

Helen Forsyth

Waters

I HAVE mentioned in 'The Orphans' that I was at the same time engaged in an affair which required my presence in Scotland. The case was a remarkable one.

James Fergusson, a romantic, dreamy youth, born and bred at Clyde Cottage, about five miles distant from the City of Glasgow, and sole heir to about four hundred pounds per annum, chiefly in house property, chose, at the ripe age of twenty, or thereabout, to fall, or fancy himself, in love with one Helen Forsyth, a gay damsel whom he met with at a funeral, of all occasions in the world for the bringing about of such a catastrophe. The girl was pretty, and considerably younger than he, her age in years being three less. In knowledge of the world she was at least ten years his senior.

Her mother was an adept in the baser department of that science; the daughter her apt pupil. This Mrs. Forsyth, who, though she could scarcely be less than five or six-and-thirty, had a very youthful appearance, was an equivocal widow, engaged in a poorly-paying mantua-making business in a by-street in Glasgow. It was shrewdly doubted that she had a legal title to the name of Forsyth, or that her dainty daughter was born in wedlock.

The purport of the counsel which, under such circumstances, such a mother gave Helen Forsyth upon the latter's return from the funeral, may, with the help of after discoveries, be easily imagined:

"James Fergusson's shy advances were not only to be encouraged, they should be stimulated by all the arts familiar to pretty, provocative damsel-kind. His bedridden father could not last many weeks, people said, and then he would possess in his own right full four hundred a year, and was, moreover, reputed to be a soft, simple youth, whom a clever wife might rule with absolute sway. Such a chance it would be just downright madness to miss. No silly scruples about being engaged to Adam Ritchie should be allowed to mar, or for a moment endanger it. Ritchie, who, as second mate of a merchant vessel, was but one remove above a common sailor, might never rise higher, nor, indeed, return to Glasgow again from the West Indies, where he was when last heard of; and if he did, and was prospering, he would very likely—sailors being proverbially as fickle as the winds and waves themselves—have no mind to carry out his light, merely verbal promise to some day marry a penniless, however pretty, mantua-maker."

Thus urged, Helen Forsyth agreed to act upon her mother's advice, though reluctantly, as she was strongly attached to Adam Ritchie, who was a smart, handsome sailor, very much superior in personal advantages to her new admirer.

There is no doubt, moreover, that the daughter's hesitation was the more readily overcome by a vile suggestion of Mrs. Forsyth's, that should she be Mrs. Fergusson when Ritchie returned, she would not be thereby absolutely precluded from occasionally seeing her old sweetheart. He was personally unknown to Ferguson, who could never have heard, never would hear, that there had been a former intimacy between him and Helen Forsyth.

Having once determined upon her course, the girl-woman pursued it with avidity, and such swift success, that she became the wife of James Fergusson within a month of the day upon which she first made his acquaintance. The marriage was kept secret, and the bride remained at her

mother's till old Mr. Fergusson's death, not long afterwards, when she at once removed to Clyde Cottage. The mantua-making business was gladly given up, and Mrs. Forsyth took up her permanent abode with the young couple, upon the invitation of her son-in-law to make his home hers as long as she lived.

A short time sufficed to enable the wilful wife to bring her youth-husband into subjection, not to herself only, but to Mrs. Forsyth. Yet not so completely but at times, and under extreme provocation, flashes of a latent spirit were evoked, which showed there was danger in him. Especially to excite his jealousy would, they were before long made to understand, be extremely dangerous. Fergusson loved his wife, wilful vixen though she was, with deep affection; and once, upon only fancying he detected a *look* of secret intelligence pass between her and a youthful neighbor who sometimes looked in at Clyde Cottage, he flew into a transport of rage, inflicted personal chastisement upon the confounded young man, and so terrified his wife and mother-in-law that they ran screaming away, and locked themselves up in a bedroom till his frantic rage had subsided. Legal process was issued against Fergusson for the assault; it was shown that there was not the slightest ground for the suspicion that had prompted the outrage; and Fergusson was not only obliged to apologize for his conduct, but to disburse a considerable sum for law charges. This incident was afterwards remembered to his prejudice.

Nothing further requiring notice transpired, with reference to the inner life at Clyde Cottage, till about a year after the marriage. The domestic supremacy of the wife was, in the main, sustained, and in one essential particular she was absolute. The money department she kept strictly in her own hands, and there happened to be in the house cash to over fifteen hundred pounds, savings from his income by the deceased Mr. Fergusson. It had been withdrawn at a moment of panic from a Glasgow bank, and was not afterwards replaced, Mr. Fergusson having determined to invest it in house property, but no eligible opportunity happened to present itself during his life. Since then several good investments had offered themselves; but Mrs. Fergusson refused, under one pretence and another, to let the money go out of her own actual possession, and steadily added to it such sums as could be spared from her husband's income. It was a foolish, costly whim, her husband urged, to keep such a sum of money lying idle. It was not, however, a matter to rouse his ire, and his wife persisted in her "foolish, costly whim" till towards the end of her first year of married life, when she became suddenly convinced of its folly.

Mrs. Fergusson admitted she had been wrong, quite wrong: the money ought to be invested in houses—Glasgow houses that could pay good interest; and she and her mother diligently searched the advertising columns of the weekly paper in search of likely looking announcements that such properties were for sale. They were always successful in finding one or more that looked likely, and the same or next day they were off together to view the houses for themselves. Fergusson, who had immense confidence in the business shrewdness of his mother-in-law, and was, besides, absorbed by his garden, upon which he prided himself almost as much as he did upon his pretty wife, never cared to accompany them. It was sufficient that he would have a say in the matter after they had passed a favorable judgment.

They never did pass a favorable judgment, and after visiting Glasgow once or twice a week, for two or three months together, they were still far off of attaining the object sought after.

Meanwhile, absorbed as Fergusson was in his amateur-gardening pursuits, he could not but become with every passing day more and more impressed by the growing change, not only in his wife's demeanor towards himself, but in her personal appearance. Her speech lost much of its tartness, and sometimes a kind of regretful regard, of bitter self-reproach, seemed, when addressing him, to be expressed in her tone and manner. It struck him, too, that she was handsomer than ever; that her eye and cheek sparkled with brighter fire, a fresher bloom. All this, added to the feverish excitement of her general manner, hysterical bursts of weeping without conceivable cause, especially if he spoke to her with more than his usual tenderness, presented her with a rare flower fresh culled from his garden, or in any other way manifested the strong constancy of his affection, greatly disquieted him. Those manifestations, Fergusson also noticed, greatly annoyed and irritated Mrs. Forsyth, whose scowling brow and snappish sneer had a marvellous effect in restoring Mrs. Fergusson's self-control. The young wife seemed to shrink into herself, as it were, before her mother's imperious rebuke, and, from abject fear of her, to forcibly suppress emotions to which she had rashly given vent.

Fergusson did not for a moment suspect that those were symptoms of a mind excited by guilty passion and poignant remorse—signs of a fitful, vain—felt to be vain—repentance of an irredeemable wrong done to a loving, true, and trustful husband. So far was Mr. Fergusson from so suspecting, that he waited upon a celebrated Glasgow physician, and requested him to call without delay at Clyde Cottage, as he feared that fever or other analogous disease was lurking in the veins of his wife, which required to be promptly checked. The physician went to Clyde Cottage and saw Mrs. Fergusson, but did not prescribe for her. Her malady was moral, not physical, he told her husband, and in such cases a high authority had long since declared that patients must minister to themselves.

The mystery was soon made plain. Mrs. Forsyth frequently received letters from Glasgow, and one afternoon, when she and Mrs. Fergusson were upstairs making ready to set out for that city, to view, as usual, some desirable house property advertised for sale, a note was brought by an elderly woman, who would insist upon giving it with her own hands to Mrs. Forsyth or Mrs. Fergusson—it did not matter which—but to one of them, or nobody else. Fergusson happened to hear the dispute, and actuated by a vague feeling of curiosity and suspicion, stepped to the door, ordered the servant to return quietly to the kitchen, and then desired the letter bearer to follow him to the presence of Mrs. Forsyth. The confounded woman mechanically obeyed, and presently found herself locked into a room and alone with Mr. Fergusson.

“You must give *me* the letter which you were charged to deliver to Mrs. Forsyth *or* my wife,” said he sternly.

The messenger, though much frightened, declared she would not. The offer of a sovereign failed to induce compliance, but a threat of taking her before a magistrate had a more potent influence, and she finally surrendered the letter under protest.

Fergusson tore it open, ran over the lines with a glance of fire, “staggered as if death-struck,” recovered himself by a strong effort, and left the room, locking the door after him upon the dismayed letter-bringer, and was seen no more by her.

The note was a brief one:

“DEAREST HELEN,

“I send to you in haste, but by a safe hand, to say that for sundry reasons we must be off this very night, instead of three days hence, as we had agreed. Be sure, therefore, to bring all the money with you *this afternoon*. Never mind about clothes. I shall be waiting at the old place by four o’clock at latest. Be punctual, and believe me to be

“Your faithful lover till death,

“ADAM RITCHIE.”

The note was certainly addressed to Mrs. Forsyth, and her baptismal name was the same as her daughter’s (Helen); but there could be no doubt that the address was a blind to cover a criminal correspondence with Mrs. Fergusson. This was the husband’s conviction, and he awaited in a state of mind bordering upon frenzy the going forth of his wife and mother-in-law upon their pretended errand.

He had not long to wait; they left the house together, intending to walk to Glasgow, and ride back in the evening by a public conveyance, which passed within a quarter of a mile of Clyde Cottage. As soon as they had gone a sufficient distance Fergusson stealthily followed, unperceived by them, though, if they had but once looked back, they could hardly have missed seeing him. His desperate purpose was to surprise his faithless wife and her paramour together, slay him on the spot, and possibly her also. Suddenly it occurred to him, after reaching Glasgow, that he had provided himself with no weapon for the execution of his murderous intent; and to enter a shop for the purchase of one would be to lose sight, in the crowded streets, of Mrs. Forsyth and his wife, who were walking very fast. Had he nothing about him that would serve his purpose? Yes; his pruning-knife—a deadly, sharp-pointed weapon, which he clutched with exultant ferocity! Passion-tossed as he was, Fergusson had sufficient command over himself to avoid exhibiting to passers-by any external indication of the mighty rage within. He met four persons who knew him well, but not one of whom remarked any thing unusual in his aspect and manner. Of course he passed them very quickly.

Mrs. Forsyth and her daughter turned into an obscure, narrow street, and when about half through stopped at a mean-looking house, opened the street door with a pass-key, and still without looking round, disappeared within. Fergusson was up in a few strides, burst in the frail door, which had no outside lifting-latch, with one stroke of his foot, and was instantly in the presence of a tall youngish man dressed as a sailor, Mrs. Fergusson, and her mother.

They were standing just within a near side room, the door of which was wide open. The sailor was warmly shaking both of Mrs. Fergusson’s hands in his, she and her mother having their backs towards the passage. Almost before the clasping hands could be snatched asunder, Fergusson leaped at the sailor with a scream of rage, striking wildly at him with the knife. Adam Ritchie, though taken at such a disadvantage, made a fierce fight of it, and after a desperate struggle, in which he received several wounds, wrested the knife from his assailant, and in return stabbed him with it in the chest. By that time the screams of the women had brought in several

passers-by, who forthwith secured the two combatants, both of whom were exhausted and fainting from exertion and loss of blood.

During the next fortnight Fergusson lay in a dangerous state, not only from the effect of the wounds he had received, but brain fever. His final recovery was slow and fluctuating, and many weeks passed before he was in a sufficiently sound state of mind and body to bear any direct allusion to the circumstances which had destroyed his happiness and well-nigh his life. Nevertheless, all that officious and unsilenceable memory did not recall might have been told in a few words.

Adam Ritchie, though he had lost a good deal of blood, was confined to his bed for about twenty-four hours only, and when called upon to explain the cause or causes which had led to the sanguinary affray, so shaped his statement that it was impossible to make out who had been the immediate aggressor—he or the jealous husband. The women, too, no doubt by preconcerted agreement with Ritchie, gave equally confused versions of the fight, so that all which clearly appeared was that a sudden and ferocious encounter had taken place between the two men, caused by an utterly unfounded access of jealousy on the part of Fergusson. All three asserted that Ritchie had, in fact, been courting Mrs. Forsyth—not Fergusson's wife. The note which had been found in Fergusson's pocket was produced and read, but, as the reader will have noticed, was perfectly reconcilable with this assertion of the witnesses. There was nothing grossly improbable in the averment that a man of Ritchie's age, about twenty-six years, should have courted a comely woman, who, judged by her looks, was not a year older than he. To questions as to why he did not visit openly at Clyde Cottage, and marry Mrs. Forsyth in the face of day, instead of proposing to run off with her at night, he replied that they had no intention of marrying, for the simple reason that Mr. Forsyth, who had been very many years separated from his wife, was believed to be still alive. They proposed living together as man and wife, but not to contract a legal union till there was no chance of a prosecution for bigamy being instituted against Mrs. Forsyth. Mrs. Fergusson had been naturally anxious that the proposed arrangement should be carried out in a manner that would least compromise herself and husband, as consenting parties to a connection repugnant to the moral sense of society and the law of God. The money she was requested to bring with her was Mrs. Forsyth's own, not Mr. Fergusson's, and so on. The former violent assault by Mr. Fergusson upon a neighbor, at the suggestion of an utterly groundless jealousy, was, moreover, referred to as a sort of moral confirmation of Ritchie's guiltlessness of offence towards the jealous, excitable husband.

Such an explanation, specious as at the first blush it might appear, would upon the slightest real investigation have broken down; yet, as Ritchie disappeared from Glasgow as soon as he possibly could, accompanied, too, by Mrs. Forsyth, no doubt with the hope of confirming the concocted story in her daughter's behalf ("the money" not having been obtained), and as no one had been killed, permanently hurt, or robbed, the affair, notwithstanding Glasgow boasted a public prosecutor, was allowed to drop.

Mrs. Fergusson had returned to Clyde Cottage, and was extremely desirous of attending upon her husband during his illness. The bare sight, however, of his wife so excited the sufferer, that the medical gentleman in attendance peremptorily forbade her to even enter the sick chamber. She remained in the house notwithstanding, and when Fergusson recovered was still there, but no

longer ventured to leave her bedroom. Thoroughly shame-stricken since discovering that she was several months gone with child, and unsustained by the hardened, defiant spirit of her mother, she could not muster courage to face her betrayed husband. Nor did she make any effort, in writing or otherwise, to cajole him into a belief that Ritchie had been courting Mrs. Forsyth, proposed flying secretly with *her*, and carrying off money she never possessed.

She must have felt it would be useless to attempt doing so. Fergusson, with all the circumstances and allegations before him, was not for an instant the dupe of the audacious fiction. As soon as possible he consulted a man of law as to the practicability of obtaining a divorce. That course, it was ultimately decided, was not open to him, the evidence, legally viewed, of his wife's adultery being altogether insufficient to support a divorce suit in the Scottish courts.

That being so, Mr. Fergusson having determined on selling his property and quitting Scotland, entered, through a law-agent, into a negotiation with his wife, to whom he offered to pay, once for all, a large sum of money—one thousand pounds—upon condition that she subscribed a bond of perpetual separation, and solemnly admitted that the expected child was Ritchie's. Mrs. Fergusson had, meanwhile, left Clyde Cottage, taken lodgings in Glasgow, and was supposed to be in correspondence with her mother and Ritchie. Encouraged and stimulated by advice from that quarter, the shameless woman stood out for better terms, and finally obtained fifteen hundred pounds as the price of freeing her husband, as far as she had the power of freeing him, from the fetters of matrimony.

Before Mr. Fergusson could realize his property, and bid a final adieu to Scotland, his wife had been delivered of a male child, and was living in open shame with Ritchie, in the immediate neighborhood of Glasgow. They cohabited only till the money was dissipated—about three years—when Ritchie betook himself to sea again, and was afterwards only heard of at long intervals apart and doubtfully. He was said to be engaged in the West India trade. Abandoned by Ritchie, Mrs. Fergusson and her mother reestablished themselves in a poor way as mantua-makers, struggled on for a year or two, and then vanished, no one knew or cared to inquire whither. The little boy, when they disappeared from Glasgow, was about five years old, and a fine robust child for that age.

I have now given as succinctly as I could the substance of the facts and fancies with which Mr. Cumming, a writer to the *Signet*, upon whom I had waited, by superior order, at the Golden Cross, Charing Cross, had favored me from his very prolix notes, when a lady and young boy entered the room. Mr. Cumming rose and said,

“Good morning, madam. This gentleman is a detective officer, whose services we have been advised to engage.” Mr. Cumming, I should state, was the gentleman who drew up the deed of separation, twenty years before, between Mr. Fergusson and his wife.

The lady, having bowed slightly, sat down with an air as if she intended to be present during the remainder of our conference.

She was a warm-complexioned, interesting woman, in apparently delicate health; and her son, a slightly framed, intelligent boy, twelve or thirteen years of age, looked as if he had but recently

recovered from severe sickness. His mother was, I afterwards knew, a French Creole; her place of birth the Island of St. Croix, in the West Indies. She, however, spoke English with fluency.

“One moment,” exclaimed Mr. Cumming, in reply to my request that he would proceed; “one moment!” He rang the bell, and directed the servant who answered it to show Captain Hardman into that room directly he called. “He will ask for Mrs. Fergusson,” added the lawyer.

“Mrs. Fergusson!” I exclaimed, with a sharp glance at the lady sitting a few yards off; “Mrs. Fergusson!”

“Yes, Mrs. Fergusson,” replied Mr. Cumming, with some embarrassment, whilst the rich color suffused the lady’s face and neck, “but not, of course, the limb of Satan who—”

“I think,” interrupted the lady, rising abruptly, and with some haughtiness of tone, “I think, Mr. Cumming, you can very well dispense with my presence here. You call acquaint me with the result of your consultation with the officer after he has left. Do not forget,” she added, “to tell Captain Hardman I am anxious to see him before he leaves the hotel.”

Mr. Cumming replied that he would be sure to deliver her message; and the lady, with a scarcely perceptible bow to me, left the room with her son.

“By the way, you must have heard of Captain Hardman?” said Mr. Cumming.

“I cannot say that I have.”

“John Hardman, captain of the Europa, which was wrecked not long since on the Galway coast.”

“I remember now, and that he displayed great coolness and gallantry on that occasion.”

“Very much so indeed. He will be an important member of our council, and I hope he will soon be here. I was telling you, Waters,” resumed the man of law, “I was telling you, Waters, when Mrs. Fer—he—em—when the lady who has just left the room interrupted us, that James Fergusson, having washed his hands forever, as he believed, of the limb of Satan he had the misfortune to make bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, sailed first to London, thence to the West Indies, and finally settled in the Island of Jamaica. He had been there,” continued Mr. Cumming, “about six years, rather longer perhaps, and was prospering beyond his hopes, when he received, through me, news of his wife’s death. That news came to me in a whining letter from Mrs. Forsyth, stating that her daughter had died the day before, humbly repentant, and in a state of almost penury. The mother begged piteously for the sum of five pounds to put her daughter decently under ground, and I was ass enough to send her ten upon my own responsibility, though why I should have done so I cannot, for the life of me, explain to myself. By the same post as the woman’s letter a Liverpool newspaper reached me, in the obituary of which were these lines strongly underlined:

‘Died yesterday, after a short illness, at her lodgings on Copperas Hill, Helen, wife of James Fergusson, formerly of Clyde Cottage, near Glasgow.’

“The ten-pound note was gratefully acknowledged,” Mr. Cumming went on to say, “and I was informed that Mrs. Forsyth was about to immediately leave Liverpool for London, taking the boy with her. I had already forwarded the woman’s first letter and the newspaper to James Fergusson, and I despatched the second also. Three months afterwards I received his reply, inclosing a draft for the ten pounds, and announcing his marriage with Julie Le Maistre, of the Island of St. Croix, with whose family he had been long acquainted. We may pass over the next dozen years, during which I heard but little of James Fergusson, and that casually. He continued, I was told, to prosper greatly in business, everything he touched turning to gold as it were; but unfortunately as he grew in riches he declined in health. As nearly as may be a twelvemonth ago,” continued the lawyer, “Fergusson returned to Scotland for the purpose of obtaining the highest medical opinion upon his case, and with a hope that a visit to the old country might of itself prove a potent restorative. Whilst in Scotland he called frequently upon me, and as there seemed to be no hope entertained of his permanent recovery, I, in as urgent terms as I could permit myself to use, advised him to settle his worldly affairs without delay, as, in the event of his dying intestate, the boy by his first wife, if he were still alive—and those slips of Satan never die—would take all of the real property he might die possessed of, and divide the personals with the son by the second wife; the woman’s written declaration that the child was Ritchie’s availing nothing in law, as I had told him at the time. He promised compliance at the time, but nevertheless left for London without having made, or given instructions for, a will. Many persons have a strong repugnance to the making of wills. It smells too much of mortality— Ah, here’s our friend Hardman! This gentleman,” added Mr. Cumming, as soon as he and the bluff seamen had shaken hands, “this gentleman is Mr. Waters, the detective officer, of whom you have no doubt heard. He will help us to get at the bottom of this damnable business.”

Captain Hardman was polite enough to say that he *had* heard me spoken favorably of, and wished me success with all his heart, though he feared that the bottom of this particular damnable business, as his friend Mr. Cumming truly called it, if it had a bottom at all, was far too deep to be reached by the most skilful soundings.

“Time will show,” said Mr. Cumming, “and our present object, of course, is to place our vulpine friend here in full possession of all particulars.”

“I was saying,” continued the lawyer, that the late Mr. Fergusson—”

“Late Mr. Fergusson! He is dead, then?” interrupted I, half involuntarily.

“Yes, poor fellow! He was a passenger in the *Europa*, and was, unhappily, drowned. I was saying,” again resumed Mr. Cumming, “that the late Mr. Fergusson left Glasgow without making a will. Nor did he take any steps in the matter for some time after he reached London. The pressing necessity for doing so had, he probably believed, passed away, inasmuch as he wrote to Mrs. Fergusson to say that he benefited so much by the London medical treatment that he had little doubt he should return to Jamaica a new man at the expiration of about three months, for which time, he had determined to remain in England. That letter arrived in Jamaica by one mail, and with the next, taken out by the *Europa*, went Mr. Fergusson himself, in a state not only of extreme physical debility, but mental distraction: so changed, in fact, that his wife scarcely recognized him. It was inexplicable at the time, but perfectly clear now.”

Captain Hardman observed that he, too, was much struck by the change he saw in Mr. Fergusson when he came on board the *Europa* to engage a passage. He had seen him three or four days previously, when he seemed to be in much improved health and excellent spirits; and there he was, a broken-spirited and an apparently dying man.

“He was singularly, one might almost say childishly sensitive where his affections were concerned. Besides, upon one in his feeble state an afflictive stroke takes infinitely more effect than upon a person in strong health. Upon arriving in Jamaica,” continued the lawyer,” Fergusson, instead of going to his own place in the hills, took up his abode at the Royal Hotel, Kingston, with his new friend Saunders; refused the society of his wife; and, except for a few minutes at a time, and eagerly, passionately, as it were, applied himself to the task of realizing his property. There was not much difficulty in that, consisting, as it almost entirely did, of sugar, tobacco, and rum, of which he had been for many years a large buyer and exporter. Upon this occasion he, however, decided to resell in the island, his impression being that he should not live till the goods could be disposed of in England. The important business of realization accomplished, Mr. Fergusson remitted the bulk of the proceeds to London for investment in consols, in which securities he was previously interested to a large amount. Next he forwarded to his wife, by Saunders, a sealed packet, one thousand pounds in cash, and a letter, a copy of which I hold in my hand. I had better read it:—

“ ‘BELOVED JULLIE,

“ ‘I send you, by my good friend Saunders, one thousand pounds, and it is my earnest request that you at once embark for France with our son. Your relatives there have long desired to see you amongst them. Place yourself, dearest, without delay under their protection. *My* days are numbered, be assured, and but few, very few, remain to me. The sealed packet contains my will. It secures everything to you and Jamie, and will explain all; but do not, I beseech you, open the packet till I am no more. I am not equal, beloved Julie, to a parting interview; but that God may bless you and our child with His choicest blessings is the constant prayer, and will be the latest aspiration, of your devotedly affectionate

“ ‘JAMES FERGUSSON.’

“I must pass over many things,” continued the man of law. “Enough to say that Mrs. Fergusson did sail for Havre with her son without seeing her husband. A month afterwards Mr. Fergusson himself embarked in the *Europa*, the same ship in which he had last sailed from England. Mr. Saunders accompanied him.”

“Who is this Mr. Saunders?” I asked.

“Well, Mr. Waters, that’s a bit of a riddle,” replied Captain Hardman. “He’s a Scot and a seaman: there’s no doubt whatever upon those two points. He came on board the *Europa*, and paid for a passage to Jamaica on the same day, and I think an hour or two after poor Fergusson had engaged his berth. He’s an uncommon fair-spoken chap, and got wonderfully thick with Fergusson during the voyage out. I fancy he had known people in Scotland that Fergusson did, and was acquainted with transactions in which Fergusson, when a young man, had been mixed up.

“During the voyage home,” continued the captain at a gesture from Mr. Cumming, “during the voyage home Fergusson and Saunders were scarcely ever apart, except when in their sleeping berths. Fergusson, who was very ill and weak, could not shake off a nervous apprehension that he should not live to land in England, and one day informed me that, in the event of his death taking place on board, his friend Mr. Saunders was authorized to take possession of all his (Fergusson’s) effects, papers, &c. Of course, I had no right to interfere; yet, knowing as I did that Fergusson had a large sum of money with him, in bills at sight on London, I made bold to ask if Mr. Saunders was an *old* friend of his.

“‘No,’ he replied, ‘he is a new friend; but, I am sure, a true one. I never saw him to my knowledge till on our voyage out to Jamaica. I say to my knowledge,’ added Mr. Fergusson, ‘for I often fancy that I have seen or met with him somewhere many years ago. As he, however, has not the slightest recollection of me personally, it is, I dare say, merely fancy on my part.’”

“Go on, captain,” said Mr. Cumming.

“Well, I thought Mr. Fergusson’s health—his bodily health, that is—seemed to be in some degree benefited by the voyage, though his mind seemed to be totally unhinged. At last, after a fine run, which brought us within three or four days of the Downs, a sudden and violent change of weather took place, we were driven out of our course, and finally wrecked upon the west coast of Ireland. The night when the catastrophe occurred was a black and bitter one; there was little, in fact, no chance of a boat reaching the shore in safety through the raging sea and surf; and I exhorted the passengers to stick by the ship, at all events, till daylight. But terror never reasons, or listens to reason. The lights on shore looked to be no further off than one might chuck a biscuit; and a number of the passengers, amongst them Mr. Fergusson, fiercely insisted that a boat should be lowered, in which they might, at least, make an attempt to reach the shore, rather than remain to await certain death in the stranded Europa. I was busy in another part of the ship, but the first mate unfortunately yielded to their importunities. A boat was with great difficulty lowered, and into it—God knows how!—dropped or tumbled seven panic-stricken passengers; the boat was cast off, capsized before you could count twenty, and all the seven perished miserably.

“Saunders had resolutely declined accompanying his friend, Fergusson, in the boat. He was, as I have said before, though dressed landsman fashion and calling himself one, an unmistakable seaman, and consequently knew better. Well, to make this part of the story as short as possible, most of those who stuck by the wreck were got off in safety the next morning, the hurricane having by that time sensibly abated. Among those saved was Saunders, and he took off with him, secured in an oil-skin waterproof bag, which he had belted on at the first appearance of real danger—at the request, mind you, of Fergusson, made in my hearing—the papers and other property, securities for money, he himself told me, that had belonged to Fergusson. During the day,” added Captain Hardman, “the body, amongst others, of poor Fergusson was washed ashore, identified by me and others, and, as soon as possible, interred. Saunders started all the morrow for London. And this, Mr. Cumming and Mr. Detective Waters, is all I know of the matter.”

“Have the money securities intrusted to Saunders been handed over by that person to the deceased gentleman’s agents?”

“Yes, oh yes!” said Mr. Cumming, “and that with the greatest promptitude and completeness. There is no suspicion of fraud in that direction. Mr. Saunders must have also posted without delay a brief letter, written by Fergusson to his wife, when the writer was in apprehension of almost immediate death. That letter, brief as it was, revealed to the distressed and astonished lady the cause of the strange conduct on her husband’s part which had so puzzled and grieved her. Whilst in London he met, by the merest accident, with his first wife—alive! The account of her death, easily inserted in the Liverpool paper upon payment of the usual charge, had been a mere device to obtain money. Possibly an ulterior purpose might even then have suggested itself to the conspirators.

“However that may be, the discovery was a dagger-stroke to Fergusson in his then enfeebled state of health.

“‘I have unwittingly done thee, dearest Julie,’ he wrote, ‘a cruel wrong, but in so far as it is possible to do so I have made amends. I, without an hour’s delay, directed a will to be prepared under the advice of eminent counsel, to whom all the circumstances were fully stated. The will, so prepared, was executed in duplicate, one copy of which thou hast’ —(the letter was written in French)—’in the sealed parcel; the other is in my possession. Thou wilt find that it leaves to Julie Le Maistre, reputed and supposed by me to be my lawful wife till the infamous deception practised upon me was discovered, all properties and moneys of which I should die possessed for her life, and at her death to her son James, my lawfully begotten son, as I had for many happy years believed.’ ‘The letter,” added Mr. Cumming, “advised the lady to apply to me in any difficulty that might arise; hence I am now here.”

“What, then, is the difficulty which I am to assist in overcoming? The will puts everything to rights, and claps, moreover, an extinguisher upon a surmise that was taking fast hold of my mind.”

“You have not yet heard all,” said Mr. Cumming. “No will has been found; no will was delivered up with the papers which Mr. Saunders brought on shore from the Europa. More—far more puzzling still—Mrs. *Julia* Fergusson, as we may for the nonce call her, found, upon opening the sealed parcel, that it contained nothing but blank paper.”

“The devil!”

“The devil—yes, and his angels to boot. It is certain, besides, that the said parcel has never been out of Mrs. Julia Fergusson’s possession—that the seals were intact when she broke them. Can you read us this riddle, Mr. Detective Waters?”

“Perhaps not; but we shall see. Of course the son by the first marriage has already claimed the property, as being the heir-at-law?”

“Yes; through Messrs. Smart and Figes, a highly respectable firm. His mother read the account of the death, by drowning, of James Fergusson, formerly of Clyde Cottage, near Glasgow, and since of Jamaica, in the newspapers.”

“Of course—of course. Could you, Captain Hardman, favor us with a description of Mr. Saunders? What kind of man is he personally?”

“Well, he is a tall man—five feet ten or eleven; has dark hair, tinged with grey; tanned, but once fair complexion; sharp gray eyes; and his age is, I should say, forty-five, or there-about.”

“And he who you are sure is a Scot and a seaman, you have reason to believe had known people in Scotland whom Fergusson once knew there, and is familiar with events with which Fergusson in his youth had been mixed up. Mr. Fergusson had also a dim notion that he had met Saunders somewhere some years before. Once only, I am pretty sure, and that once was when he surprised him in Glasgow with his wife, Mrs. Fergusson.”

“What the devil, Waters, do you mean?” shouted the Scottish lawyer, half springing from his chair, and glaring at me with distended eyes.

“My meaning is plain enough. This—that the description given of Saunders by Captain Hardman, looked at in connection with the other points indicated, spell Adam Ritchie, if there is any reliance to be placed upon circumstantial orthography.”

“By heaven, it may be, it may be so!” ejaculated Mr. Cumming. “There is a kind of likelihood about it. A Scot, a seaman, tall, the age too! Stop, we are too fast. What [conceivable] advantage could Adam Ritchie propose to himself in going out to Jamaica and returning with Mr. Fergusson? He could not surely foresee that the Europa would be wrecked, and Mr. Fergusson drowned?”

“No; but he would see, as plainly as Captain Hardman did, that Mr. Fergusson was dying. He knew that all he had to fear was a will; and had not fortune favored him as it has done, who shall say what desperate means he might not have resorted to for the compassing of his ends? Familiar confidential intimacy with Mr. Fergusson was everything with him.”

“Well, but Mr. Waters, supposing that Saunders, being Adam Ritchie, has purloined the copy of the will kept by Mr. Fergusson in his own possession, how, in the name of Beelzebub, could he abstract the copy said to be contained in the sealed parcel, which parcel had never left Mrs. Julia Fergusson’s hands, and the seals of which were intact when she opened it?”

“I have it here in my notes that the parcel was sent to Mrs. Julia Fergusson, as you call her, by Mr. Saunders: That worthy, of course, knew that the accompanying letter forbade her to open the parcel till after her husband’s death. Mr. Fergusson’s seal would be easily procurable by Saunders, and what then so easy as to open the parcel, substitute a blank paper for the will, remake and reseal the parcel? *Tut*, the whole thing is clear as daylight, always supposing Saunders to be Ritchie. The worst of it is that, if such be probably the fact, we shall be none the forwarder—in no better position than before.”

“Why not?—how not?”

“What will that fact, if it be one really, do for us? We shall be no nearer recovering the purloined will by proving that Adam Ritchie passed himself off to Mr. Fergusson as one Saunders.”

“True, true. What is your game, then? or have you none?”

“I don’t say that yet. I hardly need ask if Saunders has disappeared, or if Adam Ritchie shows himself.”

“Saunders is said to be gone abroad. Ritchie we had not thought of.”

“You have, I presume, obtained the heir-at-law’s private address?”

“He has taken up his quarters at the George and Blue Boar, Holborn. His mother and grandmother are both with him. Shall you call on them?”

“Not at present. It occurs to me that one or more of the trio must, ere this, have made the acquaintance of the police. I must inquire.”

I rose to go, Mr. Cumming not looking over pleased. The truth was, I had been bored quite as much as interested by his long, prolix narrative; and had the while, mechanically as it were, helped myself more freely than was my wont to the wine on the table. Hence my manner was not so subdued, so respectful as it might have been, and there was a crowing bounceableness in my enumeration of, and comments upon, the very obvious points of the case which he had strangely missed, that was in bad taste, taking into account our relative social positions, and certainly not habitual with me.

It was impossible to apologize in words; but as he was evidently very desirous of success in the business before us, one reason being, perhaps, that he had himself been duped by the newspaper artifice, I stayed my steps and said,

“I believe, sir, we shall be able to trip these people’s heels up yet. Ritchie, if he be Saunders—and I may, after all, be mistaken on that point—but if Ritchie be Saunders, and has purloined the will, he will hardly be such a fool as to place it out of his own power to *compel* the heir-at-law, over whom—whether his natural son or not—he has no legal control, to *share* Mr. Fergusson’s wealth with him. To hold that power he must keep the will safe, and in his own immediate custody, till the plunder is divided. There lies our best chance of success; and nothing he assured, sir, shall be wanting on my part to insure it.”

The cloud of offended self-love vanished as I spoke from the lawyer’s brow, and we parted excellent friends.

I was soon in possession of all comeatable facts in the family history of Mrs. Forsyth; but these were not of much importance. The first thing was to find Ritchie, and a pretty chase I was led in

the endeavor to do so. An emissary, as I afterwards knew, of Mrs. Forsyth, who early discovered who I was in search of, sent me off to Glasgow, furnished for a consideration, with the name of the street and the number of the house in which he was concealed. I returned from that fool's errand in no very amiable humor, the reader may be sure, but all the more thoroughly resolved to find my man if he was above ground. I had several chances in my favor. The heir-at-law, who had been drunk nearly ever since Messrs. Smart and Figs advanced the family money upon the succession which it seemed impossible to dispute, though kept strict guard over by his grandmother, more than once gave her the slip, and was cautiously tracked to various places. Nothing, however, came of it. I persevered, nevertheless, and the more hopefully after ascertaining, as I did beyond a doubt, that Ritchie had called upon Mrs. Forsyth and his reputed son on the very day that "Saunders" reached London from the Galway coast. At last I discovered that Mrs. Forsyth had once or twice rose up at dawn of day, and quietly left the hotel, closely wrapped up, when no one but the night-porter was about, a dull fellow who had not noticed the circumstance, or at all events had not spoken of it. A few days only elapsed before I knew that Mrs. Forsyth's early visits were made at a shoemaker's in Castle Street, Leicester Square, one Parsons, a simple fellow, whom I happened to know very well. I sent for Parson's to a tavern in the neighborhood, and was readily supplied with all the information he could give me. He said there was a lodger in his house, who had been there for about four weeks, and called himself Bradley. He paid his way honestly, and never went out except in the evening, to smoke his pipe at the Shoulder of Mutton, an out-of-the-way public-house, not far from Newport Market. Latterly he had only been visited once or so in the week, and desperate early in the morning, by an elderly female; but when he first came to lodge there a stout, boisterous young fellow used to come with the said elderly female, and precious rows there used to be with them—all about money, as well as he could make out.

"Once," added Parsons, "once they both came in the evening when Bradley was out, marched into his room, and turned everything in it topsy-turvy, ransacked the bedding, searched under the bedstead, and on the top of the tester, looked up and poked up the chimney, and turned all the drawers out. I was watching them, you must know, from a convenient peeping-hole, as I didn't know but what they meant to walk off with something. They didn't however, and at last went away, growling like hungry bears. When Bradley came home, of course I told him of the game his friends or relations, or whatever they were, had been playing upstairs; and, if you'll believe me, he fell a laughing fit to bust himself for ever so long, to think, he said, how nicely they had been disappointed. I don't exactly like such goings on," concluded Parsons, "and only that Bradley pays regular, and is freeish with his money, I should soon give him notice to quit."

If Bradley was Ritchie and Saunders, the case was now clear enough. That point was settled by procuring Mr. Cumming and Captain Hardman a private peep at the gentleman as he, in serene mood, sat smoking in the parlor of the Shoulder of Mutton public-house. Bradley was Saunders, and Saunders was Ritchie: there was no further question of that.

What should be the next step? Or rather, how should it be taken? Where did Ritchie keep the will, which I had not the faintest doubt he had purloined, and was holding *in terrorem* over the heir-at-law and his avaricious grandame? Not at his lodgings, as his mocking hilarity when he heard of the unsuccessful search testified. Yet he went nowhere, except to the Shoulder of Mutton public-house, and it was altogether unlikely that he would part for a moment with the

actual possession of such an important instrument. The only conclusion I could therefore come to was, that he must have it concealed about his person—sewed up, probably, beneath the lining of the rough coat he wore.

Ay, but how to ascertain if my surmise was correct or not? No magistrate would listen for a moment to an application for a warrant to arrest and search a man upon such altogether conjectural evidence as I could offer. Time pressed, too, as Messrs. Smart and Figes were rapidly pushing on proceedings, and it was impossible to dispute that the claimant was the true heir-at-law. But one alternative presented itself; and after consulting with Mr. Cumming, and obtaining his written undertaking to hold me and others harmless in respect of damages in any action for assault and battery, false imprisonment, &c., that might be brought against us, it was put in practice.

The thing was easily done. Two or three minutes after he emerged from the Shoulder of Mutton, Ritchie, *alias* Saunders, was run violently against by a respectably dressed man, who instantly collared him, and shouted, “Police! Police!” with all his power of lungs. I and another officer were up directly, and the respectably dressed stranger roundly charged Ritchie with an attempt to rob him of his watch, which, in fact, was dangling outside the fob, as if the effort to snatch it away had failed. Of course there was nothing for it but to walk accused and accuser off to the nearest station-house.

Arrived there, Ritchie, whom the preposterous charge had so utterly confounded, stunned, that he had not uttered a syllable since it was made, suddenly found his tongue, and, not satisfied with hurling volley after volley of abuse at the accuser, fiercely attempted to fight his way out. This, of course, did not help him in the opinion of the inspector. The charge was regularly entered, signed by Charles Jones, 18 York Street, Pimlico, and Adam Ritchie was a legally constituted prisoner.

The decisive business of searching was next to be gone through; and Ritchie, who, finding violence of no avail, had sullenly calmed down, himself turned out his pockets. When, however, I, suddenly pressing my hands upon his back, and feeling the crumple of parchment, exclaimed, “All right—here is Mr. Fergusson’s missing will!” he dropped without a word upon the floor, as if smitten down by a thunderbolt!

The will recovered, and probate obtained thereon, Julie Le Maistre and her friends were quite satisfied, and refused to prosecute Ritchie. They were, of course, naturally averse to its being blown abroad that she had not been, however blamelessly on her part, the legal wife of Mr. Fergusson, whose name she therefore continued to bear.

Upon stricter inquiry, it was found that Mrs. Forsyth’s daughter was free from complicity in Ritchie’s last crime, and that she had steadily refused, since she left Scotland, to have any acquaintance with him. At Mr. Cumming’s suggestion, a moderate annuity was settled upon her by the lucky legatee, and it was determined to provide in some way for the boy. I have never heard what ultimately became of him or of Mrs. Forsyth. Ritchie emigrated, I was told, to Australia. Possibly they went with him.

The Diary of a Detective Police Officer, 1864