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FIRST AND LAST CASE

Old John Hartlepool was dead. That much was certain. It was evident that he had died from a pistol shot, for there was a bullet wound in the temple, and the doctors found the bullet in his brain. A revolver with one empty chamber, which the bullet would have fitted before its shape had been flattened by contact with the old man's skull, was picked up in a court directly under a window of the room where the chambermaid had found the old gentleman lying dead, when she entered the room with a pass key, at 8:30 in the morning. She also found that the window was closed and fastened and this effectually disposed of the suggestion that the old man had shot himself and thrown the pistol out of the window, for, while there was an infinitesimal chance that he might have thrown the pistol out after firing the shot into his brain, it was absolutely impossible that he could then have closed the window and fastened it. Moreover the position of the body and the pool of blood beside it showed that he had fallen when shot and never moved again. The most careful search of the room disclosed no weapon of any kind. Suicide was therefore out of the question. It was a case of murder. So, at least, the police argued, and it must be admitted with a good deal of reason.

Who was the murderer? To aid in a solution of this question the police reasoned in this way: As the dead man was found in his apartment in the fifth story of the apartment house where he had lived alone for fifteen years, it was evident that the murderer must have had some powerful motive to induce him to take the risk attending such an act, or else he must have been temporarily excited into frenzy by something which had passed between him and the deceased. What could the motive have been? It was not robbery, for a roll of notes and a quantity of loose gold lay on the table, just \$1500, which amount it was quickly learned had been paid the deceased by one of his tenants at 4:30 o'clock the afternoon before the dead body was discovered by the chambermaid.

No one could suggest that the old

man had any enemies. His habit of life was exceedingly simple. The worst that could be said of him was that though very rich he was very penurious. He was not a hard creditor, but on the contrary was inclined to be lenient in his collections. He was somewhat proud of the fact that his mother was the daughter of an earl's daughter, but the only one who used to consider himself aggrieved by this was his handsome and high-spirited nephew and namesake. So a murderer to revenge seemed out of the question.

Had anyone an interest in his death? On this point there was no doubt, for John Hartlepool, jr., was known to all the community as his sole heir-at-law. It was also soon learned that on the very morning before his death the old man had instructed his solicitor to make a will cutting off his nephew with a pittance, which will was to be executed the next day, if the young gentleman would not in the meantime renounce his intention of marrying a young lady who was a member of a popular opera troupe and took a role which was more conspicuous because of the elegance of her figure than of the quality of her vocal powers or the degree of histrionic ability.

'Not a cent of my money shall go to a brat of a girl who makes a living by showing herself to the public,' said the old man to more than a score of people, for his nephew's infatuation of the pretty chorus girl was the one sore spot in his life.

Not that Nellie Eltham (she had not risen to the dignity of a stage name) was a "brat." She was simply an honest girl, who, having to earn her living, was doing it in a way that nature had eminently fitted her for. When Master Jack in a moment of unintentional frankness had blurted out his uncle's pet objection to their marriage, she first grew red, and then as pale as snow. Then she ended by bursting into tears, the outbreak being so long that it was a good hour before Jack felt safe in taking his departure, which he did uttering all manner of threats against his uncle for believing and asserting that modesty and the stage were incompatible.

It was known that uncle and nephew had had an interview between 5 and 6 o'clock, during which time a terrible thunder storm was raging. The elevator boy remembered that when the young man left the house he took the elevator at the third story, that he was greatly excited and said something about forgetting to ring for him to come up to the fifth story. He also remembered that it was raining furiously at the time, and that the thunder was so loud and constant that a pistol shot might have been fired almost any moment during the storm unnoticed by persons in an adjoining room. It also appeared that there was an open window on the stairs on the fourth story, which window looked out into the court where the pistol was found.

One other fact remained to be learned and that was at what time the old man was killed. The nephew had left the house a few minutes before 6 o'clock. The elevator boy knew it because he had only been gone a very little while when the janitor came to relieve him for supper. Deceased was accustomed to take his dinner at a restaurant in the lower story of the building where he resided at 6:15 and was the sole of punctuality. "If he had been alive at 6:15 he would have been down to dinner" was the verdict of every attaché and regular customer of the restaurant. No one had entered the building between the time his nephew went out at 6:15 and though several people had come down stairs and gone into the restaurant, they were all ladies and regular inmates of the house.

All these facts were brought to light during the morning after the body was found, with the additional fact that John Hartlepool, jr., had disappeared. The popular verdict was wilful murder against John Hartlepool, jr., and all the papers commented on the case said that it was perfectly warranted, and expressed a hope that the wretched youth would speedily be brought to justice.

At this stage of the case Nellie Eltham came to me.

I had just opened an office as a detective and the seven \$10 bills and the one \$5 bill, which she laid upon my desk and said were her whole savings, were my first professional fee. She soon told me her story, which was hardly necessary, for I had already read it in the papers, which had not only enlarged upon the old man's objections to Nellie's lower limbs, but had contained pictures supposed to represent those objectionable members, and, it is fair to say, if they were a faithful reproduction of them, Jack

Hartlepool deserved to be disinherited for his wretched taste. When we had gone over the story I asked her what she knew about the case beyond what the newspapers had told.

'I know that Jack didn't do it,' was the answer. 'Why he would not do such a thing. Why, only yesterday he said—' and she stopped suddenly in her rapid speech.

I suspected that she was keeping something back that I ought to know, so I impressed her with the importance of telling me everything, whereupon she repeated the pitiful story about the legs, and said very reluctantly that Jack had sworn that if the old man repeated the remark to him he would make him regret it. She confirmed the report that the uncle and nephew were to meet and discuss the will and the marriage. When I told her that she would be the most damaging witness if called upon at the young man's trial, as she was likely to be, she reeled as if she was going to faint, but recovered herself and said that no matter what might happen she would never repeat what she had just told me. 'I will die in prison first,' she said in a low, steady voice. When I asked her where Jack was, she replied that she had not the least idea.

I told her that there did not seem to be anything I could do for her, and that I would only retain \$25 of her money to pay me for attending the inquest. It seemed like robbery to take that, for I was sure that her lover was guilty.

She said she would go to her work as usual, as she must save every dollar to prove Jack's innocence. That night I went to the opera and saw her as she stood before the footlights in all her radiant beauty and grace. It happened that at the climax of the opera the prima donna proclaimed the innocence of the stage hero, and as the words: 'He is innocent' rang out, the look of triumph in Nellie's face spoke so much faith, courage and hope, that I found myself much against my will beginning to believe that Jack was innocent after all.

But I could do nothing to help her. The inquest was short and nothing new was developed and the verdict was one of wilful murder against John Hartlepool, the younger.

Three days had passed since the inquest and no tidings had been heard of the accused although the officers were scouring the country for him, when Nellie came to me and in her quick, curt way said:

'It was not suicide. Jack did not kill him. No one else could. It must have been an accident.'

'Accident?' I exclaimed.

'Yes, accident,' was the positive answer. 'There is no other explanation, and I am going to rent the room where the old man died to try and think out how it happened.'

I tried to convince her that the idea was absurd, but she was firm in her determination. So I agreed to follow her directions, which were that I was to engage the old man's apartments for my cousin, a lady who had come to the city to study elocution, and Nellie was to occupy them forthwith. This arrangement was carried out that same afternoon.

The second night after she had taken possession the people of the flat were startled by a pistol shot and a scream. Running to the room whence the sounds came, they found Nellie lying upon the floor in her night dress and a small pool of blood by her head.

They lifted her upon the bed, which she had evidently just vacated, and summoned a physician. He soon restored her to consciousness. She looked at him with a gleam of triumph and whispered: 'He is innocent,' and these were the last words that she spoke coherently for three weeks.

When her disordered brain recovered its normal condition I was summoned and she told me her story, which was in substance as follows:

She had been lying awake trying to think what the solution of the mysterious killing could be, when suddenly her eye discovered several raised button-like knobs which ornamented the high-carved wooden mantel. The light of the electric lamps in the street below shone brightly through the window and fell upon these knobs. They stood out above the woodwork of the mantel and presently her idle thought was speculating as to this curious freak of the architects. Certainly their purpose could not have been artistic, she reasoned. A close observer could not have helped remarking that they were not quite in harmony with the general design of the mantel. Suddenly she sprang out of bed and touched one of the knobs. It yielded. She pressed a little harder, and that was all she knew until she came to herself in the hospital.

To make a long story short, I went to the mysterious room accompanied

by the janitor and found the knobs as she had described them. It was the centre she had pressed, so I began by pressing the first from the center. It did not move. Then I tried the second. It did not move. Then telling the janitor to get out of harm's way, I stood against the wall and pressed the third knob with the handle of my cane. The instant I did so the knob slipped in and the sharp report of a pistol rang out. I held the knob back with my cane while the janitor inserted the end of a poker and pushed the pistol from its fastening. We heard it when it struck the bottom of the compartment into which it fell. Safe from the pistol, we began pressing the knobs one after the other and then two at a time, and found that when the first and second were pressed simultaneously they opened a cabinet in which were some money and numerous papers. Clearly there was the solution of the old man's death. He had made a mistake in trying to open the cabinet and had fallen a victim to his own ingenuity in devising a useless protection for his valuables.

I carried the news quickly to Nellie and she sent me off post-haste to the newspapers with the story, for she wanted every one to know that Jack was not guilty. Her judgment was right, for the newspapers told of the discovery with abundant praise for the young girl. Jack was declared innocent and a much abused young man and was urged to return, marry the graceful, beautiful and rising operatic star and inherit his uncle's wealth, but the hope was expressed that he would not feel obliged to deprive the stage of a lady who promised to be one of its greatest ornaments.

Two weeks later, or more than six weeks after old John Hartlepool had met his fate, a cablegram came to his late address; also one to Miss Nellie. The cablegram was dated at Liverpool, and the contents were identical, being as follows:

I am all right. Will be home on first steamer. Was kidnapped and brought to Liverpool in a sailing vessel.

It turned out that Jack had been mistaken for an important witness in a big law suit and had been decoyed on board a schooner lying at a Brooklyn dock and taken forcibly to sea.

Jack returned in a few days, and of course, I was present at the wedding.

A Home Testimonial.

GENTLEMEN.—Two years ago my husband suffered from severe indigestion, but was completely cured by two bottles of Burdock Blood Bitters. I can truly recommend it to all sufferers from the disease.—MRS. JOHN HURN, 13 Cross st., Toronto.

A Remarkable Cat.

Boston had an extra cat that he had no further use for, so he determined to drown it. He tied a brick and a flatiron to its hind legs, sewed it up in a bag, and threw it into the river. The next morning when he came down stairs the cat was sitting on the bag in front of the stove licking her paws. She had swallowed the brick and flatiron, and they made her so heavy that her wait burst the bag. She then swam ashore, and brought the bag home with her as a memento.—Exchange.

A Postmaster's Experience.

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