

One Hundred Pounds Reward
by W. D. L'Estrange

Nature has not been pleased to bestow upon me any special gifts, and I cannot call myself a clever man. But I have been brought up in a good school, and whatever natural shrewdness I may have, has, so to speak, had a keen edge put on it, in an experience of many years as a detective officer. If there is one thing more than another upon which I pride myself, it is that of discriminating character, and being able at once to detect whether a person charged with an offence is innocent or guilty. How far this pet theory of mine is borne out by fact, the following story will show.

Some years ago, in the month of December, I was strolling in the neighborhood of Scotland Yard, when I noticed that I was followed by a short thickset man, of very peculiar appearance. He looked about three or four and twenty, and was very shabbily dressed in clothes which evidently had never been made for him. Each of the garments had the stamp of having belonged to people in different walks of life. The old cord trousers, much too large, were those of a working man; the vest, which had been a bright scarlet, was that of a groom or coachman; whilst the surtout, patched and out of the elbows as it was, had the unmistakable cut of a west-end tailor. It struck me that we were old acquaintances, for his was a face, once seen, not easily to be forgotten. He was very ugly, but had not what one would call "a bad face." The greatest peculiarity about him was the eyes, which were of a dark hazel and very small, with an extraordinary obliqueness of vision, that made it impossible to tell whether he was looking you in the face or not. His head was covered by an old seal-skin cap, under which was a profusion of coarse hair of a golden red; whilst his face was ornamented with a luxuriant crop of whiskers of the same fiery hue.

All this I noticed as he twice passed—each time looking as if about to address me. As he passed the second time, I turned on my heel and followed, and, quickly overtaking him, said,

"Well, my man, you appear to know me?"

"Yes, Mr. Sharpe," he replied, "I know you very well, though, I dare say, you have forgotten me. My name is Charlie Fox, and you've had me before the beak more than once when I was a young 'un."

"Why," I said, "you are the young rascal that belonged to the Westminster gang, and used to give us all so much trouble."

"Yes, gov'nor; but since my mother died, which is a good many years now, I've been trying to keep on the square. I've been to sea, and been working about the docks, or wher'ever I could get a job. Lately I ain't had anything to do and I'm almost starving. I knew you directly I saw you, and I've been a-following you, thinking you might give me something to get me some grub. It's hard work gov'nor, to keep straight after you've once gone wrong, 'specially when you're hungry, and a lot of pals a-tempting you."

As I listened, I thought his story might be true. I remembered him as a young thief, with a bad mother, but that was years ago, and I knew, if he had been knocking about London, and up to his old games, I must have heard or seen something of him.

“Look here, Fox,” I said, “you may be telling me a lie or you may not; but if you are hungry, I will give you a meal.”

I took him into the nearest public house, and gave him some cold meat and bread, and a pint of beer, and his appetite certainly confirmed one part of his tale. When had finished his dinner, he said,

“Now, Mr. Sharpe, you’ve done me a turn which I shan’t soon forget, and I’ll do you one in return, by putting you up to a good thing. You know all about the murder of the woman at Glasgow, and I can tell you where to lay hands on the cove that did it. There’s a hundred pounds reward, and I suppose, if I plant you on him, you’ll give me half?”

I knew of the murder. It was one of peculiar atrocity, committed about a month before, in Glasgow, upon a poor girl, an unfortunate. Hitherto the police had been at fault, and the Home Secretary had offered a reward of one hundred pounds.

At first it struck me as improbable that Fox could know anything about it; but he further told me that he was lodging down at the east end, near to one of the docks; and the murderer, a sailor, who had been a shipmate, was lodging in the same house, and had confessed the crime to him. Still, I could not see a motive for Fox betraying his friend, and I said,

“You are no doubt very clever, Mr. Fox, but you must not try to make me believe that, because I have given you something to eat and drink, you are willing to round upon a pal.”

His reply did more to convince me than anything else.

“You forget, Mr. Sharpe, the half of the reward, which will take me out of the country, and give me a fresh start, but, besides that, I owe the man a grudge, and if I live I’ll pay him.”

I told him he could soon prove whether his information was true by showing me the house and the man. I would take a couple of others with me, and arrest him at once.

To this, however, Fox would not listen. He said the neighborhood was a very bad one, the man a most desperate character, and surrounded by friends, and there would be but little chance of taking him there. His idea was to entice him west, and take him when off his guard. Even then Fox warned that there would be considerable risk, as the murderer carried with him the knife with which he had committed the crime, and threatened to use it on any one that attempted to take him. After further conversation, it was arranged that Fox should meet me that night, and in the meantime I should think upon some scheme.

My plan was soon matured. It was this: I got an order for one of the west end theatres for the following night. Fox was to invite the man to accompany him, but before entering the theatre,

was to take him into a public house, and then, when he was drinking his glass, we would take him.

Punctually at the time appointed Fox met me. I gave him the order for the theatre, and explained what I wished him to do in the matter, at the same time giving him a few shillings for his expenses.

I must confess I waited for the following evening with considerable anxiety. The case was a most important one, and, if I could carry it to a successful issue, would add considerably to my reputation. I chose two officers to accompany me, upon whom I could depend, both of them experienced and powerful men. Seven o'clock was the time named, but, to guard against mistake, we were in the Strand half an hour earlier, the three of us, of course, being in plain clothes. Seven o'clock arrived—half-past seven, eight o'clock—but no appearance of our men, and at half-past eight we gave it up in disgust. For once I felt assured I had been thoroughly sold.

Next morning, however, I found at the station a badly-written scrawl from Fox, saying that the man had got so drunk the night before that he could do nothing with him, and that he (Fox) would meet me at twelve o'clock, at the house where I had given him his dinner, and if I could him another order for the theatre, he felt sure of bringing the murderer up that night. I met Fox, gave him the order, and arranged to be on the look-out at seven o'clock.

This time fortune favored us. We had not waited many minutes when I saw Fox coming along the Strand, in company with a tall man, in a rough pea jacket. He stopped to look at a shop-window, and as I passed I noticed that the tall man had the cut of a sailor. He was broad-shouldered, deep-chested, and long in the arm, and evidently would be an awkward customer to contend with. They walked on for about one hundred yards, and then turned into the bar of a public house. In half a minute my colleagues and I followed, and asked for something to drink. We five were the only people in the bar, and the barmaid was just serving Fox and his friend with two glasses of ale. At the back of where the tall man stood was a small gas-burner, and my two brother officers went behind him, as if to light their pipes. The moment that he lifted his glass to his lips I sprang upon him, and my assistants, at the same instant, seized him from behind. Quick as we were he managed to wrench his left arm away, and striking straight out from the shoulder, sent me sprawling on the floor. My two men were, however, too much for him, and by the time I regained my feet had the handcuffs on him. When I looked closer at our prisoner, I confess I was a little bit staggered. He scowled at us fiercely enough, but he had a fine handsome face, and certainly had not the look of one who could commit so dastardly a crime as that for which we had just arrested him.

“Well, mates,” he said, “this is rather rough work. What do you want with me?”

“We want you,” I replied, “for a murder committed in Scotland.”

“Murder! I never hurt anybody in my life.”

I told him that would have to be proved, and in the meantime he must go with us to the police station. Calling a cab, two of us accompanied our prisoner, the third officer being left with Fox, with orders to follow us to the station.

I stated the charge to the inspector on duty, and the prisoner was asked his name and address. He gave that of Archibald Brown, of Greenock, and stated that he was a sailor. On searching him, we found in his possession two sovereigns and some silver, and a large clasp-knife, such as is usually worn by seafaring men.

I took Fox to a coffee-house off Fleet Street, and arranged with the proprietor to supply him with board and lodging from day to day. Two men from the force, in plain clothes, were told off to watch him night and day, and with orders to arrest him if he made any attempt to escape. The next morning the prisoner was brought before a magistrate. My witness, Fox, would not, I thought, make a very favorable impression in his ordinary costume. In fact, I was ashamed of him, and purchased at a second-hand shop a suit of clothes for him. When he had his new rig-out, and his hair cut, he was much more respectable. At the Police Court he gave his evidence in such a straight-forward way as to favorably impress the magistrate with its truth. The prisoner denied having made any such confession to Fox, and protested his innocence, and asserted that he had not even heard of the murder. He either did not know or refused to state where he was at the time, and this, joined to the fact that he was a native of a town such a short distance from Glasgow, in some measure confirmed the evidence of Fox. Finally, Brown was remanded for a few days, to enable us to communicate with the authorities at Glasgow, and to produce, if possible, further evidence. We immediately telegraphed to the chief of the police at Glasgow, stating that we had arrested a man named Brown for the murder of the woman, and that the prisoner was remanded from that day (Thursday) until the following Monday. We received a telegram in reply that they believed we had got the right man, and that an officer would be sent up to London in time for the adjourned examination. Next morning we had a letter confirming the telegram. The murder had, it appeared, been quite a mystery to the Glasgow police until the day before the receipt of our message, when a woman had been found who asserted that she had seen the deceased on the night of the murder in company with a sailor named Brown, and that she had watched them go into the house together. The letter further stated that an officer would arrive on Sunday night to take charge of the prisoner.

In the meantime we kept a sharp watch upon Fox; but, apparently, there was little occasion for it, as the other officer reported that he scarcely ever left the house where he was staying, and showed no desire to do so. He twice called upon me at the station, and expressed great concern lest any of Brown's friends should get hold of him, as he felt sure that his life would not be safe. Our men watched him up to Saturday night, when, so convinced had we all become of his good faith, that I asked my chief if he thought it was necessary to continue the surveillance. He agreed with me that it was not, and the officers were withdrawn. On Sunday afternoon, I looked in to see Fox, to tell him that we should want him at the Police Court the next morning at eleven. I found him having his tea, and apparently quite at home in the comfortable quarters I had provided.

That night I met the Scotch officer at the Great Northern Station, who congratulated me on the successful arrest which I had made. I admitted that I thought there was some credit due to me, as

there had been difficulties in the way, and the prisoner being such a tall, powerful man, there had been danger also. His reply took all the breath out of my body!

“Eh, mon, there’s some mistake here. The mon we want is a wee chap, nicknamed ‘Red-headed Charlie,’ but whose real name is Brown, *alias* Fox, *alias* Sinclair, and half a dozen others!”

A light broke in upon me in a moment. A few hasty words of explanation to the Scotchman, and as fast as a hansom cab could go, we tore down to Fleet Street, but arrived too late, for the bird had flown. Fox, the actual murderer, had left the coffee shop about an hour before, and from that day to this we have never seen nor heard anything of him.

I need scarcely say that the prisoner, who was as innocent as I, was set at liberty the next morning.

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