

The Two Nephews
Compiled from a Physician's Diary
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My friend and classmate, Edward Warland, had got married and settled down, and on the first opportunity I paid him a visit. He had married Nancy Gates, one of the best and the fairest girls in the country—bright-eyed laughter-loving creature, with a heart as pure and noble as her face was fair and lovely. I found Ned domiciled in a love of a cottage, over the front door and windows of which sweet honey-suckles clustered, and before which was spread out a pretty garden. Nancy met me at the door, and with a joyous smile she gave me her hand and conducted me to the neat little parlor where the perfume of roses fairly burdened the air.

“What a happy fellow Ned must be,” I said to myself, as the fairy wife tripped away after her husband.

Ned came in with a warm smile upon his face, and in a very few moments we were engaged in a lively conversation. We talked over the scenes of our childhood days, and then Ned and I chatted about some of our college scrapes. And so the afternoon passed away. After supper Nancy challenged me to a game of chess, and beat me. Ned said I let her beat me on purpose, but I did not. I may have sat down with that intention, but before the game was half through I found I had more than my match.

One thing I had noticed which puzzled me,—or, at least, which excited my curiosity. Every once in a while Ned would fall into a fit of moody thought, and when I spoke to him he would start up, and I could see that his cheerfulness cost him an effort. I was determined to know what this meant for I had my suspicions, and I wished to know if they were correct. So I asked him what was the cause of his trouble.

“Ah,” he uttered, “have you noticed anything out of the way?”

“No,” I told him; “not out of the way, though it may arise from something that is out of the way.”

“Well, well,” he returned, “it is nothing which I need to conceal from my friends, for they must all know it someday. My uncle Mark has made

a new will, and cut me off without a penny. It is not the money I care about, for he may do with that as he pleases; though I will own that I had hoped a part of it might be mine. But to lose the old man's friendship is what galls me most. I have loved him—loved him well.”

“But why is it?” I asked in some surprise, “I thought the old man regarded you almost in the same light as a child of his own.”

“So he did,” returned Ned.

“Let me explain,” interrupted Nancy, in a tremulous tone. “He has thus turned him off because he married with me.”

“Impossible,” I uttered.

“But it is possible,” said Ned. “He asked me once if I meant to make Nancy Gates my wife, and I told him yes. Then he told me I should not. Of course I could accept no dictation in this matter. Finally, when he had got me all worked up with excitement, he told me he would cut me out of his will forever if I made the girl my wife. I simply told him that the earth never bore money enough upon its bosom to buy the fair girl from me, and then he bade me leave him. Since I have been married I have received a note from him informing me that I should never cross his threshold again. Now you know it all.”

“But,” said I, “someone must have put him up to this. To whom will he leave his property?”

“To Thomas.”

“Thomas Needham?”

“Yes.”

“I did not know that Thomas had returned from Germany.”

“O, yes,” said Ned, “he came back six months ago.”

I said no more on the subject then, for I did not wish to express any suspicions that might be unfounded. Mark Needham was an old man, and very wealthy. He had been married years before, but his wife had died young without children; so Mark grew old with only the children of other people about him. Once he had a brother and sister, both of whom were now dead. The brother had left a child named Thomas, while the sister had married a man named Warland, and left Edward, who was now just five-and-twenty. Thomas Needham was five years older; both were now orphans. Ned was by far the best of the two, and people loved

him the best; and I was not a little surprised to learn that his uncle had discarded him and preferred Thomas. But I hoped to understand it better. It was quite late when I left the young couple, and it was a long while after I retired to my bed before I slept. I called to mind the sweet face of Nancy Warland, and then I wondered how in the name of common sense the old uncle could have anything against her. I knew that in days gone by there had been a deadly feud between him and a certain Benjamin Gates, and that this hatred had run so high that Gates had sworn an oath upon the Bible that he would learn his children to hate and despise Mark Needham, and that they should be taught to spurn him as they would a viper. And this Benjamin Gates had been a cousin—a second cousin, I think—of Nancy's father. Of course I could not suppose that Uncle Mark would let this circumstance so influence him that he would turn his vengeance upon a child of his enemy's most distant relative. However, I resolved to fathom it if I could, for, to tell the plain truth, I had some suspicion of foul play on the part of the elder nephew. It was about a week after my visit to Ned Warland's that I received a call to go and visit Mark Needham. He was very sick, I was informed, and my attendance was required at once. When I reached the house I found the old man in his bed and looking quite unwell. I found his skin dry and hot, his pulse fluttering, and his tongue very much inflamed, but not yet coated. He complained of pain in the back his head, and so along down on the spinal column.

I asked him what he had been eating. He assured me that he had eaten nothing that could have hurt him. At any rate, I knew that his stomach was very foul, and I feared that the bowels were inflamed. I administered a powerful emetic; left a simple sedative, and having given directions for applying a hot bath to the surface, I took my leave, promising to call again in the morning of the next day.

As I descended the stairs I met Thomas Needham in the hall. He was a dark looking man, thirty years of age, and not such an one as I should have ever chosen as a companion. The darkness of his skin was in all probability caused by exposure in traveling; but then there was a

darkness deeper than this which was apparent at least to me.

“How do you find my uncle?” he asked, with an expression of countenance which I could see at once was forced. Ah! he shouldn’t have tried to look so concerned, because it was not natural to him, and I could see beneath it at once.

I informed him that I found the old man very sick, and that the utmost care would be necessary in his nursing.

“You must do your best, doctor,” the nephew returned, “for it would be sad to have him die now.”

When I got away from the house I wished that Thomas Needham had not spoken those last words as he did, for they gave me a dark suspicion which I did not like to hold. I feared that the uncle would be neglected, and that the dark nephew would not hesitate to help him over the eternal highway if he could. Yet, as much as I disliked the fellow, I tried to banish these suspicions.

After I had retired my bed that night I dreamed a very curious dream. I thought that old Mark Needham had engaged a new physician, and that I detected that physician giving a deadly poison for medicine. I caught the doctor’s hand, and as he turned his face towards me I beheld the features of the dark nephew! I awoke, and felt glad that ’twas only a dream. Then I went asleep again, and dreamed the very same dream once more.

In the morning I went up to see Uncle Mark again. I found him more weak than on the night before. His tongue was more inflamed; his skin more hot; his pulse small and hard, and pains shooting through his whole body. He informed me that he could keep nothing on stomach—not even the gentle sedatives which I had left.

Was it strange that my dream should have come back to my mind then? It did come—and with a strange force, too. I administered a quick emetic, but it was thrown off in an instant. I then informed him that I must use the stomach pump. He bade me use anything that would relieve him of the dreadful pain he suffered. I adjusted the pump, and having placed him in a proper position I introduced the flexible tube, and then commenced the work. I thus drew up from his stomach about half a pint of thick matter, and in a moment I detected the presence of arsenic! I removed all I could thus, and then I prepared the best antidote I had at

hand, and having called the old housekeeper I bade her prepare as quickly as possible some barley water, and gruel of the same. When this came I administered copious draughts of it, and determined to remain by until I could know how the result would turn.

“Who watched with you last night?” I asked, after the patient had become more easy.

“Thomas was with me most of the night—and the night before, too,” returned the old man. “He is very attentive.”

“Very!” I responded. But I wished not to make much conversation then, and I called the old housekeeper out.

“Thomas is very attentive to his uncle, is he not?” I said to her.

“Yes,” she returned, with a shrug of the shoulders.

I could easily interpret that motion; and by a few careful questions I discovered that she disliked the dark nephew very much, and that she had reason for so doing. I then knew that I might trust her, and having obtained from her a pledge of secrecy, I told her what I had discovered. She was horror-struck at the fearful revelation, but she was not at all incredulous.

“I never thought any better of him,” she said, earnestly. “And only to think that dear, good Edward should have been turned off for this wretch.”

“Never mind,” I said, “I think all may come out right yet. If you can contrive that Thomas shall administer no more medicine to his uncle between now and tomorrow at this time I can do the rest. Yet you must not let him suspect, for in order to prove the wickedness we must catch him at it. You will know how to do this. Let him fix things as he pleases, only be careful that nothing from his hands reaches the old man’s lips.

The old woman promised, and then I took my leave. I did not see Thomas on that visit, and I supposed he kept himself out of the way on purpose.

I need not say with what anxiety I waited for the coming of the next morning. But it came, and as soon as I had swallowed my breakfast I started for Mark Needham’s. I met the housekeeper in the hall, and she pulled me into the parlor at once; and then, without a word of

explanation, she went into another room, and when she returned she had two teacups in her hands.

“There, doctor,” she said, all anxious excitement, “last night Thomas would watch a part of the night, but I hid myself where I could see all he did. These two cups were on the sideboard with the barley water and gruel in them. I saw Thomas empty some stuff out of a little phial into them; but the old man has not touched them. As soon as I could get my mind to work I went and fixed two more cups, just like those on the sideboard, and then I came down into the hall and banged away on the front door, and pulled the bell wire. Then I ran away and went upstairs the back way and hid. Pretty soon Thomas came out and went downstairs to see who was at the door; and then I slipped in and carried my two cups of gruel and barley water, and having placed them just where the others were I caught these up and hurried out. But I didn’t leave my post even then. In half an hour afterwards the old man waked up and wanted some drink. Then Thomas took the cup of barley water and stirred it up well, and gave it to him!”

“What was it in the phial?” I asked. “Was it a liquid?”

“He had to knock on the phial with his finger to make the stuff run out,” the woman said.

“Then of course it must have been powder,” said I.

I then asked the woman to bring me a shovelful of red hot coals. She conducted me to another room, and the coals were soon brought. Then I stirred up the contents of one of the cups, and upon pouring a few drops upon the burning coals a whitish vapor arose which gave us the smell of garlic rank and strong! Of course I knew that we had arsenic—and in large quantity, too! I bade the woman keep the cup very carefully, and then I went up to the old man’s chamber. Thomas had gone out about half an hour before.

I found my patient very comfortable, and able to sit up in bed. His pulse was weak but regular. The heat was gone from his skin, and his tongue looked more natural. I informed him that with proper care he would be out in a day or two, and then we entered into a conversation.

“Uncle Mark,” said I, as soon as I could bring the matter in without seeming to reach far after it, “where is Edward Warland now?”

“Don’t mention him,” uttered the old man, nervously.

“But why not?” I returned. “I look upon him as one of the most noble-hearted, pure-minded men in the country.”

“But look at his marriage!” said Mark, warmly.

“I have looked at his wife,” I answered, “and I don’t think there is another woman in the land that could have made him so happy.”

“But he shouldn’t have married her, sir. She is the child of my most deadly enemy, and has been taught to curse me!”

“What?” I cried, now suspecting the truth. “Nancy Warland taught to curse you? Who told you this?”

“I know it, doctor.”

“But who told you that she was the child of your enemy?”

“Thomas told me of it.”

“And the villain lied to you!” I cried, now fairly excited. “Nancy Gates—now Nancy Warland—is the child of Arthur Gates!”

“What?—Ar—Arthur?”

“Aye,” I added, as the old man stammered in his wonder, “the child of Arthur Gates; and she is hardly a relative of the Benjamin Gates against whose memory you hold such enmity.”

“Then Thomas must have been mistaken,” the old man said; and he trembled while he spoke.

I was determined now to tell the man all I knew. His own safety demanded it, for a villain like Thomas Needham could not be watched all the time while he had his liberty. So I commenced and told him the fearful story. I did not break it to him suddenly, but I opened it gradually, letting the light in by degrees, and finally wound up by

relating the discovery of the housekeeper, and my analysis of what she found. During this recital the old man was fearfully moved, and when it was concluded he started up and caught me by the arm. He was pale as death, and his eyes seemed half starting from his head.

“My God, sir!” he gasped, “is this thing possible?”

“It is,” I answered. “Perhaps you are more surprised than I was. But when I knew you had discarded poor Ned simply because he had married Nancy Gates, I felt sure Thomas had been deceiving you. On the first visit I made you I went home with a terrible fear. I saw the wicked nephew then, and from his manner I knew he was anxious for your death; but I did not think of this. I only feared then that he would contrive to prevent your recovery through some kind of neglect.”

But the old man was not in a state to sustain much conversation, and I left him, promising to call again on the morning of the next day.

So on the next morning I called, and I found Mark Needham in his great armchair.

“Doctor,” he said, as soon as I had taken a seat, “here is a letter I received an hour ago. Will you read it?”

I took the note, and read as follows:—

“UNCLE MARK,— You know me now, and I am aware you won’t want to see me again. I have played a high hand for your money, and lost. Curse that doctor! Had he kept away you’d have been a dead man, and I a rich man, by this time. You may hunt for me, but you won’t find me, for I have more than money enough to leave the country with, and shall be gone ere you get this. Your Nephew,

THOMAS NEEDHAM

“But how did he discover that he was detected?” I asked, as I finished reading the characteristic note.

“He overheard a conversation between my housekeeper and myself,” answered the old man. “She was explaining to me what she saw while hidden in the entry, and Thomas was in that same entry then. I told her what you had told me, both about the poison and about Edward, and he must have heard it all. And,” he continued, in a tremulous tone, “I am glad he did, for I had feared a dark scene when I came to accuse him. Oh! I have been very foolish—very; but I can make it all up now. I wish

you would send Ned to me. Tell him, if he can forgive me, to come.” Of course this was a pleasant business for me. I fixed up such restoratives, both of food and drink, as I wanted my patient to take, and then I posted off. I found Ned and his wife just sitting down to dinner. They made me eat with them, and when we were done I told them my errand. I told them the whole story from beginning to end. “And so,” I concluded, “your uncle is not so much to blame after all. We could hardly wonder at his being angry with you when he thought you had married a child of Benjamin Gates.”

Nancy Warland came direct to where I sat, and without a word of explanation she placed one of her fair white arms around my neck and kissed me. But Ned was not jealous—not at all. He was very happy, though I could see there was a pang of grief in his soul. He had some thought, among all the rest, of his cousin Thomas.

However, Ned promised to go and see his uncle, and then I took my leave. On the following morning I called upon the old man again, and found him well. He was not yet strong, but needed no more of my care. During the next week I was very busy, and it was not until the week following that I found time to call upon Uncle Mark again. This time I found him happy and cheerful, and a tear of joy stood in his eye as he told me that Ned had promised to come and live with him.

Time passed on, and somewhere about a year after the events I have recorded a Paris paper announced the death of *Thomas Needham*. Some papers were described which were found upon his person, and we knew that the dark nephew was dead!

But there was joy in the old mansion when this cloud passed away. Not long since I paid them a visit. I found Uncle Mark playing with Ned’s child, and it puzzled me to tell which laughed the most like a child. We ate supper, and then Nancy went out to superintend the preparing of a dessert.

“Look at her,” uttered the old man, pointing towards the retiring form. “Aren’t she a woman to love? Oh—she’s an angel—an angel, doctor. And only think how near I came to losing her.”

“And yourself, too,” I whispered.

“Yes,” he added, with a slight tremulousness in his tone. “But never

mind—we're happy now. It's love all around; and as for sunshine—why, there's enough in Nancy's smiles for the whole household."

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