

Quick Work

From The Diary Of Hardshaw [Hawkshaw], The Detective

by A.P. Morris, Jr.

LORD HAROLD BERKELEY paced his long, low library with thoughtful strides. His brow was stern, his teeth hard set, and features troubled in their outline, while his proud gaze bent moodily upon the rich carpeting.

Presently, a liveried servant announces, through the half-open door, the waiting of a visitor in the hall.

“Show him to me at once,” ordered the nobleman, with a promptness that indicated plainly he had been expecting the coming of someone; and a few seconds later, a man entered the room.

He was of medium height, well proportioned, athletic in build, and his small, gray eyes shone with penetrating glance.

“Be seated, sir,” said Lord Harold, motioning the comer to a chair, and appropriating one himself; and when they were seated, he continued:

“You are—”

“Yes, Hawkshaw, the detective. You sent for me—here I am. What can I do for you?”

“I had a brother, sir, whom I loved next my life. Only a few days ago, he parted from me, to look after some important matters of business in Shefford. His cheek then flushed with the ruddy glow of health. Now he lies in his former bed-room—a corpse.”

“Quick transit! But go on, sir.”

“While on his return to London, in his traveling coach, he was waylaid, robbed, and *murdered*. I have been well-nigh cast into my grave on account of the occurrence, for I loved him, as I said, dearly. I will give a thousand pounds if the perpetrators of the foul deed can be brought to justice, though that is but slight recompense for so great a loss.”

“Then you want me to work the thing out, eh?”

“I sent for you for that purpose. I know that with you there is no such word as fail. It will at least be a satisfaction to see the murderers hanged, even while my head is bowed with grief.”

“Well, I did hear something about a murder on the Shefford road; but it was kept rather quiet, and therefore, I gave the thing very little thought, supposing the authorities could look after it

without me. However, that's my line, and I'm always ready for duty. When are you going to bury your brother?"

"Day after tomorrow, at furthest. I can scarcely realize that I am about to lay in the grave so cherished a companion as was he."

"Then I'll undertake to promise that I'll work out a focus before that time, if the fellows are in London. If they be not, why then it will take a longer time, that's all. A thousand pounds you say?"

"Yes."

"Let me see the body, if you please."

Being shown to the darkened *salon*, wherein lay the murdered man, Lord Harold turned his back upon the iced frame. The sight was too much for his already overtaxed nerves.

But Hawkshaw exhibited no such signs of timid character. With an eye of business, he bent forward and examined the corpse.

"So," he thought, "hit on the head, eh? Hard instrument of some kind—not a club, nor a hammer, nor a pistol butt. Oh! I have it—a slung shot, I think. No doubt of it. Now then, what's this?" picking up from the floor a coat that had evidently belonged to the deceased, and proceeding to search the pockets. "Aha! a diary. Been swelled with money. Rather slim just now. Hum! what's this mean? Twenty ten pound notes entered. Here's the entry; money isn't here—of course not! They made a clean sweep. Now, I'll just make a copy of these numbers," and he transferred the figures to his own diary in a trice.

"More valuable than all the contents of the pocketbook," said Lord Harold, at this juncture, "was a draft payable to *bearer*, for twenty thousand pounds."

"Heavy sum, that!"

"Have you discovered anything through your examination?"

"Very little. He was struck with a slung shot, and very near choked at the same time—see finger-marks on his throat. Draft for twenty thousand, you say?"

"Yes. Think you there is a possibility of ferreting this crime to the doers?"

"Don't know. It's my business. Detective, I am. I'll do my best. Report tomorrow afternoon. That's all, I believe."

Hawkshaw left the house and wandered about, idly at first, then falling into a watchful pace as his footsteps led through the more isolated sections, where he knew the promulgators of lawlessness and vice lurked in every nook.

He had not come thither through any expectation of finding at once those whom he sought, yet something told him that in this neighborhood he would be apt to stumble upon a clue.

About midway in a square of dilapidated houses, was a dingy, dirty-smelling rum-shop, where the lowest of characters fed their famished stomachs upon poisonous alcohol; and as he neared this, he fixed upon his face a pair of bushy whiskers, turned his coat and hat inside out, thus attiring himself in flannel, white, after the manner of a countryman; and when he drew from the leg of his boot a small, cow-hide whip, his costume was completed.

“I tell 'e he was murdered,” spoke a burly, scarred-featured ruffian, as the detective called for a drink over the counter. “I saw 'im when 'e kem to 'ir 'ouse hon a shutter, 'ith 'is 'ead smashed, an' marks o' fingers hon 'is throat.”

“A bad go!” exclaimed another. “Hif the detectives cotch the killer, 'e'll be 'anged, for sure.”

“What’s that they’re talking about?” asked Hawkshaw of a man near him.

“Weel, 'e see, there’s been a murder done—the young brother to Lord Berkeley—and the coves has been 'ere today a-looking sharp. I say 'twas a bad go, for young Berkeley was a good 'un 'ith all 'is rank. And I guess the feller what did it’ll be cotched soon enough.”

“No danger o’ that, ye know, when the lads go thick as beer hops,” put in the burly ruffian, who had, not unnoticed by Hawkshaw, been listening to their conversation.

“Think the man that committed the murder lives around here?” asked the detective, indifferently.

“Maybe yes, and maybe no. There’s a lot o’—”

Hawkshaw’s eyes, at that moment, rested upon a ten-pound note, the corner of which slightly protruded from the man’s vest-pocket, and though he endeavored to prevent the other’s noticing the quick glance he bestowed upon it, the fellow looked down, and paled as he perceived what attracted the gaze of the supposed countryman.

“You’re supplied with plenty of money, I see,” remarked Hawkshaw.

“What’s that to you?” demanded he, roughly, as he fixed his bloodshot eyes upon the detective scrutinizingly; and, suddenly, he darted forward, exclaiming:

“Ha! I know you—Hawkshaw!” and a murderous knife flashed in his hand!

Like a lightning streak, a powerful arm circled through the air.

Thud! went a heavy body to the floor, and Hawkshaw disappeared out into the darkness of the night, while the form of the ruffian lay insensible on the floor.

Next afternoon, Lord Harold and the detective were closeted together.

“What have you done?” asked the first.

“Found a clue,” was the reply; “very slight clue; it’s all right, though.”

When night set in, Hawkshaw left the nobleman’s house; but, in that vicinity, where lights blazed, and people thronged, he had scarce taken a dozen steps, when he had received a blow upon the head; his arms were firmly pinioned. He was lifted bodily, and hustled into a cab, which, till that moment, had escaped his notice.

It was a bold stroke. The renowned London detective, despite his habitual caution and constant vigilance, was captured, bound, carried off in the very teeth of the public, before even so much as a cry could escape his lips.

On whirled the vehicle, and presently they entered the identical square where was situated the rum-shop; and drawing up before a dark-looking, tumble-down frame building, his captors carried him inside, up two or three flights of stairs, and cast him somewhat roughly on the bare floor of an attic room.

“Mike’ll be here soon; an’ e’ll fix e up as e deserves, Mister Detective.”

When alone in the apartment, now dark as a chaotic abyss, a chill feeling crept over him. What did they propose to do with him? This he easily decided, as he well knew there were dozens in the vast city of London, only waiting for a favorable opportunity to rid themselves of his dread power to discover guilty ones.

But he did not despair. With him, such scenes were neither strange nor terrible to realize. His life, ever since entering the secret service, had been fraught with hair-breadth escapes, and yet he lived them through, to be a terror to, and a hound upon, the path of evil-doers.

He bent every muscle of his powerful frame in an effort to release himself from the cutting cords.

Once, twice, thrice he tried, and at last he felt the bonds stretch a little. Another straining of the wrists, and he drew his hands from the knots, as a slender woman slips a handcuff.

To tear the gag from his mouth was the work of a moment, and then he grasped his trusty revolver, which, through an oversight, his captors had neglected to take from him.

Noiselessly he left the room and descended the stairs. They were old, worn, creaky, and it was necessary to exercise great caution, lest the loose planks should betray him.

At the first landing was a room, and through the keyhole of the door a light streamed out upon the opposite wall. He heard coarse voices inside, and he recognized, with the others, that of the man with whom he had had the encounter on the previous night.

“Well, Mike”—came to the detective’s ears—“we’ll go now. He’s up in the garret, an’ ’e can serve ’im as ’e like;” and as Hawkshaw drew back in the shadows of the balustrade, two men came out, passed him, and went from the house.

The man who had remained in the room, muttered, aloud:

“Aha, my fine Hawkshaw! It’s many a man ye’ve brought to the gallows in yer time; but I’m blowed if this ’ere ain’t the end o’ all yer doin’, sure! I’ll fix ’e nice ’ith this knife o’ mine!”

He approached the door, his heavy shoes scuffling noisily as he swaggered.

As he came out upon the landing, the sharp knife fell from his hand, his muddy eyes rolled in a terrified way; for a frowning pistol-muzzle yawned at his temple, and the pale, determined face of Hawkshaw was within a foot of his own.

“Surrender!” whispered the detective, between tightly-compressed lips.

“Hi do! hi do!” blubbered the man, in a cowardly tremor.

In a twinkling, handcuffs were clasped upon his wrists, and Hawkshaw marched him out of the house, and toward police headquarters, with the significant admonition:

“You’ve only to turn your head, speak a word, hesitate a moment, and I’ll not answer for the sudden explosion of a pistol which I am holding in my hand and keeping pointed at your head.”

There was considerable excitement created at the station, when the detective unceremoniously arrived with his prisoner.

The latter was placed in secure confinement; and, following him to his cell, Hawkshaw gazed upon him triumphantly, as he said:

“So, my bird, you see I always get at these things without much difficulty. You murdered Lord Harold’s brother:—come, now, acknowledge it, you know you did?”

“Hi did! hi did!” groaned the wretch.

“Now, then, I’ll trouble you for the money you took from the murdered man’s diary. You know, I saw some of it in your vest-pocket last night—”

“Here it is, take it,” interrupted the man. “It’s all there but one note, that I spent with the boys at Jinger’s shop,” drawing a roll of notes from his vest-pocket, and handing them over.

“Now,” continued Hawkshaw, “I’ll trouble you for that draft—a bit of paper, you know—on the G— Bank, for twenty thousand pounds. Hem! let me have it.”

“Draft? I don’t know. Stop! yes, I do; the postilion has it. I saw him take it from the pocket-book.”

“All right. I’ll get that, and the note you spent easily enough;” and then, as the detective proceeded to compare the note with the number in his diary, the guilty man set up a woeful groaning.

“Correct!” uttered Hawkshaw, presently; and he immediately left the cell.

He saw the postilion—a puny, foppish individual, with red nose and buttermilk eyes; frightened him within an inch of his miserable life; gained possession of the draft, which, fortunately, he had been afraid to use, and then sent him to keep his guilty companion company, in the prison cell.

The funeral procession of the murdered man was just about to start in solemn line, from the residence of Lord Harold Berkeley, when, as the nobleman descended the steps to enter his carriage, a man, in ministerial garb, accosted him:

“I am Hawkshaw. I have kept my promise. Here’s the money; here’s the draft. The deed was done by a postilion in your employ, and a London rough. They’re both in jail. A note, sent to the —th Station, —th Precinct, will safely reach me. Good-day, sir.”

Hawkshaw received the reward Lord Harold had offered him, ere sunset of that same day.

In due time, the murderers suffered the penalty of the law, at the hands of the sheriff, whose subordinate gave a grunt of satisfaction as he sprung the scaffold-trap, and launched the guilty souls into the presence of a higher Judge.

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