

Hidden Crime Revealed
By Emerson Bennett

A STRANGE AFFAIR occurred in the north of England many years ago. One fine summer evening, not far from sunset, a rough looking fellow—half sailor, half landsman, if one could judge from his dress—drew up at a wayside inn, and asked if he could have supper and lodging. The landlord, a small, dark, sinister looking man, who was smoking a pipe of the porch, sharply eyed him for some time before making a reply.

“We’ve got accommodations for them what pays!” he said at length, throwing out a quick, derisive puff of smoke.

“And who wants ‘em without pay, you blasted land-lubber?” cried the other, in an angry tone. “D’ye think a man can’t be a gentleman without he’s got on fine toggery? Blast your old, thieving eyes! why I’ve got more money than you ever see. Look a here!” he continued, pulling out from one of his pockets a handful of loose gold; “don’t you wish you may get it?”

The innkeeper was astonished, and his snaky eyes gleamed.

“Well, well,” he rejoined, with a well affected laugh, “who’d a thought a man of your merry face would get miffed at a joke? If I hadn’t knowed you had money, I’d not answered you like I did, but told you to pass on.”

“Which I believe I’ll do anyhow!” said the other, turning to go.

“Not if you know when your well off you won’t,” returned the innkeeper. “You’ve got a good five mile to the next tavern, and a blind, lonesome road at that. Come, come—consider I’ve apologized for my joke, and let’s have a friendly drink together.”

The stranger did not require any great deal of persuading to do what he had secretly determined on, and a couple of glasses of the landlord’s best soon put him in the agreeable humor of a fed tiger.

“Going far?” said the landlord, as soon as he thought he might venture to be a little inquisitive.

“Edinburgh.”

“Got friends and relatives in these parts, it’s like?”

“No,” growled the other, with a frown, “I’m not troubled with them kind of things anywhere! and what’s more, I don’t want to be!” And he emptied his glass.

The host affected to laugh at his drollery, as he called it, pushed over the bottle, and changed the conversation to more common-place civilities.

In due time the traveler ate his supper, and was shown to a small bedroom up one flight of stairs.

The innkeeper had a wife and daughter, the latter a little girl of six, who was sent to bed as soon as the traveler had retired. Then the husband and the wife met for a secret purpose. She was a tall, dark, saturnine woman, with coarse, masculine features, black, sharp, sunken eyes, and with nearly as much beard on her face as her husband. For some time they talked together in low, mysterious tones.

“I don’t, of course, think the risk will be over much, because he haint no friends round here,” at length said the man, in reply to some remark of the other—the tone, though very low, being one of doubt and hesitation; “but still, Sarah, you know—“

“But me no buts!” interrupted the woman, in a voice that would have been gratingly harsh had it not been modulated by an effort to keep it barely above a whisper. “If you didn’t intend to do it, what d’ye begin to talk about it for? Are you a fool, Seth Raglin? Or do you take me for one?”

“Why, you see my dear,” whined the man, who really stood in more fear of his wife than his maker, “the fact is, you know, I—“

“I know you’re a coward—that’s what I know!” again interrupted the other. “You have a chance to make yourself a rich man, and you’re afraid to take advantage of it!”

“But if it *should* be found out, my dear!”

“Where’s the danger? You and I will do the work alone, and who’s to find us out?”

“But such things do come to light, you know, my dear!”

“And such things don’t come to light, I know, too, my dear!” sneered the other, who in heart was a second Lady Macbeth.

“Well—but if anybody should have seen him come here,” hesitated the man.

“Then anybody can see him go again,” replied the woman.

“You think, then, we’d better risk it, my dear?”

“Of course. Who’s a-going to inquire after the likes of him in this wild region? and if they did, aint it easy to say we don’t know anything about him, and let them have the trouble of proving we do? Pshaw, Seth Raglin, you’re scared at your own shadow! That’s what ails you.”

They then planned out their guilty work of murder and robbery, in which the woman agreed to take the lead, as the boldest and most resolute of the two. After all was settled they went to bed, and waited there for two or three hours. Then they got up in the dark, and the man armed himself with an ax, and the woman armed herself with a large, sharp butcher knife. Then they stole softly upstairs, the woman taking the lead. At the door of the stranger she stopped and listened. He did not snore, but she could hear the long, steady breathing of one in sleep. She

tried the door very gently, and found it yielded to her hand. The way was thus open for her to go forward in her guilty work, and she went. Softly she approached the side of the bed, and bent over the sleeper, holding her breath. As if his soul felt the shadow of her presence, he moved uneasily, and uttered a deep, heavy groan. The murderess quickly dropped down to the floor and waited till the regular breathing was resumed. Then she rose again, again bent over him, and poised her heavy knife above his breast, as near as she could judge. There were a few moments of awful suspense while she was gathering all her wicked powers and faculties for the monstrous deed, and her no less guilty, but far more cowardly husband, stood in the doorway, ax in hand, quaking with terror.

At last the devil's moment arrived; and then down came the keen, sharp-pointed knife, with all the force that two evil hands could send it, straight to its mark, straight into the breast of the sleeping stranger, almost through it. It was followed by a wild spring, and a horrid cry; but the knife was quickly wrenched forth and buried again, and then the body gradually grew still. One or two heavy groans, two or three gurgling gasps, and all was over; and only the pattering of the blood, as it fell from the bed to the floor, told of the dreadful crime that had sent one soul to eternity and stamped perdition on two others.

"There," said the woman at length, "now we can fetch a light without fear!" and she went off and got one, while the man stood quaking and trembling.

The two guilty wretches then took the body of the murdered man down into the cellar and buried it, and spent the rest of the night in effacing all the marks of their crime, and in counting up their reward for the damning deed. In gold and jewels they found themselves the possessors of more than a thousand pounds.

Ten years afterward, near the middle of a lovely day in June, a mounted traveler stopped at the same inn, and called for feed for his horse and dinner for himself. A very pretty and interesting girl of sixteen waited upon him at table. He fell into conversation with her, and learned that she was the innkeeper's daughter. Happening to seat herself near him and rest one hand upon the table, his eyes suddenly became riveted upon a ring of very peculiar design and workmanship which she wore upon one of her fingers. He started and changed color, and she asked him what was the matter.

"Nothing," he replied, "nothing except a sudden recollection."

He soon resumed conversation, and went on talking, in a light, pleasant strain, as one disposed to make himself agreeable. At last he touched upon the subject of rings, by taking off one he wore and asking her if she had ever seen one like it. She examined it, and replied in the negative.

"I delight in anything strange and curious!" he said; and, as if by accident, glanced at her fingers. "By-the-by," he continued, "you have something there rather rare, I think. Would you be kind enough to let me look at the ring on your middle finger."

She smilingly removed and handed it to him. He turned it over and over, with great care and deliberation, examined it minutely in every part, and said it was one of the prettiest things of the kind he had ever seen.

“From some lover, I’ll be bound!” he added, with a light laugh, as he returned it.

“No, indeed, sir!” answered the girl, with a merry toss of her head; “I’m not troubled in that way yet.”

“It is well for you then that I am not so young as I was once,” he sportively rejoined. “I’ll wager the ring was a present from somebody.”

“Yes, from my father.”

“Ah, indeed! An heirloom in the family perhaps,”

The stranger finished his meal, wished the girl a pleasant good-day, and, soon after, paid the small, sinister-looking Seth Raglin his reckoning and rode away.

The next day he returned to the inn, in company with two stout, rough looking men, who at once proceeded to take the proprietor and his wife and daughter into custody.

When he saw the handcuffs placed upon his wrists, the guilty inn-keeper was ready to sink with terror. They allowed him no communication with anyone, but took him into a room by himself. Here the traveler confronted him, and showed him the ring, which he had just taken from the finger of the daughter.

“Do you know,” he said, in a menacing tone, “that a murder was committed before this ring passed from the possession of its owner?”

“Ye-ye-yes—I know—I know!” stammered the horrified wretch, sinking down on his knees, in the most abject terror and abasement. “Yes, I know, gentlemen, I do; and oh, for God’s sake, don’t have me hung! ‘caus I didn’t do it myself; and I tried every way in the world to keep my wife from doing it; but she would; and I’s afraid she’d murder me if I didn’t consent—though I know it ‘ud be found out, and I told her so.”

This was rattled off with terrified volubility, and the traveler exchanged glances of surprise with the officer present, the other officer being in another apartment keeping guard over the woman.

“Your wife?” exclaimed the gentleman, as soon as the man gave him a chance to speak.

“Yes, she done it! she done the whole on’nt—got the knife and crept into his room, stuck him herself! and I never touched him at all till after he was dead!”

“Ha! here is another mystery,” said the gentleman to the officer in a low tone. “I do not understand this, unless, as might happen, the robber was himself murdered while he had the gold and jewels in his possession. Where did your wife kill the man?” he inquired of the innkeeper.

“Upstairs. I’ll show you the very room.”

“How long ago?”

“About ten years.”

“The time is correct,” said the officer: “this is very strange!”

It was indeed strange, considered in all its individual parts. The gentleman himself, no other than Lord Edginton, was the person who had been robbed in the first instance and left for dead, and he had simply alluded to himself in his remark to the innkeeper concerning murder, not dreaming of the crime which the terrors of the latter had thereupon forced him to confess.

Ten years ago that summer, Lord Edginton had been out sailing his pleasure yacht, along the English coast of the Irish Sea, and had been upset in a gale and washed ashore, escaping with his life, and the only one of his party that did. While in a half-dying condition, he had been set upon by a sort of land pirate, and strangled and robbed. A poor fisherman had soon after discovered and saved him. A large reward had been offered for the apprehension of the robber; but no trace of him had ever been found till the nobleman himself by accident discovered one of his own rings on the finger of the innkeeper’s daughter, and which led to the arrest of the whole family and the disclosures we have shown.

Thus it is seen that the first robber and almost murderer met with a fearful retribution through the temptations of the very gold he had periled his soul to get; and the second robbers had, by a portion of the same gold, been betrayed and exposed to the stern law of justice.

The cowardly Seth Raglin and his wicked wife were tried for the murder of the unknown traveler, and were convicted. They were never executed, for he fell sick and died in prison, and she managed to procure poison and commit suicide.

Thus is crime mysteriously brought to light through its seeming concealment, and thus are the wicked exposed and punished after the seeming security of years.

The New York Ledger, January 14, 1865