

Ready Room
Dandel

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WANTED HOURS.

I often hear the aged speak through tears that course their furrowed cheek Of wasted hours, but all in vain; They ponder o'er the fruitless past, And many sad reflections cast, The past cannot come back again. Then spander not the hours away, For life at best is but a day, And should not be spent in vain; Who at its close but must repent Of wicked deeds and hours mispent, And view them all with pain.

A GHOST FROM THE GRAVE.

One cool evening in October, having just partaken of supper, I was about to light my pipe and seek a few moments quiet reflection within my room, when suddenly the door opened and Ralph Walmesley, a medical student, came rushing in without ceremony.

"Ah? here you are, Walter; I thought I'd catch you before you started out for a stroll."

"Well?"

"Are you alone?"

"Don't you see I am," I replied.

"Very good; I came to ascertain if you will engage in a little scheme of mine which I am going in execution to-night."

"Tonight?"

"Yes, this very night!"

"Well, you beat everything for schemes."

"But will you assist me, Walter?" he persisted.

"Depends on what it is," I returned, lighting and puffing away at my pipe.

"Well it's just this: You know that old Mr. Simpson died very suddenly last Sunday and was buried to-day."

"Yes, what of it?" he echoed—"a good deal I should think; are you not aware that his death is regarded with suspicion by the people?"

"No; why so?"

"Well, he was apparently in good health at noon on Sunday and at 9 o'clock that night he died suddenly."

"I hadn't heard the particulars, Ralph, but I don't see that they are such as to occasion alarm; his death was from natural causes, leastwise so it appears if the result of the autopsy is to be believed."

"Ah, but there is the pinch—is it to be believed?"

"Why not? I am sure I had no suspicion that there was anything irregular practiced in connection with it."

"Hem—all right, we shall see; I have studied enough of medical science to know that Mr. Simpson did not come to his death by natural causes; on the contrary, I am inclined to believe that there has been some underhand work going on and that he has met with foul play."

"Why, how you startle me, Ralph; explain yourself!" I exclaimed, rising from my seat and regarding him with surprise.

"Do you know who conducted the autopsy?"

"No."

"Well, it was Dr. Crawley, and if I mistake not, that shrewd old duffer has been acting a part."

"What—what do you mean?" I gasped.

"Just this; Silas Simpson has a young wife; she is pretty and frivolous—fond of admiration and display—did she—a young woman say of five-and-twenty—marry him—a man of 67—for love."

"Well, hardly," he added; "she wedded him for his money. She thought he was wealthier than he really was, and he was greatly disappointed and despondent when she found she was not nearly as rich as she had supposed."

"In order to pacify her, he insured his life, regardless of the amount of premium demanded on the risk of his advanced age, in two leading companies, and presented her with the policies less than six months after they were married amounting to 50,000."

"No sooner did she get possession of the papers than she grew more and more discontented."

"How do you know this?" I asked, looking harder at Ralph than ever.

"I don't know it positively, but I surmise it; I am weighing the features in the case carefully in my mind and stating my suspicions."

"Oh, that's it, eh. Well, go on."

"This Dr. Crawley, it seems," he resumed, "was once an admirer of hers; but through some rival dispute they had a falling out and became estranged, and she never heard of him again until after she had married Silas Simpson and they

came to Aberdeen to live; this I know to be a fact.

"One night she became suddenly ill and a servant came post haste for a physician, Crawley was the only one who happened to be in at the time, and he very reluctantly consented to go."

"From that day forward I am constrained to believe that the two renewed their former friendship."

"Under pretence of attending her as a medical adviser, Crawley managed to visit her frequently, and forgive me if I assert my belief that between the two the managed in some way to compass the death of old Simpson."

"Then Crawley presided at the autopsy. Drs. Farsworthy and Warner desired to investigate the cause of Simpson's death thoroughly, but Crawley would not hear of it; he rendered the verdict that the deceased came to his death from natural causes."

"What of that?"

"I believe the whole thing was arranged by Crawley, who, in my opinion is capable of almost any despicable deed."

"What in the world are you driving at? I asked, my curiosity now aroused to the highest pitch.

"Wait and see. I will sum up the whole affair in a nutshell:

"Mrs. Simpson was anxious to be freed from her union with a man old enough to be her father.

"By assisting at his removal Crawley not only disposed of an odious obstruction but also furthered his own interest, she doubtless having an understanding with him to the effect that in the event of the success of their plot she would marry him after a reasonable period had elapsed. Then he would not only get her, but get her fortune."

"By Jove, Ralph, I begin to see through the thing now; but do you really believe it?"

"Why, certainly, I do, or I would not have taken the trouble to explain the details of the affair to you."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Just this—provided you agree to assist me."

"Very good; I agree."

"Then come with me to the village cemetery; it is already dark enough to start. We must resurrect the body and submit to be a careful examination."

"But that would be a serious offence," I hastened to object.

"Not in this case, for, as you will readily admit, the end justifies the means."

I could not help seeing the force of his argument and thereupon yielded my consent.

An hour later we had received a horse and box buggy—the only vehicle available under the seat of which we placed the digging utensils, etc., and by the time twilight had deepened and the shades of night began to descend upon the autumnal landscape, we were on our way to the cemetery, which was situated at the foot of a Mountain, a distance of about four miles from the green, the centre of the village of Aberdeen.

A ride of an hour leisurely pace brought us to the gate of the silent city of the dead.

The gloom of night now unfolded the sleeping hills and valleys—a night dark enough, it appears to me, to further any scheme of villainy.

Not a sound assailed our ears, save the lonesome chirp of the cricket, as we tied our horse to a tree in a convenient grove, and shovel in hand, bent our step toward the burial ground.

Passing through the gate we entered the domain of the dead and pushed our way up a boxwood-bordered path towards the spot where old Simpson had been interred with which place Ralph was perfectly familiar.

Here and there a lonely pine moaned in the breeze, mournfully as it swayed.

On, on, through the gloom, and amid the ghostly marble headstones and monuments, we pushed, until finally Ralph paused before a new made grave.

"Here we are," he murmured, propping his shovel, and proceeding to spread a funeral blanket over the grass with a careful foresight that betokened a familiarity with the details of the work in hand.

We knew there was little or nothing to fear in regard to being detected in our

work, but still felt it was better to be cautious, for Peter Hayes, the old sexton who had charge of the place, had been known to have caught some of the students before, and had made it hot for them; but as Ralph had ascertained on this occasion that Hayes was not very well he had no fears that he would be interrupted.

At the end of an hour we had removed all the mould from the grave and reached the deal case that covered the casket. Ralph then removed the lids with a stone and screw driver, after which he fastened a rope about the body, and we drew it forth from its narrow resting place.

This accomplished, we refilled the grave, carefully replacing every speck of dirt, and it was now I saw the wisdom of Ralph in spreading the rubber blanket upon the grass, for when it was removed there was not the slightest trace of our work, which would otherwise have been made apparent by the atoms of earth adhering to the green sods.

Having made the mound look the same as before it had been disturbed, we surveyed our work with satisfaction, after which we wrapped the rubber blanket about the rigid body, which we then thrust into a burlap bag.

Ralph chuckled at the success of our questionable enterprise, as we removed the corpse to our carriage, which we reached without adventure.

As there was no room in the bottom of the buggy, we were obliged to place the remains leaning against the seat, between us, after which we whipped up the horse and drove rapidly away.

On our way back toward the college, however, Ralph suddenly declared that he was very thirsty, so he drew up before an ancient-looking tavern at the junction of the two roads, and went in to "take something," for, although to tell the truth I seldom indulge, I felt that I needed some stimulant to "brace me up" after the experience of the evening.

Ralph was so elated with the success of his enterprise that he drank rather more than was good for him, and it was with difficulty that I finally persuaded him to leave the place.

We at length, however, returned to our carriage and Ralph started the horse with a cut of the whip.

As we raced over the road the liquor he had imbibed soon began to have an exhilarating effect on him.

I endeavored to restrain him but without avail.

Suddenly I heard a sound that caused a cold chill to creep up my back.

"Thunderation, what was that?" gasped Ralph, turning ghastly pale, while his eyes expanded with affright.

A deep groan, apparently proceeding from the corpse, was what had alarmed us.

My blood seemed to stand still, an icy chill vibrated through my frame, and a deadly, paralyzing feeling swept over me.

"Great heavens," cried Ralph, his teeth chattering with terror.

"Oh horror," the sound was repeated with startling intensity, and we distinctly felt the bag move.

Then suddenly it was torn open and a ghastly face appeared, white as marble.

That was enough.

Ralph gave a wild shriek and fainted dead away.

My hair stood on an end, and great beads of cold perspirations started from my forehead.

Ralph's scream frightened the horse and before I could clutch the reins from the palsied hand of my comrade the animal darted away with a wild snort of terror, and dashing down the road was soon beyond control.

I clung desperately to the seat as the vehicle bounded from side to side, in the mad plunge of the terrified brute.

Suddenly the carriage came in contact with some obstruction by the roadside and was instantly overturned.

My head had struck against a some. A myriad of bright stars danced before my eyes, and I sank into a state of insensibility.

When I recovered I found myself lying in my bed in my room at the College Barracks," as the block where we lodged

was called by the boys. "Where am I?" I asked of Ralph, who was seated near me, his arms in a sling, and a rueful look depicted on his saturnine countenance.

"Back at the barracks," he grunted.

"Ah—tell me what has happened, and how about the ghost," I asked, with a sickly smile.

"Ghost be hanged!" exclaimed Ralph, impatiently; "it was only a trick of an infernal hostler at the tavern."

"What?" I ejaculated, opening wide my eyes in astonishment.

"Well, Walter, you see it was just this way. While we were inside a young fellow thought he would play a little joke on us. He knew we were medical students, and at once suspected the contents of our bag. After a while he made bold enough to assure himself of the truth of his convictions, when it suddenly occurred to him that it was a fine opportunity to perpetrate a practical joke at our expense.

"He accordingly removed the body from the bag, dragging it to the stable where concealed it among the hay, after which he rubbed flour on his face, got into the bag himself and took the place of the corpse in the carriage."

"He only intended to give us a good scare, but when we were all thrown out and you were half killed he came forth from the bag and acknowledged all; so I think he was as much frightened as we were."

"How long have I been here?" I asked after Ralph had explained matters.

"About two hours or so. Come, try and 'brace up.' We'll have to go back and get that body before daylight."

But Ralph was obliged to do without me. He took a student named Meeker into his confidence, after which they got another carriage and returned to the tavern, where the jocular hostler helped them to arrange matter for a careful autopsy in the barn.

Walmesley was clever enough to investigate the matter thoroughly, and found unmistakable evidence of poison in the stomach of the deceased.

He determined to make known his discovery at once, and accordingly, at my suggestion, went to Dr. Havens, president of the college, to whom he confessed the whole adventure.

Dr. Havens, far from rebuking him as he expected, bestowed great praise upon him for his sagacity in carrying his scheme out successfully.

He had the remains privately conveyed to the dissecting-room of the college where, after subjecting them to a deliberate personal investigation, he fully concurred in Walmesley's belief that the man had met with foul play, for there was enough strychnine found in Simpson's stomach to kill three men.

It transpired that Ralph had been playing the part of amateur detective for some time, and through an intimacy with a young man servant at Simpson's house, had gotten the points which aroused his suspicion.

He went and saw George Osfield, the sheriff, to whom he stated his discovery, and after a conference with Dr. Havens, Osfield decided that he would be justified in arresting both Mrs. Simpson and Dr. Crawley on suspicion.

The utmost consternation prevailed when it became known to the villagers that the arrest had been made.

The insurance companies were notified of the affair and sent men to represent them at the preliminary examination of the suspected murderers.

Suffice it to say, that after a careful investigation they were found probably guilty and remanded to jail for a further trial.

In the meanwhile, overwhelming evidence against them was rapidly accumulating. The vial that had contained the poison was identified by a druggist of a neighboring town, who subsequently recognized the man who had purchased the compound from him. At this Mrs. Simpson completely broke down and confessed the whole affair.

The guilty pair were sentenced to the penitentiary for life, barely escaping the hangman's noose.

Ralph Walmesley is today a prominent physician in a leading western city.