



A MIDNIGHT TRAGEDY.
THE CRIME OF THE BROWERS OFFICE.
BY W. E. MOY.

CHAPTER XXV.
One night in the attire of a long-shoreman, Stuart was sauntering along South street when he observed a man in front of him, who he thought resembled the man he had met on the train.

The fellow entered a saloon, and Stuart followed him and heard him speak. He believed he recognized the voice, but he was not positive. The man wore a cap pulled down over his face, so that his eyebrows were concealed. But when the man left the saloon, as he presently did, he raised his cap, and Stuart made a recognition.

At last he had found the man who had brought an added weight of dread and suspicion upon him, and whom he believed to be John Oakburn's murderer. Stuart's heart leaped, and a wild, exultant feeling came upon him, while his nerves were tense with excitement.

At that instant the man turned and looked Stuart full in the face. The latter saw a look of recognition in the fellow's eyes, and no doubt the other saw the same expression in Stuart's flashing orbs, for he wheeled about and started to run.

Stuart Harland leaped after him, determined that the supposed murderer should not escape. "Halt!" cried Stuart, and he strained every muscle in the attempt to overtake his man.

The next instant, when the chase had only well begun, Stuart received a cruel blow on the head, and he fell to his knees, but with a desperate effort, inspired by the thought that the man who might prove his innocence would escape, he staggered up again, half senseless, and saw Levi Kredge disappear around a neighboring corner. The man of whom he was in pursuit was no where to be seen. He had vanished mysteriously.

Stuart reeled back against the wall of the nearest building, dazed and stunned by the blow. When he had sufficiently recovered, Stuart made his way to a neighboring corner, suffering from vertigo and a dull, heavy pain in his head.

The first passing car halted at a signal from Stuart, and, boarding it, he was carried rapidly out of the neighborhood. The incident which we have just related transpired so quickly that scarcely any witness could be seen. No excitement was occasioned.

Stuart was enraged and bitterly disappointed. It maddened him to think that the supposed assassin had eluded him, and he vowed to repay Levi Kredge for his cowardly blow if he ever had an opportunity to do so.

The young man proceeded directly to the office of Paxton, the detective, to whom he related his experience. Acting under Paxton's instructions, five minutes later Sawyer and another of the detective's agents were on their way to that particular part of South street in which Stuart Harland had encountered the unknown and Levi Kredge. They were to attempt to trace these men from that point.

While Stuart Harland was relating his recent exciting experiences Stanmore entered the detective's office and became an interested listener to all the young man's story. "Am I never to prove my innocence? Am I to be again placed on trial for my life?" said Stuart, dependently, as he concluded his narrative.

"I believe disclosures will yet be made that will flood this dark mystery with light," said Paxton, and he added: "I made a little discovery the other day, which I saw fit not to mention to any one, but to encourage you I will tell you about it now."

"Thus speaking, he opened a desk and drew out a small package. It was the very parcel we saw him take from the closet in Levi Kredge's room when he searched that apartment. "I wish you to closely observe what I am about to show you," he said, and opening the package he drew out a small canvas bag, such as gold coin is packed in at the mint.

Paxton held up the canvas coin bag, and both Stuart Harland and Stanmore saw the name "John Oakburn" printed on the bag, as though the work had been done with a pen. Stuart Harland sprang forward and examined the coin bag more closely. "I have seen that money bag in John Oakburn's little safe. Where did you find it?" he cried.

"I found it in Levi Kredge's room," answered Paxton. "Then he had a hand in the murder?" "Perhaps," answered Paxton. "At all events we now have a good case against Kredge. Let me recapitulate the point I have made against him. First, it cannot be determined where he was at the time of the murder. Second, his boots made the tracks under the office window. Third, he has a large sum of money now, which he did not have before the murder. Fourth, the money-bag known to belong to John Oakburn and to have been kept in his private safe is found in Kredge's room. Fifth, after all your labor has not been in vain. You have accomplished much," said Stuart.

"True, but it yet remains to really prove his guilt. After all, ours is but presumptive evidence," replied the detective. Paxton had business on hand, and excusing himself, presently he left the office. From the time of Levi Kredge's disappearance Paxton had felt confident that his sister Judith knew where he was, and he had placed a shadow on the woman's track as we have seen. Although the result had not confirmed the detective's belief, he had not abandoned his opinion, and he had determined that Judith should be the guide to conduct him to her brother's hiding place.

The woman saw him, and opening the door he made him enter. In a moment the detective stood in the brilliantly lighted kitchen confronted by Judith. Everything depended upon the occurrences of the next few moments.

CHAPTER XXV.
Before venturing to present himself to Judith Kredge, as her brother Levi, Paxton had well considered all the contingencies which might arise. The detective's foresight prompted him to devise a plausible excuse, whereby to account for his presence, well knowing that it would hardly be safe to trust to an inspiration of the moment for an impromptu story as to why he came there.

Moreover, he had given his assistant, who was watching the house, certain instructions, and he knew that his "fellow" would act in unison with him so as to sustain the ruse he had decided to adopt. As the detective, so perfectly disguised to duplicate her brother in appearance, she regarded him with a second, and then she said abruptly: "Levi, you're a fool to come here. I thought nothing could tempt you to run the risk of arrest you take by coming here."

As Judith thus addressed him, Paxton experienced a feeling of relief and satisfaction indescribable. The woman's words conveyed to the detective the certitude that his impersonation would succeed. "The fact is, Judith, I am here only by chance, and a very narrow chance at that," answered Paxton, while Judith hastily secured the door and drew the widow curtain closely.

"Don't talk in riddles, Levi," she said. "Well, to be plain, I was on my way to meet Pratt and Weeks, when I discovered I was shadowed. I doubled and twisted in every shape, but I couldn't throw the fellow off my track, until at last I dodged into the passage between this building and the next. Then the shadow went on by me. But he'll come back and explore the passage. We shall hear his footsteps, for I placed some loose boards where he'll step on them. When we hear him in the passage, I'll go out the front door and make off. You see I have come, Judith, merely to give my tracker the slip."

Thus Paxton replied, telling the story he had devised for the occasion in advance. "You ought to have sent a messenger to Pratt and Weeks, instead of venturing to go there yourself," answered Judith. "As she spoke, there came the sound of footsteps in the passage. "There's the fellow I want to give the slip," said Paxton, who knew the sounds he had heard were made by his agent, whom he had instructed to "traverse the passage soon after he entered the house. Quick as thought, Judith extinguished the light in the room, and she said: "Come," she said, leading the way to the front door. "You intend to remain at Brouseum's, I suppose?" she asked, as they started for the front door.

"Yes, for the present." "I think it's about the safest place you could find. No one you wish to steer clear of is likely to visit Dredgers Alley, especially after night-fall, and I presume you keep close during the day?" "Thank you for that." "With this conversation they reached the front door. "Look out, Judith, and see if the coast is clear," said Paxton. "The woman unfastened the door and cautiously peered out. In an instant she drew back, saying: "All right, now is your time." "Good. I'm off. Good-night, Judith." "Good-night, Levi."

Then Paxton sprang down the steps and darted away, not forgetting to imitate Levi Kredge's peculiar limp. In a moment he vanished around an adjacent corner. He was exultant and delighted, for success had surely crowned his effort this time. He had discovered where Levi Kredge was in hiding. He had not dared to risk a further conversation with the cunning Judith, much as he would have liked to draw her out and gain further information.

Paxton well knew the locality where Levi Kredge had secreted himself, and he was aware that Brouseum's was a sort of lodging-house, frequented by the dangerous classes of the metropolis. Moreover, he knew that Brouseum's was the most dangerous place in New York to attempt to make an arrest in, unless backed by a strong police force. But to take such a force would be to defeat his purpose when he sought to capture Kredge.

Paxton meant to arrest the treacherous janitor that very night, and in a moment or so he had hit upon a stratagem which he thought might answer his purpose. Less than an hour subsequently, in an entirely new disguise—that of a sporting man about town, the detective was on his way to Dredgers Alley.

Before setting out, however, he had repaired to the office and made a complete change in his disguise mentioned, while at the same time he had given some instructions to two of his agents whom he found there. Upon receiving Paxton's orders, these men, who were both powerful fellows whom he knew to be perfectly fearless in the midst of danger, went out. When Paxton reached Brouseum's it was near midnight.

He entered the combined bar-room and office of the establishment, which was thronged, and looked about for Kredge, but the janitor was not there. The detective sat down on a bench and waited, hoping that Kredge at this late hour might venture into the public room. An hour elapsed, and then, just as Paxton began to despair of meeting his man, the janitor appeared.

The janitor sauntered to the bar not far from the door, and just as he entered the room a man it the other end of the apartment mounted upon a rude stage and began to perform some skillful card trick with one hand, for he was a one-armed man, while a boy passed around with a hat, taking up a collection for the performer's benefit.

Paxton stealthily arose glided, to the street door and looked out. He saw his two agents, who had left the office in advance of him, standing one on each side of the door. With his men he exchanged a silent but significant signal, and then he approached Kredge and touched his arm. The janitor wheeled about with a start, and his hand sought his pistol pocket. "What do you want? Who are you?" he demanded.

"I come from Malvin. A word with you in private. It is important," said Paxton. It was his purpose to decoy Kredge outside, but the latter was wary. Just at the door he paused and said: "We have gone far enough. We are out of earshot. Tell me now what word you bring from Malvin?"

Kredge stood with his back to the door, and at that moment Paxton saw one of his agents cautiously open it. The detective cast a rapid glance about the room, and he saw that the attention of all the dangerous characters there assembled was centered upon the man with one arm who was performing the card trick at the other end of the room. Paxton came close to Kredge, as though to make a confidential communication which he feared might be overheard, and then, quick as a flash, he gave him a violent push.

The janitor reeled backward through the door, and at the same instant he was seized by the detective's two agents, and the door closed behind him. Kredge tried to call for help, well knowing that assistance would be promptly rendered him if his voice was heard by the men in the "dive," but one of Paxton's agents, clutched his throat so that he was unable to utter a sound, and, lifting him between them, they thrust him into a carriage which stood close by, leaped into the vehicle after him, and were driven swiftly away. Paxton hurried away on foot as fast as possible.

The arrest had been accomplished so quickly that even the people on the street thought that Kredge was an intoxicated man whom friends were taking away in a carriage. That night Kredge slept in a police station, and the following day he was transferred to the Tombs, charged by Paxton with assault made upon Stuart Harland, with intent to kill. The detective did not mention to the authorities that he believed Kredge was concerned in the murder of John Oakburn. Meanwhile, a few days prior to the date of the occurrences last recorded, Richard Stanmore received a letter with a foreign postmark. Inside the outer envelope a second letter was inclosed, containing a letter which had been sent from New York to a foreign country, and now was returned again.

At the sight of the directions on the inclosed letter, Mr. Stanmore evinced the greatest surprise, and he eagerly opened it. As he read the letter, Stanmore's noble, handsome face became transformed, and a joyful light beamed in his eyes. "At last! at last!" he muttered. "Her true heart never banished my memory, and she is convinced of my honesty and honor." Stanmore read the letter again and again, and he seemed like another man, so changed and joyful was his expression. But leaving Stanmore to reflections, which must have been pleasant ones, we will turn our attention to Levi Kredge.

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