



A MIDNIGHT RAGELY
—OR—
THE CRIME OF THE BROWERS OFFICE
By W. MOTT

"Can it be that they have led him into some trap?" Even as he thus reflected he heard the sound of some commotion in the house.

CHAPTER XXI.

When Malvin ushered Paxton into the apartment he saw a dozen men, including the janitor, Levi Kredge, were assembled, he introduced the detective to the company as his lawyer, Mr. Ajax Crawley.

The introduction was mutually acknowledged in a most gentlemanly way. Then Malvin drew Paxton aside and while the others resumed the conversation, which had been interrupted by the entrance of the disguised detective, Malvin said:

"I expected you would drop me a line to-day. I wrote you. Strange if you did not receive my letter," answered Paxton.

"Well, I did not receive it. But tell me, how about Andrews' case?" Paxton felt that he was in deep water, but he knew that if he hesitated he was betrayed, and so he promptly replied:

"I think we shall fix it all right, pro rata." Malvin regarded the detective with a look of amazement.

"Paxton comprehended that he must have made a mistake in this answer. 'What has so completely changed your opinion? Didn't you tell me there was no possibility of getting the sentence commuted?' the other asked.

The detective saw his way again. "Yes, but since I saw you I've made the acquaintance of a local politician who is a power with the authorities, and he has promised to use his influence to secure the clemency of the law for Andrews. Beyond the posse comitatus is our help."

He had not forgotten Crawley's fondness for using law Latin terms, whether correctly or otherwise. "This is good news. You are a trump, Crawley. You have taken a weight off my mind. I am glad to hear of your success. Some ugly disclosures if we did not help him cheat the hangman."

"I thought you were anxious about the matter, for in my note I told you to call at my office to-day. I had an idea my letter might have failed to reach you."

"I should have been to the office if I had heard from you," answered Malvin. At that moment a colored waiter announced supper, and Malvin said:

"You have dropped in just in time. I am giving a supper to a few of my select friends. There will be plenty to drink. Will you join us at the table?"

"Certainly, I am not non compos mentis. When was I ever known to decline such an offer?" Paxton answered the pretended lawyer, and his host conducted him and his other guests into a spacious dining-room at the other end of the hall upon which the street door opened.

The table was resplendent with silver and crystal. At each place several bottles of wine had been placed, and upon an elaborately carved sideboard there was a collection of stronger liquors of all kinds.

As the company was becoming seated at the table, a colored woman entered and whispered to Malvin.

"What the woman said the detective did not hear, although he was on the alert and tried to catch her words. But he heard Malvin's answer:

"Let her make all the noise she chooses, she has heard beyond the walls of the house." Paxton smiled.

"I was right in thinking I should find Marion Oakburn here. She is the female captive who must be imprisoned here," he thought.

He knew, however, that there was a possibility that he was mistaken in the identity of the female captive.

"I'll find out the truth before the night is over. Everything is working to suit me, and this supper invitation has given me an idea. I'll personate the character of Ajax Crawley to the letter, and get stupidly intoxicated, in appearance. They will be obliged to stow me away somewhere to sleep off my drunk, and thus I may gain an opportunity to search the house."

He acted his part perfectly. As Ajax Crawley naturally would have done, under similar circumstances, Paxton drank, or what amounted to the same thing, seemed to drink very freely.

Finally, after passing through the various stages of intoxication with all the skill of a veteran impersonator of such characters, he fell across the table in a full-blown drunken stupor.

"Here, Dan and William, put this sot to bed," ordered Malvin. A couple of burly colored men responded to Malvin's call, and lifting the detective between them, in a by no means gentle manner they carried him up stairs and deposited him on a bed in a little half sleeping-room, and left him.

The detective had heard Malvin and his companions express their determination to make the night of it, and he knew, therefore, that it was useless to wait for them to retire before commencing his search for the girl captive, whom he believed to be beneath that roof.

Perhaps half an hour elapsed, and then Paxton arose and crept forth from the room where the negroes had deposited him, and gained the hall.

A gas jet in the rear end of the hall burned dimly, but its light enabled the detective to see his way.

He listened for a moment, and he heard the sounds of revelry from the dining hall below.

His acute ear also presently caught another sound, which seemed to emanate from above his head.

He almost instantly located the sound which he had heard, and gained the door upon which some one who occupied the apartment to which it led was pounding.

The detective tried this door, but as he had expected, he found it locked. He habitually carried a bunch of keys in anticipation of such an emergency as this, and with the aid of a key of this bunch, he was not long in opening the door.

Quickly he stepped inside, closed the door, and placed his back against it. Paxton found himself in a small windowless room, face to face with Marion Oakburn.

In the character of Ajax Crawley the detective was not calculated to inspire confidence. Of course Marion did not penetrate his disguise.

At his appearance she retreated with an exclamation of fear. Her face was deathly pale, and her features wore an expression of fright.

"Hush!" cried Paxton, and then in a low voice he told Marion who he was. She uttered a glad exclamation as she recognized his natural tone of voice.

"Oh, how thankful I am that you have come. I prayed for deliverance, for I am a prisoner, held a captive here by solid wretches. You must save me. I am ready to explain all you wish to know. I will correct a terrible mistake. I will save Stuart Harland's life," said Marion, in intense tones that thrilled her hearer.

It seemed that in the excitement of the moment the words rushed from her lips unbidden, and that she scarcely realized their import.

She trembled from head to foot. Paxton answered her hastily: "You may depend upon me to save you if I can. You can repay me by lifting the veil of mystery which has shrouded your conduct. Come, we will attempt to escape from this house without delay, while its inmates are at table."

He cautiously opened the door and listened. Still the sound of loud voices, laughter and the merry clink of glasses was wafted to his ears from the dining hall, where the revelry was still going on.

Paxton took Marion's hand, saying: "We must not make a sound." They stole from the room, and gained the second story.

Here they paused for a moment, and then descended the stairs leading to the front door. But fortune declared against them.

As they gained the foot of the stairs, a negro came out of the dining-room and saw them. The servant turned back to the dining-room door and shouted an alarm.

Instantly Malvin and his guests came rushing into the hall. Marion and the detective had gained the front door, but it was doubly locked and bolted.

"There was no time to open it, for the key had been removed. 'What is this! a traitor in camp!' shouted Malvin, and he and Levi Kredge rushed at Paxton.

The odds were more than three to one against the detective, including the servants. "If I seem to desert you now, it is that I may live to save you," whispered Paxton to Marion.

Then he made a leap through a door in the side of the hall leading to the front parlor, just as his foes were about to close in upon him.

The detective at that moment of peril thought rapidly, and he had resolved upon a desperate attempt at escape. Closing the door of the parlor the instant he had passed through it, he overthrew a table against it with a crash and sprang to a window, which he opened as Malvin and his confederates burst into the room.

But the way of escape was not yet open to Paxton. A pair of heavy shutters barred his flight through the window.

CHAPTER XXII.

Meanwhile Paxton's assistant, who had remained in the street, became intensely excited and solicitous in his inquiries as he listened to the commotion which was taking place in Malvin's house.

He heard men's angry voices, the slamming of doors, and a heavy crash as of falling furniture, but above all the din a woman's voice rang out in a frightened scream.

"Why does he not give the signal if he needs me? The last instruction he gave me was not to show myself unless I heard his whistle," thought the detective's assistant.

He was subsequently, with a crash, the blind which protected the front window of Malvin's residence was dashed open, and through the opening a dark form leaped down ten feet to the pavement below.

The detective exclaimed the detective's assistant, recognizing his principal. The latter had alighted on his feet unhurt.

At the instant when the enemies he had encountered in the house were rushing at him in the parlor after he had opened the window, he sprang back, and making a running leap, crashed through the intricately fashioned blinds, as we have seen.

Marion Oakburn uttered the shriek which Paxton's assistant had heard. While Malvin, Kredge, and the other men pursued the detective in obedience to an order from Kredge, two of the colored servants had seized Marion and dragged her back to the room whence she had escaped. Then it was she uttered a scream of terror.

Marion's despairing cry rang in the detective's ear, and the thought that he was powerless to render her assistance almost maddened him.

"If those miscreants harm one hair of her head they shall pay dearly for their work!" he cried.

Paxton saw that the street, which was an isolated one, was deserted. No police assistance was at hand, and yet he knew that only prompt and rapid action could avail to accomplish his purpose, which was the rescue of Marion and the capture of Levi Kredge.

He did not pause an instant. "Watch the house and shadow the villains if they attempt to remove the girl," he said to the detective. He was going for help, as his assistant understood.

Paxton's auxiliary darted across the street, and concealed himself in an alley just as the door of Malvin's house opened, giving egress to Kredge, Malvin, and several others.

They saw Paxton, who was running like the wind, but they did not discover his agent.

"The girl has escaped!" cried Kredge. "Yes, given us the slip after we had him in our hands," said Malvin, regretfully.

Seeing pursuit would be useless, and fearing to call the attention of the police, they re-entered the house and closed the door.

"The fellow will return with help. He'll be sure to search the house. The girl must be hurried away, and I must not delay in fleeing myself," said Kredge.

"You are right. The girl must not be found here," assented Malvin. His guest hurried away.

None of them wished to be present when the man who had escaped returned with the police, as they believed he soon would do.

Paxton's assistant saw the men leave the house, but he did not desert his post. Malvin was a man of resource and forethought. He instructed one of his guests before the fellow left, to send a cab in haste from the nearest stand.

A few moments subsequently, a carriage was driven up to the door of the house. Paxton's auxiliary was on the alert now.

"They mean to carry Marion Oakburn away in that carriage," he said mentally. Even while this thought was in his mind, it was verified.

The door of the house again opened, and he saw a female form carried by two men, one of whom he recognized as Levi Kredge, brought out of the house and placed in the carriage.

The janitor and the other entered the vehicle with their captive, and it was rapidly driven away.

The detective's agent said to himself: "I'll try the old dodge." He immediately pursued the carriage, and sprang upon the rear springs, when he overtook the vehicle.

The detective's auxiliary had ridden but a block or two, when suddenly he received a heavy blow on the head, and he fell stunned and bleeding upon the ground, while the carriage dashed onward.

While these incidents occurred, Paxton had succeeded in getting the assistance of four police officers.

As soon as possible he returned to Malvin's house, almost breathless with hard running, and he was closely followed by the police officers.

He ran to the entrance of the alley where he had hidden his agent, and failing to discover him, he called his name. Of course he received no reply.

"I comprehend. The rascals have made off with the girl, and Sayer has followed them!" cried Paxton. His assistant on the present occasion was the man Sayer, whom he had occasion to previously name.

Although Paxton was quite confident that it would be a fruitless proceeding, he determined to search the house.

In answer to his demand for admission a colored man opened the door. This one negro was the only person found in the house and from him Paxton was unable to gain any information.

He professed entire ignorance as to the whereabouts of any of the recent inmates of the house.

"There is nothing for it but to return to my office and await Sayer's return. He will trail Marion Oakburn to the new hiding place to which she has been taken," cried Paxton when the search of the house was concluded.

He dismissed the police and returned to his own quarters. Meanwhile, but a few moments after Paxton and the police left Malvin's, Sayer, who had sufficiently recovered to do so, returned to his old hiding place in the alley.

The blow which he had received had been dealt by Levi Kredge. The janitor discovered him perched on the carriage springs, and clubbing his pistol, he reached through the window in the rear of the vehicle, and dealt the blow which felled the detective's agent to the ground.

After waiting in the alley for a reasonable length of time, Sayer, concluded that he had missed his principal, and so he made his way to the office and reported.

Paxton's disappointment may be imagined. "We have lost the trail completely this time, unless the carriage and the driver of the vehicle can be identified. Did you notice the number of the cab?" he asked.

"Yes. It was number 1111." "Find that cab in the morning, and then report," ordered Paxton, and then he dismissed his agent.

Sayer made an investigation relating to the discovery of cab No. 1111, and the result was that he obtained trustworthy information that the cab licensed under that number was not out at all the preceding night.

The detective's agent was forced to the conclusion that the cab in which Marion had been carried away was one of those unlicensed vehicles called "Night Hawks," which in violation of a city ordinance are driven by night, and upon which a different number is traced every night, or even more frequently, in order to baffie the police.

As usual Paxton received a call from his patron, Mr. Stannore, the next day, and the two discussed the situation now presented by the perplexing mystery in which they were both so deeply interested.

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