

STORY OF THREE TUNNELS

MY brain was on fire. I felt choking as I walked away from the office. Dismissed as a thief! I, the son of a man whose very name was still held sacred for his honor and integrity; oh, it was too much.

For three years I had been in an office in Edinburgh, and prided myself I was getting on fairly well. I did my work honestly and faithfully, and all seemed going smoothly when Mr. Heron, my employer, took a strange and unaccountable dislike to me. I tried to persuade myself I was mistaken, but the pleasanter I tried to be the more distant he became.

Things went on like this for about three months, till one day I was called into my principal's sanctum and dismissed. Of course, I demanded an immediate explanation. Mr. Heron sneered, and my blood began to boil, I felt as if I could have killed him as he said—

"No heroics, if you please, Blair, but thank your stars I am not to prosecute; for you widowed mother's sake I refrain, but not another day do you stay here."

"Mr. Heron," I began, as calmly as my indignation would permit me. "I demand to know what you dismiss me for?"

"For theft," he answered curtly. "For months it has been going on. Everything pointed to you as the culprit, but I was loth to believe that the son of William Blair could have fallen so low, but this day has proved it."

"In what way?" I enquired, sarcastically.

Mr. Heron's face flushed angrily—more at my tone than my words, I think.

"You have overreached yourself this time," he said. "The cheque you so cleverly forged my name to was suspected. As a rule one uses his cheques straightforward, and it would have answered your purpose better had you not clumsily supposed it

would avert suspicion, and used the last in the book."

In vain I protested—threatened—demanded a clear explanation. Mr. Heron simply ignored my request, and sternly pointed to the door.

"Go," he said, "and never darken my door again. Once your father befriended me, and for the memory of that I let you go free."

Mr. Heron's stern face is the last thing I distinctly remember. I have a hazy recollection of putting on my coat and hat, walking through the outer office amongst the clerks, who eyed me curiously, and of walking the whole length of Princess street. I could not realize what had happened; it came upon me with such a shock that I felt dazed and stupid.

Suddenly I thought of Murdoch. Murdoch was a lawyer in Glasgow. We had been fast friends since the day we both entered the same office—raw, country lads we were, too. From the very first we drew together. We shared the same rooms for three years, then Murdoch left for Glasgow, and I remained with Mr. Heron. I resolved at once to go to Murdoch, tell him the whole story, and get his advice.

I could not go home; my mother would have broken her heart to know her only son was suspected of being a thief. I turned my steps to the Waverley Station and took train for Glasgow, via Polmont. By this time my head was aching, and I was thankful to lean back on the cushions and shut my eyes. My fellow-passengers were an old lady, with a curious black bonnet—something like the ones worn by the Sisters of Mercy; an old, foreign-looking gentleman; a young mother with two little children; and a plain-looking, quietly-dressed girl, who was seated in the corner opposite me. My head was throbbing frightfully, and I lay back intending to sleep if possible.

But just as we emerged from

the first tunnel I was roused from my lethargy by a curious change that had taken place. I could have sworn that when I entered the train at Edinburgh the carriage contained but two children—now there were three. I puzzled over the third child till my brain ached. I rubbed my eyes, shut them, looked again, but no, there sat the third child grinning at me in an idiotic fashion.

Suddenly the old lady with the black hood dived underneath her cloak and stealthily produced a long dagger. I started violently, and was about to say something, when, to my horror, we entered the second tunnel. I heard a muffled groan, then a dull thud, and when once more we emerged into daylight the old gentleman was gone.

The old fiend in the black hood looked at me sardonically and smiled. An icy finger seemed laid on my heart—I could not speak—I could not move. I looked wildly at the other passengers, and they seemed paralyzed with horror.

At the next station the young mother and her children hurried out; but the young girl opposite me seemed glued to her seat, and gazed at me with terror in her face. I was about to open the door and go into another compartment when the train moved off, and we were alone once more with the maniac.

We were fast approaching the last tunnel, when the old woman looked furtively at me, pointed to her dagger, then to the defenceless girl in the corner. But I could not see her butchered in that cold-blooded way, and I stood up to wrest the dagger from the man woman. But just as I got to my feet we entered the third tunnel. I rushed to the window to feel for the cord to alarm the guard; but I was dragged back and thrown violently to the floor, and I remembered no more.

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When I regained consciousness