

# PROFESSIONAL BRETHREN

BY GEORGE E. WALSH

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(CONTINUED)

"Can you ride my horse back home or shall I go for a carriage?"

"I can walk it," she said, "if you will lend me your arm."

I had to lead my horse by the bridle while she leaned heavily upon my arm all the way to her house. Of course such an experience was delicious in a way, but it was embarrassing to one of my position as well. Certain it is that she made me her slave from that day onward.

She persisted in talking about my brave deed all the way home. First I tried to change the subject by making irrelevant replies and suggestions and then by total silence. But she could not be stopped or turned to another subject. For the tenth time she said seriously and earnestly:

"I wish you would tell me how I can repay you. Isn't there something you want or that I can do for you?"

I remained silent a moment and then said slowly:

"Yes, ma'am; there is something."

She looked at me inquiringly.

"I just want you to trust me and to believe in me," I continued. "Some day I might make a strange request of you. All I ask is that you will have confidence in me and believe that it is all for your good. It may seem very strange to you at the time, but I assure you it will be all for the best and you will thank me for it afterward."

"What a peculiar request!" she said, smiling.

"Yes, it is peculiar, but it is all I ask of you."

"Well, you shall have your wish. I will do whatever you ask of me at any time."

"All right. I shall remind you of it some day."

We parted at her gate. I would not go in, but excused myself on the ground that it was necessary to go back with somebody and attend to her wounded horse.

## CHAPTER XVII.

**I** WAS a hero in the eyes of Miss Stetson and my master after the runaway. Mr. Goddard was not less profuse in his congratulations and praise of me than the one I had saved from almost certain death. It pained me to see that his affection for her was genuine and yet not strong enough to induce him to give up his double life. I believe that if anything serious had happened to her he would have mourned for her as much as ever man did for woman. Nevertheless he continued to practice secretly a profession that would cause pain worse than death if she discovered it.

Realizing that matters were reaching a climax, I determined to make a bold stroke and try to induce my master to turn away from his evil ways. I had firm faith in him outside of his one weakness. If he was once confronted with his crimes and warned that an exposure would ruin him for life, he might relent. There was a possibility of saving him from himself and from the doctor's influence. I had the power within me to do it. I could face him and Dr. Squires with their crimes and threaten them with exposure if the latter did not immediately leave the place and the former promise to reform.

It might prove a risky experiment to permit such a man to marry a sweet, pure woman like Miss Stetson, but there was the possibility of a mutually happy union, while there would be nothing but misery and unhappiness for both if my master was arrested and punished for his crimes. Choosing what I considered the lesser of two evils, I decided to make the experiment.

A sense of honor still kept me from approaching my master and telling him all that I knew. I had given him my word that I would never mention meeting him in any other guise than that of a gentleman, or, in other words, our accidental meeting as common burglars was to be blotted from my mind unless we were thrown together again under similar circumstances.

I now determined to create those circumstances to suit my own purpose. Several days after this when I learned that he had an engagement at Dr. Squires' in the evening I made preparations to follow him again. This time I was posted so that I would not give him the opportunity to escape from me in the darkness.

It was a fitful, moonlight night. The moon came up about 11 o'clock, but the clouds in the heavens partly shut it from view. It cast wavering, vanishing shadows upon the calm earth which were exceedingly aggravating.

They were so deceptive in appearance that I felt my task would be doubly difficult.

My master left the house at the usual time and proceeded to walk leisurely toward the doctor's. I followed him at some distance, not making any special effort to keep him in view. I knew that he was not anticipating any shadowing, and we both made our way to the old mansion according to our own notions.

I hurried a little toward the end of the walk to make sure that he entered the house. I reached a vantage point just in time to see the door open and close behind him. Then I amused myself the best way I could for several hours.

Shortly after midnight I roused myself to action. The time was approaching when I must prove my skill. The house was all dark, and no signs came from it to indicate the presence of a living soul anywhere around it.

It was a full hour before the door opened. Then by the aid of the moon's white light I caught a glimpse of my master and the doctor. They were consulting together in the shadow of the porch. I saw the latter point down the road, but I could not understand anything he said.

A few moments later my master left him and glided rather than walked down the drive toward the highway. I waited for him, concealed in some bushes near the gate. His manner was quick, nervous, energetic—so unlike his natural habits. The professional burglar was aroused in him—a second self which had been carefully cultivated and developed.

We both moved down the highway cautiously, watching, listening and anticipating some unknown danger. I kept within ten yards of him, but always ready to increase the distance between us on the slightest sign from him that he intended to double upon his tracks. I was familiar with his tactics this time sufficiently to enable me to be prepared for the most unexpected movement.

Never did a detective shadow a criminal with more intentness than I did my master that night. He led me a chase two miles down the road; then without apparent reason he struck across the fields to one of the side roads which ran parallel with the main highway. A mile down this brought him to a fork in the road formed by the meeting of an old, deserted lane. Into this he turned his silent footsteps. Five hundred yards down it a small, purling brook crossed the lane. It was too broad to jump over, but only a few feet deep.

My master removed his shoes quickly and then plunged into the cool water, but instead of crossing he waded a long distance down stream and then regained the same shore again. I understood his maneuver. It was to throw bloodhounds off the track and to confuse any detective who might try to trace him back to the doctor's house.

I smiled at the trick and waited quietly for him to replace his shoes. Then once more he started on his journey. This time he ceased to pursue a zigzag course, but made a bee line for a large house not a hundred yards from the brook. This I knew was the scene of his night's work.

The house was a modern one and stood on a slight eminence overlooking the surrounding country. It was owned by an intimate friend of the Stetson and Goddard families—Mr. Jaimson.

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by name—and if occurred to me as being very peculiar that my master should attempt to rob it. But what could not be expected of him after he had looted the Stetson house, the very home of the one whom he loved? Could such baseness be ever overlooked? Could such a man be reformed? For a few moments my resolutions wavered, and I thought of returning and telling all that I knew to Miss Stetson and let her decide the fate of the two men.

But a moment later I found myself pursuing my game with renewed animation. He had actually entered the house through one of the basement windows. I waited a reasonable length of time before following him. Then when everything was quiet I climbed through the window at the risk of my own life, for I realized that my form was silhouetted against the outside light, while my master might be hidden in the darkness inside.

But I gained the interior of the basement without accident. I searched around for an open door, and, finding it, I walked catlike into a larger room. I knew that my master's first point would be the dining room, and I boldly climbed the stairs leading to it from the basement. Once there I heard the slight rattle of silver and caught the quick, flashing ray of his dark lantern. Then I concealed myself behind some curtains and waited.

I decided that it would be better to let him finish his job and then confront him with his booty in his hands. There would then be no question of his intentions.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

The muscles of a bird's wing are twenty times more powerful, proportionately speaking, than those of a man's arm.

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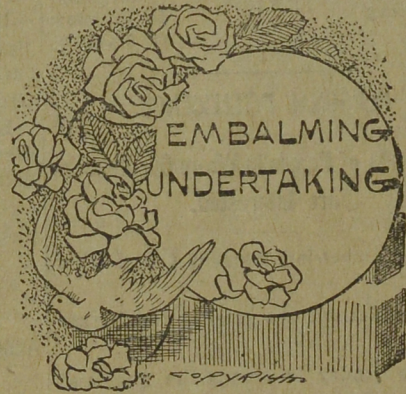
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