

A Detective's Story

“Can I sit with you?”

“Certainly, sir.”

“Nice weather?”

“Splendid, indeed.”

“Crops growing finely?”

“Yes—couldn't do better.”

I was sitting in a car on a Wisconsin railroad, one day, years ago, when a good looking, pleasant spoken man came along, stopped at my seat, and the above conversation took place, the latter part of it after I had given him part of my seat.

Now, I am regarded as a social man. I liked a joke; more so then than now. On entering a railroad car, I always looked about for a talkative man, and then I got as close to him as possible, and drained him dry, if the journey was long enough.

And I want to state one thing more: Left an orphan before I could realize the sad event which made me one, I got kicked here and cuffed there, and grew up between folks, as they say. I ought to have had at the time of which I write, a pretty thorough knowledge of human nature, and have been enabled to read in a man's face if he intended me evil. I did not pride myself at being over keen or sharp, but the knocking about among strangers ought to have given anyone a good experience.

Well, the stranger and I fell into an easy strain of conversation as we rode together, and in ten minutes I began to enjoy his company. He was a well made fellow, finely dressed and wore a fine watch, and a simon pure diamond ring. I never saw a man who could talk so easy and so pleasantly. It seemed that he had but to open his mouth and the words fell right out.

I had traveled in the South, so had he. I had heard the roar of the Pacific, he knew all about it. I had been up in a balloon, down in a mine, been blown up, smashed up and repaired again and again; my new friend had experienced all these things and was wishing for something of a more startling nature. We agreed on politics, neither had any religion, and I had never met such a railroad companion.

Did you ever meet a man, who, though a stranger to you ten minutes before, could wrest from you your secrets which you had sworn to yourself not to reveal? Well, he was such a man. It was not long before he commenced asking me questions. He did not seem trying to quiz or draw me out, but he asked me questions in such a sly, roundabout way, that before I knew it I was giving him my history.

I was at the time just on the point of being admitted to the bar of Wisconsin as a student of Law & Law, of Briefville. The firm were old lawyers with a lucrative practice, and it had been talked over that in about a month I should be the "Co." of the firm. A year before, a farmer named Preston, down about four miles from Grafton, died, and his matters had been put into the hands of Law & Law for settlement. Preston had died rich. He had money in bank, railroad stock, mortgages, etc., and everything was settled up to the satisfaction of the relict and fatherless.

About a year before his death, being pushed for money, and not wanting to sell anything at a sacrifice, Preston had given a mortgage on his own farm for \$3,000. While the papers read "for one year from date," there was a verbal agreement that it should be lifted any day that Preston desired. A month after, when, having the funds to clear off the paper, the "old money bags" holding it refused to discharge, wishing to secure his interest for a year.

I was on my way to learn the date of expiration. A fire among our office papers had destroyed the memoranda, and I must go down and get the date from old Grip, who lived south of Grafton, about five miles. The stranger pumped all this out of me in about ten minutes, and yet I never once expected he was receiving any information.

"I am not positive," I added, "but I am pretty sure that the time is the 13th, which would be Tuesday next."

"And then your folks will send down the money and discharge the mortgage, of course," he queried.

"Oh, yes, I shall most likely bring it down," I replied, and it never occurred to me how imprudent I was.

He turned the conversation into other channels and did not once attempt to pump me further. We got to Grafton at 10:50, and to my great surprise, he announced that he was to stop in the town on business for a few days. I had not asked his name or vocation, while he knew everything about me.

We went to the hotel, had dinner, and then I secured a livery team and drove out, getting through with business so that I was back to take the 3:20 express east. My friend was on the porch of the hotel as I drove up, carrying the same honest, dignified face.

"Well, did you find it out?" he inquired, in his pleasant way.

"Yes, it was on the thirteenth, as I expected," I replied.

We had lunch together, and when we shook hands and parted, I had no more idea of ever meeting him again than I had of knowing you. In fact, he told me that he should sail for England within a week or ten days, and should not return to America. At parting he gave me his card. It was a modest piece of pasteboard, and bore the name of "George Raleigh," in old English script.

Everything at the office went on as usual and the thirteenth came at length. Law & Law had arranged with me to go down with the money, and I looked upon it as a business of no special importance.

“We know you are all right,” remarked the senior partner, as I was about to go, “but I want to give you a word of warning, nevertheless. Don’t take any strangers into your confidence until you have passed out the money, and look who sits next to you.”

It was something new for him to caution me, and I could not but wonder at it; but in the bustle of getting aboard the train I forgot what he said. Ordinary prudence had induced me to place the money, which was all in bank bills and divided into three packages, under my shirt and next to my skin, where the deft hand of a pickpocket could not reach it.

Interested in a newspaper, time flew by as the train went west, and at length the hoarse voice of the brakeman warned me that I had reached Grafton. I had leaped down and was heading for the livery stable when I heard a familiar voice, and I looked up to see Raleigh. He was seated in a buggy, and had seemingly waited for me to come in.

“Don’t express your surprise,” he began, as I stopped at the wheel. “I did intend to go away, but I changed my mind, and like this section so well that I am going out to-day to look at a farm with a view of purchasing—come, ride up to the hotel.”

We rode up, ordered lunch, and while we were discussing it Mr. Raleigh discovered that the farm he was going to see was just beyond old Grip’s.

How fortunate! I could ride out with him, see the farm, return in his company, and he was greatly pleased.

I was also pleased. If anyone had told me as we got into the buggy, that George Raleigh meant to return with my money in his pocket and my blood upon his hands, I should have believed him a lunatic. And yet George Raleigh had planned to do that very thing.

It was a lovely day in June, and the cool breeze and the sight of meadows and green groves, made my heart grow larger. My companion was very talkative, but he didn’t even hint at my errand. He talked as far away as he could.

“Oh! excuse me!” he exclaimed, after we had passed a mile beyond the village, and were among the farmhouses. “I should have offered you this before.”

He drew from his pocket a small flask of wine and handed it to me. Now, I was temperate in regard to drinks. In fact, I detested the sight and smell of anything intoxicating. But I had not the moral courage to tell him so, and hand back the flask undisturbed. I feared to offend him, and so I drank, perhaps, three good swallows. He called my attention to the woods on the left, as he received back the flask, and when I looked around again he was just removing it from his mouth, as if he had drunk hearty.

In about five minutes I began to feel queer. The fences along the road seemed to grow higher, and the trees to grow larger; something came to my ears that the rattle of the buggy sounded a long way off.

“How strange! Why, I believe that I am going to be sick!” I exclaimed, holding on to the seat with all my might.

“You do look strange,” he replied, a snaky smile stealing over his face; “I shouldn’t wonder if it was apoplexy.”

I did not suspect the game he had played. His words were like an echo, and his face seemed twice as large as it was. My head began to spin and my brain began to snap and crack, and I was greatly frightened.

“You are badly off,” he continued, looking into my face. “I will drive as fast as possible and get a doctor.”

My tongue was so heavy that I could not reply. I clutched the seat, closed my eyes, and he put his horse at his best pace. We met a farmer’s team, and I can remember that one of the occupants of the wagon called out to know what it was that ailed the man. Raleigh did not reply, but urged his horse forward.

About three miles from Grafton was a long stretch of forest, and this was soon reached. The pain in my head was not so violent, and I was not so badly affected when opening my eyes. I had settled into a sort of dumb stupor, with a brain so benumbed that I had to say to myself, “This is a tree, that is a stump,” etc. before I could make sure that I was not wrong. Half a mile and then Raleigh turned the horse into a blind road leading back into the woods. I could not understand what he intended. I tried to grapple with the question, but could not solve it.

“Well, here we are!” exclaimed Raleigh, as we had reached a point forty rods from the main road.

He stopped the horse, got out, and hitched him, and then came round to the wheel.

“You don’t feel just right, but I guess you will be better soon,” he remarked, “Come, let me help you down.”

He reached up his arms, and I let go the seat and fell into them. It seemed to me as if I weighed a ton, but he carried me along without an effort, and laid me down within about a rod of a fence which ran along on one side of an old pasture. Just now I began to feel a little better. The effects of the drugs were wearing off, and I got a faint suspicion that something unusual had happened. But I was powerless to move a limb; the sensation was like that when your foot goes to sleep.

“Can you speak?” inquired Raleigh, bending over me; “because if you can it will save me much trouble. I want to know just where you have stored away that money.”

Now I began to realize my situation. His face looked natural again, and the load was off my tongue. I also felt that I could move my fingers a little.

“George Raleigh! are you going to rob me?” I asked, finding my voice at last.

“Well, some folks might call it ‘robbing,’ but we dress up the term by calling it the only correct financial way of equaling the floating currency so that each one is provided for and none left out.”

“You shan’t have the money. I will die first!” I yelled, rising a little.

“Ah! I see—didn’t take quite enough,” he coolly remarked. “Well, I have provided for this.”

He went to the buggy, procured ropes and a gag, and knelt down beside me. I had but little strength yet, and he conquered me in a moment. Lying on my right side, looking toward the fence, he tied my hands behind me and then forced the gag into my mouth.

“There now! You see you are nicely fixed up, and all because you acted like a fool instead of like a sensible young lawyer, soon to be admitted to the bar.”

While he was speaking—indeed while he was tying me, I had caught sight of the white face of a little girl looking at us from behind the rails of the fence. I could see her great blue eyes and knew that she was frightened. There were red stains about the mouth and on the little hand resting on the rail, and I knew that she was some farmer’s child searching for strawberries. I could warn her of her danger, and I feared she would be seen or heard. When Raleigh was tying the last knot I winked at the little girl as hard as I could, hoping she would move away.

“Well, now for the money!” said Raleigh, and he began searching my pockets. He went from one to the other, removing all the articles, felt down my boot leg, and then finally passed his hand over my bosom and found the money.

“Ha! here it is!” he exclaimed, drawing out the packages. “I don’t hardly believe that old Grip will see any of this today.”

He sat down near my head, undid the packages, and was cool enough to go at it to count the money. As he commenced the little girl waved her hand at me. My head went thumping, for I expected that she would utter a word or shout, but she sank down from sight, and I caught a gleam of her frock as she passed through the grass.

He drew on the other boot, and placed some “fifties” and “twenties” in it, and then continued:

“I have it all planned out how to deal with you as soon as I get this money disposed of around my person. I shall lay you on your back and pour the balance of the wine down your throat. There’s enough of it to make you sleep until tomorrow night, and by that time I shall be hundreds of miles away. As soon as I see the drug take effect I shall untie your hands and remove the gag. When you come out of your sleep—if you ever do—you had better crawl out to

the road, where you will most likely meet some traveler soon. I want to use the horse and buggy, otherwise I would leave them for you.”

How coolly he talked. He treated the matter as if it was a regular business transaction in which I fully acquiesced. He had me a fast prisoner, and I felt that he could do just as he pleased. While I was thinking I saw a little white face appear between the rails again, but in a moment it faded away and its place was taken by the sun burned phiz of a farmer. He looked from me to Raleigh and back again, and I winked at him in a way which he readily understood. His face disappeared, and I felt that I should be saved.

“You see, my young friend,” remarked Raleigh, as he drew off one of his boots and deposited some of the bills in it, “there’s nothing like transacting business as it should be transacted. Some men would have shot or stabbed you, but it’s only apprentices who do such work. All the real gentlemen of our calling will do business as gentlemen should.”

“No, old Grip won’t get his tin today,” mused Raleigh, storing away the bills in his pockets. “You will go back to Law & Law feeling put out and cut up, but they couldn’t blame you; it’s not your fault at all. True, had you minded your business on the car and not been so free with a stranger, this would not have happened. I was on my way to Milwaukee, and had no thought of such rich pickings here.”

I saw nothing of the farmer. Raleigh finished his counting, and I made up my mind that the farmer was afraid to interfere and had run away. My heart went down as Raleigh got up, for I saw that he was about to carry out his plan of further drugging me. He turned me on my back, sat down astride of me, and then pulled out the flask.

“Now, in just about a minute, we’ll be thro’ with this business,” he remarked, trying to put the mouth of the flask between my jaws.

I rolled my head on one side and he did not succeed. He was jamming the flask against my teeth, when I caught the sound of a soft step, the crash of a club, and Raleigh rolled off my body. He tried to leap up, but three or four farmers struck him down, and one of the blows rendered him senseless. Before he came to, I was free of ropes and gag, and we had him securely bound.

Over beyond the pasture a farmer and hands were raking hay. “Little Blue Eyes,” only eight years old, had wandered off after strawberries, and had, fortunately for me, witnessed a part of Raleigh’s proceedings. She had hurried back to her father and told him that “a man was all tied up out there.” Understanding the situation he and his men had moved around so as to secure an advantage, and Raleigh’s capture was the result.

When the rascal found his senses he was terribly taken aback, and cursed enough for a whole Flanders army. We took him back to Grafton, and when I saw him again he was on his way to the penitentiary to serve a sentence of fifteen years.

The mortgage was duly lifted, and the gift which Law & Law sent Katy Grey kept her in dresses for many a year.

For myself, I felt so humiliated at having fallen into the rascal's trap, and so wrathful at the treatment, that I determined to devote myself to a thorough warfare on rogues. I therefore joined the detective force, and after due study, took my place as a full-fledged detective.

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