

own view is that she was alive, but was prevented from making any outcry—drugged, most likely."

"She could not have been drugged when she hid the glove?"

"No—yet at the same time she was undoubtedly alive and not able to call for help; gagged, perhaps, or terrified by threats into silence. But even granting that, they may have drugged her before attempting to remove her. It would be a natural thing to do."

Mr. Torrance turned a haggard face upon him. "But if she were dead—that would account for everything."

"Not quite everything, I think. In fact, I do not like that hypothesis at all. But one has to look at these cases from every side. I believe she was alive. For one thing, if it had been otherwise there would have been some trace in the room; for another thing, this man, from what I have been able to learn, does not sound like a murderer. The old woman's capable of anything—crazy, I verily believe, but the man seems to be merely a good-for-nothing, unless crazed with drink. The men who spoke to him are sure that he was himself upon that night."

Mark drew a long breath. "I agree with you," he said, "besides, I think we may safely place some dependence on what the letters say. The old fiend does not wish Christine dead. It would not suit her plan of revenge. She is alive, I am sure of it—but in danger that drives me mad to think of! Johnson, when we solve the second problem, she will be safe. How are we going to do it?"

The detective fidgeted.

"I'll admit that we are up against it," he said. "Given a dark night with rain; the fact that two people drive away with a horse and cart, and that the horse and cart were returned in fairly good condition next day at noon—that is really all we have to go upon. I think we may be reasonably sure that the young lady was in the cart and that the journey taken by the horse was not a very long one. Therefore we face two possibilities—either the kidnappers are concealed somewhere within a radius of say, fifteen miles (more likely ten), or they drove to some small station within that radius and from there took the train for ports unknown. Do you agree with me that far?"

"It sounds likely."

"Now there are several such small stations near this city, and it is quite on the cards that we may pick up the trail from any one of them. They ought to have been a somewhat noticeable party. If the girl was drugged or even half dazed they would probably represent her as an invalid. As few invalids travel, they would be remembered on that account alone. Of course it is possible that the girl was not drugged, but merely terrified into silence."

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"I do not believe that would be possible," said Mark. "Miss Christine is too clever and too quick to have submitted tamely to intimidation, and they are too clever to have dared to risk it."

"I agree with you," said Mr. Torrance emphatically.

"You are probably right, but, as I believe, I have remarked before, one must look at every possibility. At any rate, I have men now despatched to every station within a possible radius; on trains, or in autos, whichever would get them there quickest. If there is a vestige of a clue one of them will be pretty sure of finding it. It seems slow work, I know, but it is thorough, and I really do not see what else we can do."

"When ought the reports of your men to come in?"

"Almost any moment. They were to 'phone results immediately, and most of them ought to have reached their destination by this time. I took the liberty of telling them to 'phone directly here, so that you might have the news as soon as I have. I think that is a call now."

"No news from Frampton," he told them, putting up the receiver after a brief dialogue with someone at the other end. "The agent there is positive that no one bought any ticket or took any train upon the night in question. The through trains do not stop there, and passengers are few."

For a half an hour the three men sat there while call after call came in—each reporting, for one reason or another, no trace of the fugitives. The detective's face grew graver as time went on. It was evident that he had expected some result from this enquiry. Mark, on the other hand, seemed distinctly cheered.

"If they don't get away," he kept saying, "then they are still somewhere near. The real danger is that they may have reached New York or some other large city, where search would be hunting for a needle in a haystack. Besides—there is that last letter! It was slipped into the letter box under cover of darkness. Depend upon it, either one of the kidnappers must have placed it there—they would not trust a third party. And where one is, the other is. They would keep together, and where they are, Christine is."

"Good reasoning," agreed the detective, "but it won't help much without a tangible clue. There is still the Dalby man to hear from. I sent our best man there, for as the five o'clock through train will stop for passengers, it seemed the most likely place, and—"

The sharp tinkle of the call bell interrupted him.

"There is your man now," said Mark.

Johnson picked up the receiver eagerly, and a hurried consultation followed. The detective's eyes were bright as he turned from the instrument.

"He's coming here," he announced. "He thinks

he's picked up the trail—at least he says he has some curious information."

"And didn't he say what it was?"

"No—but he'll be here in fifteen minutes. It's a good bit of road between here and Dalby."

"Dalby!" said Mark, and he sighed heavily, as he remembered the last drive he had taken on the Dalby Road.

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CHAPTER XXX.

THE detective from Dalby proved to be a young man with a fresh, ingenious face, whose rounded innocence was somewhat belied by a pair of very keen grey eyes. He was evidently properly impressed with the importance of his mission, but not unduly so. In fact, the three men, for Tommy had arrived a moment or so before him, were favorably impressed upon the instant.

"Would you like my evidence first, or shall I begin by stating my conclusions?" he asked his chief deferentially.

"Your evidence, of course," said the big detective, and the others who would have liked the conclusions first were compelled to stay their impatience as best they might.

"I had some difficulty in fixing the right night in the mind of the agent at Dalby," he said, "but finally he got his bearings by remembering that upon the date mentioned his youngest child had been sick with the toothache. He is sure of the date, because the next day was the kid's birthday, and she cried because she was afraid she would not be able to eat her box of candy. Well, upon that night he very well remembers a horse and cart driving up at about a quarter to five in good time for the through express. He did not see who drove the cart, but the passengers were an ugly old woman and a young girl."

Mark interrupted with a smothered exclamation, and the young detective paused for a moment, but as no one made a remark, he went on:

"There is no doubt about the old woman. The agent saw her face plainly in the lighted waiting room, and recognized the photo at once. But the young girl he did not see. It had stopped raining, and was not cold, so he saw nothing strange in the girl staying outside in the air. She was seated on a bench at the end of the building, out of the range of the lamps. She seemed too ill or too weary to rise, and the old woman said that she was not well, and that she was taking her to New York to consult a specialist. The only thing he noticed about the girl was that she had yellow, or very light hair. The old woman's clothes were decent though plain, and a very bad fit, being much too big."

"Borrowed, probably," interrupted Johnson.

"She did not buy tickets for New York or for any place. She said she had her tickets already, but she made no secret of her destination, and indeed talked a great deal, and gave her plans with a lot of unnecessary detail. The two went off on the five o'clock express, and that would have been the end of them except for the evidence of the station agent's sister. This sister, it seems, was going to Buffalo by the same train. She very nearly missed it, arriving at the last moment and boarding it in a great hurry. Neither she nor the old woman were provided with berths, and they found seats in the same car."

Now the station agent's sister returned from Buffalo only the day before yesterday, and last night was asked by the station agent's wife to tea. During the meal the agent happened to speak about the old woman and the invalid girl, and asked his sister if the poor thing had been taken worse on the train. In reply she learned the following curious facts:

"First—The sister had noticed the couple very particularly, as they were the only other travelers who boarded the train with her, and the old woman was noticeably ugly. But, strangely enough, she did not get the impression of the girl being an invalid. She seemed, she said, quite ordinarily strong. She wore a veil over her face, but her hair was very yellow. Note particularly that the sister was absolutely convinced that the hair was bleached. I questioned her myself upon this point, and she grew quite angry when I suggested a mistake. She said no one could mistake bleached hair!"

"Second—The two did not go to New York at all, but left the train at Hamstead, which is only about twenty miles from Dalby! She is sure of this—indeed, as the couple had interested her from the first she is hardly likely to be mistaken. It was still dark when the train ran into Hamstead, but she saw the two pass under the station lamps, making their way to the exit gate. The girl now wore a veil over her yellow hair as well as over her face, but she walked quite easily, and did not appear ill in the least. That, sir, is all the evidence."

The detective gave a long whistle, but before he could reply, Mark, noting the eagerness in the young fellow's face, insisted they hear his conclusions before beginning to discuss the matter themselves.

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"Well, sir," said the young fellow, modestly, "the conclusions are fairly obvious. It would seem in the first place that the old woman deliberately tried to make the agent believe that she was bound for New York, that she purposely called his attention to the alleged helpless state of the young girl; that she purposely left the girl's yellow hair uncovered that the agent might notice it. Therefore, the old woman wished to establish a trail for a young lady with yellow hair, which, if investigation occurred,

would lead to New York. It would seem, also, that the young woman was not as ill as the old one made out, and, further, that she was on friendly terms with her companion. Also, in my opinion, it is fairly certain that her yellow hair was bleached. It is not likely that another woman would make a mistake in that matter, especially as the missing lady's hair is remarkable for its natural beauty of coloring. Therefore I conclude that the young person in the train was not the lady we are seeking, but one merely intended to represent her, and thereby aid in establishing a misleading trail. It seems, further, that the two undoubtedly alighted at Hamstead. And why not? It was not necessary to go to New York, it was only necessary to seem to go there. The accident of the presence of the agent's sister in the train could not have been foreseen. If you remember, she came at the last moment, and got on in a great hurry, so that the other two did not see her, or if they did, it would not occur to them that she was any connection of the agent's. If we had only the evidence of the agent, we might very possibly have concluded that our quarry had cleared for New York, taking the half-stupefied girl with her. The old hag knew that the agent would never notice that the girl's hair was bleached!"

"I think you have thought it out very reasonably," said Mark. "It all seems to fit together like pieces of puzzle. And the conclusion of the whole thing is—"

"It is rather early for such a conclusion yet," declared Mr. Johnson, who like other successful artists, was not without jealousy. "Still I suppose it will do no harm to hear what he thinks."

"I think," said the young detective, "that the missing lady is concealed somewhere close at hand, probably between here and Dalby."

"Bravo!" said Mark. "I feel sure of it."

"And the young person with the bleached hair?" asked Mr. Torrance.

"She must be partly in the secret, and she ought to be easy to trace. My own guess (it's only a guess, would be that she probably belongs to the house where the missing lady is concealed."

"Hum! well, guessing is not going to help us," said Mr. Johnson, rather sourly. "What we want to do is to spot all the possible places of concealment within a ten-mile radius of Dalby—that is, if there is anything in your theories." He drew from his pocket a large paper map which he spread upon the library table. "Here is a road map. It is a special map made under my own supervision. Every house is marked with a few illuminative notes in cipher. Now then, we will first take the straight Dalby Road. It doesn't look likely. See, these houses set along it at reasonably frequent intervals are all farm houses belonging to old residents, not much chance of hiding a kidnapped girl in any of them, eh? This is the toll-house, kept by a respectable old couple. It consists of one room and a bedroom, a rat could hardly be hidden there. This is the Dalby Road Inn. It is quite well known as a stopping-place for motorists. They give quite a decent country lunch there. I've often tried it myself. It is kept by a very respectable woman, by name Haffey, with a pretty grand-daughter. I am convinced that they would not lend themselves—"

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"Excuse me," interrupted the young detective, diffidently, "but those people are no longer in charge of the inn. They left about a month ago, and are now living in Hamstead."

"How do you know that?" snapped Johnson.

"I—well, you see, I know Miss Haffey rather well. She is, as you say, a remarkably pretty girl."

"Oh, I see—sweethearts! Well, that accounts for it. Perhaps you know who keeps the inn now?"

"No; I have never been there since Mrs. Haffey and Fanny left. I only know that they sold out for a good sum. Stay, though—I came by there to-day in the motor. We were going very fast, but I naturally looked at the house. There was someone at the side door scattering the grain for the chickens. It was a woman. I couldn't see much of her." Suddenly he jumped to his feet with a startled exclamation. "By the lord Harry!" he cried. "She had yellow hair!"

"What?"

"How stupid of me! never to think of it. Of course she had yellow hair! It was the only noticeable thing about her. I remember thinking at a distance it might almost be Fanny, but Fanny's hair was dark brown. This girl's was yellow, startlingly yellow!"

Mark had also risen. He was very pale. "It looks like a clue," he said. "If it is—" he locked the young man's hands in his own with a grip that spoke volumes.

"Plenty of girls have yellow hair," said Johnson the complacent. "So don't get excited. However we'll soon know about this one. Think you can tell bleached hair when you see it, Cunningham?"

"I think I can, sir," said the young detective, modestly.

"Well, you and I will run down to the inn at once—"

But Mark, who had been talking excitedly with Mr. Torrance, interrupted him without ceremony.

"We think that that would be very unwise," he said. "There is always a chance that you may be known to be a detective. If they are as sharp as they seem to be they might have time to get away. Wouldn't it be better for me to go alone in my own motor as I have gone dozens of times before?"

"I do not think so. If they know Mr. Torrance, isn't it likely that they will know you? Be-

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