

My Counterfeit
by Judge Clark

It was during a tour in North Germany, that I made the acquaintance of Mortimer Graham. The tie of fellow-countrymen between people meeting in a strange land, is, itself, almost equivalent to friendship. With this to begin with, Mortimer and I soon became not only friends but intimates. We bore, withal, so strong a personal resemblance that we were called doubles, and were constantly mistaken one for the other.

There were no secrets between us. We exchanged histories without reserve. I even made him the confidant of my engagement to Maud Temple, a beautiful heiress to whom I had been betrothed almost from childhood.

My friend and I were both ardent sportsmen, and the country abounding in game, we made many excursions together.

One day we gave chase to a wild boar, a magnificent beast, a trophy to be proud of if we succeeded in his capture.

“Take that way!” shouted Mortimer, who knew the forest better than I, pointing to a narrow path that diverged through the trees, “and I’ll keep this. It’ll go hard but one of us gets a shot.”

I dashed at full speed in the direction indicated, and had gone a quarter of a mile, perhaps, when with a suddenness that threw him almost on his haunches, my horse stopped and stood trembling with fright. An undergrowth of bushes, too slight to impede his progress, was the only cause apparent for this unexpected halt. Before I could examine if there was any other, Mortimer Graham came galloping along a path which crossed mine at the point at which I was.

“Clear the way!” he cried; and half in jest, half in excitement, seemingly, he gave my horse a smart cut over the back with his whip.

With almost a shriek, it sounded so human, the frightened animal bounded forward. I felt him sink under me, as I caught a glimpse of the fearful precipice over which he had plunged. I had barely time to grasp an overhanging branch, which bore my weight just long enough for me to hear the sickening sound caused by the poor brute’s body as it struck the bottom of the chasm. Then my frail support gave way, and with the exception of some sharp sensations of pain caused by lacerations received from the boughs of a tree whose top I encountered in my descent, I remembered nothing more.

When consciousness returned I found myself in the cottage of a peasant, whither I had been conveyed by those who found me. Though I was terribly bruised and crushed, none of my bones were broken—a fact attributable, as was, no doubt, the preservation of my life, to the force of my

fall having been broken by the thick branches which had intercepted it.

One thing gave me much surprise. Mortimer Graham, though witness to my disaster, and certainly its immediate cause, never once approached my bedside to offer his sympathy or to inquire into my condition. It was equally unaccountable that he should have gone his way, leaving me, dead or alive, to the chance of being found and cared for by strangers.

Another fact set me thinking. My valuables, including a sum of money I had about me, and a miniature of Maud in a case set with diamonds, were all missing. It would have been ingratitude to suspect the kind people, who had extended me their hospitality, of robbing me. I knew Graham was at times straitened for money, and more than once I had relieved his embarrassments. Could he have attempted my life for the purpose of gain, and, after plundering me, have left me for dead, believing that those who found me would ascribe my fate to accident? Though anxious to do him no injustice, my mind was filled with distrust.

Many weeks elapsed before I was suffered to leave my couch. Graham, I learned, had not been seen since the accident, and no one could tell whither he had gone.

As soon as I was able I resumed my travels, which I brought to a close much sooner than I had purposed. After the perils I had gone through, I was anxious to see my friends again, and above all, Maud, with whom my marriage only awaited my return.

Her family and mine lived in cities distant from each other, but I resolved that my first visit should be to her. That I might lose no time, I set out the very day I landed, and reached my destination the same evening.

“Will she know me after two years of absence, and all the changes time has made?” I asked myself, as I walked briskly along the street that led to her home. “I’ll take her by surprise, at any rate, and see.”

It was Maud’s voice I heard as I hurried up the steps. The air she was singing was an old acquaintance—and, surely, that was her hand at the piano.

She had just finished her performance, when, unannounced, I stood before her.

Her first look was one of surprise; her second, of haughty coldness. It was evident she did not know me.

“May I ask,” said she, rising, “the object of this—”

“Intrusion?” I interrupted. “I thought you would have guessed it; but I see you don’t know me.”

“I do *not* know you, sir.”

“Why, Maud, is it possible you can so soon have forgotten your old friend and playmate, Clarence Herbert?” said I, laughing, and advancing to snatch the kiss which, all things considered, I thought myself entitled to.

“I know Mr. Herbert,” she replied, distantly, and drawing back; “but granting your name to be the same, I see nothing in the coincidence to warrant your present conduct.”

I was beginning to be pained at being so completely forgotten where I felt I had a right to be better remembered.

“Maud, is it possible you do not know me?”

“I have told you I do not.”

“Not know Clarence Herbert?”

“He was here an hour ago, and I expect his return presently—Ah! here he comes! His presence, I trust, will be a security against further impertinence.”

As I turned about, whom should I confront but Mortimer Graham? When our eyes met, his drooped. Never did criminal stand more abashed in the presence of justice. A flush of joy, mingled with indignation, overspread Maud’s lovely face, as she looked from one to the other. Now that she saw us together, she was no longer deceived.

“Had this perfidious wretch the assurance,” I exclaimed, “after seeking my life, and actually robbing me, to attempt the personation of the man he thought he had murdered?”

The villain staid to hear no more. He fairly fled from our presence.

“You see, he had my miniature,” said Maud—“the same you carried away with you; and then he talked of so many things that I thought nobody knew but yourself; besides, he was so like you that I never once suspected the cheat.”

When I explained all and had the kiss before withheld—

“Only think,” said Maud, blushing, and with a frightened look, “we were to have been married in a week!”

“And so ‘we’ shall, with your consent,” I answered, “only on that occasion I prefer to represent myself.”

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