

A WEIRD MYSTERY

Tracing a Dark Crime.

BY ALEXANDER ROBINSON, M. D.

CHAPTER XIV.

I began to see things that had been hidden behind a veil of mystery. Leonore—his wife!

Something had come between them in the past, and the old Doctor believed his son to be a guilty man.

Suppose she was guilty, would he ever disclose the past?

I believed him a man of an iron will, like his father before him. Truly had he said torture could not force him to reveal what he had seen.

"This is a surprise to me, Mr. Ketcham," I said, frankly.

"As much so, perhaps, as the discovery of Theodore's identity was to me."

"Leonore is his wife, and he was making an effort to see her when he looked upon a sight that sent him away again without accomplishing his errand."

"So it seems."

"Honestly now, Mr. Ketcham, since you are not willing to believe that Theodore saw his father killed, what do you suppose he did gaze upon?"

"He saw his wife enter the old Doctor's room, and her face must have told him that she was crazy for the time. Unable to bear the cruel sight he hastened away, came back to look again and then fled."

"When you told him how his father, instead of committing suicide, as the coroner's jury decided, and the afternoon papers printed, had really been murdered, his mind leaped at once to the dreadful truth, and he closed his lips upon the story."

"That is the most probable view we can place upon the matter, looking upon him in a charitable manner. Whether Leonore is guilty or not, her husband believes now that she slew his father in a fit of insane frenzy, and believing that he is the one who holds the secret, has resolved to die before he will reveal it."

"That straightens the kinks out of the line up to a certain place, Mr. Ketcham."

"Where is that, Doctor?"

"The possible presence of a second party upon that trellis of vines on that night."

Mr. Ketcham was measuring the distance between a crack in the ceiling and a corner of the room. He did not even deign to cast me a glance.

"Ah! Doctor, you have something to say upon that subject?" he drawled.

"Yes, sir. In the first place, Theodore denies having passed more than once each way between the walls and the house."

"There were two trails."

"I know it; and yet they diverged in places."

"You examined the marks?"

"I did."

"And thought they had been made by the same person?"

"At the time I never questioned it, and yet I can now see that a clear examination might have revealed some difference."

"What next, Doctor?"

"Theodore also swears he never owned or carried a tool of the kind I described, and which you affirm is an ingenious device of a burglar or cracksmen."

Mr. Ketcham reached out his hand and took the article in question from a small drawer near him. Not until then did he withdraw his eyes from the ceiling.

"This is an ingenious device used by burglars almost exclusively, a few that, perhaps, there might be, although would fall into other hands."

"Well, he declines the honor of ownership."

I fancied I could see the detective's face light up, as though I had given him a valuable clue.

"That may be all stuff and nonsense, Doctor. Mind, I merely suggest that idea, and do not affirm it as my belief. We do not know Theodore yet. He may disappoint us and turn out a diabolical villain."

Was this an attempt to turn me off upon another tack?

I had believed it, and yet at the same time did not give myself away, simply making up my mind that more would be heard from this quarter in the future.

The case was a remarkable one.

Mr. Ketcham, a detective of great experience, had solemnly declared it to be the most mysterious and complicated of his life.

If this were the case, then I could not expect to solve it without great labor. What made it more difficult was the fact that there were so many trails leading away from the scene of the crime, and any of these, at different times, seemed to be the right track.

"Doctor, I told you of one discovery I had made. Now, there is another that may interest you."

"When I went down that morning to see Leonora, I found her examining the pantry window, which had been opened by a deft hand in the night."

I heard his words with a feeling of both astonishment and satisfaction.

It seemed to be a link in the chain leading to the third party.

"They a burglar entered the house through the pantry window?"

"That seemed to be the indication. It was singular about it was that not a thing had been stolen."

"The doctor! that is singular."

"Perhaps Theodore entered the house the way when he came either the first or second time."

"That is possible, of course."

Did Mr. Ketcham believe this?

It was hard to tell, for his face was that of a sphinx, and beyond the mere ordinary reader.

There was a mask, figuratively speaking, upon which it was impossible to ap-

What if there had been another party in the house on this night—who was he? If a burglar, what a fool not to have carried off the plunder while he had the chance, and not go away empty-handed. I made up my mind to investigate this matter before I would be satisfied.

Perhaps this person who had been lurking in the neighborhood, and who had entered the house after all, it seemed from the pantry window, might not have been a burglar after all.

My mind was clear as a bell. All that I had seen and heard relative to this case rose up before me.

I realized that this was the last chance to save Leonore.

Should this fail then she must inevitably be guilty.

It all depended upon who was meant by Dr. Seabury when he expressed himself in daily fear of some one. If we could only fathom this mystery of his past, the truth might be made clear.

Who could help me? My thoughts turned to Theodore. He might tell what mystery of the past this was connected with his father.

The only question that arose was whether he would feel so inclined.

There was no need of telling all this to Mr. Ketcham.

The advantage was already on his side, since he had drawn out all I knew, and suited himself about returning the favor.

By this I mean that he told me what he discovered, but without taking me fully into his confidence, and explaining the possibilities of each discovery.

I did not feel hurt by this way of conducting the case. From the beginning I had realized that it was an honor to be connected with a man of sterling worth like Abner Ketcham.

I was contented to assist him by any means that lay in my power, without any desire to reap the reward.

In the name of justice I would work; at the same time it was with the hope that I could help to prove the innocence of the one against whom the case seemed darkest—Leonore.

My mind was set in a certain quarter, and I was anxious to once more begin work, so that I might the better learn whether my last suspicions were founded upon fact or were fated to be wafted away at the first breath of cooling wind.

In some way I must find out who had entered through the pantry window, what their object had been, and also what they had seen or done.

If this end could be achieved, I felt that the curtain must be raised and a glimpse of the truth be discovered.

Every means within my power must be brought to bear upon the matter, with this end in view.

In connection with this, I believed I had a strong point, whether Mr. Ketcham noticed it or not.

"Where did you get this?" Ketcham asked, holding my breath.

His answer gave me a terrible blow. "In the room of Leonore, hidden behind a trunk, Doctor."

CHAPTER XV.

SAT there motionless, my eyes glued upon the fatal handkerchief.

Could it possibly be that, after all, the girl was unconsciously guilty?

A shudder went over me.

Of what avail this trying to fight against the hand of fate? Better give it up, and let the hand of justice, in the shape of Mr. Ketcham, have its course.

Truly, I felt discouraged, the prospect ahead looked so black.

Again I minutely examined the frail web in my hand.

There could hardly be the least doubt but that a knife of some sort had been drawn through the handkerchief to cleanse it.

Was it the crease that was wont to lie upon the table in Leonore's room, used as a paper carrier?

Mr. Ketcham seemed to divine my thoughts.

Out from one of those capacious pockets he drew the veritable weapon.

Evidently he had been putting his time to good advantage around the house on the avenue, while I was chasing myths.

"See here, Doctor, how precisely this fits, and tell me if you think it was the weapon that was drawn through this kerchief."

I did look. He proved it to me in such a way that I must have confessed it as a fact, even though it had signed the death-warrant of my dearest friend.

Either that crease, or a blade just like it, had been drawn through the handkerchief.

"I am afraid I must give it up, sir."

"I wouldn't do that, Doctor. This far you have carried your end of the log in a manner highly creditable to you, and with the greatest admiration from me. If you see any chance for work still ahead, ferret it out. It is best to make all safe and sure."

There is one thing which as yet has not been followed up.

"The burglar?"

"Yes, the man who entered at the pantry window. Who was he—what did he come for—what did he do and see, and why did he leave without stealing a thing, when the whole house was spread open before?"

These are pertinent questions which may have a decided bearing on the case. I ask you to take the idea out as you did the other trail leading to Theodore; it will only be a question of a short time before the truth in that quarter is known."

His words were uttered in a calm, earnest tone, and he took my hand as if to assure me that he did not mean to flatter.

"That settled it with me. I would do much for Mr. Ketcham. He was a man to win one's earnest admiration and devotion."

I was anxious to get off.

"Hold on a minute, Doctor," he said, laughing, as I was about bidding him good day, "perhaps I can help you a little in this matter."

"I jumped at this offer."

"You will oblige me very much, sir, by doing such a thing," I replied.

"Sit down again. Now, I have examined the work at the pantry window, and I should say it was done by an expert."

"Perhaps you may not know that these first-class cracksmen have each a peculiar way of running things, but it is a fact."

"More than once I have been able to tell at a glance whose hand had done a certain job just from the manner in which the fellow had gone to work to overcome certain difficulties in his way."

"My first thought, then, was to look for some such private mark that would betray the fellow's identity."

"Certain things gave me what I was disposed to believe was a clue, and I felt almost ready to swear that the man who had entered the pantry window was no other than an expert cracksmen known to the fraternity under the name of Colonel Cain."

"Now, my idea is that you hunt up this man, get in with him by pretending to be of his ilk, and gradually worm your way into his confidence, when the conditions being favorable, you can get at his secret."

"You do not approve, then, of hurling the truth at him and making him confess?"

"That would all depend upon circumstances, Doctor. You might find a better opportunity to work that way than any other."

"To take it literally, then, I am to use my own discretion in the matter?"

By the time twilight had settled down over the great city I had gotten through with my work and was ready to take up the trail of crime once more.

I had never believed that I would make anything of a good detective, nor had I believed that I would ever have a fancy for the work, but the fascination of the work was something astonishing.

Now that I had become all worked up in the case, I would not have given it over for a good deal.

When I had finished eating my supper I prepared for the work on hand.

It was a singular piece of business for a physician in good standing to enter upon, might have to pass through all manner of ugly places, and enter the haunts of crime before I could accomplish my object.

My mind was made up, however, and it must be more than this that could keep me from carrying it out.

Thoughts of Leonore urged me on. If there was a chance of saving her, I would take heavy risks to accomplish it.

So, shortly after darkness fell upon the city of New York, I left my office and began to make my way down to the artery of the city—the Bowery.

A RECORD OF TWENTY-ONE.

A Texas Desperado Whose Victims Were Scattered Far and Wide.

The man who told the story between the puffs of his cigar was from Texas, says the Kansas City Times.

"Clay Allison's life was a romance," he began. "Clay Allison was a desperado. He lived in the Red River country in the panhandle. His trigger finger was the busiest in the early '80s. His record was twenty-one."

He boasted of it. Twenty-one dead men, whose graves were scattered from Dodge City to Santa Fe. I myself saw him kill Bill Chunk, a bad man, who strove people just for the fun of seeing them fall. The two men had no cause for quarrel. They were the prize killers of the same section of the country. It was a spirit of rivalry which made them swear to shoot each other on sight.

Their friends bet on the result of their first chance rencontre. They met one night at a cross-road inn in New Mexico and sat down at tables opposite each other, with drawn six-shooters resting on their laps beneath their napkins. A plate of oysters on the shell had just been set before Chunk, when he dropped his hand, in a careless fashion, and sent a ball at Allison beneath the table. Quick as a leap of lightning Allison's gun replied. A tiny red spot between Chunk's eyes marked where the bullet entered. The dead man rolled over on the table and was still, with his face downward in the dish of oysters.

"Allison was a large cattle owner. He went on a drive to Kansas City once, and while here fell in love, married, and took the woman to his home in the west to live. A child was born to them—a child whose face was as beautiful as the face of a cherub, but whose poor little body was horribly deformed. Allison loved the child with the great love of his passionate nature. In the babe's misshapen and twisted form his superstitious mind read a meaning as significant as that of the message which the Divine hand wrote on the palace walls of the king of old in Babylon. God, he thought had visited a curse upon him for his sins. He quit his wild ways. He drank no more. No man ever after the birth of his child fell before his deadly pistol. He was completely changed. In the new life which followed he devoted himself with absorbing energy to his business interests. He became rich in time. Ten thousand cattle on the Texas ranges bore his brand. A few years ago he was driving from his ranch in a heavy road wagon to town. The front wheels jolted down into a deep rut. Allison pitched headforemost to the ground. His neck was broken. The team jogged on into the distance and left him lying there dead and alone on the prairie."

He snored while the storm raged. During a voyage across the Atlantic several years ago, says a traveler, a terrific storm arose and it seemed as if our boat would be safely lost. The passengers crouched in their cabins in mortal terror, expecting every moment to go down to the bottom. The captain assured them that there was no danger, but all expected that their time had come—all save one. This fellow, who was an inveterate snorer, lay peacefully in his cabin sound asleep in the midst of the uproar. His wife rushed in the cabin crying: "Lucien, O Lucien, the vessel is sinking!"

Lucien turned over, partially awake, and murmured: "Sinking, are we? (Snore.) Well, let her (snore) sink. What are you (snore) going to do (snore) about it?"

His remarkable coolness partially served to glay our fears and the storm shortly after went down.

ONCE in a while the gods who are supposed to preside over the drama lose temper and played pranks. To so vile a pitch has the "realistic" play been carried that even a real sawmill has been thrust upon the boards, and one of the players found the machine more realistic than he desired. The poor fellow lost his real hand by a turn of the real saw.

While his misfortune is justly a cause of sympathy, the fact may tend to rid the theater of the outrageous stupidity that thus discredits the proscenium supposed to be devoted to drama.

