

*Circumstantial Evidence*  
by Mary Kyle Dallas

“You’ll have the green baize all off your desk yet,” said old Mr. Markham to his cashier, stooping over and putting his long, lean fingers upon a corner of the covering of the great desk that curled up exasperatingly. “Why don’t you gum it down?”

“I’ve thought of it half a dozen times,” said the clerk, looking up.

“But as you didn’t do it that doesn’t matter,” said Mr. Markham.

The cashier, who was counting some money, did not even look up.

“When *I* think of a thing I *do* it,” said Mr. Markham, and reached for the mucilage bottle. As he did so the cashier suddenly started up, caught his hat, and ran out of the store, leaving the bills under a paper weight.

“What is the matter, I wonder?” said Mr. Markham. But he gummed his baize down all the same before he went to the door to look out. When he was finished he saw that he had knocked the paper-weight from the pile of notes the cashier had been counting, and replaced it.

“I never knew Moreland to leave his business like that,” said he. “Hope he hasn’t run mad these dog days.”

It was late in the afternoon indeed. Although the sky was still bright, it was absolutely evening. The store was partially shut up, and the cashier was winding up affairs for the week by the light that came through the door. He had sharp, young eyes, and could see better than old Mr. Markham did. However, it was almost too dark for him by the time he returned, and Mr. Markham was growing indignant.

“Well, sir, and where did you fly without a word of explanation,” said the old gentleman, testily. “Singular, indeed, really.”

“I beg pardon, I’m sure,” said the cashier. “I really should have said something, but I saw a friend whom I have not seen for a year passing the door, and I—felt—that I—I—” and he blushed crimson and stopped.

“Not at all business-like,” said Mr. Markham.

“And I had finished everything,” said the cashier, putting the pile of notes into the safe, and depositing the book in its proper place.

“I wish you’d mentioned that. I need not have waited,” said the old gentleman. “There’s my dinner spoiling no doubt.”

Then the two went out together. It was a small establishment, and the three clerks had gone home at closing hour, and Mr. Markham, who was always offended by anything like neglect of duty in an employer, went home to dinner, and over it told the story to his wife.

“And I suppose you saw everything was right about the money afterward?” commented the lady.

“Why?” asked Mr. Markham, turning pale.

“Because when a cashier goes flying off that way there may be some reason for it,” said Mrs. Markham.

“Bless me!” said her husband, “I declare it never entered my mind. I’ll go over and investigate this evening. But what need could there be of his playing off like that? He’d only awaken suspicion.”

Still the thought haunted him, and after dinner he took his keys and went to the store.

Ten minutes before the cashier had left the desk he knew all had been correct—doubtless all was correct now, but still he should sleep better for making sure.

He lit the gas and opened the safe. In ten minutes he leaned back, with the perspiration standing on his forehead.

“I would not have thought it of the young fellow!” he said. “Dear, dear, I’d never have thought it of Tom Moreland, never!”

The money in the safe was a hundred dollars short of what it should have been. There had been a hundred dollar bill taken in that day, which was noticeable, because of some writing in red ink on one corner, and which had caused some talk, because the lady who offered it, had bought fifty cents’ worth of goods. It was this hundred dollar bill that was gone.

“But perhaps,” said old Mr. Markham, “perhaps it isn’t so. It may have fallen on the floor. It may have hidden itself away in the safe. I’ll look. I’ll search carefully. Good heavens! I can’t believe this of Moreland. Why, I knew his poor father; as honest a man as ever lived. It can’t be.”

But though Mr. Markham lit all the gas in the place, and swept and dusted and poked into every corner with the greatest care, the bill was not to be found.

He was forced to own that he must have been deceived in one in whom he had believed implicitly, and nothing can be sadder. He was a testy old gentleman enough, but he was a good man, and he was grieved, as a Christian should be, at this discovery.

“I’ll be as gentle as I can with the boy for his father’s sake,” he said to his wife, “but I can’t keep him, and I can’t recommend him; and, of *course*, there’s very little chance for him after that.”

“*Chance!*” said Mrs. Markham. “And what does he desire, my dear? You are too lenient altogether.”

The next morning Moreland was met in his arrival with looks he did not understand; and his consternation, when he heard of what he was suspected, was intense. He informed Mr. Markham that the person he had seen passing the door had been a lady engaged to him. They were to be married very soon, but he had not seen her for a year. She had just come to the city, and was on her way from the train to the house of an aunt, where the wedding ceremony was to be performed.

“Of course I could not let her pass,” said young Moreland. “Mr. Markham, you don’t believe I could do such a thing—that I could be so ungrateful. It is certainly my fault that the money is lost. I am responsible for it in leaving it on the desk, but don’t think me a thief. Don’t do that, Mr. Markham.”

For a moment the old gentleman waivered. Then he said:

“Perhaps I’m an old fool, but—you’re Tom’s boy. If you were tempted and fell, confess, for Heaven’s sake. No—no— Well, well, don’t look so, boy. Other young fellows have been there. I’ll believe you. Go to your place.”

So young Moreland stayed. Mrs. Markham led her husband a life of it for a week or two, but nothing went wrong again.

Moreland paid the lost money by degrees, and married as he had intended to; but the accusation and the doubt that might remain in his employer’s mind clouded his spirits greatly. He was scarcely the same man. His health failed somewhat, and his sleep was troubled. Mrs. Markham laid the change in him to conscious guilt. Mr. Markham doubted and wondered. He had tried to believe in Tom’s boy, but circumstantial evidence was against him. So matters stood a year from the loss of the bill, when one day, being quite alone in his office, the old gentleman sat writing a note at the desk, and overturned the inkstand.

The green baize was saturated at once. Mr. Markham, who was very neat, was greatly annoyed by the circumstance.

“I’ll tear it off,” he said, “and send someone to put on new. I can’t have a stained desk.”

The taking a paper-knife, he inserted the point under the baize, and up it came, stained, dingy, and torn.

“Pah!” said Mr. Markham, and tossed it into the waste-paper basket. Before him laid the bare, unpolished wood that the baize had concealed, and glued to it by pressure and heat—a bank-note. A bank-note of the value of one hundred dollars, with writing in red ink across one end. The note which he had accused Tom Moreland of stealing, and which he himself had pushed under the baize and gummed in unconsciously.

It was forty years since Mr. Markham had shed a tear, but there in the solitude of his office he sat down and sobbed as a woman might.

“I might have ruined the young fellow’s prospects for life,” said he. “I have insulted and hurt him. By George, I’ll make it up to him!”

Today Tom Moreland is partner in the firm, and as prosperous and happy a man as you can find, and old Mr. Markham had one precept which he endeavors to fix on every youthful mind: “Never rely entirely on circumstantial evidence.”

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