

The Pond House

J.W. Watson

FORTY years ago I was placed as junior clerk in the house of Ayerigg and Co., who will be well remembered as leading merchants of the time. The first year of my service with the house was marked by an incident, so strongly fastened on my memory, productive of such great consequences to all concerned, and so powerfully recurring tonight, that I shall use my sleepless hours in putting upon paper what comes up in my brain with the vividness of yesterday.

My fellow clerks were Jared Palmer and Wilson Elliott. Two men more entirely dissimilar in style and habit it would be impossible to find, and yet these two were the firmest friends—more, I may say, like brothers than otherwise. Palmer was the eldest. He was of a quiet, undemonstrative manner; more given to musing absent-mindedness than any other peculiarity—laughing seldom, and apparently enjoyed a silent sociality with more relish than scenes of merriment and pleasure. We spoke of Palmer as of one who was destined for success as a merchant. He was careful, and attentive to duty; and was generally supposed to save a large part from his salary of \$500 per annum— a salary which in those days was liberal for a young man.

Elliott, on the contrary, was loose and lavish in his expenditure. He was a gay, handsome fellow, loved dress, and dressed well. His joyous disposition never led him into dissipation by wine or by dissolute companions. When Elliott overreached his income it was never from these causes, but rather from extravagance in dress, or an outlay that his means did not warrant, in order to shine in female society. His salary was the same as Palmers, and yet many times I have known him, as the month was approaching its completion, and pay-day yet some distance away, to borrow of his more saving associate such sums as were necessary to meet casual expenditures until he was again in funds. Whatever Elliott's shortcomings were in this respect, he never failed to pay, and his duties in the counting-house were quite as rigorously performed as Palmers, and certainly with more rapidity and brilliancy.

A short time after my debut with Ayerigg and Co. there was a rumor got about the establishment that Mr. Bennett, our book-keeper, would soon retire from that post to become a member of the firm. This rumor was of little consequence to any except Palmer and Elliott, who had each been a number of years with the firm, and looked forward to the truth of the rumor as something that would certainly lead to the promotion of one of them. These rumors after a time strengthened into certainty; and it was well known that, in accordance with the policy of the house, one of these two would be called within a year to occupy the post to be vacated by Mr. Bennett, with its salary of \$1600 per annum. This had become a matter of frequent conversation between us, and I am entirely convinced that when it was first known as a certainty there was not the slightest feeling of jealousy between Jared Palmer and Wilson Elliott for its possession. Each spoke openly of his hope that he might be selected for the vacancy, when it should occur, but each as candidly admitted that, should the choice fall upon the other, the unsuccessful one would rejoice in his good fortune, with the entire confidence that it only interfered with his onward progress in the world for a short time, and that Messrs. Ayerigg and Co. would see that neither suffered by the good fortune of the other.

It was early in the spring-time—about the time of first flowers, and birds, and of city people feeling a strong desire for a day's fishing, a ride into the country, or some momentary freedom from the tedious monotony of mechanical life. We—that is, Palmer, Elliott, and myself—took a single day from our desks for a breath of fresh air. In those days there was no dashing off a hundred miles before breakfast, and back at night, by rail. We were obliged to be content with a carriage and horses to carry us half a score of miles, where we threw a line for a few fish; ate a quiet, wholesome dinner at some wayside tavern; and returned refreshed in the evening from the excursion. I am not sure but it was a better way than they have now of making a toil of one's pleasure by going too far and too fast. We had run down to our agreed-upon destination, stabled our horses, eaten some natural bread and milk, and, in accordance with our programme, were throwing our lines rather successfully in a beautiful bit of water called Cazneau's Pond, and pulling some rather nice trout, considering we were only city fishermen. It seems always to be my luck, whenever upon a rural excursion, to meet with some accident; and upon this occasion I was not behind my usual fortune. An enthusiastic remark of Elliott's respecting a lady on the shore caused me to turn suddenly in the boat, and see, as I disappeared under the engulfing waters, a quick vision of a beautiful girl, mounted on horseback, motionless, within twenty yards of where we lay, and apparently watching our fishing. As soon as my head came above water I was dragged by my laughing companions, spitting and sputtering, into the boat, with the continuation of my vision before me joining my friends most heartily in their mirth at my dripping and dejected appearance. She rode forward to the edge of the pond, and pointing to a pretty brown house standing a few rods distant, invited us to walk up, where a fire would restore me to my original state of comfort. I had no fault to find with the invitation; it was given very cordially and very prettily; but with a memory of the laugh to which the wicked little creature had yielded but a few moments before, I was in favor of walking back a mile to the inn, and there finding the necessary element she had offered. In this I was overruled by my companions, each of whom seemed to look upon my accident as a peculiarly fortunate thing, which would allow them a chance for closer acquaintance with the fair equestrian.

The result was, that in a few minutes I was consigned to the care of Terry, the old and faithful negro man—one of that race we learned to respect, but which have now passed away; and in lieu of a suit of dry clothes I was wrapped in a profusion of warm, clean blankets, while Terry attended to the rapid drying of my own. From him I learned where I was, and all things necessary to allay my curiosity. The house, the hospitality of which I was the recipient, was the Pond House, once the residence of Stephen Cazneau, who was deceased; his widow, with her only daughter, Miss Florence Cazneau, the lady by whose invitation I was being dried and warmed, and their servants, were the only occupants. I could hear occasionally from where I sat the laugh of Miss Florence, and that of Elliott; and then I listened, a little interested, to the voice of Miss Florence singing to the accompaniment of a harp; and a few moments after a little jealously to that of Elliott doing the same to the guitar. It was very clear that they were making the best of their time, and that very pleasantly, while I was recovering the results of my dive.

When, by the assistance of Terry, I was sufficiently renovated to make my appearance in the parlor, I found that an acquaintance had been awakened with more than ordinary quickness by the accidental discovery, on the part of Madame Cazneau, that the mother of Palmer had been an old and very dear friend of her own, in long past time. This had at once opened in the old lady's heart a claim on her consideration that no casual accident could have accomplished; and when I

made my appearance I had nothing left but to assent to the arrangements, which were, that instead of dining at the inn, we were to dine with her and Miss Florence. Terry, in the meanwhile, was to bring over our horses; and, when the time of departure came, it could be taken from the Pond House as well.

A very pleasant day we spent. There was something about Florence Cazneau that left me, when the evening closed in, very much of the opinion that the Pond House was about the most desirable place on earth; and when next day Elliott confided to me, at a moment we were alone, a series of the most heart-rending and enthusiastic raptures on the same subject, declaring that he should make full use of this invitation to Pond House, and win its fair occupant, I could not blame him, though a pang of fear shot through my own breast lest he should.

I noticed from that day forth that Palmer was still more given to his silent, moody way; that whenever Elliott, as was almost his hourly custom, spoke of our day at the Pond House, and of Florence Cazneau, his mouth would contract, and a hard grayness would set about his face. He would speak of her but seldom, and then only when we were alone together, avoiding studiously any chance of conversation on the subject with Elliott. I knew from all this that Jared Palmer loved Florence Cazneau also, and I pitied him when I thought of the rival with whom he had to contend, and of the terrible effect that a want of success would have on a disposition like his. I had not long to wait that I might see the result of this love on both. As the weeks passed over, the two, who had but a short time before been so friendly, became cold and distant. From the lips of Palmer I learned nothing. Whatever of success or failure he met with in his wooing his lips were closed as the grave, and no indication met my eyes, only that hard, deathly look, whenever I sought, through curiosity or other cause, to draw from him any expression concerning Florence, or of Elliott and his success.

Elliott was different. With him there was nothing secretive. One day he was in a flurry of hope. He had spent the previous evening at Pond House. He had been received with coldness by Madame Cazneau; she favored Palmer; but Florence had confessed her love, and bade him hope in the coming time.

“All depends,” he said, “now upon one thing.”

“And that—” I asked, “is—?”

“How can you ask? You must know that my success depends on my obtaining the vacancy when it occurs. Ah! pray for my realization of it.”

This startled me rather unpleasantly. I had heard no expression on either side of late regarding this point, though I ought to have been sure that the same feeling could not remain that once actuated them.

“And your success,” I said, “depends on your obtaining the situation?”

“Certainly it does, with Florence’s mother. Palmer has her favor, and should he find favor in the eyes of the firm, then I am lost. Florence herself is penniless if she marries without her mother’s consent.”

“Then if the house should confer the position on Palmer you mean to relinquish Florence?” I asked.

“Never! But I cannot bring the dear girl from her present position of plenty down to five hundred dollars a year, can I?”

“If she is willing.”

“For my sake she will do all things. But I cannot consent. And yet we cannot wait. Should Palmer obtain the preferment he will press his suit, and I must take Florence, to the sacrifice of all her hopes from her mother, or leave her subject to the persecutions of Palmer.

The entrance of Palmer closed this conversation; and this day I noticed these two men, as they took their seats on opposite sides of the great desk, raise for an instant their eyes to each other. That look remained fixed on my memory for years; and nothing through all the strange future could wear away the belief that in that one glance was centered the most deadly hate that man could bear against man, on the part of Palmer. With Elliott, it seemed more the flush of fierce indignation than any settled venom.

One morning, about a week after this, when I came into the office Mr. Ayerigg called me to his private room, and most unexpectedly announced to me, for I had no hope to that end, that I had been promoted to that desk vacated by Mr. Wilson Elliott, who had been placed in that of Mr. Bennett, that day made a partner in the firm of Ayerigg and Co. A flush of exultation passed over me at this intelligence—exultation as much brought forth at the success of Elliott as at my own advancement. On maturer thought a shade of pity for Palmer was mingled with joy for the decision; but when I considered that both could not be the fortunate one I felt sincerely happy that it had fallen to Elliott. When Elliott came down I saw him approach his desk, where a note was lying, which I knew communicated to him the fact of his appointment. I saw him take up the letter and look at the superscription, which in a moment, I could see by his countenance, he recognized as Mr. Ayerigg’s handwriting. He was deadly pale in an instant. He looked all around the office wildly, more particularly at Palmer, who, bent over the book in which he was writing, with white lips, and cramped fingers on the pen, seemed instinctively to know, without looking, all that was passing. Elliott gathered nothing, I am sure, from my countenance. I did not intend to interfere with the intelligence, as it would come to him through the letter he held in his hand. I watched him read it with eyes distended and lips wide apart, as though struggling for breath; and then, when he had drunk in every word as though it were life, I stepped toward him and grasped his hand. He staggered into my arms, and for a moment I thought was about to faint. There was not a word spoken, no sound, only the scratching of Palmer’s pen.

The moment that Elliott recovered his presence of mind he stepped rapidly from where I stood across the office, and before I divined his purpose had Palmer’s hand in his own. I say before I knew his purpose, though, had I known it, I would have offered no impediment, though I am

obliged to confess that the action sent through me one of the most unpleasant pangs. I had the memory of that look which only a week before had so impressed me. Palmer yielded his hand; and while Elliott's eyes were filled with tears a strange fire shot from Palmer's, a fire that seemed a show of pleasure, and yet—

“We are friends?” Elliott said.

“Yes.”

“Believe me, if there is any shadow over my path at this moment it is my success at your cost.”

“You have not succeeded in anything upon which I set value,” was Palmer's answer.

Was this so? I thought, and for an instant my belief was staggered by the coolness of the speaker. Elliott had the same thought passing through his mind; he questioned:

“Florence?”

“Miss Cazneau is one whom it is honorable to admire,” Palmer answered. “I admire her; but I knew long since that I had awakened no reciprocity in her. I had not to wait for my failure to secure the situation to renounce all hope of Miss Florence Cazneau.”

I was dumb. I was forced to believe, and yet these phrases were too well worded to entirely deceive. That they did Elliott I was sure. He held Palmer's hand still, grasping it tighter as he spoke.

A month went over. To all ordinary observers the old feeling between Elliott and Palmer was restored. To myself, who wished most to believe, there was something that hung like the sword of Damocles suspended by a hair; but what that something was, or how to detect or avoid it, I could not tell. Palmer showed no sign of the old feeling. I detected nothing of the old look. On the contrary, he smiled more than ever before; he talked more; there was certainly more anxiety on his part to act what is commonly termed “the agreeable” than I had previously noticed. I tried to argue with myself against my instincts, and term them prejudices. I tried to make myself believe that Palmer had seen how false his course was, even regarding it as a matter of policy to cherish animosity against one who had not injured him and who sought to be his friend. All this I plead in my own mind. But one single flash of memory, carrying me back to that day when I had watched the look upon Palmer's face, blotted away all my argument and brought back the shadow that would not be gone.

One morning I entered the office as usual. Elliott was absent. I inquired from Palmer, as I was opening my books carelessly, the cause of his absence. At first I did not look as the answer was given, but the strange huskiness of his voice attracted my attention, and I looked up. He was flushed and excited; he was generally pale under agitation. He pointed with his finger to the inner office.

“There is some trouble inside,” was his answer.

“Trouble?” And singularly my mind went immediately away from Elliott to Mr. Ayerigg, and visions of bankruptcy fluttered through my brain.

Palmer bent down over his books.

“Yes, trouble about some money—the safe has been robbed.”

“Robbed! Of what amount?”

“Twelve thousand dollars, they say. Elliott is inside.”

At this moment Mr. Bennett opened the door of the inner office and called my name. As I entered I noticed a stranger—a thick-set, red-faced, gray-eyed man, who looked quickly over me, and then drummed with his fingers on the edge of his chair and whistled under his breath. Mr. Bennett, as he motioned me to a chair, said,

“I have sent for you that you might tell Mr. Ayerigg as nearly as you remember the circumstances attending the deposit of the case of money in the safe last night. You and Mr. Elliott were both present, I believe?”

I complied with his request.

“The safe has been very singularly robbed;” he went on, in an explanatory way, “and we thought, perhaps, some little incident would strike your memory in connection with the closing and locking of it last evening that might have a bearing.”

I said that I had revolved the same idea instantly in my mind, but I could remember nothing different from the ordinary way.

“You knew, then, of the robbery?” Mr. Bennett said, looking at me.

“Yes. Mr. Palmer informed me this moment.”

“How much money did he say was taken?” said the strange man, speaking very quick.

“Twelve thousand dollars,” I answered.

A look passed between the stranger and Mr. Bennett which I did not understand, and Elliott and myself were dismissed. We went back to our desks silently, and that day there were less words spoken between us than usual, each perhaps revolving in his own mind the affair of the morning. In less than an hour the strange man passed out of Mr. Ayerigg’s office, stopping at Palmer’s desk as he went, and obtaining a bit of blank paper, which he stood carefully folding, and finally slipped in his pocket, all the while, as I imagined, taking a survey of Palmer, his desk, and all its belongings.

After this we heard more of the robbery. The money was principally in notes of the United States Bank, with some foreign gold. It had been received late in the afternoon of the day before, and counted by Mr. Bennett. The only ones who carried keys to the safe were himself and Elliott, the latter only since his promotion. The safe had not been broken; expert locksmiths had examined it and pronounced the lock right; and the conclusion was that it had been opened with a key. When this announcement was made my heart beat faster. I would not allow myself to entertain for a moment any feeling that pointed with suspicion toward Elliott. I only trembled when I thought how long it would take to scatter from men's minds the dumb spectres that would sit in watchfulness over him. All the police assistance of the city had been brought to bear on the robbery, but nothing was evolved; and as day by day went by hope of recovering the money was growing less, and the agitation caused by the loss was beginning to wear away. There was no theory, as far as we knew, that would lead to any clew.

So completely had the discovery of the robbery absorbed all other things for a while that Elliott and I had almost ceased to speak of Florence and his approaching marriage. I knew that its consummation had been postponed for some months under the imperative commands of Madame Cazneau, who had only given reluctant consent upon the entrance of Elliott to his new position, and the withdrawal of Palmer from all claims. She would not agree to the marriage of Florence until a year had passed, that Elliott might be enabled from his own pocket to place his wife in a home of her own. Elliott wrestled hard with this decision, and once or twice he was on the point of stating the case to Mr. Ayerigg and asking from that gentleman an advance upon his salary to overcome this difficulty. I persuaded him from such a course, but still he chafed under the restraint and spoke freely, both before Palmer and myself, of the poverty that delayed his happiness, declaring, at some unguarded moments, that he would sacrifice all hopes from the mother by marrying Florence, and leaving the home to come in its own good time.

One day, nearly two months after the robbery, I met Elliott upon the street. He had asked for and obtained a week's leave of absence, which time we supposed was to be spent at the Pond House with the Cazneaus. I was, therefore, rather surprised to see him, and still more so when he came toward me with out-stretched hands and a face covered with smiles. He had smiled so little of late that I could not but notice—his usually happy manner having changed into a fretful, querulous way. Now he seemed once more to be the old fun-loving Elliott.

"Yes!" he answered, in response to my question, "I am over my troubles. We are to be married this day week."

"And Florence's mother?" I asked.

"Oh! my boy, all difficulties are removed; *l'argent*, you see, works wonders. We are to have a house, a home, a larder, a cook, a kitchen—everything that is useful, to say nothing of the ornamental." He was in wonderful spirits; and as he turned and slipped his arm through mine and walked with me, he talked all the time. He had been at the Pond House, and had only that morning returned to the city that he might see everything right. Everything was right, and he was the happiest man in the world. I was to be his groomsman—that was long ago understood—and we talked of some necessary matters connected with the coming ceremony. There was one thing I wished very much to know, but as the information was not volunteered, I could not ask it. I

wanted to know how Elliott had surmounted the difficulty, how he had obtained the money necessary to the end he had just announced. I left awkward gaps in our conversation just at the point when I felt that he would know I expected this communication, but it had no effect. I hinted, without any effect, and finally I came more to the point by saying:

“I am glad, Elliott, that you have succeeded in getting the necessary money. You did not say that you had any hope whatever when I saw you last.”

“No! I—you see—well, it was unexpected, accidental I may say. But come, you must dine with me and I will tell you.”

I consented to dine with him on one condition—I was on my way home. If he would go there with me, that I might leave word where I could be found through the evening, as I expected a person to call upon me whom I wished to see on business. If he came I wanted him sent wherever we went. This was arranged, and we proceeded to dinner at a neighboring hotel. We had disposed of the dinner and were sitting over our wine, but still there seemed a disinclination on the part of Elliott to lead the conversation to the point where my mind continually wandered. I came at last boldly to it, though speaking as though it had only accidentally occurred in that direction. I said:

“By-the-by you said you would tell me how you became so fortunate as to reach your hopes unexpectedly.”

“Ah! yes,” he answered, very quickly, “I must tell you; but it is a secret, remember. It must go no farther than yourself. Nobody knows it, not even Florence. It was a very unbusiness-like thing, but very fortunate. I hope it will not reach the ears of the firm. I bought a lottery-ticket and it drew a prize of one thousand dollars.

There was something in the manner in which Elliott said this that sent a sickening tremor through me. He did not raise his eyes to mine; and I knew instantly that if he had spoken the truth, and I had never before doubted him, there must be something more which he had not told. I sat still, looking down into my glass. I was afraid to lift my eyes lest I might catch his and find there his falsehood, if it was one, or betray my doubt if he had told the truth.

There came a tap to the door, and the head of a waiter immediately following, announced that a person wanted to see the gentlemen that were dining in No. 17. It was for me, I said; show him in. Instead of the one I had expected to see, and for whom I had left word at home, I was astounded to see the stranger that I remembered from the morning of the robbery, who was with Mr. Ayerigg at the time I entered the office. He was close following the waiter, and came into the room almost upon my words. I sprang to my feet in astonishment. Elliott did the same. The stranger paid no attention to us, but closed the door the waiter had swung wide to admit him, and then he turned the key.

“What is the meaning of this?” I faltered. The courage had left me the moment I met his face.

“Nothing to you, Sir,” he said, “but to this gentleman much. I have a warrant for you, Mr. Elliott. I hope you will behave like a gentleman now, and not make any fuss.”

“A warrant for me!” said Elliott, in a low, astonished tone.

“Come, now, that’s right; you see the thing’s all out, and it won’t do any good making any row.”

“What do you mean by ‘all out?’ Why in the name of Heaven don’t you explain?” I said, in rather a loud tone.

“Well, well! keep quiet now, and I’ll tell you. Mr. Elliott knows all about it. The amount of it is that the money Mr. Elliott has been paying out has been traced, and the things all up. Mr. Elliott knows what I mean.”

I was chilled until my teeth chattered as I looked at Elliott; but I saw nothing in his face like guilt. I turned back to the man, and said, chokingly, “Go on!”

“Well, if you must have it, the money that Mr. Elliott has been paying out is part of the stolen money—part of them \$12,000. Now you’ve got it all. I’m sorry, but it’s so; and therefore, d’ye see, its no use making any fuss. I’ve earned what I’ll get in the matter mighty hard, for I’ve followed up this thing night and day. And my advice is to this young man to give up the rest of the money, and make the best terms he can, or he’s a goner.”

I looked now at Elliott. He was pale—very pale—but there was a proud sneer upon his face, and he was perfectly self-possessed. He was looking at me, but he spoke to the man.

“Do your duty, Sir, and arrest me. I am guiltless of this charge, and can immediately show it. I obtained the money honestly which I have paid away, and have ample proof to that effect.”

I drew one long sobbing sigh, and the weight that had fallen upon me as a million of tons was raised. I believed what Elliott had spoken.

I did not ask any explanation then. I felt sure that it would come. The man sat down quietly and took wine by himself, while Elliott discharged the bill and prepared to go. As a matter of course I accompanied him to the magistrate. There we had the explanation that the arrest was altogether accidental; though the warrant had been issued that afternoon, it was not intended to serve it until the next day. The officer expected to arrest Elliott at the Pond House, and Mr. Ayerigg, not knowing the location, had sent him to me for information. The man had called at my house, and there received the intelligence that Elliott was at that moment dining with me at a certain hotel. In consequence of this unexpected arrest and the lateness of the hour the examination was necessarily postponed until the following day. This was equally with Elliott’s consent, and the next morning accordingly was set, Elliott declaring to me, as he did to the magistrate, that a few minutes, when all were present, would explain the matter. I obtained, as a favor, the privilege of his remaining in the custody of the officer instead of being committed to confinement, and so I left him. That night, as I sat looking into the fire and wishing for the morning, I thought over every possibility that could lead to such an end as the possession by Elliott of any portion of the

stolen money without compassing his guilt. I pondered it over. I burned with the fever of my brain, and still I was obliged to confess to myself that in the balance against Elliott I had nothing to put but his word and his past. I had known him only a little over a year, but my attachment was equal to brotherhood, and I could only view the fact of his guilt being made apparent as a most deadly blow struck at myself. I cherished a hope against hope that the morning would show him a true man, and that Florence, that darling girl, whom I loved as a sister, and came so very near loving as something more, would never hear of this night's work.

And the morning came. I had not seen Mr. Ayerigg since the arrest. I could not; there was no time until we met at the magistrate's office. I looked anxiously in his face when he entered, as though I could see there some portion of the coming story. All I could detect was a quivering attempt at sternness, and a restless desire to avoid looking at Elliott. Mr. Bennett and Palmer were present, the last with the same flush, so unusual to him, that he wore on the morning when he announced the robbery to me. He had only known of Elliott's arrest, he told me, an hour before, when Mr. Bennett had requested his attendance at the magistrate's. They were taking evidence. Mr. Bennett testified to the amount of money and its denomination. The only portion of it that could be identified was a bill of one thousand dollars upon a New Orleans bank; this being a new currency, it had been particularly noticed, both by himself and Mr. Ayerigg. After the robbery it was concluded to say nothing about this note, as by that means the robbery might possibly be detected. This proved successful. The bankers of the city having received through the police a description of the note, it was stopped in the hands of one of the large dealers in furniture. This man being called, testified that he received the note from Mr. Elliott in payment for articles bought; that Mr. Elliott explained the possession by saying that he had received the note by remittance from New Orleans, in payment of an old debt. I looked at Elliott as the man said this, and the hope fled out of my heart. The calm self-possession that had upheld him through all, up to this point, was wavering. He looked from Mr. Bennett to myself, and the blood mounted to his face, until it became purple. There was nothing farther in evidence against him; nothing was needed. The magistrate was leaning over his desk, writing upon a printed form. I knew it was a commitment, and my very heart sank. Had the prisoner anything to say, the magistrate asked.

Yes, he had only the simple truth to relate, which he would now do, although he had not told it before, for reasons which he would give. He had told the furniture dealer what he had testified to relative to his possession of the note. He had also told Mr. Bennett, at the time of asking for leave of absence for a week, that he had received some money from a relative in settlement of future claims. He also confessed that he had told me what was untrue when he had ascribed the possession of the money to a prize in the lottery. This, though he did not justify himself in the deceit, was done at the request of Mr. Palmer.

"Mr. Palmer!" said several voices in an instant.

Yes, Mr. Palmer, who had acted so nobly, so generously with him. When Palmer knew that he labored under difficulties that would possibly drive him into a premature marriage against the commands of Florence's mother he had offered his aid. Mr. Palmer had not the amount which Elliott wanted in cash. His savings had been invested in various ways, but he offered to Elliott a draft which he held, as a boon, leaving him to obtain the money for it, or use it in exchange, only

taking his, Elliott's, acknowledgment for the amount, one thousand dollars, payable in twelve months.

At this juncture Elliott turned to Palmer as though for support of his relation. Palmer bowed his head, and said it was correct. Elliott went on. Mr. Palmer made a request—a request which amounted in Elliott's heart to a sacred thing, that he would keep secret the real manner of his obtaining this aid, and ascribe it to other sources if he was questioned. Palmer again bowed in acknowledgment, and Elliott proceeded.

He had offered this draft to the person he was then in treaty with for goods—it was refused, and the transaction was broken off. He had mentioned this to Palmer, who had given him the address of two persons who could possibly aid him. One of these, a broker, named Connington, had bought the draft, giving him the full sum named upon its face, though it had five months to run before maturity, on condition of his taking this New Orleans note, which was at five per cent. discount. This was his entire story, and would be found true on inquiry.

Oh, great Heavens! how the light broke upon me! It was all clear enough now; and I stood there and wondered why those who heard him did not break forth in one voice of acquittal for the innocent and condemnation for the guilty. I wondered why the magistrate should wish to go through any further action in the case, and why he did not immediately order Elliott to be set at liberty. All this ran swiftly through my brain as I heard him order the officer to go in search of this Connington and bring him there—the case would wait his return.

It seemed hours to me instead of minutes until the officer returned with Connington. He was a tall, stately man in black, smooth-faced, and wearing an unimpeachable white cravat. He came in with confidence, looking around the room with a bland smile, as though searching for some familiar face. He was sworn. Did he know the prisoner? Yes. Would he relate in what way that knowledge tended? Certainly! Mr. Elliott had called on him about a week before, and deposited in his hands a draft for which he wished to enter into negotiation. He, Connington, had taken the draft, but had been unable so far to find a purchaser. Elliott, who had been sitting, sprang to his feet. His face was ghastly. His hands were clenched. The light had broken upon him. The magistrate pushed up his glasses and looked at Connington.

“Do you mean to say,” he asked, “that you did not buy that draft of the prisoner?”

“Certainly I did not;” and the broker deliberately drew forth a wallet from his pocket, undid the strap, and laid the draft upon the magistrate's desk. The magistrate took up the draft and examined it.

“Who does this draft belong, to?” he asked of Connington.

“To the prisoner, as far as I know,” was the answer.

The magistrate held the bank-note up to the view of Connington, and asked,

“Mr. Connington, have you ever seen this note before?”

The broker took the note, looked at it for a moment, and then handing it back, answered,

“No, Sir.”

Elliott, who had remained standing, sprang violently toward the broker, and, catching him by the throat, screamed,

“Liar!”

In a moment the room was in confusion, and Connington was dragged out of Elliott’s hands, the magistrate was down again at his desk. A paper was handed to the officer, and Elliott was committed in full upon the charge.

When I went out from that room I felt that I could spring upon those two, Palmer and Connington, and tear the truth out of their hearts. I loathed to go back to the office where I should be obliged to meet Palmer, perhaps to speak to him, and yet I knew that any open accusation of him would only ruin all chance of Elliott’s escape. I must be secret and silent for his sake. Florence must be made acquainted with all, and who so fit to break the truth to her as I? She must not only know the case as stated against Elliott, but she must know my theory of it. I went to the office, saw Mr. Ayerigg, and obtained from him permission for a weeks holiday. I wanted that time, I said to myself, that I might think of some plan for Elliott’s aid. I then went to visit him in prison. We exchanged our thoughts, and cheered each other with hope; and then I went away, bearing his messages and his protestations to the Pond House.

Florence Cazneau was a woman, every inch of her. There was no screaming, no fainting, no nonsense of any kind. She heard all my recital with a flashing eye and a bloodless lip, and then like Demosthenes she declared in favor of action. Ay! but how? She would see this man Connington. To what purpose? I asked. She did not know. At all events she would see him and conclude from the interview what could be done. Woman-like, to form her opinion from physiognomy, perhaps? No! To gratify curiosity? No! Whatever was the motive I was not to know it. I had my task assigned. I must see this man Wood, the officer who had tracked out the affair so far and arrested Elliott, and by some means make him serve me in secretly tracking it further. The next day Florence Cazneau and myself went together to the city. She upon her errand, I upon mine. I saw Wood, and from him I learned that his business with Mr. Ayerigg was finished and paid for. A strong emphasis he laid on this last word. Twenty dollars in Mr. Wood’s hand loosened his tongue, and made all things slide easier. He informed me after I had stated to him all my surmises, all my suspicions, and all my certainties and convictions, that the watchfulness had first fallen upon Palmer, this course having been awakened by the fact that Mr. Palmer had, in communicating to me the news of the robbery, stated the amount of money when it had not been told him at the time of the first alarm. This was the only circumstance of suspicion, and upon a question casually put to him by Mr. Bennett, he asserted that he had overheard it stated from the inner office.

Wood took the matter in hand with some spirit, under a promise that if it was traced out to Elliott’s liberation one hundred dollars should be his fee. That no circumstance should be lost, I

obtained the names of the parties to whom Elliott had first offered the draft. As it was a security of the very highest class, I wondered that any one should refuse it when offered in trade. I called first upon the furniture dealer. In response to my question he showed himself a man of few words. He opened his desk and placed in my hands a note without signature or date, cautioning him against receiving such a draft, which would be offered him, as it would lead to trouble, and he would eventually be the loser. This note I obtained. The next person I called on was the other broker to whom Palmer had sent Elliott. He was more wary, and more wordy, but upon partial explanation, a reference to the house of Ayerigg and Co. in case, as he expressed it, of any future trouble, he showed me a similar note to the first, and confessed that but for that note he would have bought the draft at a low rate of discount. He promised to produce the note when wanted. So far so good. We had here evidence to show that notwithstanding Palmers ingenuity in giving the names of two brokers, the intention was to drive him to Connington finally. The name of the dealer to whom Elliott first offered it was known to him through Elliott's own admission. The object now was to identify the writing. It was not Palmer's—that I knew. It was more of a woman's hand. I did not think it Connington's, but I believed the letters were written by someone through his instigation. Florence was appealed to. She had visited Connington, to whom she was, of course, entirely unknown, under the pretense of negotiating some Government securities for an aunt residing at a distance. She had seen his handwriting, and declared at a glance that the letter was not his, but I watched the sparkle of her eyes, and I knew that Florence had struck something. It proved so.

This visit to Connington was without motive beyond that of observation. How well she had observed Florence showed by declaring that letter to have been written by a woman in Connington's house, perhaps a housekeeper—something more, at all events, than a servant. She flitted in and out the room several times while Florence was there, as though anxious to hear whatever was said, and stopping occasionally to enter into the conversation, at which Mr. Connington would fidget uneasily, but made no remonstrance, as though afraid of the woman. By her speech she was German, though speaking good English. The note, on examination, showed that it was written from dictation, or copied by one who wrote the hand peculiar to the Germans, one or two misspelled words supporting the hypothesis.

To all this Mr. Wood was called in. He listened to every word with his head drawn to one side, his left eye buried in his hat, and both hands busily engaged in nursing his foot, which was drawn well up for that purpose. When Mr. Wood heard all that was said, he deliberately folded up the letter, put it in his pocket, and laconically jerking out, "That's my woman!" Mr. Wood marched away. Three days after I was at the Pond House. Florence and myself were both depressed, but each trying to cheer the other. During those three days nothing new had transpired, and I had not been able to find Wood anywhere. I could not arrive at any other conclusion than that he had deserted the cause, seeing little chance of winning the hundred dollars. It was drawing toward evening when we heard the sound of carriage-wheels, and on stepping to the window I saw Mr. Wood jump from a closed vehicle at the door. There was something about the man's face that said success. I almost ran into the hall to meet him. Mr. Wood extended a finger patronizingly to me, and with the other hand knocked his hat slightly forward.

"My woman's there!" he said, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder.

It took me a moment to gather the meaning. I then knew that he had this woman, the writer of the anonymous notes, in the carriage outside. I said to him, "Bring her in." Mr. Wood by this time had forced his way to the back-room, and stood beckoning me mysteriously. I went to him. He drew me inside, and looking warily round, shut and locked the door in the same way he had done at the hotel on the night of Elliott's arrest.

"Now, gov'nor, honor bright, you know! I've done the right thing by you, and I guess, if you're a gentleman, you'll do the same by me."

He stopped there, and I assured him I would certainly.

"Then, d'ye see, I'm going to get all this money back, and get your friend out of the scrape. But that won't benefit me much unless you act on the square. You see, the house offered a thousand dollars reward for the recovery of this money."

"Which will be entirely yours, besides my hundred," I answered, knowing this was what the man was coming to.

"That's enough said between gentlemen." And Mr. Wood thrust both hands into his pockets and whistled very low. I opened the door, and in a few minutes Mr. Wood ushered in a rather good-looking woman, with a sharp gray eye, whom he introduced as Mrs. Reichart.

I shall not follow Mrs. Reichart in her revealing, nor Mr. Wood in his rather egotistical account of how he won the lady's confidence in three days so completely as to succeed in bringing her by her own will to the Pond House. He found entry to Mr. Connington's on pretense of business, at a time when he knew the broker was out; saw, of course, his fair housekeeper; won her ear by a sad detail of loneliness of his state of widowerhood; called a second and a third time—each time missing the broker, but finding Mrs. Reichart; each time winning farther and farther into her confidence; until now, as Mr. Wood blushing informed me, they were on their way to be married, having left the house of Mr. Connington at two o'clock that day for that purpose. Since that hour Mr. Wood had been riding about the country with the fair widow, convincing her that it would be better to make a clean breast of it, and share the reward, than to join her master in the county jail, where he would certainly be before night. If she lost the husband she expected on starting from home, she would be a clear gainer of five hundred dollars. On sober second thought the widow thought so too; and within a short time after her début at Pond House a statement was drawn up, and signed by her, which in aftertime she verified on oath. In this confession she owned to being the writer of the two anonymous letters, which were written from Connington's dictation. That she had been a listener at various interviews between her master and Palmer, at which this matter was discussed. That she had seen the bill paid to Elliott, in the same manner, by overlooking them from a closet communicating with an adjoining room. That the balance of the stolen money, she believed, was in Palmer's possession, but that Connington knew where it was, as there had been several quarrels regarding its division. There was some little other information volunteered by Mrs. Reichart, one item of which was that Connington had promised for a long time to make her Mrs. C., until she had, in the blindness of love, given into his keeping some three thousand dollars, the savings of the late deceased Reichart, after which he refused to

fulfill his pledges. It was therefore a heart caught on the rebound that Mr. Wood had fallen in with, wooed, and won in three days.

As the detective gentleman elegantly expressed it, "the jig was up." Mrs. Reichart was left at the Pond House in the care of Florence and myself, making herself pretty comfortable, and entertaining us with many piquant anecdotes of the past villainies of Connington, while Mr. Wood drove back to the city to achieve the arrest of that individual and Palmer. We expected to hear from him again that night, as the Pond House was only an hour's ride. It was getting late, nearly midnight; Mrs. Reichart had retired; the fire was burning low; while on the rug, between Florence and I, lay a hound that had been presented to Madame Cazneau by Palmer. Florence had not spoken for some minutes, and everything was very still. Suddenly the dog started to his feet, raised his head, with the nose extended toward the ceiling, and sent forth a half scream, half bark, that sent a shudder through my veins. Without ceasing the sound, the dog sprung to the door and pawed violently. I opened it, and as quickly he dashed at the hall door leading on to the piazza. I should not have opened this, but that Terry, hearing the cry of the dog from the back room where he was sitting, considering it a duty to remain up the last in the house, and knowing that something more than ordinary was in progress, came into the hall at that moment. I threw open the door and the dog rushed away over the lawn with a moaning bark. I followed, with Terry close upon my track. The hound came to a stand at the edge of the pond, close by the spot where we had fished upon that memorable day when we had first seen Florence Cazneau. Something there was floating out from the shore, about a hundred feet away, and propelled by the wind, for it was blowing almost a hurricane that dull September night. There was considerable delay in getting the boat; she lay the other side of the pond. In time we raised this floating object into the boat. It was a man; more than this we could not tell for the darkness, but between us we brought him to the house.

Oh, my God! when the light fell upon his face it was Jared Palmer. Dead! Drowned upon the very spot where he had first seen her, to gain whom he had so sinned and suffered.

Within the hour Wood's carriage rolled up to the door, and the officer, with a face signifying his want of success, entered the house. His story was soon told. He had arrested Connington and had him safely. Palmer had by some means escaped, having taken alarm, and was supposed to have the money with him. Elliott would be released the next day; as soon as the District Attorney could go through the form of entering a *nolle prosequi*. I took the officer by the arm and led him into the next room, face to face with the man for whom he held an unserved warrant. For a moment he was startled, and then running his hands rapidly over the dripping body, he whispered. "It's here, all right!"

Yes, it was there, every cent of the stolen money, less the bill of one thousand dollars. There was more there, too, for Palmer had been careful, very careful of money.

How it was that Palmer had, as the first step in his flight, come to the Pond House, will only he explained at that time when all things are brought to light. There were many theories, mine is too terrible to tell.

Elliott next day was released, and again took his position at the desk of Ayerigg and Co., the old gentleman, to say nothing of Mr. Bennett, giving way to some eccentric but not less real modes of showing their satisfaction.

Mr. Wood got the thousand dollars, which, like a man of honor, he shared with the fair widow, who to the day of her death remained still a widow.

Connington did the State seven years service, after which he disappeared to parts unknown.

And here am I, a bachelor, forty years after, writing this history from a room in the Pond House, where I am on one of my numerous visits to my very dear old friends Mr. and Mrs. Wilson Elliott, *née* Florence Cazneau. Strange, is it not?

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