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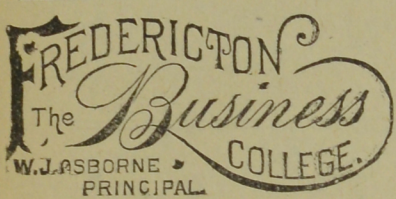
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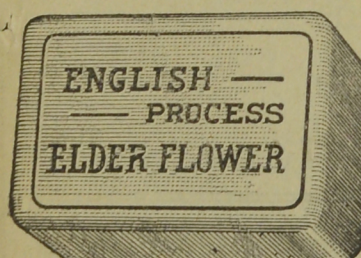
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WEST END DAIRY

The Lash of Circumstance

— BY —
Harry Irving Greene

Author of "Yosonde of the Wilderness"

Supplied Exclusively in Canada by The British & Colonial Press Service, Limited.

THE room was in a state of disorder. Everywhere was to be seen the hand of violence. Bureau drawers had been ransacked and left yawning; the bed was a twisted tangle of sheets and crumpled pillows; clothing was scattered about the floor. But what was more startling than anything else was the condition of the iron safe. Its combination had been shattered by some powerful explosive, and its door, standing wide, gave a full view into its looted interior. With the sweat starting from my forehead I rushed forward.

I inspected it with a glance. No money remained in it, but the papers looked as though they had not been disturbed beyond a general overhauling. I swept my eyes about the room and under the bed. No glimpse of my uncle rewarded me, and I ran from the room with loud calls for Mrs. Tebbets. It was her custom not to disturb us on Sunday mornings until she announced breakfast, and that she knew nothing of the condition of affairs in the upper part of the house had been evidenced by her ordinary demeanor as she admitted me. From room to room of the upper story I went in rapid search for the missing one, and at last, in one of the dark closets I found him and dragged him forth. He was bound hand and foot, and I bent over him and shook him. He seemed to be rather more unconscious than otherwise, but he certainly was alive.

Puffing up the stairs in response to my cries, Mrs. Tebbets reached me just as I had finished my hasty diagnosis. I immediately removed a handkerchief which had been tied around his mouth, slashed the cords which bound him, and together we carried him to my room and placed him upon the bed. I tore open his night garment and examined him superficially, but could discover no marks of physical violence save about the throat.

There it was red and puffy. Mrs. Tebbets, in a hysteria of excitement, was useless as an assistant, and hastening to the telephone, I called up first Doctor Courtney, our family physician, and then the nearest police station. After that I went back to the victim.

He was breathing more freely, now that the handkerchief had been removed, and presently his eyes opened and he stared at me. When I spoke to him, however, he did not answer. Having done everything for him that I could think of for the moment, I sat down upon the edge of the bed to await the arrival of those whom I had summoned.

CHAPTER III.

Doctor Courtney arrived first. Up the drive he came whirling in his light electric runabout, and darting through the door which the housekeeper held wide for him, was by the patient's side in a few seconds. Together we made a thorough examination of the reviving man. The physician tested his temperature, his heart and reflexes, afterwards addressing me concisely.

"It is nothing serious. There is no permanent injury, and he will be all right as soon as he recovers from the shock. He seems to have been severely choked, but there was no chloroform or other drug administered." He gave the patient a stimulant, and I was much relieved to see my uncle respond to it favorably as the patrol wagon arrived. A moment later a group of officers, piloted by Mrs. Tebbets, swarmed into the room. In a few words I explained to them the condition of affairs as I had found them, and in two and three they went trooping over the house from top to bottom in a survey of the safe, the doors and shutters and other things of interest to them. They came back to us. Uncle Abner by this time was able to speak in a low voice, and the captain, seating himself, demanded that he be told all that the pilled one knew of the affair. Still speaking with more or less difficulty, Uncle Abner addressed us.

"I was sound asleep. The room was very dark and I knew of nothing unusual until I awoke and found myself pinioned to the bed by a heavy man. He was choking me and pressing my arms to helplessness beneath his knees. I attempted to struggle, but could do little more than squirm beneath his strength. He used a good deal of force, and in a few moments my senses left me. I knew nothing more until I awoke and found myself in some dark hole. I rolled about a little, and from the closeness of the walls to each other knew it was a closet. There was a handkerchief in my mouth and I could not call for help. Anyway, it would have been useless, for there was nobody else on the premises but Mrs. Tebbets, and I knew if she should awake and attempt to come to my assistance or give the alarm, my assailants would do something to render her helpless if they had not already done so. Therefore I desisted attempting to make a noise. After awhile I must have lost my senses again, for all is blank to me from then up to the time I awoke here a few moments ago. I do not believe that more than one man had hold of me, as I heard nothing to indicate that he had companions. He may have had, however, for I could see nothing in the darkness. I do not believe that I am hurt very much, but I am considerably exhausted and feel pretty well battered up. He used me pretty rough, and I thought he was going to kill me. I am rather old and not very strong, you know, and cannot stand as much as I could once upon a time. I could not identify the man if I saw him by daylight, but I heard him cough in a peculiar way as he was choking me."

He stopped speaking, and the first of his old foxlike smile came creeping out of the corners of his mouth. "But I will bet he did not get much, the infernal villain. Everything of value was locked up in the old strong box. You may be sure I took good care to see to that."

We at the bedside shot significant glances from one to another in the silence. I disliked to break the news of his loss to him, not knowing what kind of a scene he would make, but decided I might as well do so now as at any other time. "They got what ever money was left in the safe, uncle," I said. "They blew the combination into old junk and cleaned out the currency to the last cent." He uttered a gasp and tried to sit up, but the physician pushed him back upon the pillow.

"Burglarized the safe! Got all the money!" he yelled, hoarsely, his eyes rolling upward so that the whites were to be seen. The expression upon his face was a ghastly reflection of the shock to his soul, and despite his miserliness I felt sorry for him as I grasped one twitching hand. His cheeks turned to the yellowish white of a fish's belly as he straightened out to his full length with a groan that was horrifying in its death mimicry.

"My God! My God! Forty thousand dollars of money that I toiled and schemed and saved for, gone into the pockets of loafing thieves. And I was going to put it in the bank the first thing Monday morning. Oh! it's terrible—terrible." He fell to rolling his head and cracking the joints of his fingers in his mental agony as the officers looked down upon him in mingled pity and contempt. Presently he recovered himself with a start and demanded to know about his papers; and this time I was glad to be able to tell him that so far as I had observed in my hasty scrutiny, nothing had been taken but the money. He seemed a trifle relieved for the moment at this information, but soon fell back into his lamentations. It was one of the most lamentable sights that I ever looked upon, exhibiting as it did all that was deplorable in his nature. The captain cleared his throat and began his examination.

"We have made a thorough inspection of the premises and cannot find that anything outside of the front rooms has been tampered with. All the windows of the unused lower portion are nailed down and the shutters fastened from the inside. The burglar alarm is in perfect order and would have notified the station had anything been forced open. The locks on the doors have not been broken, and they are of an intricate Yale pattern that could not have been picked. Everything goes to show that whoever entered did so by means of a key to the front door, since the rear door was bolted from the inside. If he did not unlock the front door it must have been left open, or else he was secreted in the house beforehand." He turned to Mrs. Tebbets. "Are you sure that everything was locked up last night when you retired and that no outsider was secreted anywhere?" She burst forth eagerly.

(To Be Continued.)



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