

THE OLD HOME.

BY J. F. HOWARD.

The old home is deserted. The walls are covered o'er with greenward and with wild weeds...

A WEIRD MYSTERY

Tracing a Dark Crime.

BY ALEXANDER ROBINSON, M. D.

CHAPTER III.—(Continued.)

"I am convinced, Mr. Ketcham, be- fore I had any shadow of doubt, that the dagger was used; at least, that Dr. Seabury was yet alive when this cruel thrust was made into his heart."

"On the other hand, if you can swear that the creese was used while Dr. Seabury was yet breathing, and that it killed the action of his heart, it is a case of murder!"

"I drew a long breath. 'Quite a fine point of distinction, sir.' 'And yet some one's life hangs upon it. If you raise a plea in court that the man you slew in cold blood had hasty con- viction, and must die shortly at any rate, that won't save you. The court doesn't take into consideration the state of health of your victim. It seeks a motive and result. That is all.'"

"I have since suspected it. Now the deadly qualities of this drug, found in the tomb of some old Pharaoh of Egypt, and secured in a hermetically sealed jar, consist in paralyzing the heart and its tributaries, so that they cease their action instantly, and the blood coagulates."

"I solemnly believe that, had that dagger been thrust into his body after the blood had issued at all, which I seriously doubt, it would have been as black as tar instead of crimson as you see this stain."

"Thank you, Mr. Ketcham, but don't do it unless you think it possible. I know how to keep a close mouth, and if I can be of any use to you, command me."

"A word dropped sometimes gives me an idea or a clue. I generally work on the principle that a secret is better kept with one than with two. At the same time I have seen occasions where two heads were better than a single one."

"I was astonished at his words. They gave me subject for further thought when I could ponder upon the range and possibilities of an invention such as that he mentioned."

"I could imagine it, and I shivered with the realization. What could not these mute walls have told had they been gifted with tongues?"

"I could see it as the old detective spoke—the swartly villain bending over the bed, his evil face aglow with hate and triumph."

"I believe I can show you the face that bent over Dr. Seabury while he expired."

"I walked about a few minutes, and then made my way to the foot of the vines that clambered up the side of the house. The yielding soil might tell a story. I found footprints. They seemed to be those of a small man, but of course that was not positive, for if the assassin were a woman she might have been in disguise."

"Mr. Ketcham, where did you get this piece of hair?"

"I caught at a straw, as very often a man who has about given up hope will. 'But, my dear sir, having found that picture among his papers, as I presumed you did, what tangible evidence have you to connect her with the case? This is a most brutal crime. The fact of this hair resembling hers in color would hardly warrant the suspicion that she is the guilty party.'"

"I started and looked at it again. 'Turn it over. Upon the back you may discover something.' 'Sure enough I did. In a man's handwriting I found a few words, as follows: 'Lenore!'"

"I was now early morning, and I could see the gloom of night giving way to the light of day. 'I cannot answer that question fully, for on my visits here I saw no one save an old woman servant named Ursula, and his aged man of all work, Peter, who sleeps in the stable.'"

"I went to the window and looked out. The vines were torn as he had said, showing that some one had made use of them to enter the room."

"I walked about a few minutes, and then made my way to the foot of the vines that clambered up the side of the house. The yielding soil might tell a story. I found footprints. They seemed to be those of a small man, but of course that was not positive, for if the assassin were a woman she might have been in disguise."

"I picked up a peculiar piece of steel that stood up in the earth, having evidently fallen from above. To my uneducated eyes it was a puzzle, but I had an idea that it was some species of burglar's tool. Undoubtedly Mr. Ketcham could throw some light on this subject. I placed it absently in my pocket and continued my investigations."

"I saw that it was the lowest point in the wall, and judged that the assassin had made previous observations in order to go ably locate this."

"I remembered what Mr. Ketcham had said about one of his visits, and sprang to my feet. As I turned to face the person who entered, I felt the blood rushing to my heart, while my hands clutched the top of the chair in front of me, for I gazed upon the countenance of Lenore, the dusky beauty upon whom had fallen the suspicion of this terrible crime."

"I was too surprised just then to make a deliberate note of her charms. Later on they floated before my mind as a dream. 'I could only realize that her presence cast a subtle spell over me, which at first I did not even care to resist.'"

"I beg your pardon, miss; I am a doctor, Vance Burton. I was sent for on professional business." "There flashed across her face a look of genuine alarm."

"I could not and would not believe it unless stronger evidence was put forward. 'Tell me the worst, sir.' Her white teeth were pressed into her lower lip, and I could see that she was possessed of hidden powers for which I had not given her credit."

"I hesitated. This was a direct question, and I might be hurting Mr. Ketcham's case, if I gave too much information. I would be conservative, and allow him to run his own business."

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"Then who sent for you, Doctor Peter?"

"This morning, about two o'clock, this friend of mine received the summons. He hastened here at once, let himself in with a key the old Doctor had given him, and found Dr. Seabury dead, his hand still grasping the fatal phial which he had pressed to his lips."

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