

## *The Philadelphia Detective*

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A man came hastily down Chestnut street, Philadelphia, and mounted the stone steps in front of the Central station.

He entered the broad, old-fashioned doorway with the steps of one who was at home in the building.

Two steps from the front door was another, the entrance to a large room. Here the new comer found a number of brother officers, lounging, smoking and gazing out upon the street.

“Hulloa, Bill! seen the chief yet?” asked a tall broad-shouldered, good-looking man, as the new comer entered.

“No. Why?” asked Bill.

“Oh, nothing in particular, I suppose. He asked for you a while ago,” was the reply.

Bill turned upon his heel and left the room. Mounting the stairs, he reached the second floor, and entered the chief’s office.

“Here’s a letter that was left for you, Bill,” said the chief, as he handed the missive to him.

“And here’s something else I want you to take in hand. You have been working very faithfully in the city for the past year, and this job will take you into the country for a month, perhaps.”

As the chief ceased speaking he handed a telegram to the man before him.

Bill glanced at it in a careless manner, and read the following:

COUPLY, PA., Aug. 6, 1864.

“Send on one of your smartest detectives as soon as possible. A mysterious murder has been committed, and if you comply with my request the life of an innocent man may be saved.”

A. J. FERGUSON.

One hour after reading the above, Bill Davis, one of the shrewdest detectives in Philadelphia, was being carried as fast as steam could carry him towards the village of Couply.

For the first time since his start Bill thought of the letter which the chief had given him.

Taking it from his pocket he proceeded to open it, and as he began to read, the careless look upon his face deepened to one of intense interest.

It ran as follows:

COUPLY, July 20, 1864.

“Well, dear old boy! I suppose you thought that I had forgotten you. No, sir! And I take this opportunity of writing to beg that you will come to Couply and spend a week or two with me, to be in at the wedding, you know—at the wedding! Yes, I am captured at last, old boy, and it will be your turn next. I think I see you smile at the thought that you will ever yield up the charms of old bachelorhood. I shall say nothing about my bride, but shall leave you to see for yourself. But when you see her sister, Rose, if you do not fall in love, why then you never will; and I will be willing to believe that you are a hopeless case. Be sure and come, old boy. The country is just delightful.

Yours,  
NED HARRINGTON.”

Our hero did smile, but not at the thought of falling in love. Oh, no!

He was a smile of pleasure at the thought of seeing his old school chum, whom he had not met for over five years.

William Davis had often longed for a home and home surroundings or someone to love, and for the love of some warm heart to cheer him on in his life’s rough journey. But he remained alone; none in the wide world seemed to care for him. He threw all his tireless energy, all his unyielding perseverance into his profession, and he stood at the head of it. It was said that Bill Davis was the best detective on the force.

“Coup-lee!” shouted the brakeman, poking his head through the door, and then out again, as though he expected to have something shied [at] him.

Couply was a small country station, and our hero found himself to be the only passenger for that place. The few loafers who always gather about a country station to see the coming train, were there[.] Of one [of] these our hero asked to be directed to the residence of Mr. Ferguson.

Receiving his directions, he was about to start, when he was accosted by an elderly gentleman who had just come up.

“I think you were inquiring for Mr. Ferguson, if I mistake not?” he said.

“Yes, do you know him?”

“I am the man you are looking for, if you are from Philadelphia.”

“I am.”

“Come with me,” said the stranger.

Our hero followed his guide, and after walking a short distance they entered a neat, pleasant looking cottage.

Together they entered the library, and Mr. Ferguson at once proceeded with the business he had in hand.

“You are a detective are you not?” he asked.

“I am,” replied Bill, as he handed a card bearing his name to his companion.

“Ah, you are Mr. Davis. I have heard of you before, and believe you are capable of working up this case, if any man can.

“Thank you,” returned the detective. “Now please begin at the beginning and tell me the whole story. You said, I believe, that the life of an innocent man might be saved.”

“I did; and I firmly believe that Ned Harrington is innocent of the crime of murder.”

“Ned Harrington! Great heavens!” gasped the detective.

The detective was used to great surprises and startling developments, but all his self-control left him, and he sank back in his chair, pale as a sheet, at the mention of his friend’s name.

“You know him?” said Mr. Ferguson, in some surprise.

“He is my friend. We graduated from the same school, and I, too, know that he is innocent. Such a man as Ned could not take the life of a fellow man.”

“I am glad that [you’re] his friend, and we can work together.” said Mr. Ferguson, extending his hand, which the detective grasped and shook warmly.

“Now for the details,” resumed the merchant. “The story is short, and the facts seem to be very conclusive. One evening Ned was coming across a pasture lot upon the other side of the village and found the body of a murdered man. The corpse lay directly across the footpath which was used by those living on the other side a short cut across the lots. He stooped over the body and drew from it a long clasp-knife. The deed had not been committed long, for the body was hardly cold, and as he drew forth the knife a stream of blood followed it. At this moment several men, with Lawyer Grey at the head, came upon him. They had been traveling in that direction and had suddenly come upon the terrible scene. The freshness of the blood, which was hardly cold, the finding of Ned standing over the body, knife in hand, the confused [manner] in which he answered their questions, all seemed to point to him as the guilty one. And when it was discovered that the knife which had done the deed was Ned’s own, with his name upon the handle, nothing seemed clearer than that he was the murderer. Since his imprisonment he has protested his innocence, but of what avail? When his trial comes off he will be condemned just as sure as the sun shines!”

“His declaration is sufficient. I would believe Ned against the world.”

The detective remained a while longer, and was introduced to the wife and two daughters of his

friend. He could not help admiring Ned's taste as he gazed upon the fair face of Mable Ferguson. He smiled as he stood face to face with the gentle Rose. This was the maiden with whom Ned had predicted that he would fall in love.

He did not think so, however, as he gazed upon her thoughtful face and looked into the clear depths of her blue eyes.

Mr. Ferguson had informed him that Ned was engaged to his daughter Mable; for [Ned] had not mentioned the name of his betrothed bride in his letter, and but for that he would never have suspected that it was to the daughter of the merchant that he was engaged.

"I must see Ned." said Bill, after he had spent some time in the company of the merchant and his family.

He had no difficulty in gaining access to his friend.

"Bill!" gasped Ned.

"Oh, Ned, is it thus I find you?"

As he spoke Bill grasped Ned by the hand and pressed it warmly.

"Oh, Bill, you don't believe me guilty of this great crime, do you?"

"No, my boy. Sooner would I believe that the sun ceased to rise. I believe you to be innocent."

"Thank you, Bill. But how did you get here? I mean how is it that you are here at this critical juncture?"

"Well, I received your letter inviting me down here. I did not get the letter until today, at the same time I received a telegram from Mr. Ferguson, or rather the chief did, asking for a smart detective. I was detailed to work up the case. Little did I think I was to spend my vacation in saving the life of my friend. Owing to your letter having been written a week or two before the telegram, I knew nothing about the affair. Now tell [your] story. Be particular and tell me all."

Thereupon Ned related the facts which are already known to the reader.

"Had Miss Ferguson any other suitors besides yourself?" asked Bill.

"Why, yes."

"How did they take their defeat in the matter?"

"Why only as gentlemen should."

"All?"

“Well, no, not all. Robert Grey, the lawyer, seemed angered at first, but he seemed to recognize the inevitable and take it quietly enough after a short time.”

“Do you know of any other instance in which this lawyer was defeated in object?”

“Let me see. Yes, there was the Medon’s estate. He wanted that, but a young man stepped in and paid off the mortgage. That kept it out of his hands.”

“What happened to that young man?”

A strange look came into Ned’s face as he saw the drift of the detective’s question.

“Great heavens, Bill, what do you mean?”

“Answer my question, please.”

“He died within six months.”

“How did he die?”

“His body was found in the mill pond, and it was always supposed that he fell in.”

“Very good. And now, Ned, when does the trial come off?”

“In two weeks.”

“Now, I must leave you, but I have hopes that you will be cleared. I will do my best.”

“I am sure [you] will, Bill.”

“But what do you mean about Lawyer Grey?”

“Never mind: you’ll know soon enough.”

It was night when the detective quitted the cell in which his friend was confined. Having ascertained the whereabouts of the residence of Lawyer Grey, he walked slowly in that direction, intending to survey the premises.

Why he did so he could hardly have explained, but he had an idea, and he determined to work it out.

Having arrived opposite the lawyer’s handsome residence, he looked about him as well as the darkness would permit. As he was standing in the darker shadow of some trees he saw the form of a man dart quickly forward and entered the house.

“I must gain admittance to that house by hook or crook,” muttered the detective.

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The two weeks that intervened before Ned Harrington’s trial passed away rapidly. Strange to say, the detective had disappeared, or nothing had been seen or heard from him.

If Mr. Ferguson felt any misgivings he did not mention the fact. Some strange influence urged him to trust the officer. He believed that there was a deep plot somewhere to ruin Ned. It was well known to some persons that a detective was upon the ground, but few knew where to look for him.

Still, the merchant feared that in spite of all his caution, the detective might have met with foul play. In no other way could his strange disappearance be accounted for.

At length the day of the great trial arrived. The court-house was thronged with eager people. It was with the greatest difficulty that the officers could keep the aisles clear.

Ned Harrington, pale and careworn, [sat] in the dock. But there was no look of guilt upon his face, and his eyes never faltered as he gazed upon the multitude. Mr. Ferguson and his family were there, sitting near the prisoner. Mr. Ferguson gazed anxiously over the sea of faces, hoping to see the detective. But he did not see him, and his heart sank. How could he hope to see the prisoner go forth a free man[?]

The lookout was indeed dark.

Ned had many friends present, but they had lost all hope.

Near the witness stand, among other laborers, sat a rough-clad miner. It was nothing strange to see such a man there. There were many such men in the village every day, and this man seemed to excite no particular attention. But his interest in the trial seemed to be intense.

The counsel for the state, a young and rising lawyer, opened his argument for the prosecution, and as fact after fact was brought forward, the doom of Ned Harrington seemed sealed.

Lawyer Grey was called to the witness stand, and he repeated his story with terrible distinctness and precision.

The counsel for the defense now opened, but it was simply no elaborate argument, the principle feature of which was the prisoner’s previous good character.

He was a smart young lawyer, and did his best, but he had no facts to present.

“Your Honor, may I ask lawyer Grey a few questions?” inquired the miner, as the lawyer for the defense sat down.

“Certainly, my man, if you know anything about this case, let us hear it by all means,” answered

his Honor.

“The crime was committed upon the night of the 25th July, wasn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“At about 10 o’clock at night.”

“Yes.”

“Well, I’d like to ask lawyer Grey where he was at 10 o’clock on the night of the 25th of July.”

The lawyer started, and for an instant his face paled, but by a powerful effort he controlled his emotion.

“What do you mean, fellow?” he asked, “Your Honor, am I to be questioned by every vagabond rascal that chooses to speak?”

“You need not answer if you don’t care to,” replied the court.

“Then I decline to do so,” growled the lawyer.

The miner grinned audibly, as he asked—

“May be you won’t object to telling us where you were at midnight on August 6th?”

“I was home in bed,” replied the lawyer, although his voice trembled as he spoke. He felt troubled as he spoke. Why, he could not tell. Who was this man that seemed to read his very soul with his burning gaze! Was he the simple miner that he appeared to be?

“Let Mrs. Reid come forward,” was the next request of the miner.

Mrs. Reid, lawyer Grey’s housekeeper, came forward.

“What do you know about this case?” asked the judge.

“On the night August the 6th I sat up nearly all night. I had this toothache, and found it impossible to sleep. I knew that lawyer Grey had an interview with a strange, rough-looking man, and that it was half past one o’clock when he went up to his room.”

The lawyer’s face was pale, but his teeth were tightly clenched, as though he had resolved to brave out whatever might be said about him.

The testimony of the housekeeper caused quite a sensation throughout the court-room.

“Now, yer Honor, if that man will lie one time, why would he not lie any time?” asked the miner,

quaintly.

With giving time for a reply, he continued:

“Have you got the knife that done the deed?”

“Yes—here,” said the judge, as the knife was produced.

“Is that Ned Harrington’s knife?”

“It is.”

Hardly the question been answered, when the miner produced a knife the exact counterpart of the one in the judge’s hand.

“Which is Ned Harrington’s knife?” he asked, as he stepped forward and laid the knife by the side of the other. The judge and those around him, gazed with astonishment upon the two knives. They were exactly alike: Ned’s name was engraved upon the handle of each, in exactly the same place.

“Let Robert Smith come forward,” asked the miner, and in the response to the demand, a stranger came forward.

“You are the hardware business in New York, are you not?” asked the miner.

“I am.”

“Did you, or did you not, have this knife made the exact counterpart of this other, to order of lawyer Grey?”

“I did.”

“Liar!” thundered the lawyer, starting up. “Your Honor, I protest. Am I to be subject to this outrage, to be insulted by this miserable coal digger?”

He was ordered down; and when he had ceased his raving, the strange miner resumed.

“Let Billy Daffy come forward!”

At the mention of this name, the lawyer’s face became ghastly; but ere he could utter a word a man led by two officers, came forward. He was very weak from loss of blood which was flowing from an old reopened wound in his breast. His face was pale, and his clothes were wet with his life blood. He fixed his wavering gaze upon the judge.

“Your Honor, I’m dying,” he said in a faltering voice. “I have been the scapegrace of this town; I have led a bad, wicked life, I know; but God forgive me! But, your Honor, I can do one act of



repentance ere I die. As I hope for mercy from above, I declare that Ned Harrington is innocent of the crime for which he is now being tried. Mine was the hand that drove the knife to the heart of William Roberts[.] But there, cowering before you, is the real murderer, Robert Grey; with my dying breath I swear it! He hated young Harrington because he won the hand of the lady whom the lawyer loved. He furnished me with the knife, and told me when to strike the blow—when he knew that Ned was coming directly across the fatal spot Gray contrived to be on the ground with several others, and thus he entrapped Ned. He knew that Ned had lost his knife, and he thought if he could get one made like it he would more effectually fix the crime upon him. I visited him upon the night of August 6th, and we had a quarrel about the pay; he stabbed me, and, thinking me dead, carried me to the cellar, and there left me. Why, or for what purpose that coal miner was in the house, I cannot tell; he rescued me, and took me to a house where he boarded, and secretly cared for me for two weeks. But I am dying, and as I am a dying man, I've told you the truth! Yes, I'm—”

Before he could finish his voice failed him; limp and lifeless his form slid from the grasp of the two officers, and fell heavily upon the floor[.] When they raised him up he was dead.

“I've played my game and lost!” hissed the lawyer. “But you, curse you, you shall not gain by my downfall.”

As he spoke he drew a pistol and aimed it full at Ned Harrington. With a bound that was like the leap of a wild animal, the miner was upon him, and before he could fire, the weapon was knocked from his grasp; the next instant there was a loud click, and a pair of delicate steel bracelets encircled his wrists.

“No, you don't,” cried the miner.

“In the fiend's name, who are you?” hissed the baffled villain.

“Yes, who are you, sir?” questioned the court.

“I'm Bill Davis, the Philadelphia detective,” was the quiet reply.

The excitement in the court room was intense; cheer after cheer came from the vast multitude. A desperate rush was made toward the platform, and Ned Harrington and the detective were raised shoulder high, and borne from the court. The detective had spent his vacation nobly; he had saved the life of his friend.

The jury rendered a verdict of “not guilty” without leaving the room. Ned Harrington was borne from the court room a free man, with out a stain upon his name.

“But, my dear fellow, how did you do it? how did you find out so much about lawyer Grey, when none of us suspected?” asked Ned.

“I thought it a singular coincidence that the only two men that crossed that man's path, should meet with such disastrous ends,” replied Will. “A young man baffles the lawyer in obtaining an

estate, and in a short time his body is found floating in the mill pond. Another young man baffles him in obtaining a wife, and, ere two weeks pass, that young man is the inmate of a felon's cell, charged with murder. We detectives have a way of putting things together, and these two facts gave me an idea which I resolved to work out. After my interview with Ned, the first night of my stay here, I visited the residence of Grey. While looking around outside of the house, I beheld a man enter in a very suspicious manner. I resolved to gain admittance to the house myself; I did so, and overheard the interview between the lawyer and man who entered, who was no other than Billy Daffy. I saw the lawyer stab him, saw him carry the supposed dead man into the cellar. I followed him, and when he left, I examined the wounded man, and found that, though badly hurt, yet he was not dead. I removed him to a house where I had resolved to board, and nursed him until the trial came off. I then disguised myself, that I might the better follow the course I had marked out for myself. You know the rest."

"Ay, we know the rest. God bless you, Will!" cried Ned, giving his hand a warm grasp.

Three days after the above event, the detective "stood up" at his friend's marriage. And we are happy to state that Ned's predictions did come true. Will did fall in love with the gentle Rose Ferguson, and when the bells rang a merry Christmas chime, they were married.

As for Robert Grey, to use the Irishman's expression, "he was condemned to be hung, but saved his life by dying in prison!"

*The [Middleburg, PA] Post, October 2, 1879*