowance he received, he killing her niggardly, she bemoaning his extravagance. Thirdly, that he is a man of unusual muscular power. Fourthly, that he came home that night a little before midnight, and that at quarter after 12 the watchman saw some one go to the half-lighted burner in Mrs. Dovener's bedroom, light a match, which must have already been used, carry it carefully into the little adjoining room where she kept her papers in a desk, and light the jet there. Both these rooms, you remember, are heavily hung with lace curtains, so that though the streak of light being carried from one fixture to another could be seen from the street, the one carrying it remained invisible. Fifthly, that to support the reasonable inference that he was this person, there was found in his possession a paper which the old lady had culpably withheld, namely a letter enclosed by Sebastian Dovener in his will requesting her to turn over at once to the young folks certain shares of stock. Sixthly, that Malcolm was deeply in debt and pressed for money. Seventhly, that the other persons in the house at the time were Gertrude, the butler, the maids and the old housekeeper; and there were no signs of anyone having unlawfully entered. Who, then, was there to suspect? Not Gertrude. The poor girl was already in the throes of that brain fever, from which she is only now beginning to recover. Not the servants, trustworthy, and without a motive for such a crime. You know them yourself, is there one you would accuse?'

'Under ordinary circumstances, no,' answered Helen; 'but as against Malcolm, any and all of them.'

'Well,' continued the Judge, 'you see the police didn't have your faith, though they tried to act fairly. They questioned Malcolm, but he refused to make any explanation or denial. Then, unwilling to proceed to extremities against a member of so wealthy and respected a family, they put him under surveillance, with the result that he was caught when about to sail for Europe in disguise. His indictment and trial speedily followed in response to a healthy public demand for an example; and what was his defence? Nothing worthy of the name, on my faith as a lawyer. He protested his innocence; he refused to say how the secret letter came into his possession; he admitted the truth of all the other incriminating circumstances. The theory of the prosecution, on the other hand, was clear cut and logical. It assumed that Malcolm, after trying in vain to obtain money from his stepmother, came home, that night, having drunk heavily while brooding over his troubles, and in a sudden frenzy murdered her; and that he searched among her papers and found the letter, which he kept in his possession, either through that unaccountable perversity of judgment which so often betrays a murderer, or in the hope of so using it as to throw suspicion on some one else. Now, these assumptions being pretty thoroughly sustained by proof, there was nothing left for the jury to do except to convict; their bringing in the lesser degree being a pure act of grace.'

'That is,' retorted the girl bitterly, 'they simply aided him in convicting himself. Can't you see that if he had planned to do such a deed his quick, resourceful mind would have conjured up a thousand schemes for self preservation? Only a fool, a madman, or one bent on sacrificing himself, could have acted in such an insensate way! Perhaps it was a distaste for life, caused by my cruelty, which governed him. Whatever it was, I am bound to learn the truth and I come to you, my guardian, for help. Now is the time for a quiet, independent investigation, when the police are occupied with other matters and the case is supposed to be concluded forever. I want a detective on whose judgment and integrity I can rely, a keen, far-seeing man—'

'If I did not have just such a person in my employ,' interrupted the judge, 'I should have nothing whatever to do with the scheme, for I have no sympathy with it. But as it is, and since you are so persistent and I am so soft hearted, why, a willful maid must have her way, and, sending for Abe Cronkite, he hurried off to court, leaving the two in close consultation.'

With a direct and comprehensive continuity, which in a woman revealed an overmastering interest, Helen detailed the history of the case. She was agreeably surprised when she finished to have this experienced man, so silent, so imperturbable, announce that to his mind the chances were in favor of Malcolm's innocence, and that he would gladly cooperate with her in such ways as seemed best to them both.

'I distrust police conclusions,' the former detective explained. 'They are so apt to follow the line of least resistance. Speaking generally, the rule "Seek the one interested" is a safe one, but this does not mean the most obvious one. Granted that Malcolm had an interest in Mrs. Dovener's death, there are other interests besides money, which move full as powerfully to the commission of crime: hatred, fear, revenge. What step was taken to determine whether this old lady, penurious, determined, vindictive, did not have an enemy, one in her power, perhaps, to whom she refused mercy? Then, too, the theory that Malcolm committed the murder is self-contradictory. His motive must have been to insure his own future ease by getting possession of the fortune contingent on her death. Would he not in such a case, have taken every precaution to avoid suspicion? I am inclined to accept your suggestion that self-sacrifice governed his otherwise unaccountable course, for, of course, if he had an actual distaste of life as you seem to fear, he would not have tried to escape.'

'Oh,' sighed the girl, 'I thank you so much; you have lifted such a burden from me.'

'Gratified, I'm sure, Miss,' said Abe Cronkite, 'I hope to do much more in that line. Now, self-sacrifice being accepted, one naturally thinks of his sister

Gertrude. You must see that there is a mystery connected with her sudden illness. She was in the house at the time, the one most intimately acquainted with the thoughts and deeds of the dead woman; and yet her brother did not care to apply for the delay, which he could have doubtless got, but went on trial without the benefit of her testimony. Why? Evidently because he feared it would hurt, not him, but herself. Don't misunderstand me, Miss. I believe that she is as good as you know her to be; but brother and sister may have been at cross purposes. If they were, then not only is his course explained, but a sufficient cause given for her fever, arising out of her anxiety for him. Hence, don't you see, what I want you to do is to renew your old friendship at once with Miss Gertrude and gain her full confidence. You say she is convalescent at the Dovener homestead, where everything has remained unchanged, she becomes the sole owner, her brother being civilly dead. Let it be your part to be the one to appraise her of all that has occurred since she was stricken, and to urge her to tell the whole truth, for nothing can harm Malcolm now, and anything, however trivial, may help him.'

'Oh, tell me; do you suspect anybody?' asked the girl.

'It might very well be,' answered Abe Cronkite modestly, 'that I should derive one or two impressions from your very clear narrative, strong enough to cause me to investigate them, and yet too unsupported to be mentioned lest injustice might thus be done. Let us give the facts first, and then, if they direct, why it will be right for us to follow. You yourself through your familiarity with the household can enlighten me on many points. For instance, you might tell me something about the ages of those who composed it.'

'Malcolm,' replied Helen, 'is 25, and Gertrude two years younger. Then, the three maids are about 20, I should judge, and the butler, certainly less than 30. Mrs. Cattenet, the housekeeper, must be 60, though she looks older, she is so feeble.'

'Quite a delicate old party, hey?'

'Yes, indeed; bent by both years and sorrow. Her husband before he died abused her shamefully, and her son has been nothing but a trial to her, though she worships him.'

'Her son?' repeated Abe Cronkite with surprise. 'Why, this is becoming interesting; I never heard that she had one. Won't you tell me all about him, Miss Needham?'

'I know nothing good,' said the girl with a smile. 'George is really quite an impossible young man. There isn't a friend of the Doveners to whom he hasn't gone on some begging expedition, and the excuses he makes would be droll if they weren't so wicked. The only time he came to me was on a very cold day when he told me that Gertrude had lost her wrap while out driving, and wanted to borrow mine until she could get home. Of course I sent her my sealskin and of course that was the last we either of us saw of it. He ran away from home when 14, and never goes near his mother except to extort money from her.'

'About how old is he, did you say?'

'About 20.'

'Then I think I can draw his picture for you,' said Abe Cronkite. 'Short, rather thickset, a sullen, peevish expression, tiny eyes with a quick glance from the corners, a protruding chin, undershot we call it, a liking for dress, for horses, for billiards, for low company, a continual sense of being ill-used and fingers tipped with yellow from perpetual cigarettes? That's about right, isn't it? I thought so, and yet the police ignored such a bundle of evil possibilities! Well, well; I think I must include him in my inquiry; if his mother has a master key I can very well see how he might have sneaked into the old lady's room, tried to rob her and then turned like a wolf when detected. I shall get myself stationed at the house, Miss Needham, as a watchman or supernumerary of some sort; but of course we must not know each other when you come to see Miss Gertrude. We'll both find out all we can; it is never ignoble to work for the truth, remember, and let us meet in a week—say here at the Judge's office and report progress.'

The week rolled around and the appointment was duly kept. Helen Needham seemed unusually grave and she glanced at the Judge and then at the detective in an appealing way. Finally she spoke as from an enthralling impulse.

'Much as I long to free Malcolm,' she began, 'I will not divulge one word of what I have learned unless you both agree to hold it confidential until we have exhausted the last hope of finding the murderer. As a last resort, perhaps, it will have to be used. Know, then, that it was Gertrude who took the letter from her stepmother, stole it, I suppose you would say! She had reason to think that her father had left some such request, and, being most anxious for ready money, she searched for it and found it. What was

this urgent necessity, you ask? Simply that she was attached to a young man, worthy but poor, and an opportunity offered for her to aid him without his knowledge. She took the letter to Malcolm, and he talked, oh, just lovely to her, and was going to return it to old Mrs. Dovener in the morning with some fond explanation. But in the morning the old lady was dead, and he was arrested, and the letter was found in his possession; and Gertrude thought that he might have done it, and he feared that they might suspect her, and, oh! it was all so dreadful! But they're both good and true, and I love them.'

'Ah, what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive,' quoted the Judge severely.

'Don't worry, Miss Helen,' said Abe Cronkite, quite unmoved by this truism. 'Your friend's confidences shall be sacredly protected. I have been investigating those little impressions I spoke about, and really believe that if you two will be so good as to meet me in the library of the Dovener house at 8 o'clock this evening I can point out the guilty person. I must make a little experiment to do so; and, as I want you to be perfectly unbiased, I won't mention any names.'

Judge Marcellus frowned. 'I have not approved of this investigation from the first,' he protested, 'being so old fashioned as to have respect for the verdict of a jury and reverence for the spirit of the doctrine of stare decisis. I fear the further we go the more of disillusion and disappointment there will be for my young friend here. Therefore, Cronkite, I must decline to take any part in guesswork, however spectacular.'

Abe Cronkite wrote a name on a bit of paper and sealed it in an envelope. 'The test is logical, sir,' he said 'and founded on deductions natural and almost inevitable. In the cause of justice you cannot refuse to be present; and when it has been made you may open the inclosure and see whether there was any guess work about my detection of the guilty person.' And the Judge was too fair and also, perhaps too curious to interpose further objection.

That evening, then, the three were seated together in the half lighted library of the Dovener homestead. All was silent, save, as through the curtained portals stole the clink, clink, of silver and glass and china from the dining room, across the broad hallway, where old Mrs. Cattenet, the housekeeper, was clearing the table. There came the sound of steps, shuffling, yet determined, as if some one was hastening to an appointment which he dreaded to keep yet feared to evade, a heavy rush from either side, a struggle; and then a thin boyish cry: 'Help, mother, help! They are killing me!' There was the sharp click of the handcuffs, and a stern voice: 'We arrest you, George Cattenet, for the murder of Mrs. Dovener.'

Again that shrill almost childish entreaty arose: 'Mother, mother, help! They are killing me!' and then, in response, the quavering but distinct tones: 'My boy! Spare him. Free him! It was I, oh, my God, it was I, who murdered the old lady! There was the swish of a fall, and slow, retreating footsteps, as someone was led, as someone was borne away, and then silence again.'

Judge Marcellus sprang forward, exclaiming: 'I can't stand any more of this sort of Greek tragedy,' but Abe Cronkite restrained his hand on the curtains.

'Stop,' he said; 'your duty is here with Miss Needham, see how the poor child trembles! We can safely rely on the two men from headquarters, who were secreted out there, to attend to the matter.'

'But I must know what has happened.'

'Open the envelope,' said Abe Cronkite; and the Judge, obeying, read from the paper within the name 'Mrs. Cattenet.'

After a little, when it was certain that the wretched mother and her more wretched son had been removed, and the natural color was returning to Helen's cheeks, Abe Cronkite explained that through his investigations of the past week he had discovered that George Cattenet, a day or two before the tragedy, wrote a blackmailing letter to old Mrs. Dovener which not only utterly failed of its purpose but so embittered her that, despite the prayers and entreaties of the housekeeper, who had served her so long and faithfully, she persisted in the determination to have the young man prosecuted and punished to the extent of the law. 'It was that paper,' said the detective, impressively, 'for which the person with the lighted match was searching a few moments after the murder was committed.'

'But why may it not have been the young man himself?' asked the Judge.

'I never, for one instant suspected him,' replied Abe Cronkite; 'creatures of his type gain money too readily to resort to burglary, for which they haven't the heart. It is true that such a one might fight when cornered just as a rat will, but there were no signs that Mrs. Dovener was disturbed

from her sleep. No, no; the two impressions I received pointed directly to the housekeeper.'

'And what were these impressions?' asked the Judge.

'Well, in the first place, sir,' explained Abe Cronkite, 'I thought the police erred in suspecting Malcolm Dovener because he is very strong, and there was evidence that unusual strength had been employed in the murder. A trained athlete, such as he, knows too well how to use and reserve his powers to exert them unnecessarily. Those same indications told me, on the contrary that a feeble aged person, conscious of weakness, but all nerved to accomplish the purpose, notwithstanding, was the assassin. My other impression, too, called for a person of at least mature age. I was very much struck by the account of what the watchman had seen. Some one, you will recollect, went to the half lighted burner in Mrs. Dovener's bedroom, lit a match which must have already been used and carried the light carefully into the adjoining room to light the jet there. Now, would any young person instinctively, at such a time of stress, be so economical? Most assuredly not! Any one of the present generation would have gone at once into the adjoining room and used a fresh match or a dozen as a matter of course. But recollect, sir, how it used to be, years ago, when we were young, and how it came again during the Civil War. Matches were scarce and costly; people, well to do and liberal of expenditures, were careful of them, making one do the work of many, using tapers, and twisted papers and such like devices in their stead. Now, who in that household was likely to be so governed by this fixed habit; who, but Mrs. Cattenet!'

'Maternal love furnished the motive for her crime, and I felt sure it would be strong enough also to induce her confession. I managed to find young Cattenet and persuade him to come here this evening; I arranged with the Headquarters men to conceal themselves by the rear stairway and arrest him suddenly in the sight of his mother, and—and—well, there you are, sir.'

'Yes, here we are,' said Helen, with a little shudder, 'spectators, as the Judge well described it, at a Greek tragedy. I thank you, Mr. Cronkite, for your share in the performance, but I pray I may never have to witness one again.'

### THERE WERE OTHERS.

One Fisherman's Luck While Taking Home a Fine String.

He was an honest faced young man who had been off for a day's fishing and was returning home with a reasonably fine string and much self satisfaction. He had scarcely boarded the street car, however, when a passenger with a deep voice growled out: 'Yes, I was out fishing myself one day last week. I brought home twenty pounds. I bought 'em of a regular fisherman!'

A giggle was heard here and there among the passengers, and then a man with a squeaky voice observed:

'I've played the game myself, but it was years ago, when I was a bad j-man. I bought 'em from a fisherman and brought 'em down home and lied about them—lied in the most barefaced and shameful manner! Yes, gentlemen, that is the one regret of my life!'

The young man with the fish was red-faced and uncomfortable, and as he was hitching around a man with a wart on his nose called out in a loud voice:

'Gentlemen, I don't deny that I love whiskey, but I am not a liar! I get drunk and smash things, but I reverence the truth. Before I would lie about a fish I would torture myself at the stake!'

Then a hatchet-faced young man rolled up his eyes and exclaimed:

'They not only lie to the public but go home and lie to their poor, innocent wives and trusting children!'

The honest-faced young man saw that all were against him, and he decided to leave the car. As he rose up to motion to the conductor a fat man who had been drowning rose up and said:

'Gentlemen, I date my downfall from that one thing—from the lie I told about fish. I hired a man to kill me a dozen with a crowbar, and then I brought em home and swore I caught 'em on my own hook and line. I lied about it—deliberately and maliciously lied—and Providence—'

'All off!' shouted the conductor as the car stopped.

The car rolled on, and the young man with the perch and bass fishpole stood in the gloaming and looked after it and clenched his hands and gritted his teeth and whispered cuss words, and an hour later a pedestrian stumbled over something and got up to rub his knees and elbows and called out in amazement:

'Well, I'll be hanged if some liar hasn't stopped here to lie and gone and left his fish behind!'