

Murder Will Out

by John Ross Dix

“DID I ever tell you about that curious murder in Bermondsey, and how I found out all about it—ay, and nabbed the criminals into the bargain?”

“No,” replied I; “but 'twas a singular affair, so far as I am acquainted with the particulars.”

“I should say it mi—much more curious than half the stories you read in papers and magazines. Lord bless you, sir! We detectives see so many things in our line of business, that we could furnish a dozen story-tellers with better materials than they could trump up, if they harassed their brains till doomsday.”

“No doubt,” I observed; “but suppose we have these glasses filled—and then, perhaps, you'll tell me all about the matter. What will you take?”

“Wall, sir, I'll have a little gin and water. I've to see a lady respecting a jewel robbery, this evening, and so must not take anything stronger—d'ye see * But, Lor' bless you! There *are* times when I'm obliged to drink grog by the painful. I've got to accommodate myself to all sorts of company.”

The speaker was Mr. Digg, a member of the London detective force. Never mind how I got to know him; enough to say that we were on pretty intimate terms, and that we were cosily sitting together in my apartment at the Golden Cross—Charing Cross. Mr. Digg was a middle-sized, sharp-faced man, with a keen gray eye that seemed to take in everything at a glance. Nothing was too small to escape his notice, and no Indian ever surpassed him in the perseverance and certainty with which he would follow up a trail when he had once “struck “it.

“One morning,” said the detective, “just as I was about sitting down to an early breakfast, congratulating myself on having a day of rest— for I had only come home from the North the evening before—a messenger from the chief of our division walked into my room, and said I was wanted immediately at head quarters.

“Do you know what's up, Grawler” I asked; for Grawler was a special messenger, and in most of the secrets of our department.

“It's about O'Connor,' he replied, sententiously; ' those Bermondsey birds have flown.'

“That's just what I expected. Tell Mr. File that I'll be with him in half an hour—stay, I'll go with you, Grawler!’ And off I went.

“My wife was too much used to this sort of thing, to express surprise or disappointment; besides, it was all in the way of business, and business that paid well, too.

“Some six weeks before, a Mr. Patrick O'Connor, who was employed as a custom-house officer in the London Docks, was suddenly won est. He was a man of some fifty-two or three years of age, and of penurious habits. He had therefore acquired considerable property, which was invested in stocks and bonds; and being a bachelor, he lived by himself, in a single room, at the eastern part of the metropolis. Here he was often visited by a Mrs. Manning, a Swiss by birth, a dashing, showy woman—the wife of a man who had formerly been a large hotel keeper in the west of England. Manning and his wife resided in a small house in Bermondsey, some four miles from O'Connor's lodgings, and there the latter often visited them—people said for the purpose of seeing the lady—indeed, no one doubted that an improper intimacy existed between them, and that Mr. Mauling himself was privy to it.

“The day Mr. O'Connor was missed, he told his landlady that he was going to dine from home, but did not say where. He left his lodgings at about four in the afternoon, and not returning that night, or the next day, alarm was excited. A week passed, and a reward was offered for his discovery, dead or alive, but not the slightest trace of him could be discovered.

“The matter was placed in my hands when a fortnight had elapsed without any tidings of the missing man. I visited his lodgings, and examined everything and everybody, but could discover no clue. His drawers and boxes were all fastened with patent locks, and there was not the slightest appearance of their having been tampered with; so it was not deemed necessary to open and examine their interiors. Indeed, had I done so, not knowing what they usually contained, I could not tell what might have been abstracted. My next step was to find out what places O'Connor was in the habit of frequenting. He was too stingy to drink ; so he was not likely to visit public houses. He did not care for amusements—in short, he never expended a penny for anything unnecessary. So said Mrs. Towler, his landlady, who had, however, a great respect for her lodger, who was, she said, ' the most punctual gentleman she had ever seen. His rent was always paid to the day, sir—yes, I might say to the minute. And as for giving away anything, sir,' she added, 'Lord bless yer, I never know'd him part with the valley of a brass garden—yes, I remember he did make a present, once, to that nasty trollop, of a black satin gown.’”

“I pricked up my ears at that, but said nothing.”

“A great brazen-faced creature,' went on the indignant Mrs. Towler; 'the only fault poor O'Connor had was being too fond of her, and siie a married woman. Why, she was here the very day as Mr. O'Connor was missed—not an hour after he went out of the house.’”

“O ho!' thought I; ' it is possible that this woman may be in some way or other mixed up in the matter. It will do no harm to see her, at all events.’”

“So ascertaining her address, I at once went off to Bermondsey, which is a great district of the metropolis, not far from London Bridge. This, let it be remembered, was about a week after O'Connor was first missing.

“I found the house of Mrs. Manning without difficulty. It stood in about the center of a small row of some twelve or fourteen, all similar to it in appearance. It was only two stories high, with a basement. In front, was a small, neatly-furnished parlor; behind it, a back parlor, looking into a garden ; and up stairs, were two bed-rooms. The basement consisted of a front and a back kitchen, which were both reached by a flight of stairs leading from the entrance passage. The back kitchen was furnished as a sort of half-parlor, and in it, when they had no company, Mr. and Mrs. Manning took their meals.

“In fact, they were dining in this particular apartment when I paid my first visit to them—or rather tee, for I took Mr. Grawler with me for the sake of company. The front door was opened by a tall, fine, rather foreign-looking woman, who on my saying that I had called to make some inquiries about Mr. O'Connor, invited me, in a slightly foreign accent, to enter. She led us along the passage to the staircase, and we followed her into the back kitchen, in the centre of which was a table, with a fine roast goose thereon, and a gentleman, whom she introduced to me as her husband, busy picking a merry-thought.

“Begging her to resume her seat and continue her meal, which she did, I took a chair near the fire, refusing, as did Grawler, to join them in dispatching the goose. I thought Grawler looked very anxious to partake of one of the drumsticks, but he quietly followed my example and declined.

“Poor dear Mr. O'Connor !' said Mrs. Manning, applying her white cambric handkerchief to the corner of her eye. ' He was to have dined with us the very day he went off. We waited dinner for him till seven o'clock, and then I went in a carriage to his lodgings to see what had become of him.'

“And have you any idea, madam, where he went off to?” I inquired.

“Not the least, sir; it's a most mysterious affair. But he was an eccentric creature, and had some relations in Ireland. Maybe hate gone there.”

“I'll bet ten pounds he has!” said Mr. Manning, speaking for almost the first time.

“He was a rakish-looking man”, with a broad, open, fair-complexioned face, and flaxen, curly hair—what some women would call good-looking, but with what I called a weak expression. In this, he was the very opposite of his wife, who had a bold, determined face; indeed, altogether she resembled, as I afterwards thought, a Lady Macbeth in present life.”

“He was a particular friend of *yours*, madam?” I asked, quietly.

“I glanced at Manning, and saw that he winced. She, however, looked me boldly in the face, and said: ‘Yes, a particular friend of *ours*; and we feel very uneasy respecting him.’

“No doubt of it, ma'am,' I said; but I did not at that time know how near I was to the truth, nor the particular sort of uneasiness she experienced.

“After a little more talk, Grawler and I left. Pretending to want to make a short cut, I asked permission to go out through the back door of the garden. Mr. Manning led the way cheerfully, and I purposely delayed for a few moments, asking some useless questions. My real object was to see if there was any appearance of the ground having been disturbed; but no! It had evidently been as it was for months. The place was utterly neglected, and overgrown with weeds. There were plenty of empty beer and porter bottles, but no flowers. A glance at Mr. Manning's eyes told me plainly enough who had consumed the contents of those vessels. He had evidently, too, been drinking something much stronger than beer, of late, for his hand was tremulous, and his eye had that glaring expression which ardent spirit alone causes.

“There's a petticoat at the bottom of this business,' I said to my wife, when I returned home. ' I'll bet my life of it, though I can't see anything clear as yet.”

“Mrs. Digg looked daggers at me and said:

“Men always supposed women were at the end of all mischief. I wonder you ever ventured to marry one,” she added.

“There are exceptions to every rule, my dear,” I observed. And what with a kiss, and a little soft sawder????????????, I made all things smooth again.

“Now when Grawler came in while we were at breakfast, as I have told you, and said the Bermondsey birds had flown, I looked triumphantly at Mrs. Digg; for I was sure I had got some sort of a clue of which M». Manning was one end. She, however, merely lifted her head, as much as to say, 'you're a mighty cute fellow, in your own opinion!' I didn't stay to argue the point with her, but putting on a suit of plain clothes, started for head quarters.'

“Digg,' said Mr. File, on my arrival (Mr. File was our superior in office—and a deep file he was, I can tell you),' Digg, here's as pretty a job for you as you could take in hand. The Mannings have gone off suddenly, leaving their house shut up, without saying anything to anybody, and no one knows where to. *We* must know, however, and you must find out. In two hours time, a large reward for the discovery of O'Connor will be offered ; but the first thing to do, is to go with Grawler and search the house, and leave a guard of three policemen there, and the next thing to be done, is to search O'Connor's lodgings thoroughly for letters and papers, or for any traces of this mysterious matter. There's now no doubt that the Mannings know something about the affair; for, if they were not implicated, why this mysterious departure? However, the matter is now placed in your hands, and I need not say if you succeed in your investigation, you will be well rewarded. Here are the search-warrants; so now be off without loss of time.' And Mr. File bowed me out.'

“Now, Grawler,' said I, ' that these people are off, there's no doubt; but that they have both gone in the same direction, is by no means probable. Together, they could scarcely fail to be recognized ; apart, they might avoid being known. Now go at once and

telegraph to all the sea-ports marked in this card these descriptions, which I have written out, of their persons, and then we'll take Bloker and Sawbridge and go down to the Bermondsey house. Meet me at my house in two hours from now, without fail.'

“When we got to the late residence of the Mannings, we learned from the neighbors that the pair had suddenly departed the night before, their flight having been discovered by the man who brought their milk in the morning. We soon opened the front door, and excluding the curious mob which had now gathered, commenced a still more careful survey of the premises than hail yet been made.

“Upstairs and down stairs, from the cellar to the garret, in cupboards and under staircases, beneath the roof, and in out-houses—in short, everywhere we searched, but found nothing. The furniture remained just as the owners had left it, and as though they might soon return to use it once more. All looked natural, and only the absence of the tenants was suspicious. In short, having found nothing, we went away to search Mr. O'Connor's room.

“On opening his drawers and chests, nothing that we could see had been disturbed ; his clothes lay all in order, his account-books were undisturbed, and with the exception that no money was found, there was nothing whatever to lead me to suppose that he had been robbed. All at once I remembered Mrs. Towler had told me that Mrs. Manning had been there on the day O'Connor went away, and I once more questioned her.

“Mrs. Towler, when did you last see Mrs. Manning?”

“She came here the evening of the day Mr. O'Connor left; and when I told her he was from home, she said she would, as she usually did on such occasions, wait in his room and see if he would arrive soon. She staid by herself for an hour or more, and then rang the bell. I answered it, and found her sitting by the fire. She said she would not wait any longer, but asked me to beg Mr. O'Connor to call on her to-morrow, as she was very uneasy, behaving promised to dine with her that day, but had failed to keep his appointment. She then went away.”

“Here was a hint, at least. Mrs. Manning had held possession of the room for an hour, and no money nor securities—and it was known O'Connor held many of the latter—were to be found. I turned the matter over and over in my head, and that night but little sleep visited my pillow.”

"Upon what trifles important events sometimes hinge. That evening, when I returned home, weary and disappointed, I flung myself on the sofa ; and as my wife had been perusing Bulwer's novel of Eugene Aram—indeed, had it at the moment in her hand—I asked her to divert my thoughts a little by reading a few pages aloud. It chanced to be that part where the bones of Clark were discovered in St. Robert's Cave, where they had been buried.

“By Jove!” I exclaimed, a sudden idea striking me; 'we never dug in the garden. I'll try that the first thing in the morning.'

“And sending to Grawler and the two other men to be at my house by seven o'clock, I retired for the night, but as I have intimated, not to sleep.

“As soon as the men came next morning, we were off once more to the house at Bermomlsey, which had been carefully watched night and day ever since the departure of the Mannings. We commenced the search, and dug every foot of the garden over; but not a trace of anything suspicious. In one corner were some pieces of unslacked lime, but at the time so ordinary a matter did not excite any attention. Grawler, however, looked about to see if any building had been going on, but could observe no traces of brick or stone. He had been once a working mason, and the idea of looking for such things was natural enough to him. Now, strange as it may seem, those few broken bits of quicklime led to a very important discovery,

“Men in our business are constantly on the look-out for what other people might consider as mere trifles ; but trifles put and fitted together, become great matters now and then. Grawler, though he would have been a fool at book learning, had a mighty active and practical mind of his own ; and though he said nothing, that lime haunted him, as he afterwards said. He couldn't tell why, but he felt sure it meant *something*; and as you will presently see, it did.

“We determined to make another search over the house, and commenced with the basement. Grawler looked up the chimneys to see if *they* had been repaired; but no. Then we threw open the shutters and examined the walls minutely, to see if there were blood marks, or traces of struggles; but, Lord bless you ! The ' Happy Family' itself may have lived there, for anything we found to the contrary. Then we went up stairs, and in brief, we searched and searched until we all agreed that nothing more was to be discovered, and that we might as well give it over.

“We were just leaving the basement, having gone down stairs to close the shutters, when I happened to say :

“Well, Grawler, I shouldn't mind a slice of a goose now, like that which Mr. and Mrs. Manning was picking, when we called here, you remember.”

“Remember? Of course I do. He sat here, and she opposite to him; and hang me if there ain't some of the gravy marks on the stone floor now!”

“What! Are you going to lick it up?” I said, as Grawler went suddenly down on his knees and put' his nose close to the square stone

“It *aint* gravy,' observed Grawler, quietly, as he took from his pocket a pen-knife and inserted the blade between the interstices of two large square flat stones. “It aint grease, it's soft mortar; *and that accounts for the lime?*”

“He jumped up, like a man mad with excitement, and called for a crowbar.”

“No mason ever laid this!” he said, as he raised the flag stone with the powerful implement. “Look here! A man who's used to this sort of business would only put mortar round the *edges*; here is a thick bed of fresh mortar all *under* the stone.”

“It was so. Grawler's keen eye had seen the dark line between the flags, the cement not having dried—the mark which I had mistaken for a gravy streak. He fairly had the laugh of me.”

“We quickly and cautiously dug down for three feet, and then came to a button and some bits of cloth. On removing another foot of earth, there, sure enough, was the body of Mr. O'Connor doubled up, with a great hole in his skull, made evidently by a ball. The weapon, whatever it was, must have been fired close to his head, for his gray hair and whiskers were singed by the explosion.

“It was no wonder Mrs. Manning should have said she was very uneasy respecting Mr. O'Connor, when I saw her and her husband eating roast goose over the grave their murderous hands had dug for him.

“The murder was now literally out; the body was identified, as Dr. Parkman's in Boston, partly by some artificial teeth, and a reward of five hundred pounds offered for the arrest of the Mannings.”

“Three days after the reward had been offered, intelligence was telegraphed from Edinburgh that a Mrs. Smith had disposed of certain railway scrip to a broker there, and was to call on the said broker with some more. She answered to Mrs. Manning's description. That night I went to Scotland, and by next day, at noon, Mrs. Manning was on her way back to London under my care. She asserted that her husband had done the deed, and compelled her to act as an accessory after the fact. Of course, I didn't believe *that*.

“A fortnight elapsed, and Mr. Manning managed to elude all our vigilance, though the reward was doubled. One evening, the post brought me a letter from a young woman, who described herself as a governess. She said she had known Manning when he kept a tavern in the west of England, and had seen him, or some one very much like him, on board a steamboat which plied between Southampton and Jersey— one of the group of Channel Islands between England and France. She had accosted[^] him, but he had denied his being the man she took him for; but spite of his false whiskers and wig, she had no doubt he was the individual.

“On this hint, I acted. Taking Grawler with me, we went down in the night train to Southampton, and caught the morning boat for Jersey. Of course, we were disguised—I as a sporting gent, and Grawler as my livery servant.”

“Arrived at Jersey, we kept our eyes open, I assure you. We soon became certain our man was not at the hotel, and next turned our attention to the lodging houses. With gun on shoulder, and a fine brace of dogs, Grawler and I strolled about, looking for other game than people supposed, but all to no purpose; no Mr. Manning was visible, and we, of course, did not inquire for him.”

“It's no go,” I said to Grawler, “we may as well go back in the next boat. By George! How thirsty this sport makes a fellow. Suppose we call at this cottage, and get a drink! Every one keeps good French brandy in Jersey, where it isn't taxed.”

“It *is* capital tippie,” I said to the woman who provided us with the liquor; “I never tasted better. I suppose that plenty of it is drank hereabouts.”

“Yes; but mostly by strangers,” replied the woman. “Why, there's a gentleman lodging over at Mrs. Bowlegs who takes a matter of a bottle full a day! He has his liquor, they say, in his bed-room, and never goes out at all. They assert he's half crazy, already!”

“Visit a fashionable watering-place and never go out” I thought. “That's strange! And then perpetually drinking! That's strange, too! Remorse, perhaps.”

“I made some cautious inquiries of different people, and little by little wormed out that the stranger, whoever he was, was well armed; that he never ventured to the hotel, nor the pier; and that he always kept his room door locked, only unfastening it to take in his supplies of brandy. He even made his own bed and emptied his own slops.”

“I found out, also, that he sent the last thing in the evening his bottle to be filled for the night's supply—the messenger being a little girl. My object was to intercept this child, and learn all I could. I did so; and without being suspected, ferreted out enough to make me certain the man was the person I sought, and I took measures accordingly.”

“The next night, having secured the assistance of the local police, Grawler and I, with two other men, went well armed to the house where he lodged. The woman of the house was retained in our interest. Our plan was to conceal ourselves in the dark passage outside his room, and when the girl came back with the bottle of liquor, to burst in upon him suddenly when he might be off his guard.”

“That night, however, half insensible and in fancied security, he did not open the door himself, but cried, 'come in!' when the girl rapped. She entered, and so did we. The moment I got inside, I saw him lying on the bed with his back towards me. In a second I had leaped on him, clasped him in my arms as in a vice, and Grawler clapped the handcuffs on his wrists before one could say 'Jack Robinson.’”

“I never saw a man so cowed in all my life. He literally whimpered; and instead of showing a bold and defiant front like his wife, he sniveled and swore that she did the deed, and threatened to serve him the same, if he didn't aid her in disposing of the body.”

“The facts of the case came out afterwards. When O'Connor arrived at the house of the murderess to dinner, Mrs. Manning persuaded him to go out into the basement to wash his hands. She followed him, and shot him from behind as he descended. Her husband and herself had previously dug the grave in which we found him. The moment he was dead, she rifled his pocket of his keys and went off to his lodgings, where, being left alone, she opened his drawers and stole all the money and securities they contained. She then returned to the house, and found her husband in the garden, smoking; he had not dared to stay alone in the house with the corpse. Together they buried the poor victim—and the rest, you know.”

“Well, sir, the precious pair were tried and sentenced to be hanged. On their way to the gallows, in consequence of some repairs in the principal corridor of the prison, the procession was compelled to take a round-about way and pass through the prison yard. In that yard, their grave was dug; but that fact had escaped the notice of the prison officers. When the Mannings, husband and wife, came to their ready-made grave, a plank was thrown across it for them to pass over on ; and I saw them give each other a look full of terrible meaning for me. You see, sir, they ate and drank over their victim's grave, and now they were obliged to walk over their own! Curious—wasn't it, sir t And another singular thing was, she was hanged in the very black satin gown which Mr. O'Connor had given to her.”

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