

Now he will find out if Jane Hardy and the girl who visits the supposed burglar are identical.

At three o'clock on a certain Thursday afternoon in February, the passage leading to the accident ward at St. Thomas was thronged with the friends of the various patients.

It was not the first time he had been in the ward, and he knew his man. At first he walked about carelessly, inquiring by those patients who had no one to see them, but many he halted by the bedside of the sufferer next to the one he was interested in.

At last he turned round, and took a good look at the girl.

She did not in any one particular answer to the description of Jane Hardy.

Maybe she was a messenger sent by one who was afraid to come herself, and, assuming she was, the detective passed out of the building, and occupied himself behind a pillar near the entrance resolved to follow the girl wherever she should go.

By and-by she came quickly out, looked nervously to the right and left, and then walked rapidly away, crossed Westminster Bridge, went on by the Thames Embankment to the Metropolitan Railway, and took a ticket to Dulwich Lane.

The police officer, feeling more certain than ever that this was a new move to elude detection, did not go up to the room assigned to her, but came for a glass of beer, he took up a position in the bar which commanded a view of the staircase, and drawing a pipe from his pocket, smoked away complacently.

When the hour came for the house to be closed for the night, he went out, and now muttering about, now leaning against some railing opposite the house, now sitting down on the door-step, he passed the time until morning.

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At about a quarter of eight his patience was rewarded. The same figure reappeared, and walked away more swiftly than ever, after the night's repose. Away, past the neat little villas, with their trim garages, the only break in the morning's stillness being the distant shriek of an engine, or the whistle of the milk-man's can, or a maid half asleep still, shaking her hat outside the door of her master's dwelling.

"Does, by Jove!" ejaculated the detective, as he stared vacantly after the gradually disappearing vehicle. "She's an awful one, and no mistake!"

Then he walked moodily on, thinking over the events of the previous day. The letter the girl had written was doubtless to tell those who were in her secret that she was watched, and to give the means for her escape which had succeeded so admirably.

The country town of Golderby is a stir, revelling in one of its few galas; for the spring assizes are coming on, and the judges have just made their triumphal entry.

There are not many cases on the list this time—three only. One of embezzlement by a banker's clerk; another, of wilfully setting fire to a dwelling-house by a woman; and the third, the one upon which all interest is concentrated, the trial of William Hardy for the wilful murder of Robert Kenyon, gamekeeper.

At ten o'clock on the morning after the arrival of the judges, the court is crowded. Policemen guarding the steps leading to the doors have declared that only jurors and witnesses are to pass, but those who are neither wedge their way in nevertheless, and the galleries are full.

When his lordship is seated, the usual formulae are gone through; lawyers present little folded papers, which are received with the customary stereotyped bow and smile. The case of embezzlement, which comes first, is soon disposed of.

The incendiary case is also quickly dispatched; the culprit, to the relief of all pleads "Guilty," and thus leaves only sentence to be pronounced.

Then comes the longed-for moment, and amidst almost breathless stillness the magistrate's clerk, at a sign from one of the judges, reads out the indictment against William Hardy.

Then the stillness gives place to a general commotion, as the prisoner, with a policeman on either side of him, takes his place at the bar. All those spectators who are seated at the back press forward to catch a glimpse of the unfortunate man—unfortunate at this dreadful moment, whatever may be his crime.

Taken at last!

No sooner have the doctors declared him able to leave the hospital, than the police pounce upon him, arresting him on the charge of being an accomplice in the burglary at Westminster, and while in custody, some of the inhabitants of Sefton are taken to the prison, and each swears that, though he has in many ways disguised himself, he is none other than Bill Hardy.

The clerk of arraigns offered the prisoner, telling him that he is accused of the double crime of murder and burglary, to both of which indictments he pleads "Not Guilty," and then the trial for the wilful murder of Robert Kenyon proceeds.

The first witness is the under-keeper, who states that about half-past eleven o'clock on the night of the 1st of December, he, in company with the head-keeper and two more watchers, was in the woods. They heard a noise, and on going to the spot found four men, all of whom were well known, especially Hardy, who was a most notorious poacher. A violent struggle ensued; witness saw the deceased botched down in the ditch at the beginning of the affray by two men, of whom Hardy was one. Witness and the watchers succeeded in capturing one of the poachers, and were struggling

Jane Hardy, daughter of the prisoner, is next called. She gives her evidence most unwillingly and hesitatingly. She was asleep, she said, when her father came in, and did not remark what time it was, did not remember that he was agitated; he frequently came in, and went out again; she thought nothing of it, he may have been in the habit of poaching, but not more than many of his neighbors, he occasionally brought in a rabbit; forgot if he went out again directly or not, knew he went up-stairs, did not see him again from that night for two years, though he frequently sent her money, sometimes two pounds at a time.

The prisoner maintains all this while the same hands-on look upon his face, occasionally smiling to himself as the evidence falls to point to him as the man who actually struck the fatal blow. He knows the clothes he wore that night cannot be produced against him. If they could, maybe it would go hard with him, but they cannot. Without proof, how can he be found guilty?—and he knows now that there is none. They may imprison or even transport him for the poisoning business, or for the burglary, but they cannot take away his life. They have no proof. No proof!

measure erased the stains, but yet they are there.

No sooner are these two things brought forward, than the prisoner suddenly stretches forth his arms, gives a cry rather than a groan, and exclaims—

"O God! who'd ha' thought as my boy 'ud haug me!"

Many present are moved to tears at this piteous cry, from the man whose condemnation five minutes before they have been thirsting for.

"It appears for that the incident gives a new impetus to the counsel, for never was a prisoner's cause more eloquently pleaded.

He represents to the jury that the blood upon the clothes was, under the circumstances, nothing. It might have come there in the struggle, long before the death-blow was dealt. In fact, the whole evidence of the witness Butler is most vague. Could it be easy positively to identify any one in the uncertain moonlight, under cover of a dense thicket? And as for the evidence of the voice, could they condemn him upon that? When a man was stoned, could he be certain of anything? All this, and much more, he urges upon the jury, and then they withdraw. In an incredibly short space of time they re-enter the court, and amidst the breathless excitement of all present, give their verdict of "Not guilty!"

William Hardy is acquitted of the crime of murder, but he is found guilty on the second charge of being an accomplice in the burglary that had been committed at Westminster.

Even in this instance the evidence against him fails to prove that he was a principal actor, and he is sentenced to six months' imprisonment only.

Now the punishment is over, and a new Bill Hardy has returned to his native village. Prison fare and prison discipline, after such an accident as befel the man previous to his trial, have thoroughly broken down the once iron constitution, and a miserable, disabled wreck crouches over the same old cottage hearth once more. He will not poach again, for he cannot. He will not quarrel with or swear at his wife, for he has none. He will not in softer moments lift the little Joe upon his knee, for the boy has been dead six weeks.

Often during the two years of exile, spent half in concealment and idleness, half in reckless sin, Hardy was recommended to go to the colonies and start in a new life unknown. But he could not go. So long as he could send something to Jenny, he knew his youngest darling would not starve.

Many days during the weary hours of imprisonment, he almost felt he should die, but for the one thought of seeing his boy once more—the only creature on earth he ever really loved. The knowledge that he returned a convicted felon, with the stain of a grave suspicion upon him, did not trouble him. He had escaped hanging, a feat which amply satisfied his conscience. Home in his mind was Joe, and for him he would live.

But Joe had been run over by a wagon, and killed on the spot, and when Hardy came home that was the news he heard.

The clergyman of the parish visits him occasionally, but to him he is either sullen or morosely rude; so the rector has thought it wiser to leave him a great deal to Miss Forrester, whom he will see and talk to, because Jenny tells him that she taught Joe his letters, and that he loved her.

Six weeks after his return Bill Hardy is lying on his bed, propped up with pillows, no longer strong, nor busy, nor cheerful, but wasted almost to a shadow, and the lamp of life is burning low.

Miss Forrester is sitting by the bedside. She has been reading. Jenny is sobbing in a corner, and the children are down-stairs, very talkative indeed, wishing they could have their dinners, or go out to play, and—if truth must be told—feeling heartily sorry that father ever came back.

Hardy is whispering something to Miss Forrester, and suddenly she falls upon her knees beside him, and murmurs some words which she says to the dying man.

Then he speaks louder than at first. "Tain't no use to peach upon me, miss, in this world; I'll be at another bar afore long, and the Judge as is there knows."

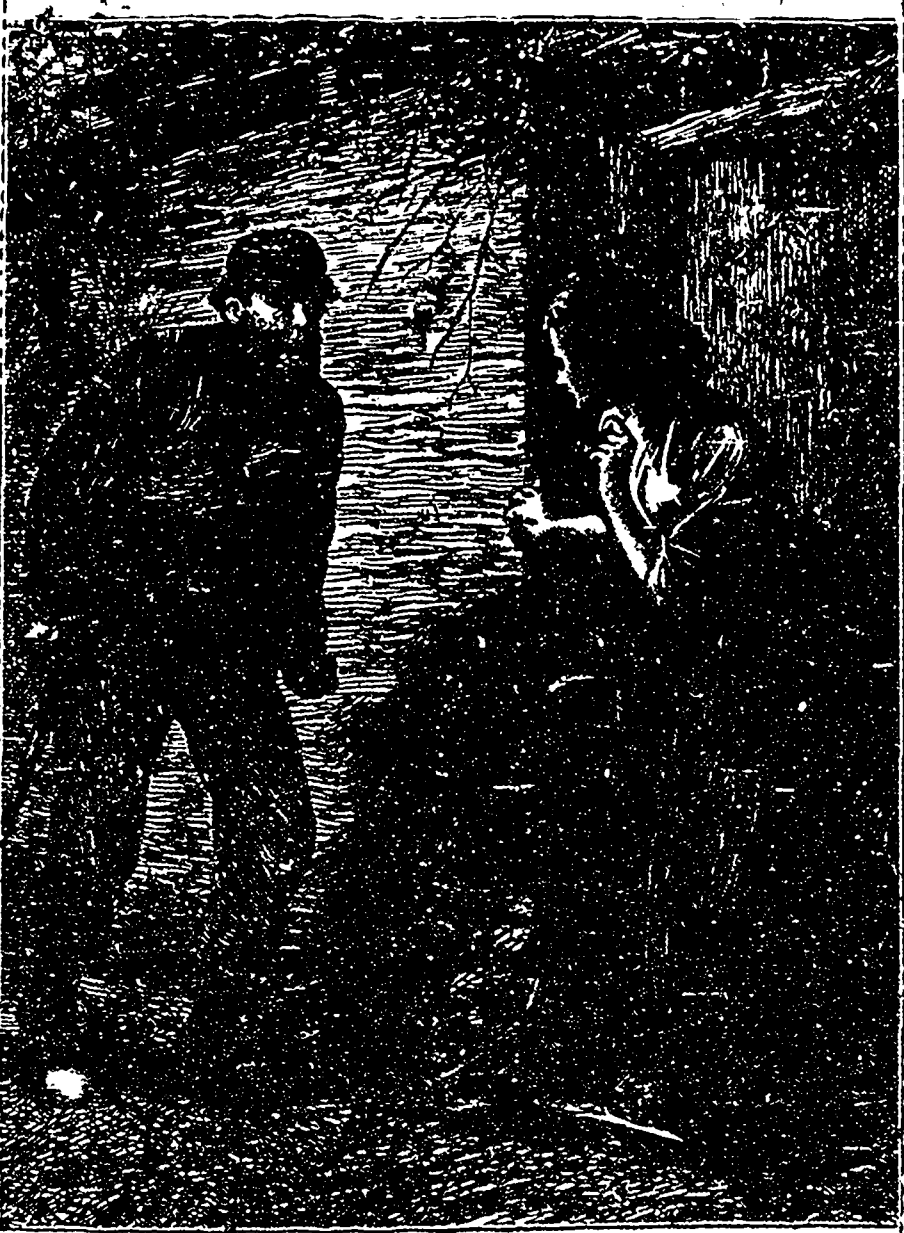
Again she answers him in a low, soothing voice still upon her knees, and he replies—

"Ay, tain't no good to plead 'Not guilty' there."

Then there is silence for a few moments, and when Hardy speaks again the words are difficult of utterance, but Miss Forrester understands.

"Dye know, miss, I do think, and think, as I lies here, as there'll be a counsel a-pleadin' for me then, as the Lord'll hear, and that's Joe. When I come in that night with the blood upon me, and stood at that there bed, with the innocent baby in my arms, I wished I hadn't ha' done it. Tears come to my eyes with the wishin', and I says, for the first time in all my bad life, 'God forgive me!' and I do think as 'praps Joe know'd it, and 'll tell it up there, and 'twill do some'ud for me. And now the trial's a-comin' on again, miss, and I looks to Joe and you. The Lord knows as I'm guilty, but ye'll tell Him as I'm sorry for't—I'm sorry for't."

They were the last words William Hardy spoke on earth.



"THE FACE HAGGARD IN THE MOONLIGHT."

with another, when witness received a blow with a heavy instrument at the back of his head, which half stunned him, and he fell. He distinctly heard the sound of blows in the direction where Kenyon was lying, and a voice which he could swear was William Hardy's, say, "I've finished him," when witness recovered himself, Hardy and one another had decamped, and the other two were captured. Shortly afterwards the police who chanced to be at Sefton Court, on duty (as there was a ball going on), arrived at the spot, and assisted in carrying Kenyon to his home, but he was quite dead, his skull having been battered in with the butt-end of a gun which was found in the ditch close to him. Witness has not the smallest doubt that William Hardy was the murderer.

On being cross-examined as to whether he could swear that he saw William Hardy strike the deceased, he says, "No."

Was the gun with which the wounds were inflicted, Hardy's? "No, it was the keeper's own gun, the poachers had no firearms with them that he was aware of."

Can he swear to William Hardy's voice? He says, "Yes."

Can he assert upon his oath that the words which Hardy had used were "I have finished him," or might they have been "We have finished him," or "You have finished him?" Witness cannot positively swear.

The police constable who examined the cottage is now brought forward, and again there is a commotion in court. He is known to be an important witness. His evidence is as follows:—

The cottage-door was ajar when he reached it, and the girl was sleeping on the floor, dressed, with her head leaning against a chair, as if something unusual had occurred. It had been snowing outside, and there were traces of melted boots and snow upon the kitchen floor, and up the stairs. Witness had followed the tracks, hoping to discover that the man had concealed himself in the bed-room, but there was no trace of him beyond a small bed in the corner of the room, in which a boy of about three years old was asleep. On holding a lighted candle to the bed, he discovered that the breast of the child's night-dress was stained slightly with blood; there was a stain on one shoulder, and on one side of the head, as if it had been pressed against something that had blood on it. There was no scratch upon the child's body anywhere from whence the marks could have proceeded. Witnesses had quietly cut off the lock of hair, and also taken possession of the night-dress, awakening the child in so doing. He had naturally been excessively terrified, and was moreover too young to be questioned.

Here the night-dress and two curly rings of flaxen hair are produced. Time has in some