

A Detective's Story

It was a very singular, mysterious and complicated case.

In a bare room of an old house in the vicinity of London bridge railway station, a man was found dead, hanging by a small cord to a hook driven into the wall, his feet resting on the floor.

He was discovered some days after his death, by reason of the strong smell sent forth from the decomposing body.

He was a stranger whom no one knew, and why he should have come to that place to commit suicide was a mystery.

He was well dressed, had a gold watch in his pocket, to which was attached a heavy gold chain; he had a diamond stud in his shirt front, and a cluster ring of diamonds on one finger; he also had a pocketbook on his person containing over £200 in bank notes.

It was therefore evident that he had not committed suicide on account of poverty, nor been murdered for his money.

Was it suicide, or was it murder?

There was no scrap of paper on his person to tell who the stranger was, nor his motive for the murderous deed, if he did it.

The room, which was an upper story of an old building, the lower portion of which was occupied by a commission agent, contained no article of furniture.

It had been rented about ten days previous to a rather venerable man, who walked a little lame and wore goggles, who said he wanted it for an office for the sale of a patent that would become very popular with sea going people.

When questioned about the patent he said that he would not then explain it, but would have some things on hand for an exhibition in the course of ten days or two weeks.

The dead man was not the one who had taken the room, however; and how and when he had got access to the apartment no one knew.

There was an old-fashioned fireplace in the room, and some paper ashes in this attracted the attention of a detective, who happened to be no other than my humble self.

In turning over these ashes I discovered two or three little bits of paper not entirely consumed, and they had these words written on them, though now barely distinguishable:

“found her and locked”
“private room”

“meet you”
“station”
“G.”

Now, after reading these disjointed sentences, I began to study and ponder them.

Might not this be a portion of a message sent to the dead man to lure him on to the city for the purpose of putting him out of the way?

But for what motive?

Ah, that indeed I could not know—that was something only to be found out after a serious investigation, in case one should be made.

I examined the charred paper as well as I could, and reached the conclusion that what I had read was a part of a telegram which had been sent by somebody from London and received by somebody at a distance, and that either the sender or the receiver intended to destroy it.

Now, if the deceased had received it, it must have been sent to him by somebody, and that somebody intended to meet him, and probably did meet him at the railway station.

Well, then, where was that somebody, and why had he allowed his correspondent to visit that out of the way room and commit suicide without ever going near him afterward?

And why should the man come to such a place to kill himself?

And could he have found the room without a guide, and did he get across to it unknown to anyone, if he were not the man who had rented it in the first place?

But then it was certain that he was not the man unless he was in disguise when he hired it; and why had he gone to all that trouble merely to hang himself, when he could have done it quite as effectually in 10,000 better places?

No; looking on it—reason as I might—I could not bring myself to believe that the stranger hanging in that bare room had put the rope around his own neck.

I told the coroner of my belief; but whether he coincided with me or not, it is certain his jury did not, for they brought in a verdict of suicide.

The body was placed in the mortuary for recognition, and I requested that it should be kept there as long as possible, for I had a desire to see what I could do in working up the case.

I started out with the bits of paper I had secured to see if I could find at any telegraph office any messages recently sent off embodying the words I had transcribed in their consecutive order.

I was soon fortunate in getting possession of what I believed to be the original message.

It was addressed to Horace Granger, 187 — Street, Manchester, and read as follows—the words I found among the paper ashes I enclose in brackets:

I have [found her and locked] her up in a [private room]. Come and use a parent's authority. Take the last train and I will [meet you] at London bridge [station]. G.

Judging from this it was a case of a runaway daughter, whom "G" had followed and captured in London and whom the anxious father had come on to see and probably to take back with him.

As the dead man appeared to be not far from 35 years of age it was natural to suppose that no daughter of his could be beyond her teens.

A school girl, perhaps, who had played truant and ran away.

But, then, if she had been caught and locked up it was not reasonable to suppose it had been in that bare room in a mercantile building that contained no other lodgers.

And then, again, if the father had come on and found her, what had become of "G," who had sent the message? And why had the father remained behind to hang himself?

Or had the girl, assisted by "G," murdered her father?

In any event the affair was one of great mystery, and on privately reporting my discoveries to my chief I received the welcome order to work it out to the end.

To do this properly I immediately went to Manchester.

The address took me to a large elegant mansion in the suburbs, which led me to believe the owner was a man of means.

I did not ring, enter and state my business, but visited the nearest apothecary, as the man most likely to know the general facts about his neighbors.

"Would you be kind enough to answer a stranger in the city a few questions?" I said to the dispenser of medicine.

"Proceed," he replied, looking curiously at me.

"Do you know a gentleman by the name Horace Granger?"

"I do."

"Has he a family?"

"A wife and daughter."

“About what age would you judge him to be?”

“About 35.”

“And his daughter?”

“Fourteen.”

“Is Mr. Granger at home?”

“I cannot say. I have not seen him for more than a week.”

“Is his daughter at home?”

“I think not. I think she is away at boarding school.”

“Pardon me, sir, if I seem to be inquisitive,” said I; “but I have a reason beyond mere curiosity for all the questions I ask, and some time, if not just at this moment, you shall know all. Can you tell me if he is on good terms with his wife?”

“It is rumored—mind you, I only say it is rumored—that he is jealous of a certain gentleman of whom he has no reason to be, and that he has confidence in one who may yet turn out to be a treacherous villain.”

This was becoming very interesting to me.

“May I venture to ask the name of this second party?”

“Well, sir, as you are a stranger to me,” replied the druggist, “I will not mention any name; but if you should ever happen to have business with the head clerk of Horace Granger, it is my opinion you will be within 100 miles of the party.”

“Thank you,” I said, feeling now pretty sure of my course.

After some further questions I left the apothecary, and repaired to the office of Horace Granger, the street and number of which I had ascertained.

I found a tall, dark, muscular, sinister looking clerk, about 30 years of age, standing at a desk behind a counter.

“Is Mr. Granger in?” I asked.

“No,” was the curt reply.

“Will he be in soon?”

“Don’t know.”

“Has he been in to-day?”

“Can’t say.”

“Was he in yesterday?”

“Can’t say.”

“Will he ever be in again?”

The man started, and looked at me for the first time in a quick searching way.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“Has he come back with his daughter?” I questioned in turn.

He again started, came forward, and sharply scrutinized my person; but, as I fancied, with a guilty conscience.

“Who are you? What do you want here? And why these impertinent questions?” he demanded in a fierce way.

“Don’t you know that Horace Granger is dead?” said I, with a fixed look upon the fellow that made him quail.

“Dead!” he echoed, in well assumed amazement and horror. “Good heavens! How? When? Where?”

“How?—by hanging; when?—six days ago; where?—London.” I answered, categorically.

“You take away my breath!” he almost gasped.

“What is your name?” I queried.

“George Grenham.”

“Ah, yes, the G.!” thought I.

“You knew Mr. Granger went to London nearly a week ago to find his daughter?” I proceeded.

I saw the man turn pale and shudder as he answered, in a mumbling, confused way.

“I believe—he did—go—somewhere.”

“But his daughter was not in London, you know!”

I said this at a venture, for I fancied I had divined the plot.

“Why, how did you know that?—that is—I mean—”

“Never mind,” I interrupted. “His daughter was not there but you were.”

“Man!” and his eyes fairly glared.

“You had been there before, in the disguise of an old man,” I went on; “you had engaged a room in a commercial house to exhibit a patent; you went on again and telegraphed to your employer that his daughter was found and locked up, to come on the last train and you would meet him at London Bridge station. You did meet him; it was in the night; you took him to the room you had previously engaged; you fell upon him; you garroted him; you hung him up to the wall; you burned the telegram, and then you hastened back here to play the role of innocence!”

I went through with my accusations so rapidly, giving the villain no time for consideration or even interruptions—I piled one fact upon another so quickly and surely that I seemed to the guilty wretch to be an eye-witness relating what I had seen; and I brought the whole damning scene so vividly to his mind’s eye that, with a face distorted with horror and covered with the sweat of mental agony, he staggered back, sank down, and half groaned and half shrieked out:

“Good heavens, have mercy!”

Well, I had my clue; but before I could make much use of it the murderous scoundrel blew out his own brains.

Of course the affair made quite a sensation in certain circles at the time, but was kept as much as possible from the public at large, and was soon hushed up and forgotten by everybody not in any manner interested beyond the mere curiosity and scandal of the hour.

What part the wife had in the wicked plot I do not know.

I, of course, won the distinguished approval of my chief for the part I had taken in the affair, and that proved of much importance to me in the future of my profession.—Hartford Times.

The Wisconsin State Register [Portage, WI], March 5, 1887

Rock Island Daily Argus [Moline, IL], April 18, 1887

Huntingdon [PA] *Globe*, April 21, 1887

Reprinted in the *Commercial Advertiser* [Canton, NY], March 24, 1887; however, after the line, “The address took me to a large elegant mansion in the suburbs, which led me to believe the

owner was a man of means,” the story shifts to an entirely different story—that is not a detective story but a romance that focuses on a woman named Sybil Travers.