

Murder Will Out A Strange Revelation

THEY say murder will out—I wonder if that’s true? Let me see; it’s thirty years since that Schrapnell case—full thirty years; that was never found out—never will be, probably. Then, ten years ago, the Farwell case occupied the public mind—a foul murder that was—never the least clue to the perpetrators has leaked into the public press, though thousands of dollars were spent to find the murderer.

It was a case of jealousy—if my memory serves me right—a girl and her lover both killed—or a young bride and her husband—I have forgotten which. No, no; murder does *not* always leak out. Suppose I write a story—nobody will believe that I was the chief actor. My gray hairs, my great respectability, are against the supposition. Here sit I in my room—a gentleman of fortune, one who loves luxury and will have it. It is twenty-five years since—bah! why should I tell? And then I was forty-five, a hale, young-looking man. Nobody guessed my age; in fact, I flatter myself that caution and good living have preserved a fine physique moderately well.

I have never married—plenty of chances, oh, yes: without vanity, I may say hundreds—pretty, medium and beautiful girls, thrown at me. It may have been one of my penalties that I am a single man—perhaps, but why should one complain? If I have missed the pleasures of domestic life, there are also its perils escaped. Besides, having a face ever before me, an ear always beside me—I am not sure I could have kept my secret. Not that it has troubled me at all—save when my digestion may have been out of order. I take it that a man’s stomach is a sort of thermometer of his conscience. Let the gastric juices get a trifle wrong, and down drops the quicksilver, or *vice versa* up it goes to its extremest limits.

All these years I have lived like a gentleman. It was ever my ambition to exist without care. I was a pretty boy in my youth, and an only son, so that sister and cousins vied in showering attentions upon me. I never had to fatigue myself. To sit, to smile, to recline in carriages—to dress with perfect taste, to eat dainty dinners daintily—that was my forte. I never did anything awkwardly but once, and I blush at the remembrance—I kicked a cat, and I did it so badly that I broke her leg. By-the-by, I’ve a great tenderness for cats, and I flatter myself Antigone, yonder, is perfect; pure Greek by descent. A beautiful creature is Antigone—mark the breadth of the chest—the arch of the neck—the magnificent fur—the length of the tail. Come here, my beauty. You are hungry, are you? Observe, she takes cream out of a silver saucer, and prefers her chops cooked. I am particular about my pets—very fond of them, in fact. My heart bleeds when I think of the monstrous cruelty inflicted upon brute creatures—it does indeed.

The fire burns blue to-night—I have observed that phenomenon at times—a curious outer edge of a pale, infernal color, that gives its own unnatural tinge to the surroundings. I fancy it sometimes adds to the splendor to my favorite old picture across the parlor—a satanic thing, to be sure, since the “Everlasting Hokey,” as an old friend of mine humorously calls his bad eminence, is the most prominent object there. I don’t know why it is that picture so fascinates me, or why I fancy that I should be uneasy without the glare of his demoniac eye. However, that is the only unpleasant thing about—all my furniture is perfectly *au fait*; my couches are of the first quality, lined with velvet and trimmed with gold. My carpet, Persian, worn ten years now, is

intact in its coloring—not a line dim from age or ill usage. I have remarked once before, I believe, I was left an orphan at the early age of twenty-one—early age, I say, because, having been coddled, and dosed, and petted as I had, I was not better able to act for myself than a boy of ten. Luckily, a fortune was left me, but not knowing the worth of money, I ran it through in ten years—quite through. I became a slave. My tradesmen bullied me, my servants insulted me. I had serious thoughts of ending the matter in a gentlemanly way, either with poison or a pistol, when news came that my brother-in-law was killed. He was riding, poor gentleman; his horse leaped a bad ditch, and his neck was broken. I had a great aversion to funerals. Had I been in different circumstances, assuredly I should not have gone; but, to tell the truth, I was glad to get away from my duns; and John Tremain was enormously rich; there might be a plum for me.

It was something of a journey then from New York to Wilmington, but I managed to do the thing comfortably, and arrived at my sister's at twilight of the third day. It was a sad household I found, for my sister, who had been in delicate health, had been so shocked by the terrible accident, that she was not expected to live. She sent for me, poor soul! She was white and pale, and even then dying.

"I've but little strength left, dear Lewis," she said, "and with that I commend my poor boy to your care and keeping. His father's property and mine both fall to him. You have enough of your own; though, of course, if you take charge of him, so much of his income will be set aside to defray all necessary expenses. But our solicitor will inform you more explicitly upon these matters. He has been with me all the afternoon. Poor John had willed the bulk of his fortune to me. I have left all to my child; in the event of his death before he becomes of age, of course the property will be yours."

Very curious! as I finished writing the last sentence, I raised my eyes, and between me and the pale blue flame of fire I saw *her* face. Very white it was, and rigid and threatening. Really, I am shaken—it was an illusion—but no! I rubbed my eyes and looked straight at the fire, but the face still kept its position between me and it. It must have been an illusion—I see it no longer. Very strange, these things; quite a curious illustration of the power of the imagination.

Let me proceed. The next day my sister was dead, and I saw the child. Can any one explain the reason, I wonder, why, at the first glance, I hated that boy? He was small and slender, with a head larger than it should have been, and eyes, not blue and soft, like his mother's, but black, full, and melancholy. He put his little hand, so small that it looked like a baby's, in mine, but did not keep it there any longer than to feel the pressure of my fingers, and then he seemed to avoid me. Poor lad! he was too young to mourn very long, but his grief, at times, was terrible.

"There's a blight on him, sir," said the old family physician, a portly, red-faced man, with pompous, old-time manners—"there's a blight on him, sir; trouble in store for him, poor boy! Insanity runs in the family—on the father's side. Poor John escaped it—this boy may; but in the next generation there's a possibility, and something more, that the trouble will come."

At these words, I felt a strange pressure at my heart, and a new throb of dislike against this puny sprig of my family tree. However, I returned home with lighter spirits, accompanied by the boy. No need to tremble at duns, now. I knocked one of them down with a malicious throb of

pleasure, and then paid him twice the amount of his bill. I turned all my servants off, after I had settled with them, though some of them came to me with tears, begging to stay.

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My boy and I settled down. I was kind to him. He was always rather shy toward me, but in time I think he grew to like me, after his fashion. I tried honestly, I tried hard to feel a similar trust and liking, but it was not possible. At times, the very sight of the child was odious to me. I was obliged to send him from me, because I could no longer endure the sight of his pale eyes and pointed chin—the feeling grew sometimes unendurable. He kept the stature of a dwarf for years—had his nurse and tutor—the latter I paid for doing nothing, for my boy was too sickly to study; but the thing looked well, for was not the child heir to a large fortune? At twelve he began to grow, and then he shot up like a weed. There was nothing attractive about him, save to some persons his dark, melancholy eyes had a charm of their own, and his mouth was as rosy and sweet in its expression as that of a babe.

At fifteen he was an indefatigable student; at sixteen his health broke down, and he became subject to moods of intense sadness. By this time he had become convinced that there was no sympathy between us. He never avoided me; neither did he any longer seek my society, but preferred remaining much alone by himself. Occasionally I found scraps of paper, on which he had written passionate rhymes, bewailing the loss of his mother and his kindred; the want of congenial hearts; the oppression of gloomy and weird fancies; the terror of darkness, and the frequency of visions for which he could not account. I began to grow alarmed—not for him, let me say, in all frankness, but for myself. I remembered the old doctor's saying that there was madness in the family. If this misanthrope should lose his mind, I was as liable to become his victim as any one—more, more likely than others, for sometimes I fancied I saw in his eyes a glare of dislike—a sudden, sharp hatred in his fixed, aggressive glance. I consulted physicians; they recommended travel and cessation of all study. My boy liked that; it put color into his cheeks while he talked of it.

“We'll go to Wilmington,” he said, one day. “Would you object, sir, to going there? I should like to see the house were I was born, where my poor mother died, and, above all, I wish to visit her grave.”

I did not object to Wilmington, and yet I had rather he had chosen some other place. It was natural enough, though; the boy remembered his mother—the poor, lone waif, I felt a sort of pity for him, sometimes, and often caught myself wondering if it had not been vastly better that the poor lad had slept with his mother. But he clung with miserlike tenacity to life, even when he walked its shifting sands with listless eyes and hollow cheeks, and scarcely the motion of vitality. Strangely enough, it almost angered me that he should live, even in the midst of my pity. The doctors advised sea-air, and sea-bathing. There was plenty of places from which we could choose, and we waited till our visit to Wilmington should be over before we decided which should have the honor of our sojourn.

Wilmington was more quaint then than it is now; there are newer houses, newer streets, newer churches there; but the same hills could be seen, the same surroundings. The house in which

John Tremain had lived long ago passed into other hands, and was now occupied by a physician and his thriving brood. I think he had fifteen children, two or three sets of twins among them; but when we called he was very polite, and invited us into the long, low parlor, where children in frocks, in pinafores and long clothes, kept going in and out, staring at the strangers with rustic rudeness.

My boy only cared to see his old nursery and the room where his mother died, which he just remembered. The noise distracted him. I am sure it nearly drove me wild, and we were glad to get out on the street again, and take our way to the grassy graveyard, where a pure white monument, of very simple, yet chaste design, told the passerby that here mingled the dust of John and Mary Tremain.

I went round at the back of the grave, leaving the boy looking thoughtfully at the slab that held the inscription.

“And I, too, shall lie beside them, perhaps,” I heard him exclaim, in a low, muffled voice.

The blood rushed to my brain at this exclamation. I was so overcome that I was obliged to seat myself on an old, moss-grown slab. Would his words, indeed, prove prophetic? I did not disguise to myself that I was in some sort a pensioner on the bounty of this sickly boy. Nobody but myself, of course, knew to what extent; I had not chosen to tell people that I was a beggar. My sister had not suspected it, and if he lived and recovered strength in the flush of his manhood, what was to become of me? Ruined, penniless, the very prospect of the boy’s attaining his majority drove me nearly wild. *If he died*, his fortune was mine. Affluence, boundless affluence, unlimited luxury, my very being, seemed to depend upon this sickly, diseased, overgrown boy. In four years—only four years—he would be twenty-one.

I glanced at him furtively. The pale, attenuated features gave a ghastliness to his delicate profile which was heightened by its contrast with the red light of the sun, that, sinking in fiery masses that sent long, low flashes of crimson splendor over the quaint walls, along the half-sunken mounds and gray granite tombstones, threw into the atmosphere a rich surfeit of its own crimson glory.

When we met again he looked happier, but still pale, and I thought I saw the shadow of an early doom deepening the faint lines of his brow.

We went to Cape May. It was not then a fashionable watering-place, and I soon tired of its stagnant life. But we were not the only visitors, although the season was somewhat advanced. I found apartments in a tolerable hotel, and by adding here and there, contrived to live somewhat in the style to which we had been accustomed.

Tom Titus, my boy’s tutor, an old-young fellow, who looked as if he had been lost in some theologic convulsion, and taken out of its strata a thousand years after, miraculously preserved, like the frog we read about, was never in the way. You might have played a polka under his nose, and he would have gone on serenely solving some abstruse question. I don’t think my boy was benefited much by this antiquated bit of humanity—I mean in the way of an education—but the

man loved him, and he loved the queer, bent tutor, who was, or would have been, his willing slave.

He, with my valet, and a smart boy, who was under the heir's protection, constituted our retinue. I disliked taking many servants on a tour of this kind—it distracts one's mind, and servants will quarrel. So we settled down, or, rather, I did, for the heir and his tutor took long rambles on the beach. I fancied my easy-chair and a twilight canter best. Sometimes the boy ventured on horseback, but he was not a good rider, and never appeared to advantage in that situation.

One day—I shall never forget it, a sultry July morning—I made up my mind for a stroll on the beach. No sooner had I decided than I donned a fresh linen suit, and took my way to the seashore. It seemed quite deserted. The fine sand glittered in the sun, as a white coating of spray crawled over it: the pebbles might have been diamonds by the sharp glitter of their wet edges. A broad path of gold, cut into lines by the restless motion of the waves, ran from the beach toward the opposite horizon, across which glittered now and then a white sail, or the foaming outline of a faroff ship. For a few minutes I sauntered on, until I came to an old, dismantled bulk, rearing its huge skeleton from the sand, and standing quite near the water. I fancied I heard voices. A moment more and I saw Tom Titus. He had burrowed out a hole in the sand that had drifted like a solid wave up against the old wreck, and sat there drawn up together, quite lost in the perusal of an old book that was yellow where it was not black, and that looked as if its edges had been subjected to the heat of some fiery furnace years before its possessor was born. He did not see me, so, retracing my steps, I moved round on the other side of the huge ruin, and then stopped, transfixed by what I saw. There stood the heir, his cheeks flushed, his hair blowing back from cheeks and brow, his eyes dilated and shining, talking to, or rather, I should say, listening to, the prettiest creature it was ever my fortune to meet. A celestial beauty seemed to light up that lovely face, as the red lips moved, making music to me, almost, with their dumb motion; for I was too far off to hear, and the wind blew off shore. She held a hat, by the blue strings, in one hand; the other grasped a book. Her white dress the breeze had coaxed from the slenderest ankles and daintiest feet, and her smiles were so bewildering, that, at that moment, for the first time in my life, I lost my heart, and hated the heir yet more for his good fortune in having secured this dainty creature to himself.

Yes, Louise Savern was the only woman I ever loved, and she refused me. But I anticipate.

So, I had found out a secret. I saw, now, why the boy battled so bravely with disease, and put a bold front on the contingencies at which doctors hinted. That was why he smiled so often, was it? That was why his bath refreshed him, when, pale and languid, he left his couch in the morning; that was why he wished to be so much by himself, and to write, no doubt, sonnets to his ladylove. But why should I be enraged that he had not confided in me? He had never made a confidant of any one but Tom Titus. I had never encouraged him to be familiar. Whose fault was it that the boy was uncommunicative, cold, unfeeling? It was all his own, I said: and then, as to a boy of seventeen being in love—bah! The thing was sickening. Had I not passed forty-five years without the sign of such a feeling? From that hour the gulf widened between us; from that hour my hate was fed with fresh fuel. I bantered him about his companion. He blushed like a girl.

Had not I met the Saverns? They were in the house over the way. Perhaps I had noticed a pretty little old lady, who led a King James spaniel by a ribbon; that was Miss Louise's mother. Miss Louise herself was very young—only sixteen (he might have seen the sneer in my face), and she had not quite done going to school.

In time, I cultivated the Saverns. Miss Louise seemed always a little afraid of me. I made myself agreeable to both papa and mamma, who were quiet, dignified, hum-drum sort of people; but for all that, I knew that the heir and Louise met often.

“Getting on famously, sir—famously,” said the doctor, whom I had called in on one or two occasions, and who had been my sister's physician; “if he can manage to pull through till he is twenty-one, there'll be no trouble, I'm inclined to think. Of course, candidly, I have doubts, serious doubts.”

So had I.

One day I overheard the heir talking to Tom Titus.

“I really feel as if I had a new lease of life, old Tom. It's pleasant here, isn't it? One would like to live and find one's romances realities. A year ago, and I didn't care; but, oh! Tom, death looks cruel to me now. Do you really think I shall pull through, Tom, till I am twenty-one?”

“Oh, yes,” said Tom Titus, his face a total abstraction.

“If it wasn't that I am so weak of mornings! What is that medicine I take in water, I wonder?”

“Good for you—doctor ought to know; your uncle knows;” and Tom Titus was off among the stars again.

Every night the thought occurred to me, “What if he should go mad before morning?”

Fearful to feel such a sword suspended—to live in perfect—well, dread of insanity; better he should die young. As for the powders, *I mixed them myself.*

That face again—pitiless, menacing; I tell you I did it for the best. I was never cruel in my life—never. You may threaten me with your ghastly eyes, but you cannot make me think it was a crime. Besides, he never could have lived. Do you hear? That witless son of yours never would have lived.

And then, at the last, I tried to save him—ay, I did; at the last, I gave it up—the powder. But his vitality was too far spent. Poor boy! he wanted to live, for her; she loved him, the silly little fool. I sent him to sea—the vessel was a shell—it foundered—and not a soul—

At that moment the old man looked over his shoulder—gave one convulsive shudder—a wild cry escaped him. Whose were those stern eyes, set in a face bronzed and bearded?

“Go on,” said the voice; “I have read the last ten pages; go on; say that the sea gives up its dead, sometimes. Say that I was saved as by a miracle; that I spent twenty-four years in a foreign land; that I have been home six months; that Providence saved Louise, who has never married, for me; that we become husband and wife to-morrow; that you and— Ah! the shock has killed him. I didn’t dream he would take it that way. Murder *will* out, old man! He did not hear me, deaf that he was, when I entered. God forgive him; he sacrificed all the best years of my life to his lust for gold.”

A well-appointed funeral moved from a stately house. There were no mourners—only the semblance of woe!

Frank Leslie’s Pleasant Hours, February 1872 (Illustrated)