

body could guess that he had been away and had committed a crime.
 'And why did he leave the jewels in Dean's room at Kirkstone Hall?'
 'Ah, you know that?' said Banson, much surprised. 'Why, he hid them so as to throw the blame on Dean. Everything was suspicious against the man. He was presumably guilty of the first crime, he had threatened to kill Miss Gilmar, he was in Grangebury on the night of the murder, and the jewels—as Alder arranged—were to be found in his room.'

'They were found,' said Gebb. 'I found them, and for the moment believed Dean guilty. But about that ticket found in the Yellow Boudoir?'
 'That was purposely dropped there by Alder to further incriminate Dean.'
 'How did he get the ticket?'
 'In giving the confession it fell out of Dean's pocket, and Alder picked it up. So you see, Mr Gebb, that in every way chance played into Alder's hands.'

'The wicked flourish like a green bay tree,' but not for long,' said Gebb grimly. 'But tell me, 'Why was Alder so kind to Ferris?'

'Oh, that was his deceit,' said Banson, with a sigh. 'He fancied that when Dean was accused of this second murder Edith would never marry Ferris, as being the son of such a man. He was kind to him because he wanted to ingratiate himself with Edith, so that she might marry him after parting, as he thought she would, with Ferris.'

'Infernal scamp!' cried Gebb, swearing, 'when he knew that the poor devil was innocent. Have you Miss Gilmar's confession?'

'Here it is!' Alder gave it to me. It clears Dean entirely, so I suppose he'll receive a free pardon.'

'I suppose so,' said Gebb, putting the confession of Miss Gilmar into his pocket along with that of Alder. 'But his life is ruined. I'm only sorry for one thing: that Alder did not live to be hanged.'

'Well, I cannot agree with you; after all, he was my friend,' said Banson sadly.

'He was a blackguard,' retorted Gebb, and took his departure.

CHAPTER XXVI.
 THE END OF IT ALL.

One month after the death of John Alder, the two detectives, Parge and Gebb, sat in the room of the former, discussing the now solved mystery of the Grangebury murder case. On the table there lay a cheque for two hundred pounds made payable to Absalom Gebb, and signed by Edith Wedderburn. The conversation was mostly about this cheque, and how it should be divided between them so as to compensate each with due fairness. The matter was a delicate one, and could not be settled without some sharp words on either side.

'After all, Simon,' remonstrated Gebb in vexed tones, 'I did most of the work and deserve the reward for my pains.'

'You don't deserve all of it,' retorted Parge captiously.

'I don't claim all of it. I say divide it into two parts of one hundred pounds each. That will pay me, and much more than compensate you.'

'I don't know so much about that,' grunted the fat man. 'I've done a deal of thinking over the case, I can tell you. And it was me who found out the murderer. So in justice I ought to have the whole two hundred pounds.'

Gebb snatched up the cheque and slipped it into his pocket. 'If you talk like that you won't have a single penny,' he cried wrathfully, for he was disgusted with the avarice of his coadjutor. 'In the goodness of her heart Miss Wedderburn considered that she should pay the reward out of the estate, and did so—to me; there was no word of you, Mr Parge, when she signed this cheque.'

'I daresay not,' growled Simon savagely; 'that's gratitude, that is; yet if it hadn't been for me her father-in-law to be would have swung for a murder as he didn't commit.'

'Don't you make any mistake about that, Simon,' replied Gebb, dryly. 'Mr Dean could have proved his innocence without you in both cases. The confession of Miss Gilmar shows that she killed Kirkstone, and the evidence of the hotelkeeper of The Golden Hind proves that Dean slept there at the very hour of the murder. He would have been declared innocent even if you hadn't discovered the truth.'

'Well, I did, anyhow,' declared the other sulkily.
 'So did Mr Banson, if you come to that.'

'Rubbish!' cried Parge. 'He only heard the confession of Alder.'

'Well, and didn't that reveal the truth? As a matter of fact, in the face of that confession, Miss Wedderburn need not have paid the reward to anyone. However, she thought that I deserved payment for all my work, so she gave me this money. It is only because you are a pal, and because I know you've helped in the matter that I give you fifty pounds for yourself.'

'Fifty pounds!' roared the fat man, growing purple with rage. 'You said one hundred just now!'

'So I did; but I've taken off fifty for your greediness, Simon. I don't need to give you a single stiver if it comes to that.'

'I'll never help you again.'
 'Much I care!' retorted Gebb. 'I can get on without you. And I can't say as I care to work with a man as doesn't know when his friend is doing him a good turn. You say another word, Simon Parge, and I'll reduce your reward to twenty-five pounds.'

'If Parge had been able to move he would no doubt have fallen on Gebb; but chained as he was to his chair, he could do nothing but glare at his junior with a fierce eye and a very red face. He knew very well that Gebb was acting in the most generous manner in offering to share the reward, so, fearful of losing all by opening his mouth too wide, he sulkily signified that half a loaf was better than none.'

'I daresay it is,' said Gebb tartly; 'but you only get a quarter of a loaf. I brought two fifty pound notes with me, but as you have been so avaricious you shall only have one. There it is,' and Gebb clapped a Bank of England note into the hand of Parge, which closed on it readily enough.

'And you keep one hundred and fifty?' he said, with a frown.

'I do; and I've earned it, Simon, by the sweat of my brow. But now that I've behaved towards you a deal better than you deserve, I'll go and bank my money. You'll not see me here again in a hurry.'

'No, no!' cried Parge, seeing that his greed had carried him too far, and softened by the money, which, after all, had been earned very easily. 'Don't go, Absalom. I can't do without you. Haven't I been generous, Simon?'

'Yes, you have. Don't take a man up so short. Sit down and have a pipe and glass of grog, and a talk over the case.'

With some dignity Gebb accepted the olive branch thus held out, and resumed his seat. Afterward Parge secured so repentant of his late behaviour that the dignity of Absalom disappeared altogether; and, moreover, the whisky and tobacco proved strong aids to patching up the quarrel. In ten minutes the pair were chatting together in the most amicable fashion.

'Well, Absalom,' said Parge, with a plethoric grunt, 'and how does the matter of that Grangebury case stand now? You know I'm shut up here, and never hear a word of what's going on. Tell me the latest news.'

'Miss Wedderburn has inherited the Kirkstone property.'

'She owns the Hall then?'
 'Yes, she inherits the Hall, and also Miss Gilmar's personal property. It was left to Alder first, and falling him to Miss Wedderburn, so she is now a rich woman, and I dare say will make a better use of her money than the old skinflint who left it to her.'

'She'll buy a husband with it. I suppose,' said Parge, ill-naturedly.

'Don't you make any mistake,' contradicted Gebb, friendly to both Edith and Arthur. 'She was engaged to Ferris in the days of her poverty, and she'll not throw him over now that she is rich, but there is no purchase about the matter. I daresay Ferris will yet succeed with his pictures. In the meantime, he is to marry Miss Wedderburn, and good luck to both of them, say I. They are as decent a young couple as I know.'

'When does the marriage take place?'

'Next month. Old Dean can't live long, and he wants to see the pair man and wife before he leaves this very unjust world.'

'Unjust world!' echoed Simon incredulously. 'Dean has been pardoned, has he not, Absalom?'

'Of course, pardoned by the State for a crime he never committed, after passing nearly 20 years in gaol for Miss Gilmar's sake. I don't wonder the old fellow is dying. He is worn out with trouble, and a sense of harsh injustice. He has one foot in the grave now, and I expect he'll drop

into it as soon as his son marries Edith Wedderburn.'

'And he didn't kill Kirkstone after all?'

'No,' replied Gebb, with something of a dismal air. 'It appears from the confession left by Miss Gilmar that she struck the blow. Do you remember the bowie-knife mentioned in the evidence as belonging to Dean?'

'Yes, the knife with which the man was killed,' said Parge. 'The sister borrowed it from Dean, didn't she?'

'Yes, and it appears that in her rage against Ellen Gilmar, for presuming to love Dean, she threatened her upstairs with the knife, while Kirkstone and Dean were quarrelling in the smoking-room. Ellen wrenched the knife away, and said she would take it at once to Dean in the Yellow Room. She went down with it, and found that having quarrelled, Dean and Kirkstone had parted, the former having gone up to bed. Ellen entered with the knife in her hand, and laid it on the table. Then Kirkstone, who was in a bad temper, began to insult her. She retorted, and in a short space of time they were at it hard. Then when Miss Gilmar said something unusually cutting to Kirkstone, he rushed at her to strike her. She snatched up the knife to defend herself, and held it point out. In his blind rage he dashed against it, and the point pierced his heart. He fell dead on the spot.'

'Oh,' said Parge reflectively, 'then it was really an accident?'

'Yes; but Miss Gilmar was so terrified that she hardly knew what to do. Then, remembering that the knife belonged to Dean, and that he had been fighting with Kirkstone, also that he despised her love, she determined to inculcate him, so as to avenge herself and save her own life. She ran upstairs and told him that Kirkstone wished to see him again in the Yellow Room. Dean fell into the snare, and came down only to find Kirkstone dead with the knife in his heart. Then he was seized with a panic, and fled back to his room, whence he was dragged when that wicked old woman accused him of the murder.'

'Didn't Dean suspect her?'
 'No; he fancied that Laura, to whom he had lent his knife, had struck the blow; but afterwards when reviewing the circumstances in prison it occurred to him that Miss Gilmar might be guilty.'

'But how did Miss Gilmar quieten Laura?'

'Easily enough! She told her that Dean had taken the knife and had killed Kirkstone. But it seems to me,' said Gebb, meditatively, 'that if Laura had only given her evidence clearly, the truth about the knife would have been found out.'

'I daresay,' rejoined Parge, tartly. 'But if you had been in charge of the case, as I was, you would have found out, when too late, that Laura, being weakwitted and under the thumb of Ellen Gilmar, was afraid to tell the absolute truth.'

'Nevertheless, the case was muddled,' insisted Gebb.

'Absalom!' cried Parge, fiercely. 'You can take the best part of the reward if you choose, but you shan't throw discredit on my past work. I conducted the Kirkstone murder case to the best of my ability.'

'And punished the wrong man.'
 'That was the force of circumstances.'

'It was the want of getting the necessary evidence,' retorted Gebb, with some heat. 'However, we have improved since then in detective matters, as in others.'

'Oh, have you?' growled Parge. 'Then why did you arrest the wrong man in the person of Ferris?'

'You have me there, Simon, you have me there,' laughed Gebb; 'which admission put Parge into great good-humour.'

'And criminals nowadays are just as stupid as they were in my youth,' he said, waving his pipe. 'For instance, why did Alder kill Miss Gilmar?'

'Because he wanted her money.'
 'Well, by threatening her with Dean he could have got her to allow him a good income. There was no need for him to strangle her.'

'Perhaps not; and especially in poor Mrs Presk's front parlour. She hasn't been able to let it since. And to make matters worse, Matilda Crane has gone away with the five pounds you gave her.'

'Mrs Presk had better give up the house at once,' said Parge, nodding. 'No one will occupy a room in which a murder has taken place. Taint nat'ral to live with ghosts. What about that Yellow Boudoir at Kirkstone Hall?'

'Oh! Mr and Mrs Ferris are going to pull it down when they come back from their honeymoon. I expect they will build another wing.'

'By the way, is Ferris going to stick to that name?'

'Well, no; but all the same he isn't going to call himself Dean.'

'Then he is going to take his wife's name, I suppose?' suggested Parge.

Gebb shook his head. 'By the will of that ancestor who left the Hall to his descendants, all who live in it not being Kirkstones have to take that name. If Alder had lived he would have called himself John Kirkstone.'

'Like the one that was murdered. A bad omen!'

'Well, he never had a chance of changing his name. But I expect Ferris and Miss Wedderburn will call themselves Mr and Mrs Arthur Kirkstone.'

'Well,' said Parge, raising his glass. 'I hope they will be lucky.'

'So do I,' responded Gebb, 'if only because they paid this two hundred pounds.'

'Of which I got only fifty,' grumbled Parge, and so got the last word after all.

[THE END.]

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