

My First Case
A Young Detective's Story.
by Mrs. W. F. Carrington

“YES, Lord,” said Simon, had he been a Catholic, would have crossed himself, but being *Simon*, he used that not indifferent substitute, a shake of the head—“Yes, Lord, it’s er cuyus time. I say ter Hagar dat ar bery day, says I, ‘Hagar, sum’in’ gwine ter happen,’ en do dat she ’spress herse’f es makin’ light uv it, I kind er never felt easy in my mine. ’T’us dat same ebenin’, when we win’ wus er cuttin’ so soft en ’ceitful like, just er moanin’ now en den, like es if ’t ’us in mis’ry. Somehow like, I tell ye, I done felt all dat week like things wus gwine wrong. Look like eb’ry day sence Mars Frank lef’ here I couldn’ git settled in my mine. ’Peared like he done took de luck wid him. En fo’ de Lord he *did*,” Simon concluded, pausing, and shaking his head sadly, as his hands dropped hopelessly between his tremulous knees. “’T’us a bad day,” he presently resumed, “when ole massa let dat ole heah’s tail leave dis pl’ntation.”

“What about the hare’s tail?” I asked, inquiringly.

“Luck, massa, luck,” old Simon replied, quickly. “It’s be’n in our fambly eber sence ole massa’s father was a little chap. Old Uncle Isr’el he cotch de heah, en blessed de tail fur luck, en giv’it ter de old gin’l, en it done hung in de same spot whar he put it, ober de big room chimn’y, eber sence, ’tel when Mars Frank wus here lahst time, he ’lowed ter his gran’father he wanted it, en de ole man gim it ter ’im, cause he ’lowed he done had his day, en hard luck couldn’ hut him; but I seem em fotch ar kine uv er sigh when he tole me ter take it down, en when he seed de ole place empty, what it done hung so long, de tears come in his eyes. ’Peared like it kine er put ’im in mine uv all de res’ what ’ad gone, missis en de chillun. I tried ter ’suade ’im ’gin lettin’ it go. ‘No, ’z’e, ’Simon,’ z’e. ‘It kyan’t he’p me now. Missis is gone. I’ll soon be gwine, too. Let Freddy try his turn now. He’ll bring it back, maybe, arter while.’ I ricullect pertickuler uv his sayin’ that, en his po’ ole face wus tryin’ ter smile, ’do his heart wus er cryin’. But it seem ter me frum dat day, better’n two munts ago, things is be’n er droppin’; en that night, be’n three weeks now *yistidy*, lahst time I seed ole massa wid de bref in ’im, I wus pahsin’ ter Inkle’s kennel, he wus settin’ in dat berry winder” — pointing to the handsome gray stone mansion — “er lookin’ so cahlm in de moonlight, like he dun be’n ahskin’ de Lord ter cumpose his mine down ter ’is sorrows, en ’ad got ’is prear. When I seen ’im agin he wus layin’ white en cold, de blood in a puddle on de flo’, en him never gwine ter call Simon any more.”

“Was there nothing to show how or by whom he was murdered?” I asked, as the old man paused.

He shook his head slowly.

“That’s es folks take it, massa,” he said, sadly.

“How do you take it, Simon?” I asked.

The old man raised his head slowly from the drooping position it had assumed, and looked at me steadily a moment, and then said, slowly:

“I take it, massa, ’at them what sets up fur larnin’ kyan’t allers read right.”

“So you can read a little yourself, Simon?” I said, as I drew together a rent in my gamebag.

“Well, mass, et’s nigh on sebenty year ’at Simon’s be’n puttin’ things terguther, en ef he ain’t l’arnt no figgerin’ like dey larns um at de schoolhouse dese days, Simon ain’t libed his time out ’dout seein’ what de Lord puts befo’ him.”

I thought an appreciative nod the best answer, and he continued:

“Marster Frank’ us allers er sorry creeter fur lookin’ round ’im. No use fur nozin’ out, but he’s be’n er good chile ter ole massa, ’do—be’n er speckful, cumfertin’ chile. When Mars Robert was grievin’ uv him, en bringin’ him ter tuin, Mars Fred he allers do one ter hope ter kiver his ways wid soft, kine er sorrerful speekin’, en fo’ de Lord what kine er tale are dey naratin’ ’bout him? all cause uv er few hot words wid ole massa, what he had when his blood wus hot wid luv’in’ sum ’un ’at massa didn’ ’prove uv, en ’do he mought er ’lowed he’d make er beggar uv ’im, like Mars Robert says, Simon knows he neber meant it, en most pertickuler not sence Mars Fred dun lef’ off gwine ter Squire Finch’s, en took up wid makin’ money ’stead uv spendin’ it. No, sir; Mars Fred never had no mine ter hurt a hyar uv *no* person’s head, not fur *no* price, en ef he *never* comes back ter ’splain ’bout him not bein’ here, en git his glove under de winder, Simon’ll allers know dat he’s cl’ar uv *dat* sin. De Lord hab jestic out er de wicked soul what dun it,” he concluded, his voice gone from emotion, and his whole frame quivering with exhaustion. “He’s done broke ole Simon up, massa,” he added, after a pause, as his head swung slowly and sorrowfully from side to side; “done broke him up.”

I had hitherto taken only the interest of a common humanity in the details of this murder. The section in which my Autumn holiday had happened to fall was all unknown to me, and the multitude of horrors which one reads from day to day in the columns of any moderately successful newspaper have gradually worn away, not our hatred of crime, but the edge of our emotional nature as related thereto. When trunk tragedies are common, why should one lose a day’s shooting to learn the particulars of a perfectly well regulated and genteelly conducted murder?

As old Simon’s sorrowful face, his tone of deep, heartfelt grief, and air of utter dejection and hopelessness made themselves gradually present to my inner consciousness, a strong desire came over me to salve his poor broken heart. I could not restore the dead, but I might find, by investigation, some clew which would show where vengeance should justly fall, and if it might be possible really to prove that the suspicion attaching to Mr. Fred Therndon was unfounded, it would be an unspeakable comfort to the old man. Public opinion was certainly setting in a whispered current in that direction, though none could tell whence it had started, or on what it had fed. A glove, identified as Fred Therndon’s, had been found under Squire Therndon’s window the morning after the murder, and clutched in the dead man’s hand were a few strands of reddish-brown hair.

Tears had gathered in Simon's weak, old eyes, and were dropping slowly upon his cheeks. He drew his sleeve across them once or twice as he sat looking on the ground, and occasionally shook his head, in slow accompaniment to his lonely sorrow.

"Simon kyan't do nuthin', massa," he said, sadly; "but de Lord'll know whar to let His judgement fall, ef de white folks don't. *He'll* know whar dem spots come frum what'll stain dat wicked soul when de gre't day comes, en ole marster lay his han' round his blessed throat what neber open but ter speek what 'us good en true. *He* kin pint him out, bless de Lord! en mine, I tell ye, Simon'll say, 'Yes, marster, Simon knowed it; dun felt it, marster, right hyer."

The old man laid his hand on his breast as he spoke, and seemed for a moment almost carried away by his emotions.

"The house is closed?" I said, interrogatively. "The room where the murder occurred is not open to visitors?" I suggested, as the old man looked up.

"Mr. Robert is from home," he said; "but he giv' orders anybody what wanted ter look in wus welcome. Will ye like ter walk in, sir?"

I expressed my desire to share the general permission, and followed the faithful old servitor across the broad greensward which separated his humble "cabin" from the dwelling-house. We entered the large, square room which had been the squire's. Everywhere were the signs of a past age, as represented by the surroundings of a not self-indulgent, but refined and intelligent, gentleman. Well-filled bookshelves, trophies of the chase, hunting apparatus of rather ancient date, with here and there portraits, which I took to be those of Therndon ancestors, surrounding the walls. In the bright bay window a pair of mockingbirds were singing love-songs, and across the polished floor a dark red stain wound like a heavy cord. By the large armchair was a larger, deeper stain, where the squire's lifeblood had slowly pulsed itself to rest and endless quiet. There was really nothing to see, but the coroner advised that everything remained undisturbed till Mr. Fred should come, Simon said, "which he wus in some uv dem fur-off places, as nobody knowed when he'd git here."

"The hyar what was in the squire's hand? Yes, sir; in the top uv that old snuffbox, wid de glass face."

I look at them, but they could tell only a short story; a few soft strands of reddish auburn hair, though Mr. Robert Therndon had been anxious to make them a groundwork for building inquiry on, and would have left no effort untried for finding his grandfather's murderer, had not Mr. Fred Therndon, the other grandson and heir, when at last he had been heard from—two weeks after the murder—telegraphed and written too, Mr. Robert said, that killing another man couldn't bring his dear grandfather back, and he was opposed to having more to do with detectives than he could help; pronouncing them a set of knaves, in league with half the rogues and murderers in the country. So the matter was to be dropped, and the homestead was to pass, with all the rest of Squire Therndon's vast possessions, to Mr. Robert Therndon, except twenty thousand dollars in bonds, which was to be Mr. Fred's portion.

“It kyan’t be ’at massa was in his right mine when he rit dat will,” old Simon said, slowly, when he was showing me the secret drawer of the desk, which, since the removal of the papers, was empty, and stood sprung. “None uv us ’ud ever said ’at Mars Fred wouldn’t git de biggest sher ub ole massa’s b’longin’s; him what neber gin ’er back ahnswer, en dat massa lubed same es ole miss, mighty nigh; dey’s no ’countin’ how he could er turned agin dat chile fur good; en ef massa writ *dat*, mine, I tell ye, he done ’pent uv it long ago, en writ another *somewhar*.”

The old man shook his head and sighed, as was his habit at the conclusion of a sentence.

“Ole massa loved de sunshine,” he began again, seeing me pull my hat-brim to shade my eyes from the glaring rays, as they poured through the window. “Dat corner what gits de mos’n pertickuler sun, he allers kep’ de kyver on.”

On the side of the desk next [to] the window the long Persian silk scarf hung almost to the floor. I slipped my hand beneath its folds to examine the exquisite texture more closely, and in so doing inadvertently reversed a portion of the cover, so that the lining was visible. The mark of bloody fingers on the smooth white facing gave a sudden thrill and shock to my nervous system. I started at sight of those five bright-red spots. Not light touches—the hold had been strong and close. Perhaps a hand had grasped the desk for purchase when the other was used to prize open the secret drawer, after the murder had been done.

It was the work of but a second to cut with my pocketknife the bit of stained lining from its place, and drop the scarf again into its former position. A footstep sounded on the gravel outside as we were leaving the room, and in the hall-doorway I came face to face with Mr. Robert Therndon. He paused and said, affably, as I acknowledged his bow:

“Is not this Mr. Brown, from the Tribble House?”

I bowed in assent.

“I am told you are in the ’H’ detective service,” he went on; “but for my cousin’s earnest remonstrance I should have had your whole force working on this sad case, sir. I can scarcely bear it that his death go unavenged.” He paused a moment. “I would like to talk with you, sir. Will you walk in?”

I turned and followed him into the large library, where he at once ordered luncheon should be served. Mr. Robert Therndon was a man calculated to give a most pleasant impression. Slim and shapely, he was in his movements the most graceful man I ever saw. A broad, white brow, with his light hair lying not in waves, but suggestively of them. His straight, Grecian nose had an exquisitely arched nostril, and his eyes, which were too light, were covered by long lashes; they were strange, restless eyes, which were rarely on you unless your own eyes were elsewhere. I wondered, as we sat at luncheon, how they would appear in a photograph. I had an uncomfortable feeling when they were on me. There was not the sensation of being read over, but of being taken in snatches.

Luncheon was over. Mr. Therndon had given me a cigar, and was taking one himself from his pocket-case, as he said:

“As I told you, Mr. Brown, my cousin decides that we are not to work up this case,” indicating with his thumb the room across the hall, which had been the squire’s. “Of course, you will understand how anxious I feel to know if anything can be discovered, and you detectives have eyes all over your heads,” he said, his thin lips parting to show a set of exquisitely white teeth beneath his blonde mustache. “Since your visit was not professional, I need not hesitate to ask what you saw, or if you saw anything but what is on the surface in my poor grandfather’s room this morning?”

“Nothing, sir, but what would meet the most casual eye,” I replied. “There is little to be read from such pages as a blood-stain and an orderly desk. The murderer was evidently acquainted with the your grandfather’s methods, and knew how to find what he wanted without disturbing what he did not. A fiend incarnate could scarcely, after such a deed, have been deliberate enough to solve the mysteries of spring locks, and then rearrange all the papers so completely.”

The soft, gray smoke was floating across Mr. Therndon’s handsome face.

“*All the papers were not there,*” he said, hesitating slightly as if uncertain whether to give me this confidence or not. “*There were five one thousand dollar bonds gone, which should have been in my poor grandfather’s desk. I saw them there not a week before his death,*” he added, speaking in a deep, suppressed tone, and fixing my eyes with his own.

“This, then, gives you a strong point,” I said. “When they are used you——”

He stopped my further words by laying his hand upon my arm. He rose from his chair, crossed to the door, as if uncertain of his purpose, then resumed his seat as he said:

“You are young, sir, but I feel strangely inclined to trust you with what I have not known until twenty-four hours ago. It overwhelmed me,” He paused, overcome for the moment by emotion, and rested his brow in the palm of his long, shapely hand, as his elbow leaned upon the table. “I can give but one solution,” he began again. “Perhaps you, with your detective skill, can help me to another theory. God grant you may!” He paused a moment. “*My cousin, sir, has the bonds!* When our trouble first came I wrote and telegraphed in vain. He could not be found. Recently I have had a couple of letters urging that I do nothing in the way of investigating, since he believed there was no clew that would lead to anything. It would be a great trial to see our dear grandfather’s pitiful story in every paper, and we could not restore life by taking one. I will read you an extract from a letter received yesterday,” he added, taking an envelope from his pocket and reading as follows:

“Let it be twenty, or ten, or nothing. As he wished it, so do I. When I was last at home, he gave me *five one thousand dollar bonds*. So, you see, I am not a beggar, and have enough.”

“Were the bonds in your grandfather’s desk, of your own personal knowledge, within a week of the squire’s murder?”

“They were.”

“After your cousin’s visit they were in the desk?”

He bowed his head in answer to my question.

“Were you prepared to believe the amount a sufficient inducement to this deed?” I asked.

“Help me to some other solution.” He paused a moment, then added: “Since I have gone so far, I will say frankly that I believe my grandfather intended leaving him *nothing*. You may or may not have heard that my cousin had irreconcilably offended our grandfather, who had openly expressed an intention of leaving him penniless.

“Did he ever make any writing to that effect?”

“His lawyer thinks a *will*,” he said, slowly.

“Then the one which was found——” I began.

“I have reason to know, or to believe——” he corrected, and then hesitated. “Come with me to my room a moment.”

We crossed the long hall obliquely, and entered the room in the rear of the squire’s room, a pretty, airy chamber, more like a lady’s than a bachelor’s.

“This, sir,” he said, as he drew a folded sheet of paper from a writing-desk, “is my grandfather’s handwriting. Do me the kindness to examine it carefully.”

He fitted a key into a small ebony box on the table, and unlocking it, handed me therefrom two small bits of paper, one torn in two and pasted together, the other charred at the end and much soiled.

The first was covered with separate letters, perfectly imitating Squire Therndon’s hand. The other had combinations of two and three and four letters. In one place the squire’s initials were plainly written. The imitation was excellent. No casual observer would have said otherwise than that Squire Therndon had written the letters and words.

“These,” the young man said, “I found in my cousin’s room after his last visit. He has a wonderful talent in that direction, and has frequently boasted that he could make his living as a forger.”

“I cannot understand,” said I, “if he forged the will, why he should have shown himself so little favor. Twenty thousand is a small consideration in a property like Squire Therndon’s.”

Mr. Therndon was silent a few moments, and then said:

“I have thought of that. Might it not have been he feared more would excite suspicion?”

“Scarcely; and if, as I hear, the breach between the grandfather and this hitherto favorite grandson was already healed, the whole thing is utterly incomprehensible.”

“Who says that it was?” the young man asked, turning quickly the flash of his strange eyes upon me. “It never had been, and never would have been, as the whole neighborhood knows,” he said, strongly. Then added, with a slight lifting and curve of the upper lip: “This is one of old Simon’s garrulous tales. No, no, sir,” he went on, “that was something we had ceased to hope for, knowing our relative, though we often talked of it, and I always assured him it should make no real difference in his share of property; but now” —he paused— “if our suspicions are true, things are changed; but I must do Fred justice, sir” —looking me for a second in the eye, and then shifting his glance—“give him every chance, sir, and, when you no longer doubt, I shall tell *him* only what I know, and drop the case. Put these in your pocket and examine them at your leisure,” he said, handing me the bits of paper.

I returned to the library, where Mr. Therndon soon joined me, bringing the will with him, and saying, as he laid it before me: “Consider yourself professionally engaged, Mr. Brown, and with professional secrecy enjoined; but, remember, your work must not be shared.”

I felt flattered by Mr. Therndon’s willingness to trust so momentous a matter to so young a man as myself. He had, however, been led by impulse, and there was really little to do. The case, if such it might be called, had worked itself up. I had only to scan the evidence and give a judgement.

After the contents of the squire’s will had become known in the neighborhood, the general verdict had been that the will was written some time before, when there was anger in the old man’s heart. It was evident to me now that there had been no reconciliation, and the young man, possibly brought to severe straits, had gradually determined, perhaps during his stay here last, to take the contents of the desk, which were at that time considerable, and to introduce a will which would at least ensure him from absolute want. He had not intended to kill the old man, but had been interrupted in his work; discovered, angry words had passed, and murder was the result.

I gave to the bits of paper a careful, critical examination with my magnifying glass, and then compared them line by line, letter by letter, with a piece of Squire Therndon’s writing which Mr. Robert had given me. The imitation was perfect, and there could be no doubt that they were written in intentional imitation of the squire’s handwriting.

I then drew to me the letter which had been left lying open on the table—which had been received from Fred Therndon the day before—and put my glass upon it. The hand was round and flowing, but the weight in the lines was surprisingly like the forgery. Here and there, too, the turn of a letter was exact with those on the bits of paper. A certain trick of lifting the pen before his *h*’s, which appeared nowhere in the handwriting of the old man, was invariable in that of the young one, as well as in the words on the bits of paper. I had no room to doubt that this forgery

was Fred Therndon's. A sentence or two from the letter worked itself into my brain, as I ran my glass along the lines:

"This is not a time when we are both overwhelmed with grief, to speak of heirs and heirship. If I have expected to be first, it has only been because I believed dear 'grandy' had a soft spot, which no one else could touch, for his 'baby,' as he loved to call me."

It seemed strange, indeed, to read such words from a murderer's pen. Yet the evidence of his guilt was strong. On bad terms with his grandfather; a wild, reckless disposition; mysteriously absent from home at the time of his grandfather's death; possessed of bonds known to have been in the desk a few days before Squire Therndon's murder; had forged his grandfather's name; and the few *hairs* in the dead man's hand exactly corresponded in *color with Fred Therndon's own*.

As I started to leave the library, that I might fetch the little box containing these strands of hair for examination, I encountered Mr. Robert Therndon in the doorway.

"Excuse me, I left my letter this morning—" A shade of annoyance crossed his face when he saw that I had been using it. "These effusive expressions show my cousin in a bad light," he said, apologetically. "I will furnish you with specimens of his handwriting;" and unlocking a drawer, he laid several letters on the desk near me, and left the room.

For the next few days I spent much time examining and comparing these different bits of writing. I was not an expert, and was young enough to feel very much flattered by Mr. Therndon's sudden confidence, and not as much impressed by a sense of the responsibility he was throwing upon me as an older man would have been.

The will I studied carefully, and with results which confounded me beyond measure. I took it line after line, word after word, stroke after stroke, repeating the operation accompanied by my bits of paper, finding upon each the corresponding letter in the other, and critically comparing them.

On placing the note which I had in Squire Therndon's handwriting side by side with the will, I was surprised to find the differences which I had traced between this note and the forged bits of paper totally wanting between this note and the will. The letter was in many respects a more complete imitation. The lines of the will were slightly waving, and I was tempted to believe it genuine, and to attribute the uncertain lines to the tremor of age; but my microscope showed the lines from the older pen broader and less methodical. The peculiarity of making both letters *short* when *ss* occurred, and of lifting the pen to cross final *t*'s, neither of which points could be found in any of the squire's writings—although I looked through numberless letters—showed beyond doubt that he had not written the will.

Repeatedly I compared the will with Fred Therndon's letters, and with the bits on which he had undoubtedly imitated his grandfather's hand. In no instance could I find that double *s* was written otherwise than with one long letter, and only once, in many letters, could I find the pen lifted to cross a final *t*. I was completely at a loss for a theory, when compelled at last to believe that *Fred Therndon* had not written that will. The will was a forgery, but whose? And had it anything to do with the murder? I felt out of humor with this upsetting of what should have been a plain case,

and as I sat, on the morning of the third day, examining for the hundredth time lines, angles, shades and distances, I had about decided to call Mr. Therndon and give up forming *any* opinion, when a mere accident turned me to a fresh scent, and nerved me to renewed effort.

My magnifying glass was in my hand, and I ran it idly along the layers of paper which filled the library table, now changing a monogram to a colossal gilded archway, and now developing from a tiny crumb myriads of busy, rushing animal life. A sheet of impression paper fell from a file of magazines as they were pushed out of my way, and I placed my glass upon a thumb-stain which marked the surface. It was wonderful to note the fine waving lines, all circling, not smoothly, but by a certain unvarying rule, ever wider and wider. "If I could only have such a print of Mr. Fred Therndon's thumb," I said, mentally, as I drew out of my little pocket-case the small scrap of stained silk which I had cut from the cover. *If I had!*

I placed the microscope upon the thumb-stain, and I felt the blood bound in my veins. I could hear it pulsing in my throat, and on my forehead great drops of sweat were starting. Close examination only confirmed my first hasty glance. The likeness was perfect. I moistened my own finger with ink and touched it to the paper. The impression was quite different. My face could not have been more unlike another's than this thumb-mark from mine. I could not tell whither this would lead me, but the man who had handled this paper had stained the silk lining with Squire Therndon's blood.

I could not remember whether I had ever seen this paper before; it might have lain there from the first, unnoticed, most probably. Another strong proof that the man who had murdered the squire, had used the library familiarly.

My sense of smell had always been unnaturally keen, and, applying this test, I found the paper pervaded by a delicate odor of heliotrope—there was no other sheet similarly scented. This could not have lain long without imparting some slight odor to its companion, yet there was no solution possible to its having been recently put there, unless—I held the paper between myself and the sunlight. A few faint marks were discernible at the bottom of the sheet. With some effort I was able to decipher the date—a day old! My heart bounded with hope. Mr. Therndon had handled the paper only yesterday, and could tell me whence it had come. The door opened, as I was about rising from my seat, and that gentleman entered.

"This is a very fine quality," I said, raising the sheet of paper to attract his attention. "Can you—
—"

"A new supply which came yesterday," he replied quickly, as if wishing to dismiss the subject. "Have you found no reason to be satisfied about our case yet, Mr. Brown?" he went on, speaking pleasantly, but earnestly. "You can understand how anxiously I wait, since my cousin—"

"You shall have my decision tomorrow," I interrupted him, feeling suddenly repulsed by him, and anxious now, for new reasons, to be alone. As I bowed his dismissal and turned again to the table, he left the room, and a few moments after I heard the sound of his horse's hoofs, as he rode in the direction of the village. I had at least a couple of hours ahead of me, and I determined to

satisfy myself if there was proof within reach on a point which I had suddenly become unwilling to share with my employer.

In an old drawer of Squire Therndon's desk I had seen large files of letters, on many of which I had recognized Fred Therndon's handwriting. I might find somewhere what I sought, and I accordingly set to work with a will. Sheet after sheet, package after package, was unfolded, only to be replaced without revealing what I sought. At last, a letter written by Fred when a lad of fifteen made me draw a long, expectant breath. There was a faint impression on the last page, but greatly blurred. In or two faint traces the print of the fine lines had remained. The impression was scarcely deserving the name, but it satisfied me—*Fred Therndon's hand had not shed his grandfather's blood!*

As I was crossing the hall, old Simon entered. He gave no nod of recognition as usual, but I, anxious for a few words with him, followed him to the dining room.

"Is ye done foun' what dey say ye is, sir?" he asked, turning shortly upon me.

I looked inquiringly.

"I say, sir, is ye done foun' what dey say?—how dat Mars Fred dun kill old marster?" he said, glaring at me almost savagely. "Simon tell ye, sir, how it's er *lie*, ef ye *does* say so," he added, his voice trembling with indignation and anger, "en ole Simon'll say so till de *Jedgmint Day*; en fur all ye white face, ole Simon'd be de lahst 'un ter be in yer shoes when de debil gits his own." The old man paused for want of breath.

"I have said no such thing, Simon," I answered, quietly. "Who told you so?"

"Mr. Robert 'lowed it, speekin' ter Mr. Fred's sweetheart what *he's* gwine ter marry, now dat he's got all marster's money, en my John what tends over dar heerd him sayin' uv it; en he 'lowed pertickuler how it wusn't never ter be spoke about, only dat he wanted ter jestify hisse'f 'bout keepin' uv the money. H'it ain't goin' ter bodder Mars Fred 'bout *dat*. Ef marster said it, dat's all right; but mine I tell ye, mun, ye better say ye prears 'fo' ye let *him* know as ye'er sayin' he'd hu't a hyar ub ole marster's head. Lord knows de Angel Gabr'el hisse'f couldn' say no sech thing en live, es dey say ye's be'n er findin' out."

"I haven't said what you have heard, Simon," I said, very positively.

"Yes, Lord!" and Simon turned, with an expression on his face hard to describe.

"No," I repeated, "I haven't said so, and do not believe it, if Mr. Robert *did* tell Master Fred's sweetheart so. Is this the young lady your old master disliked?" I asked.

"Yes, sir, dat 'us all Mars Robert's doin's. Mars Fred 'us allers kind er headstrong ef ye takes him de wrong way, en Mars Robert wucked old marster up ter 'posin' uv 'im, cause Mars Robert wanted 'er hisse'f. Thank de Lord he's got 'er. 'Er 'ooman ain't much, sir, what kin take ter one man 'gin she lets go ernothe."

It was not easy for me to decide what course to pursue. The plan for throwing the suspicion on Mr. Fred Therndon had been well laid. Much had been counted on his peculiar disposition, which had been accurately gauged. An accident alone had put the key into my hand.

I returned to the library and went again over the testimony before me, with the same result. The scraps which had been found in Mr. Fred Therndon's room were undoubted imitations of his grandfather's hand, but might have been written months or years ago, in jest or earnest, who could tell?

The will was a skillful imitation, also, of the squire's writing, but displayed none of the peculiarities of Fred Therndon's. I drew a note from my pocket which I had that morning received, a note with a pretty monogram at the top—R.F.T. —gracefully bound together. I did not need my glass now. By the new light I had gained there was no need for searching. I knew I should find here the double *s* and final *t* identical with those in the will.

I had been employed not to clear, but to discover, Mr. Fred Therndon's guilt, yet I shrank from bringing the charge home where it belonged. I shrank from meeting those restless, shifting eyes.

However, after much hesitancy and doubt, I penned the following note:

“MR. ROBERT THERNDON, SIR: I have gradually arrived at an opinion regarding the will and death of your relative, which is founded upon facts I am prepared to prove, and which I here state briefly:

“1st. The hair found in the dead man's hands shows by the presence of a foreign substance upon its roots, that it is *false* hair, and not, therefore, a witness regarding that of the murderer, but only of what he wished to represent.

“2d. An accurate impression of the murderer's thumb left upon the silk lining of the desk-cover, on examination, is identical with one left upon a sheet of impression paper lying upon the library table this morning, and bearing signs of recent use.

“3d. The will, though a forgery, was not written by Mr. Fred Therndon. The writer's invariable habit of using a small *s* when the consonant is doubled, as well as that of lifting his pen to cross his final *t*'s, is striking, and will convict him, if a specimen of his handwriting can be procured.

“I am thoroughly assured of the weight and accuracy of my statement. I shall await twenty-four hours some indication of your wishes, failing which, I shall put Mr. Fred Therndon in full possession of the facts now before me.”

My plan succeeded perfectly. A few days later all the world knew that Mr. Robert Therndon had renounced all claims to his grandfather's estate, and gone no one knew whither.

“Yes marster,” old Simon said, as I said goodbye. “Yes, marster, bress de Lord, ole Simon mos' gone; one foot in de grab' en de udder mos' dar; but it kind er *holps* 'im, knowin' 'at Mars Fred's

comin' whar he b'longs, en de ole hyar's tail, bress de Lord, back in its place, which it's dun
hung dar nigh on ter sebenty year."

Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly, October 1887