

*The Invisible Crime;*  
*or*  
*Foot-Print Evidence.*

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WRITTEN FOR THE ALTA CALIFORNIAN,  
BY LE SOLITAIRE

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CHAPTER I.  
FINDING THE BODY

Dead!

The cold moonbeams played over the ghastly face that was upturned to the sky, and the silent stars shone as brightly as if there were no murder upon earth; while gentle zephyrs bore as light a wing and as sweet a perfume as if the world were full of innocence, rest and beauty.

It was a weird scene. No necromancer, with all the cabalistic and magical agencies within the reach of sorcery, could ever present a *coup d'œil* of such sickening horror. Gaunt crime stood out in its most appalling form, and the curse of Cain brooded over the blood-stained spot, making night hideous and the darkness heavy with a burden of fearful guilt.

The lifeless body lay in a narrow road, fenced on both sides, and having stalwart trees forming a loose arch above with interlacing branches. It was a picture of rustic beauty, fields of corn showing their silvery wave in the moonlight, and softly rustling under the passing breeze, and the silence of nature reigning around in undisturbed serenity. From the hillock where the blood deed had been done, a winding valet could be seen sleeping in shade, where stood a small village, composed of the homes of a few industrious farmers; and a little further off, on the rise of a thickly-wooded bluff, the gable roof of a rather pretentious building rose above the encircling trees. This was the residence of Robert Stanwright, commonly called the Squire, a gentleman of means, and the owner of large tracts of land contiguous to the village, and in other parts of the State.

As soon as the day dawned, one of Mr. Stanwright's farm hands, who had instructions to carry to his master's lumber mill, which was located at a distance of about four miles, rode across the valley and entered the narrow fenced road up the hill. Before he had proceeded far, his horse sniffed, shied, and began to tremble. Not perceiving any cause, nor understanding the meaning of such strange conduct, the rider applied a violent cut with his whip; but the animal, instead of showing any disposition to advance, evinced a very decided wish to return. Lashes and coaxings, however, succeeded, after a while, in getting a little headway, but the trembling horse seemed to hug one side of the road, as if shunning something dreadful on the other side. The rider was quick to comprehend this, and after a few moments examination, he was able to detect a dark substance, which resembled the form of a man, lying close to the opposite fence.

Dismounting, he led his horse, which now seemed more composed, to the object, and on getting near, started back aghast.

“Heavens!” he exclaimed: “here’s bloody work! Young Stanton murdered! What will master and Miss Alice say?”

Not knowing exactly what to do— whether to take the body with him or leave it lying as he had found it— he stood in confused thought for quite fifteen minutes, and then decided to hurry back alone to impart the horrible intelligence. The horse, nothing loath, galloped along, and required only a few minutes to reach its master’s door. The family had not yet risen, but the servant rang the bell violently, feeling the while as if he himself had become a guilty criminal, and realizing a sense of horror to which, till then, he had been a stranger.

Presently an upper window was thrown open, and Mr. Stanwright’s face appeared, first beginning to flush with anger when he discovered that a farm hand was his early disturber.

“What do you want, you varlet?” he angrily asked; “why don’t you speak instead of standing there with open mouth and staring eyes?”

“Oh! sir,” began the poor fellow, but seemingly could get no further.

“Well, what is it? speak out,” demanded Mr. Stanwright, with increasing rage.

“Oh, sir,” repeated the man, trying to manage his tongue. “Oh, sir, young Mr. Stanton is—”

“What do you say?” the master anxiously inquired, commencing to fear that there must be something seriously the matter.

“Murdered, sir,” the man gasped out, as if he were surrendering up his life with the word.

“Murdered, do you say?”

“Yes, sir, and his body is lying up the hill road.”

“Wait where you are, John; I will be down in a moment,” Mr. Stanwright said, growing suddenly calm, as most men generally do when a question of death takes a hold on the soul.

It was not many minutes before he presented himself fully dressed, and when he had ascertained from his servant the full particulars of the morning’s discovery, he, being himself a magistrate, called together four of his men, who by this time were about to enter upon their day’s work, and after getting them to unhinge a door to serve for a litter, he headed the party to the spot where the murdered man was said to be lying. On

reaching the village, most of the farmers were met just coming out to their daily labor, and they, on hearing the news, joined Mr. Stanwright's party, each face wearing a scared, serious expression. The village doctor was next aroused, and speedily prepared himself to accompany them; and thus in the early daylight, a solemn company of about thirty or forty horror-stricken but resolute men, proceeded up the hill road to find the dead body.

Many features of our humanity are peculiar. Life and death struggles are almost silent, but small quarrels are noisy; unimportant wounds are excruciatingly painful, but mortal injury is comparatively painless; unreasoning passion is violent, but determined reason is cool and deliberate; a small danger excites, but a mighty peril calms; an annoyance is often worse than a calamity; and when there would seem serious cause for wordy demonstration, there is invariably less talk than when only some valueless trifle stands in the way.

So now; the farmers walked on in almost breathless silence, with greater solemnity indeed than if they were attending a funeral, and only the startled expression of the eyes and the extra compression of the lips denoted that their feelings had been shocked by some awe-inspiring event.

Mr. Stanwright and the doctor led the way, and were the first to reach the corpse. It was lying on its back, exactly as John, the servant, had described; but now the morning sun flashed its golden rays upon the inanimate face, which made it look more ghastly pale than ever.

"Dead! quite dead!" the doctor solemnly remarked, as he laid his hand on the cold, marbled brow."

A shudder ran through that party of world-hardened men, and from more than one heart an involuntary tear welled up in token of deeply awakened sympathy.

And no wonder. The body was indeed that of young Edward Stanton, who was well known to all of them, and a great favorite with every one who knew him. It was only the previous evening that they had spoken to him, then in all the flush and buoyancy of a young, happy life. His age could not have been more than twenty-five, and death could not deprive his handsome features of their Apollo-like beauty.

"Death must have followed immediately," observed the doctor, "for the ball has passed through the main artery of the heart."

"Murdered?" inquired Mr. Stanwright.

"Clearly," the doctor replied, "or rather assassinated, for there is no evidence of any scuffle. I should say that the villain was ambushed, and fired with deliberate aim as his victim was passing. Every appearance indicates that he fell precisely where he lies."

“Well, no good can result from any parley here. I will take the responsibility of having the body removed to my house; and after the arrival of a detective, for whom I will at once telegraph, I will hold an inquest; and mark me, friends,” he continued, with solemn emphasis, “I will spare no effort or expense to bring the author of this bloody deed to justice. Come, men, place the body on the litter, and bear it carefully to my house.”

Mr. Stanwright and the doctor again led the way in troubled converse, followed by the men bearing the corpse, while the party of farmers, now engaged in half whispered talk, brought up the rear.

Thus they passed through the village, the families of which, having before this obtained intelligence of the horrible discovery, were clustered together, debating, women like, all the possibilities and impossibilities of the subject which their active fancies and ready tongues were capable of inventing; but as the melancholy cortege approached, they, too, had recourse to semi-whispers.

In a short time the body was deposited in a room of the squire’s house, a detective telegraphed for, and the several farmers had, in a solemn sort of way, applied themselves to their ordinary vocations; but to them all it seemed that the air was dark and heavy, and that the word “murder” was dolefully whispered by the passing breeze.

Superstitious fancy, it may be said, is inseparable from conscious life. As happiness and misery are not dependent on actual circumstances, so neither are our senses most powerfully impressed by abstract realism. An object of horror striking the eye is bad enough, but it is the imagination working upon the horror that produces the most heart-sickening sensations. Death, in a house with the shutters firmly closed, and muffled footsteps moving about, and whispers heard seemingly more distinctly than full utterances, changes the whole aspect of the world to the household of the bereaved family, as if the pulse of life stood still, and a sepulchral gloom reigned everywhere. Under such circumstance the imagination is morbidly alive, and works out the most frightful vagaries. So, likewise, in cases of a shuddering consciousness of crime or of guilty fear, a deceased fancy engenders the most horrible phantasies, and inspires the soul with more terrors than the worse realities are capable of doing. This is forcibly portrayed in Shakespeare’s “Julius Caesar,” where the shrinking wretch is made to exclaim:

“How ill this taper burns! ha! who comes here?  
I think it is the weakness of my eyes  
That shapes this monstrous apparition—  
It comes upon me! Art thou anything?  
Art thou some god, some angel, or some devil  
That makes my blood cold, and my hair to stare?”

Truly, crime and guilt fashion whips to scourge, and even the vicinity of violence is infested to the innocent, with horrors never imagined before. This was how the villagers were affected by the discovery of murder in their midst, and they all anxiously awaited

the issue of the investigation about to take place, hoping that some light might be thrown On the perpetrator of so hellish a crime, and the reasons that instigated it.

As yet, everything was shrouded in the most profound mystery. The village, which bore the name of Swinton, had never before this been the scene of anything like criminal violence; indeed, if peace and innocence existed in the world they might be said to exist there; and now, all of a sudden, to be rudely awakened to the dreadful certainty of murder, was to startle the inhabitants with a shock of overwhelming horror that, while it excited their feelings, almost paralyzed their senses, and drove them distracted.

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE SQUIRE'S DAUGHTER

Mr. Stanwright was denominated "The Squire" for two reasons; first, he was the most extensive property holder in the county, and second, he was the District Magistrate and sole Trustee of the village church, which offices invested him in the eyes of the simple-minded residents with a dignity little inferior to that of the President of the United States.

He was a widower with a family of three, all daughters. The death of his wife, to whom he had been married nearly twenty years, and whom he dearly loved, had occurred two years previous to the opening of this story, and had been so tremendous a shock to him that it was commonly stated he had never been the same man since. But people now-a-days do not die from mental shocks, and, indeed, ten or a hundred shocks, more or less, no matter how severe, do not make much difference to a man who has buffeted against the grim experiences of the world. Certainly, the first hard rub tells with prostrating force, but the second, though it may be more severe in reality, is not so severely felt, and the multiplied repetition brings about a callousness of the senses so that what at one time would have been deemed an irrevocable misfortune becomes simply a casual mischance that occasions a moment's melancholy or elicits a bitter sneer. It is the first death that strikes with solemn effect; the first betrayal of friendship that goads to a sour misanthropy; the first business misfortune that causes a collapse of hopes; the first womanly deceit and faithlessness that plant the roots of cynicism. Naturally the human heart is too tender for these things, but in time the losses, crosses, hardships, impositions, deceits, and falsehoods, that crowd the pathway of life, give a stamina to the heart-strings that produces a stoicism sublime in its heedlessness. The milk of human kindness becomes exhausted by lavish drainage, and the innate fountains of sympathy that feed the affections run dry. Furnaces of passion that once fired brain, heart, and soul, die out for want of material to consume, leaving cold blood, tearless eyes, and hollow smiles. Hence it is that all those who have passed over the Syrian desert of experience are stigmatized as heartless, causing the poet to say:

"Alas! for the rarity  
Of Christian charity  
Under the sun!"

What mockery of sentiment! Coal, when burned, leaves nothing but ashes and cinders!

Mr. Stanwright, as in nature bound, rallied from the shock of his wife's death, and turned to the responsibilities of his position with a cheerful face, while in his home circle, he sought to make up to his children in extra kindness and indulgence for the loss of their mother. Thus for two years he had played the part of a man who imitated the kindest virtues with the warmest domestic affections.

Alice, the eldest daughter, was now in her twentieth year and had charge of the house, endeavoring with all the fervor of her affectionate young heart to make her father happy and supply the place of mother to her dependent sisters. For a year after her mother's death no counter claim had encroached on her tender affections, and she had devoted herself to her self-appointed duties with a loving zest which made household cares and responsibilities a source of genuine pleasure to her. Nor afterwards, when a counter claim intruded itself on her affections did she relax in the least degree in her efforts to promote the comfort and happiness of her father and sisters.

That counter claim had, nevertheless, grown very sweet to her, it being no other than pure love's appeal in favor of a deserving object. When young Edward Stanton, who was the son of a wealthy merchant carrying on business in the chief city of an adjoining State, had, after returning from college and remaining for a short time, come on a visit to her father's house, the parents of both being long intimately acquainted, she had at first unconsciously yielded to the spell of his cultivated manners and handsome person, but afterwards acknowledged to her own soul that she loved him with all the passion of which a maiden's heart is capable.

Alice Stanwright was not beautiful according to the generally accepted meaning of the term. Her features did not harmonize; her chin was prominent, and her nose *retrousee*, but her forehead and eyes would have aroused the warmest admiration of critic or poet. Not high, but a square oval, white and polished as alabaster, her forehead was one of the most beautiful that ever belonged to woman, and indicated not only a powerful, but also a delicate mental organization, such as is ever associated with the purest virtue, and the truest sympathy. The eyes were large, full, and dark hazel in color, brimming with intelligence, and wonderfully variable in expression as if they mirrored forth every changeable emotion of the soul, and were the index of feelings that needed no disguise.

The vulgar opinion regarding beauty is a sadly mistaken one. A baby face, having a clear complexion, regular features, coquettish eyes and a seductive smile, is the conventional type of beauty. Oftentimes, "oh, beautiful!" is the epithet applied to a showy simpleton, who has little modesty and less culture, and whose only charms consist of a good figure and doll-like features.

"What glorious eyes," is frequently the praise awarded to visual organs which, though bright, are as devoid of expression as moonbeams are of warmth or color, and which, in an intellectual sense, agree with anything rather than with the poet's pretty conceit of "Orbs swimming in liquid lustre." Thus the superficial criticism of society establishes a

standard of judgment that is both pernicious in tendency and contrary to the refined criticism of taste.

Beauty, judged irrespective of the true principles of art, is undoubtedly a question of opinion. Every woman, no matter how plain, is beautiful in at least the eyes of one man. Love is blind, we are told, and the most unprepossessing Dulcinea is painted in angelic colors by the enslaved suitor. As every husband is apt to think that every wife but his own is open to suspicion, so every lover charges with prejudice or want of taste all those who do not see in his inamorata all the grace which his own fond fancy pictures. But distinct from the vagaries of judgment common to society and individuals, the true criterion of beauty is expression and not features. The luminous power of intellect in the eye, the face flushed with the eloquence of thought, the lips trembling with the warmth of beautiful language, and the whole expression instinct with soul, feeling and virtuous sympathy—these embody an ideal of loveliness compared to which mere physical beauty is contemptible. The face of Madame De Stael, which in features is plain and irregular, often lights up, when she is engaged in animated conversation, with a soul-beauty that as much excels inert facial graces as the natural sun does the painter's representation.

This is the high order of beauty—it is soul appealing to soul, warming and refreshing the noblest instinct of our nature. The other kind is “of the earth, earthy,” and awakens the feelings and passions which have been advanced to prove the Darwinism of our descent.

Edward Stanton's visit was a protracted one, extending over two months, and would not probably have ended then had not his father written to him, desiring his presence at his family home on Thanksgiving Day. His own feelings towards his fair young hostess were growing infinitely tender, and it was with the greatest reluctance that he obeyed his father's wishes. He was old enough, and sensible enough to detect and admire the sterling qualities of soul, heart and mind, which raised Alice Stanwright so supremely above the ordinary type of her sex, and it was some time before this that he discovered many tastes and sympathies that harmonized between them. He had noticed day by day how the affectionate girl consulted the inclinations and anticipated the wishes of her father, and indulged with smiling patience the caprices of her sisters, and his own heart told him that so true a daughter and sister would not fail to make one of the best of wives. Whether or not he formed any idea respecting the place he occupied in the young girl's thoughts can only be conjectured. It is sufficient that on concluding his visit he gratefully accepted a further invitation to return at an early season, and suit his own convenience as to his length of stay.

At the end of six weeks he did return, and a month afterwards was Alice's betrothed husband loved with a love that passeth human understanding, and reciprocating the love with an intensity that no language can express.

The engagement was one that evidently pleased the parents of both for they exchanged visits of congratulation, and sincerely looked forward to the approaching family relationship with the keenest satisfaction. If Alice's father regarded his daughter with feelings of the tenderest pride, Edward's father, none the less, looked upon his son with

mingled love and admiration, and, truly both children were deserving of all the warmth of affection entertained in their favor.

Under such circumstances, and while young Stanton was on one of his visits, the murder that had been committed was inexpressibly shocking, and Mr. Stanwright was terribly alarmed lest the frightful nature of the calamity should prove too much for his daughter's powers of endurance. He had therefore hastened home in advance of the party bearing the body, and finding his daughter, had led her into a back parlor, where he sought to acquaint her in the gentlest manner with the horrible truth.

"Alice, my child," he commenced, "I want you to be a strong minded woman, for I have something very unpleasant to tell you."

"What is it, papa?" she asked, "I think you will find me strong enough to hear anything that does not seriously affect my father or sisters."

"Is there no one else you would include, Alice dear?" he inquired in a tone of voice more softly, gentle, if anything, than a woman's.

She gazed at him for a moment in conscious confusion, the blood mantling to her cheeks, and her eyes wonderfully eloquent in their mute appeal. The next instant she trembled as if with a shock of fear, and throwing her arms around her father's neck she asked in a frightened whisper:

"Oh, papa, has anything happened? Tell me quickly."

"Have courage, my child," he replied. "There has been an accident, and Edward is injured."

"Quick! papa, where is he? let me go to him. Poor, Edward!"

"No, Alice, you can do no good by going to him. He is very badly injured; my child."

"Papa, papa! Tell me all, the truth, or I shall stifle," she wildly exclaimed, beginning to realize that something serious indeed had happened.

"You must have courage, my [daughter], I cannot tell you all, but you must be brave and trust Heaven that whatever may happen is for the best."

Her face was deadly pale, her lips quivering, and her eyes bore that startled expression which is only induced by heart emotions so violent as to be next to unbearable. A choking gasp denoted her anguish as, looking fixedly into her father's face she asked with a voice that was almost inaudible in its muffled agony: "Is Edward dead?"

"I say again, be brave, Alice— ah, as I feared, she has fainted," and taking the insensible form tenderly in his arms he laid her on a sofa; then ringing for a servant, who quickly



appeared, he hurried from the house to send the doctor to look after his daughter while he himself attended to the placing of the dead body, and to such other matters as the exigencies of the case demanded.

Alice Stanwright was removed to her room and placed in bed, where she remained for two hours in a semi-unconscious state. This was followed by a sort of *syncope* which the doctor regarded with considerable alarm, being fearful that brain fever might be superinduced. Nor were his fears on this head without good ground, for in the course of two hours more his patient passed to another change and began to talk incoherently. This brought the case to a settled state, and the doctor knew that he had to deal with brain fever, though, he hoped, in a mild form.

Meanwhile a detective had arrived and was in consultation with Mr. Stanwright. He was a quiet looking man somewhat below the medium height, and with features so apparently impassive that one unlearned in physiognomy would have been apt to pronounce them dull. But there was a keen fire in the eye, and a sensitiveness about the lips which never fail to denote a superior shrewdness of intellect, and which the sharpest detectives of the world with all their schooling in facial immobility are unable to effectually disguise. Mr. Dykes, the present detective, had the reputation of being one of the keenest in the country, and was greatly feared by the criminal classes.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### THE INQUEST AND A DISCOVERY

The day following the finding of young Stanton's body, a Coroner, accompanied by two police officers, arrived from the State Capital, which was situated about ten miles from Swinton village, and ordered the immediate impanelling of a jury for the inquest. A celebrated lawyer had also arrived, engaged by Mr. Stanwright to unravel, as far as the circumstances of the case would permit, the mystery of the murder. In the interval, Mr. Dyke, the detective, had been quietly but shrewdly at work, and although he was taciturn to the last degree, and would express no direct opinion, even when closely questioned, it was clearly evident that he took the profoundest interest in the task he had entered upon, and was not without opinions of his own.

The inquest was held in Mr. Stanwright's large dining-room, where the jury was sworn in. They at once proceeded to view the body, with the doctor, who made a post mortem examination, and then returned to listen to whatever evidence might be forthcoming.

There was solemn silence in the room when Mr. Wilton, the eminent lawyer, arose and commenced to speak. With a low, impressive voice, he began by stating that one of the most horrible crimes ever committed in criminal life had taken place in their very midst. A young man, he said, who was universally respected for his many superior qualities of head and heart, who was a favorite with all who knew him, and who was not supposed to have a single enemy in the world, had been villainously murdered in a manner so mysterious, and for reasons so inscrutable as to bewilder the strongest intellect. The only

knowledge possessed up to that moment, was that a foul, bloody murder had occurred, and that a criminal was loose upon the world whose enormous guilt demanded the combined agencies of heaven and earth to bring him to justice. There was enough evidence to show that, sheltered by the darkness of night and the loneliness of the spot, the determined murderer had haunted the steps of his victim, and finally ambushed himself to fire a deliberate shot with fatal precision, succeeding in his hellish work. The motives that instigated the deed must have been extremely violent and deep-rooted. Robbery was not the object, for nothing was missing from the pockets of the murdered man. It could not have been self-preservation, for there was plainly no encounter, and nothing can be discovered to show that anyone's safety or happiness was menaced by the life of the victim. It could not well have been a mistake on a point of identity; for the locality was so secluded and the moonlight so bright at the time of the murder, that every intelligent consideration indicated that no one but young Edward Stanton was the person intended. The only possible conclusion to be arrived at, therefore, was that the motive was one of revenge, and that in the discovery of the criminal the antecedent circumstances of young Stanton's life would need to be sifted to find a clew to the guilty party. "There are considerations involved in this inquiry," concluded Mr. Wilton, "which are inexpressibly affecting, and I feel satisfied that no persuasion of mine is necessary to urge the jury to a searching examination of the evidence they will hear, or to inspire the officers of the law with emulation to eclipse each other in the efforts they shall use to hunt the secret of this superlative crime to the light of day."

Mr. Stanwright was the first witness examined, but his evidence was immaterial, he being only able to depose that he had parted from Edward Stanton about nine o'clock on the evening previous to the discovery of the body, the young man having then lighted a cigar and declared his intention to take a moonlight walk.

"Was this the first time that he had gone out in this manner?" inquired Mr. Wilton.

"Oh, no," Mr. Stanwright replied, "he had frequently before taken a solitary evening stroll while smoking his cigar."

"As he did not return, was not his absence noticed?" Mr. Wilton asked.

"Not at all," was the reply. "The fact is, we keep rather early hours, often retiring before ten o'clock, and Mr. Stanton had resolutely insisted that no one should remain up waiting for him whenever he went outside for a smoke after the family hour."

"What was the first knowledge you had of the murder?"

"When John Knox, one of my men, aroused me the next morning, and told me of his discovery."

"Are you acquainted with anything, Mr. Stanwright, that helps you to any opinion regarding what has happened?"

“Not the slightest thing, sir. Mr. Stanton never gave me to suppose that he had a trouble in the world, and I have seen nothing to assist me in any conclusion whatever.”

The next witness examined, was John Knox, the farm hand.

“What caused you to rise so early yesterday morning?” Mr. Wilton asked.

“Master gave me a letter the night before to take to the mill overseer, and told me that I was to deliver it by sunrise.”

“Then you got up early for that purpose!”

“Yes, sir.”

“What next?”

“I saddled ‘Mildew,’ the horse, sir, and commenced my journey. After going some little distance up the hill road, the horse began to show fright and would not go on. I whipped him, sir, and then he crawled slowly along close to the lower fence, and I could not help wondering why ‘Mildew’ acted so strange, for he is a ready horse, sir, and never shies or sulks, and he don’t want the whip at no time, more especially of a morning. At last, sir, he got to trembling, and I just happened to look across to the other fence, and there I seed a dark object on the ground that ‘peared like a man laying down, and I got off ‘Mildew’ and led him ‘cross the road, and there I found young Mr. Stanton quite dead, for I took his hand, and it was oh! so stiff and cold; and I seed blood, sir, on his shirt and vest.”

“Did you change at all the posture in which he was lying?”

“No, sir, I only touched his hand.”

“Did you notice anything that attracted your attention, or see anyone from the time you commenced your journey?”

“No sir; I saw nothing and nobody. The village ‘peared all asleep.”

“What did you do after discovering the body?”

“I mounted ‘Mildew’ and galloped back, and knocked master up, and told him that Mr. Edward was murdered, and was lying dead up the hill road.”

The doctor was the next witness examined, but his evidence was mostly technical, explaining the direction of the ball and the cause of death. He distinctly asserted that the shot was fired by a second person, and stated his reasons for this conviction, to the entire satisfaction of all present.

There being no further evidence procurable affecting the case, the Coroner, with the approval of Mr. Wilton, who expressed a fervent hope that the present was only a preliminary step toward the unravelment of the horrible mystery, charged the jury, directing an open verdict, which was eventually rendered as follows:

“That the deceased, Edward Stanton, came to his death by a wound inflicted by a pistol ball, willfully fired by some person unknown, and that said person is guilty of murder in the first degree.”

As will be seen, the evidence given at the inquest was extremely meagre, and threw no additional light upon the circumstances attending the fearful crime that had been committed. The awful mystery that surrounded the case gave it a more horror-striking character than would probably attach to it if all that was necessary to be known were ascertained; and Mr. Stanwright, as well as the simple villagers, was overawed with the terror that secret midnight murder naturally inspires. Still, he was not without hopes that some link in the direct chain of evidence would be found sooner or later, and he had the greatest possible confidence in the astuteness of detective Dyke, whose record vouched for his acumen and efficiency. Mr. Dyke was present at the inquest, but gave no signs of paying the slightest attention to the proceedings. Indeed, he appeared the veriest dullard, and his subsequent wanderings about the village and neighborhood were characterized by a seaming listlessness, similar to what belongs, as a rule, to weary, half-witted people. He would frequently gossip with the women in a kind of silly manner, and ask the funniest questions imaginable. When anything affecting the life and associations of Alice Stanwright was mooted, he was especially slow of intelligence, and the villagers had to repeat over and over again the trifles they remembered in connection with her. Nor did he seem to believe much in young Edward Stanton, and they often warmed up in their simple-hearted way in his praise, narrating every little incident of which they had any knowledge that told in his favor, to make him comprehend the true excellencies of the young man’s character. Mr. Dyke was very dull and hard of belief, they confessed to one another, and they could not understand him at all.

Two days after the inquest, Mr. Dyke called on Mr. Stanwright, and desired to see him alone. Being conducted into a private room, he seated himself, and at once engaged in conversation.

“How is Miss Stanwright, today?” he asked; “I hope she is rapidly getting better.”

“Yes: I am glad to say she is greatly improved, and the doctor entertains hopes that she will be comparatively well in two or three weeks.”

“I am happy to hear it,” the detective replied. “Mr. Stanwright,” he continued, after a few moment’s pause, “I have two or three questions to ask you, for very important reasons of my own, and I know that you will answer me without reservation.”

“Certainly, sir.”

“Your daughter was engaged to young Stanton, was she not?”

“She was.”

“With your full consent?”

“With my full consent.”

“How long is it since this engagement was made?”

“About six months ago.”

“When was the marriage to take place?”

“Next month.”

“Young Stanton has often visited you during the past twelve months, has he not?”

“Yes, several times.”

“How long had this last visit continued?”

“About three weeks.”

“Was your daughter ever engaged to anyone before?”

“No, sir.”

“Did she receive the attentions of anyone?”

“Really, Mr. Dyke, that is a very strange question to ask.”

“Pardon me; but I have good cause for asking it, as likewise for two or three others of a similar questionable tenor. So, I repeat, did she previously receive the attentions of anyone else?”

“I hardly know, sir; but there are two or three circumstances which your question may render it desirable that I should explain, if you will be good enough to listen.”

“Cheerfully, sir.”

“Well, about eighteen months ago, a young man called on me, giving his name as Morris Tyler, and explained that the object of his visit was to purchase a large farm in the vicinity of Swinton. He described his connections and circumstances so plausibly that he rather took my fancy, and I offered to further his wishes to the best of my power. His third or fourth visit, I remember, was made late one afternoon, and it being my dinner

hour, I invited him to my table. A violent rain storm came on, and I placed a room at his disposal for the night. His visits after this were frequent, although, as he explained to me, he had temporarily relinquished the intention of making the purchase he had indicated at first. After awhile, I could not shut my eyes to the fact that he was paying assiduous court to my daughter, and as his person and manners were eminently calculated to engage a young girl's fancy, I was not surprised to find that Alice was apparently inclined to favor his attentions."

"How long did this state of things continue?" the detective asked.

"For about four or five months," Mr. Stanwright replied. "I began at last to think it strange that this Morris Tyler should be unknown to everyone of whom I made inquiry concerning him, and fearing that Alice's opinion of him might be influenced by my seeming endorsement of his conduct, I caused the most searching investigation to be made into the young man's antecedents, personal character and circumstances, and was successful in obtaining information which satisfied me that he was far from a desirable acquaintance to encourage, and that his representations to me were open to the charge of falsehood. On discovering this, I confided all the knowledge I had gained to my daughter, and was happy to find that her affections were anything but compromised. When Tyler next called, I frankly told him of my action, and forbade him all further visits to my house. He had the impudence to be insulting, and on leaving was boastful and threatening in his language."

"Did you see anything further of him?"

"No, I did not, but Alice met him two or three times subsequently, and he had, as she told me, greatly frightened her with the wildness of his manner when she declined his continued acquaintance."

"Can you tell me if she has seen him since her engagement to young Stanton?"

"Yes; she informed me one day, on returning from a walk, that she had encountered this Tyler, who had forced his company upon her, telling her that he knew of her engagement, but that he had sworn the marriage should never take place—that she should marry him and him only. This occurred about three months ago, and although I immediately set a watch for the villain, determined if I caught him to punish him for his rudeness, nothing, from what I can ascertain, has been seen of him from that day to this."

"Enough, Mr. Stanwright; but I have made a discovery, which, with what you have told me, will, I doubt not, untangle the mystery of young Stanton's murder," remarked Mr. Dyke, very quietly taking from his pocket a sheet of paper.

"What! in connection with Morris Tyler?" exclaimed Mr. Stanwright.

"I did not say so," Mr. Dyke composedly replied; "but did you ever see anything resembling this?" he asked, exhibiting the paper, on which some lines were traced.

“It looks like the pattern of a boot-sole.”

“Yes, sir, it is the pattern of a boot-sole, and that is my discovery. Listen: I detected the impression of a man’s body on the grass behind the fence, in an almost direct line to where young Stanton was found, and there, in a piece of soft clay, was the distinct outline of a boot-sole. This is a *fac simile*. It is a peculiar pattern, and important to me.”

“I do not exactly understand,” Mr. Stanwright confessed, slightly puzzled.

“No matter,” the detective observed, placing the paper in his pocket. “Our conversation and my discovery are, of course, secrets between us. If some days should pass without your hearing from me, be sure that I am not idle. Good day, sir.” Saying which, he took his departure, leaving Mr. Stanwright more bewildered than ever.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### PURSUIT, ARREST, AND CONVICTION

A shrewd detective is, without doubt, one of the most extraordinary specimens of combined cunning and intelligence that can be found. The criminal records furnish innumerable instances of the discovery of crime without scarcely the faintest clew to commence with. Emissaries have gone out from Scotland Yard, London, to trace unknown perpetrators of crime without being supplied with any, the least guiding data for their search and have with the unerring instinct of blood-hounds followed an invisible track through days, weeks, months, and sometimes years, to the sure quarry of their prey. Crimes as secret and mysterious as the Nathan murder have been brought to light by means which oftentimes astonish the most cultivated non-professional intelligence, and criminals who have escaped to alien ground without leaving the smallest possible trail behind them, have been followed with merciless precision and brought to justice.

Mr. Dyke had set out on a detective errand, the invisibility and mystery of which were about equal to any instance of the kind on record. So traceless appeared young Stanton’s murder, to the ordinary mind, that probably not one man in a hundred would have taken trifle odds on the chances of discovery, but, nevertheless, Mr. Dyke had parted from Mr. Stanwright with as certain a conviction of the author of the crime as if the culprit had stood before him invested with all the habiliments of crinating guilt, and he felt sure of tracking the criminal to certain discovery.

Previous to his interview with Mr. Stanwright he had been groping in the dark, simply because he had no clew to *motive*. The whole matter now appeared to him as plain as daylight, and the difficulties that stood in his way were reduced to the minor ones that simply belong to “a following up,” which, in his estimation, was the easiest thing imaginable.

After turning his back on Swinton he leisurely rode on to the State Capital, where, on his arrival, he put up at the Union House, giving his horse in charge of the stable keeper. Swinton village being only ten miles distant from the city, the murder had naturally created quite a sensation there, and every one was intimately acquainted with the few meagre details that had come to light. Mr. Dyke, therefore, had no difficulty in conducting any conversation he pleased into the channel of young Stanton's death, but like a true detective he at first listened to everything and said very little. His preliminary action was to examine the registers of all the hotels and lodging houses in the place, which took him nearly a day to get through, but his time and labor in that direction were thrown away, for the name he searched for did not come under his eye. This, however, was exactly what he expected, and, paradoxical though it may appear, rather strengthened his convictions than otherwise. The next day something happened which to an on-looker would have appeared rather singular. Mr. Dyke, who maintained a strict incognito was standing in the yard of the Pulverton House with a sheet of paper in his hand, alternating his examination between it and the ground. He had come again upon the footprint, this time impressed with striking distinctness on one side of a narrow concrete walk. Quickly returning the paper to his pocket he struck a whistling attitude until presently a porter came along.

"This is a new pavement, is it not?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, it was only put down a few days ago," replied the porter.

"How many?"

"Some four or five, sir."

"Ah, indeed." Then as if he had just discovered the boot impression, Mr. Dyke exclaimed, "What a singular footprint! Have you noticed it?"

"Yes, sir, I polished those ere boots when the gent was here and wondered what the nails were put into that shape for."

"Why did you not ask him? Is he here now?"

"Oh, no, sir, he had room 16 and only stayed two nights. I did ask him but he only laughed."

Mr. Dyke merely smiled and nodded in reply, and quickly went into the office, directing his attention at once to the register. He found the entry of room 16 with the name of William Horton, from St. Louis against it. Calling the clerk he said.

"I notice a Mr. Horton from St. Louis has been here. I think I know him. Did he stay long?"

"No, sir, only two days."



“Do you remember him?” inquired the detective.

“Very slightly, but sufficient, I think for a faint description;” and the clerk gave three or four particulars of features and dress, which, from what Mr. Dyke knew of Morris Tyler’s description convinced him, as he suspected, that William Horton was no other than Alice Stanwright’s rejected suitor.

“Can you inform me what direction he took on leaving this city?” he inquired.

“I am not certain, sir, but I recollect having a conversation with him, and I think he told me he was bound for San Francisco.”

“What imprudence!” Mr. Dyke mentally exclaimed, and was shortly on his way to the telegraph office. A message in cipher was very soon sent on its way to the Police Superintendent of San Francisco.

Early the following morning Mr. Dyke received a telegram that read as follows:

“Description agrees with a passenger who reached Valiejo by train three days ago. Is supposed to have crossed to this city. Search is being made. If discovered will be shadowed. Take next train and come on.”

That same evening Mr. Dyke was on his way to San Francisco, where, on his arrival, he ascertained that no progress had been made in the finding of the person concerning whom he had telegraphed.

Whilst waiting at the Union House where he stayed after leaving Stanton, he had received from Mr. Stanwright a minute written description of Tyler’s person which would enable him to recognize that individual whenever seen, no matter under what *alias* he might be sheltered.

Days passed and the search was fruitless, but the most successful detectives are the quietly patient ones, who proceed composedly on with their investigation undiscouraged by the most tedious delays and difficulties. Mr. Dyke was one of this class and frequently succeeded when his intellectual superiors of impulsive temperament failed. He leisurely walked the streets of the city with a vigilant eye; attended the theatres from the *California* to the *Comique*; visited the Harmony Halls and the Bagnios; played for trifling sums at the gambling rooms, and flirted with the denizens of Dupont street; and nearly a week had thus passed all to no purpose. But he felt no disposition to hurry, being in his own mind certain of his game, and one night, the seventh after his arrival in the city, his shrewdness and patience were rewarded.

Hearing music and laughter rising from a basement as he was passing along Kearny street, near the Plaza, he just took a fancy to see what was going on. Descending he found a mixed party laughing, joking, and drinking, seemingly all well acquainted with each

other, and to be thoroughly enjoying themselves. It was only a common sort of low revelry, he thought, covertly scrutinizing the company as he pretended to swallow the whiskey which he adroitly threw on the floor; and was on the point of leaving when his eye caught the sole of a boot that was raised across the wearer's knee. It was enough; he called for another glass of whiskey and took a seat at a table immediately facing the owner of the peculiarly soled boot, who was apparently in a half doze with a felt hat drawn over his face. Rising, under the pretence of inspecting a picture hanging against the wall, he very dexterously brushed the hat off the wearer's head, and gently apologized for his clumsiness, when the face was angrily turned to him. The first glance told him that he was at the goal of his search, and that once more subtlety, vigilance, and patience had unearthed a murderer; that the application of a *motive* had utilized a very trifling discovery, and thrown daylight on what seemed a darkly shrouded mystery.

Detective Dyke was a disciple of surprise, believing that a man, especially a guilty one, taken suddenly off his guard, is naturally apt to say and do things, which, in self-possessed moments he would carefully avoid. He further believed in sharp crushing accusation, whether correct or not, and in pretending to a full knowledge of facts even when the greatest ignorance existed, arguing from his experience of human nature that well acted assumption carries about the same force as reality.

His line of action in the present case had been decided upon from the first moment of engaging in the pursuit. He well knew that Edward Stanton's murder had been very cleverly contrived, and that as yet no positively convicting proof existed against the perpetrator of the bloody deed. So far he had only succeeded in establishing a moral certainty in his own mind, and although the significant fact of finding and tracing the peculiar footprint might amount to something in the way of direct evidence, yet his knowledge of law told him that it would be insufficient in itself to criminate. His course of policy, therefore, was plainly to surprise the suspected party into a confession.

Closely scrutinizing the room, and convincing himself there was no outlet, save by the door, through which he had entered, he ascended to the street, and there, being fortunate enough to find a police officer just passing, he sent him to the City Hall with a message for two Constables in plain clothes to hurry to the spot where he was standing. A short period only elapsed before the officers arrived, and then Mr. Dyke, leaving them to follow, returned to the basement. Almost immediately after the constables quietly entered prepared for any *emergency* that might arise. Being thus backed, Detective Dyke approached the wearer of the tell-tale boots, and with a heavy clutch on the shoulder, exclaimed:

"Morris Tyler, I arrest you for murder. You were seen to fire the shot, and everything is known;" and before the young man could realize his position one of the officers had hand-cuffed him. At last he cried:

"Tis false, no one saw me!"

“You bet,” the detective rejoined in a knowing manner. “Come, bring him along, officers.”

“Well, I don’t care,” Tyler loudly exclaimed, with an air of bravado, completely taken off his guard. “Served him right for poaching on my ground. I swore she should never marry Stanton, and I have kept my oath; ah, ah!”

“Exactly so,” remarked Mr. Dyke, as composedly as ever; and seeing that resistance was useless the prisoner allowed himself to be gently led away. A few moments subsequently he was lodged in a felon’s cell.

Before the trial came on the guilty man confessed everything. He acknowledged that his first visit to Mr. Stanwright was for the sake of the daughter, his object being to ingratiate himself into favor by spurious representations regarding his connections and circumstances, and eventually to marry into the family. For three months he looked upon matters as progressing favorably, and made certain of compassing his purpose, but after this he knew that the father regarded him with suspicion, and yet when he was dismissed the house he still determined, in spite of everything, to marry Alice Stanwright sooner or later. Nor did he recognize any insuperable obstacle in the way of his doing so until young Stanton came upon the scene. The engagement between the two, which he soon ascertained, was, he confessed, his first incentive to murder his rival, and that for a month previous to the perpetration of the crime he had wandered about the Swinton neighborhood in disguise and carefully keeping out of sight, implacably fixed on his murderous design. Knowing that the marriage was shortly to be celebrated he determined to hasten the deed. “On the night of the crime,” he said, “I was lurking about Stanwright’s residence and saw Stanton come out with a cigar in his mouth, and start for a walk. I followed some little distance until I saw him take the hill road. Noiselessly running in a circuitous direction to get in advance of him I, at last, lay in ambush by the road fence, and fired at him as he was passing. Immediately after this I made my escape, believing that the murder would never be traced to me, and intending after a while, when my presence would create no suspicion, to renew my efforts to marry Stanwright’s daughter. But it’s all up now— I have tried for fortune and failed, but I accept the consequences, and can meet my fate like a man.”

There was but little formula at the prisoner’s trial. The boot evidence in conjunction with the confession established the guilt of Morris Tyler, and the sentence for murder in the first degree was passed upon him. There was no endeavor made to save his life, and six weeks afterwards he expiated his crime upon the scaffold.

Alice Stanwright never married. In her father’s old age she was his ministering angel brightening his passage to the grave, and to her sisters she continued the indulgent friend— the almost more than mother.

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