



MIDNIGHT TRAGEDY. OR THE CRIME OF THE BROKER'S OFFICE.

CHAPTER XIX. Paxton's finger was upon the trigger of the weapon when Marlon Oakburn appeared in the door through which the man who was the object of the detective's pursuit, had fled.

The cashier's daughter was in deadly peril of her life at the instant when she pressed herself before Paxton.

Had the detective's finger involuntarily contracted even to the least extent, a bullet would have been sent speeding on its mission of death.

Fortunately was that the detective's weapon was not discharged.

Amazement at the presence of Marlon Oakburn, and astonishment at her conduct in interposing to favor the escape of the supposed assassin, for the instant had the detective's spoolband, and he recoiled.

He was mentally dazed by this startling denouement.

The thought that the fugitive whom of all things he desired to arrest was escaping, broke the spell almost instantly.

"Stand aside, Miss Oakburn! You are impeding the course of justice, and interfering with me in the discharge of my duty," he said taking a forward step.

As he made this advance, Paxton's acute ear caught the sound made by the closing of a door somewhere in the rear of the building, and almost simultaneously he heard a low whistle from the same direction.

Paxton fancied the whistle was intended as a signal.

As if understanding it, and as though acting in obedience to a secret mandate, the moment the whistle sounded Marlon Oakburn lowered her weapon, with which she had menaced the detective, and sprang aside out of the doorway.

It was of course all important to cut off the escape of the fugitive.

Thinking only of overtaking him, Paxton darted through the interior door and rushed through a passage beyond the next apartment.

At the end of the passage a door confronted him, but he tore it open and rushed into the open air.

Said Hedden closely followed.

The detective and his companion found themselves in the dense gloom of the impenetrable night.

But Paxton was provided for such an emergency, and he produced a pocket lantern, lighted it, and then flashed its light about him.

A narrow alley in the rear of the building which they had just left was before them.

It was folly to think of pursuing the supposed assassin, for it was utterly impossible to tell in what direction he had fled.

Realizing that failure had again overtaken him, Paxton ran back into the house.

The boots were a perfect fit for his casts, and the rows of nails were the same in both casts and boots.

Of course the presumption was, that the boots had belonged to Kregde. But regarding this point the detective desired to positively convince himself.

Paxton called upon the landlady of Kregde's late boarding-house, and from having seen them in his room, a chance to identify the boots as belonging to Levi Kregde.

This sufficed to prove, to the detective's entire satisfaction, that Levi Kregde entered the office of Jason Garrison on the night of John Oakburn's murder, through the rear window.

But meanwhile the trial of Stuart Harland was concluded.

All that men could accomplish in behalf of the accused had been done by his attorney and friends.

The result was a verification of Lawyer Saybrook's prediction.

The jury had failed to agree.

They were discharged, and Stuart Harland was remanded to prison to await the process of the law.

In his case, a new trial would now be necessary.

But Harland was not destined to remain in prison until he was again placed on trial for his life.

The young man was admitted to bail in the sum of twenty thousand dollars.

His wealthy aunt became his security, and signed his bail bond.

Edna Garrison, and Stuart's friends, who had latterly dreaded a conviction, were rejoiced at the result of the trial.

Stuart was himself dejected and gloomy.

He was aware that public sentiment was against him, and he felt that he could enjoy no rest or peace of mind while the awful shadow of doubt rested upon him.

After his release, Stuart called upon Paxton.

The detective received Harland very cordially, and the latter said very abruptly:

"Paxton; I am determined to take a part in the work you have undertaken for my salvation. Tell me how to help you. I must do something."

"I understand how you feel, and I honor you for your inability to rest while others are laboring to unearth the mystery in the solution of which you have a vital interest. But you are a novice in the business," answered Paxton.

"But I have an interest to work as no other man can feel bound to."

"True. And you would be more likely than any one else to recognize the man who exchanged overcoats with you, even if he were disguised. You might undertake a search for the villain on your own account. Chance may favor you," said Paxton.

He saw that the young man was inclined to brood upon his misfortune, and he wished to divert his mind, even though he had no great hope for the result.

From that day Stuart Harland seemed to have but one object in life, and that one motive was to find the man whose acquaintance he made on the train on the night of the murder.

too much that you don't recognize him?" said Mrs. Kitts. And she pointed to a low-browed, thick-set man, who was seated at the further side of the room, smoking a short black pipe.

Of course the detective did not know the name of this dangerous-looking fellow, but he was equal to the emergency, and imitating the voice of Ajax Crawley, he said, crossing to the fellow:

"How are you, old man? Didn't notice you until Mother Kitts spoke."

"Tolerable, Ajax, tolerable," answered the other.

Some conversation followed, and as they turned to a desk, Mrs. Kitts said:

"Well, you may as well get to work, Crawley."

"All right, I'll tend to business de facto," answered Paxton, who had noticed that it was Crawley's habit to use law Latin in ordinary conversation.

Mother Kitts, as she was familiarly called, produced account books, and seating himself at the desk, Paxton began to busy himself with the accounts.

Mother Kitts watched him, and suddenly her eyes became fixed upon Paxton's hands, and she saw that his fingers were small, white and shapely.

"Mother" Kitts had discovered by his hands that Paxton was not Ajax Crawley.

"The man in the other room is a spy in disguise. I know it by his hands!" she said to the man with the pipe, in a whisper.

Mrs. Kitts' companion sprang to his feet and drew a murderous-looking knife.

He seemed about to rush into the detective's presence, but the woman grasped his arm and held him back.

The two whispered together earnestly for a moment, and then Mrs. Kitts returned to the apartment in which Paxton remained, and presently the man also sauntered in, while the detective unsuspectingly continued to work at his accounts.

Unobserved by Paxton, the man to whom Mrs. Kitts had communicated her startling discovery regarding our friend, carefully worked his way along until he was behind Paxton's chair.

But while Mother Kitts and her confederate were both plotting against the detective, the latter had taken advantage of their absence to secure a letter which he had discovered at the moment of his entrance partially concealed under a sofa.

Paxton naturally surmised that the missive had been lost by some one, and he concealed it on his person as he picked it up, intending to improve the first favorable opportunity to read it.

In order to divert the attention of the detective from her confederate, Mrs. Kitts began a conversation with Paxton the moment she returned to the outer apartment, after having the confederate regarding her discovery.

The cunning creature conversed about her business affairs in the most natural and unobtrusive manner in the world.

Paxton replied as best he could, but now that she had detected his disguise, the woman craftily shaped her remarks so that his replies served to confirm her suspicions.

The detective sat close to a window which was closed by a heavy outside shutter.

While Mrs. Kitts was talking, and while her confederate gained a position in Paxton's rear, the latter heard a faint, scarcely audible tapping on the window shutter without.

It was only by the exertion of a supreme effort that Paxton avoided giving a violent start, which would have awakened a suspicion in the mind of the old woman that something was wrong.

He recognized the tapping on the window shutters as an imitation of the click, click of a telegraphic instrument.

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