

FOILED IN TIME.

Dr. Tom Grig sat in his diminutive back office—which he dignified with the name of 'study'—one rainy morning with a copy of 'Godard's Wilson' on his knees, a short, well-blackened pipe in his mouth, his feet on the highly polished fender and his eyes fixed meditatively upon a glass-fronted case of bottles, books, anatomical preparations, sharp, ivory-handled instruments in red leather swaths, pill boxes, gallipots and other miscellaneous medical property. He was a young physician, just coming into a fair practice, and was not engaged, as he appeared, in counting or admiring the bottles, books, etc., above mentioned, but in building some very charming chateaux en Espagne, intimately connected with his increasing business and a certain fair damsel with dimples, away off the country where Tom's dear old mother lived, and whence he had just returned after passing the holidays at home.

'Ah,' mused Tom, half aloud, the words and the pipe-smoke mingling together, as they came through his mustache, 'ah, won't it be jolly! Nice little suite of rooms on second floor—say two bedrooms and a parlor—nice little office downstairs—it won't cost so much more than living alone, and then, God bless her! she'll keep me from spending a small fortune in dissipation, which a single man has to do to kill time. I do think I'm a remarkably lucky dog—why, she's too good for a king; yet she loves me, I believe, as honestly as—Come in!'

A knock at the door had broken Tom's meditation and called forth this last exclamation.

It was the servant—a little Irish girl, with pink eyes, orange-colored hair and a generally burst open style of dress.

'There's a letter for ye!' remarked she, with an intensely Hibernian independence in her tone, at the same time handing him a note, directed to a trembling, scrawling hand.

Tom took the missive and found it to be a request for a visit, written in semi-jocose style, from a gentleman whom he had known slightly some two years before.

27 ANTIQUOUS PLACE, N. Y.

DR. GRIG—I am ill—they say, and want a doctor—they say. I seriously do not think anything is the matter with me, unless I am a little hypochondriacal; but to satisfy my friends, you might administer a stomach pump or trepan me a little and then prescribe something to relieve me of the effects of such treatment. I am not willing, however, a removal of the spinal column or an amputation of the carotid artery, even to please them. Come this afternoon, if convenient, and oblige.

Yours truly

R. F. SIDNEY.

P. S.—I don't think you will need to bring any medicine with you, as I have a bottle of hair dye and a box of dinner pills somewhere about, which I guess will be sufficient.

R. F. S.

'I haven't seen Sidney for a long while!' mused Tom; 'No. 27 Antinous place, eh? he must be well off—that is a decidedly aristocratic neighborhood. I'll go up and feel his pulse!'

In accordance with this resolution, he called in the afternoon at the house designated—a somewhat palatial-looking residence—and was admitted at once to the invalid's apartment.

It was a handsome chamber, furnished with much luxury and supplied with everything that comfort and taste could require. The invalid was arrayed in a rich quilted dressing-gown and slippers of embroidered velvet. In spite of his joking assertions contained in his note, there was evidently something wrong about him, and Tom would hardly have known the thin, sawn man, with hollow eyes encircled with dark haloes, for the ruddy, full fed, hearty-voiced Sidney he had heretofore met.

'Ah, Dr. Grig, I'm glad you have come. They're trying to persuade me that I'm ill, and I want you to help me deny it!'

'I hope to enable you to deny it conscientiously in a short time, sir!' said Tom; 'though I must confess you look a little bilious just now!'

'There! that's just what I told them—nothing but a little biliousness. I fancy I've been living a little too fast—too much rich gravy and pastry, eh?'

'Very possibly. Let me see your tongue—hm—coated a little—how's the pulse—hm.'

Mr. Sidney's tongue was quite white and his pulse small and thready. His face looked as if he were very bilious, but there were several symptoms that seemed to contradict each other, and Tom was a trifle puzzled. Of course he did not let his patient see this, but spoke confidently of bringing him around in a few days, left a prescription for some simple medicine and departed, promising to look in the next day.

That night, shortly after he had retired, he was aroused by a succession of vigorous pulls at the night bell. He sprang out of

bed, and hastily dressing himself, opened the door. A tremendous gust of driving wind and rain, mingled with sleet, greeted him, in which a woman entered.

'Is this Dr. Grig?'

'Yes, madam.'

The lady threw up her veil and sank into a chair.

'I wish, sir, that would accompany me immediately to Mr. Sidney's house, where you called this afternoon. I think he is very ill.'

'Are there any new symptoms?'

'Yes, sir. He was taken with a severe fit of coughing and an apparently high fever shortly after you left. I administered the medicine you prescribed and he went to sleep somewhat relieved, but about half an hour ago he awoke a little delirious and has since had several convulsions. He seems in great agony and I came down here personally to insure your attendance.'

'You are very considerate, madam,' said Tom, bowing, 'I will accompany you in a moment.'

He was soon ready, and taking a small portable case of medicines entered a carriage that stood at the door and rode with the lady to Sidney's house.

The patient was suffering much, but had rallied a little and endeavored to preserve his customary cheerfulness.

'Glad to see you, again, doctor,' said he, in a husky voice and with a faint attempt at a smile; 'I'm pretty well convinced that something is the matter with me after all. If it's bile it is a very unpleasant manifestation of it!'

Tom made his examination more carefully this time, with a view of getting a reliable diagnosis of the case.

'Sallowness—tongue white and furry—pulse feeble—fever cough, convulsions!' thought he; 'rather an extraordinary combination of symptoms!'

And he tried in vain to discover what disease his patient was suffering under. Mr. Sidney complained of sharp shooting pains in his head—of a dead, cold sensation in the abdominal regions—of thirst—dizziness of vision and an untiring restlessness.

'If I hadn't the best nurse in the world,' said he, 'I should get quite low-spirited, but she keeps my spirits up finely. By the way, doctor, I haven't introduced this lady to you, although she went after you. Dr. Grig, Mrs. Bellair!'

For the first time Tom's attention was attracted to this lady. She was a somewhat handsome person, with fair hair and large, soft blue eyes, which she had a way of opening and shutting slowly. Her face was full, a little pale and finely moulded. Her mouth was a peculiarly sweet smile nearly all the time, her nose was straight, with long, narrow nostrils, her teeth white and even, but very pointed, and her form perfect.

She bowed to Tom and proceeded to take off her bonnet and cloak, displaying in the act a round, fair arm and delicate hand ornamented with several handsome rings. In stooping to pick up a fallen glove she inadvertently displayed a small, aristocratically narrow foot in a neat gray garter.

'Mrs. Bellair,' continued Sidney, 'was a very intimate friend of Mrs. Sidney and stayed by her through her last illness, so that she has had much experience in taking care of invalids. Indeed, I tell her she ought to establish a hospital; it is her mission, evidently, to be a ministering angel!'

Mrs. Bellair smiled and disclaimed such flattery, but said that Mr. Sidney and his lamented lady had been great benefactors to her and her family and gratitude alone should have prompted her to do even more than she had done.

While all this was going on Tom had compounded some mysterious white powders and enveloped them in papers, which he numbered, with instructions for their administration. He could not help acknowledging to himself that he was working almost in the dark, notwithstanding the careful inquiry he had made of Mr. Sidney and Mrs. Bellair also concerning his patient's former habits, the first appearance of the disease and all other circumstances that could throw light upon it.

After this his visits were daily, and he found himself still further perplexed by the course of the malady. It seemed guided by no rules or laws, and while the medicines he gave produced the happiest results at times, on other occasions they had no apparent effect whatever. The patient's continual thirst was best quenched by a weak sort of wine-lemonade, made of some rich old Burgundy that had long lain in his cellar, and Mrs. Bellair took the greatest pains to prepare it for him. She paid him every attention imaginable and Tom began to suspect, about the third or fourth time he saw her, that she had a feeling for Mr. Sidney considerably warmer than mere gratitude and friendship.

He discovered, in the course of time, that she had known the Sidneys for several years, and since their residence in Antinous place had been an inmate of their house, together with her husband, an insignificant little man, with grubby hands and a shock head

of hay colored hair. She did not live very happily with Mr. Bellair and they were desperately poor, but Sidney had got the little man into lucrative business and lodged them both rent free, so that they became somewhat more comfortable. When Mrs. Sidney was taken ill, Mrs. Bellair had watched with her, attended her, nursed her and done everything that a mother could have done for a sick child, and when the poor little, delicate, spirituelle form was laid in the coffin, she mingled her tears with those of the bereaved husband and mourned as if she, too, had loved and lost. This delicate but intense sympathy won the esteem of Mr. Sidney, who was an honest, whole-hearted gentleman, and he felt very grateful to the high-bred woman who was tied to such an ugly nonentity as Bellair.

But the disease which was wearing Sidney out was a mystery, and the young physician kept a scrupulous diary of its symptoms as a curiosity. He studied it, to the neglect of much of his other business, and was finally honest enough to come out boldly and tell his patient that he could not understand it, much less cure it.

'I have tried everything!' said he, 'I have dieted you, physicked you and done all I know how, yet here you are, no better in health than at first. All I can do is to give you relief when you suffer most acutely. I tell you this frankly, because I like you and do not wish to deceive you with false, delusive hopes!'

'My dear boy!' said Sidney cheerily, 'do what you can, then. I have faith in your treatment as a means of relief, but I have, between you and me, given up all ideas of ever recovering. I feel that every day that passes brings me nearer the grave!'

A slight sigh attracted Tom's attention, and turning around, he saw Mrs. Bellair bending down over her sewing, her face almost hidden and stifled sobs agitating her frame. Mr. Sidney complained of thirst, and the lady went to prepare some lemonade for him, evidently glad of the opportunity to leave the room before her emotion overcame her.

'Mrs. Bellair is very solicitous,' said Tom gently; 'she seems to have a great friendship for you!'

'Yes. She is a noble woman. I never saw a woman I liked so well, except poor Carrie—Mrs. Sidney. I shall leave her all my property in her own right, as my only relatives are distant and wealthy, and I hope she can enjoy herself a little more independently of Mr. Bellair, who, to tell the truth, is a mauvais sujet!'

Mrs. Bellair soon returned with the lemonade, and, after tasting it and stirring it, filled a glass for the invalid, who praised it and invited both her and Tom to take a glass with him. They did so, but the lady found it a little strong of the wine and immediately took a swallow from a glass of water that stood on the mantle-piece.

'Why, what a curious taste that water has! Some of your drugs must have got into it, doctor!' she said; 'just see what an odd flavor!'

And she passed the tumbler to Tom, who, tasting the water, perceived a faint acid flavor.

'Probably some medicine has been taken from the glass!'

'Nothing poisonous, I hope?'

'No, I have given nothing but very simple medicines!'

Tom gave his patient some prescriptions and prepare to leave the house. Mrs. Bellair followed him out and confronted him in the hall with a face of suffering.

'Do you think he will die, doctor?'

'I cannot tell, madam. While there is life there is hope!'

'But can you not cure him?'

'To be honest, no. I have exhausted all my knowledge and have experimented upon him until I know nothing more to try!'

'Oh, doctor! do not say that he cannot live! Oh, he must not die! He shall not!'

'Calm yourself, madam. Tears and misery avail nothing. He is willing to die, and I should be sorry to give him hopes that I do not see any foundation for!'

The lady burst into a passionate flood of grief, and Tom called a servant, who just then passed through the hall, to attend to her. The servant, a handsome Spanish quadroon, approached and glared savagely upon Mrs. Bellair, who was apparently almost fainting.

'Get some smelling-salts and assist this lady to her room!' said Tom. 'Mrs. Bellair, you must not give way to this sorrow; he may recover yet!'

The servant hesitated a moment, scowled fiercely at the lady, made a half-gesture toward Tom, as if she would speak to him, and finally ran to obey his order as he departed.

His office slate was filled with calls when he returned, and for the rest of the day he was kept pretty busy in prescribing for Mrs. Fanfaron's headache, Master Fitz-Augustus Jupiter's chapped lips and Mr. Plumpty's indigestion. At night he again entered the cozy little study, laid off his overcoat, invested his feet in the warm slippers that the kind little landlady had laid on

the fender for him and rang the bell for his supper to be served. This meal over, his coffee finished and his pipe lit, he lay down upon a lounge, which served him as a bed at night, and went at the old labor of constructing the chateaux en Espagne that had afforded him pleasure and occupation during all his leisure hours, ever since that day, just before Christmas, when he sat in the old-fashioned country kitchen of his dear old mother's house and made love to the fair damsel with dimples while she manufactured some marvellous mince pies, which subsequently made 'dear Tom' quite ill.

While thus engaged there came a gentle, timid ring at the office door, and I fear that 'dear Tom' said a naughty word. It was cold and snowy out and he was just getting gloriously comfortable.

'Well, it may be only an office call,' growled he. 'I'll see what it is, anyhow.'

As he opened the door a tall, slender girl glided in and Tom wondered where he had seen her face before.

'I want to speak to you, doctor,' said the girl, 'about something very important and very private. I come from Mr. Sidney's, in Antinous place.'

Tom looked at her and recognized the quadroon chambermaid whom he had seen in the hall that day.

'Is your master worse, then?'

'No—that is, no worse than might be expected.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean that he might be expected to be sick, sir, considering the circumstances.'

'Come in here, to my study, and sit down. Now, then, tell me what you are driving at?'

'Well, sir, it is just this: Mrs. Bellair is poisoning Mr. Sidney. That's what's the matter with him.'

'You are crazy!'

'I know it, but I was not until I knew that.'

'How do you know it?'

'A chambermaid knows everything. I suspected poison when Mrs. Sidney died, and now I have proofs. Mrs. Bellair puts a white powder into Mr. Sidney's lemonade

whenever she makes it, and if anybody comes in she puts the powder into her bosom.'

'But, good God, child, you don't mean to say that she, who seems so kind and pleasant always, has actually murdered Mrs. Sidney and is now murdering her husband?'

'Yes, I do.'

'Impossible—I can prove that you are mistaken. If that lemonade was poisoned I should have been ill, and Mrs. Bellair, too, for that matter, for we both drank of it today.'

'Didn't you drink anything else afterward?'

'No—nothing.'

'Then you will be ill. Didn't Mrs. Bellair take anything after it?'

'No—oh, yes, she drank a little water.'

'Ah! some that, she had in the room, ready to her hand.'

'It was in a tumbler on the mantle.'

'And didn't she ask you to drink it?'

'Now I think of it, she did ask me to taste of it and I took a single swallow. It had an odd taste.'

'There was some stuff in it that she takes to keep the poison from hurting her. I don't know what you call it.'

'An antidote.'

'Yes; she often tastes the lemonade—people might suspect if she didn't—but she always says it is too strong for her and takes a mouthful of water immediately.'

'Great heaven!' ejaculated Tom, his head almost whirling with the terrible suspicion thus forced upon him; 'can it be possible? But no—it is absurd—why, child, what would she poison him for? She is much better off while he is alive.'

'I don't understand it, sir, but it is something about a will. She wants to get his property, somehow.'

Tom suddenly remembered what Sidney had said—that Mrs. Bellair would receive his property in her own right. If he had already made his will and she knew of it, this was still further corroboration of the girl's story.

'But from what I can see,' he urged, 'Mrs. Bellair loves Mr. Sidney, and he loves her.'

'Oh, sir, you don't know what women can do. It is all put on—all make-believe, sir. She is a deep one and lays her plans well.'

'Can you get me some of that white powder?'

'I don't know, sir. I'll try to-morrow.'

'Why did you not tell me this before?'

'Well, sir, I wasn't perfectly satisfied till to-day. I've caught her twice putting something in her bosom when she was making lemonade or tea, and I've seen her drink water many times after tasting it, but to-day, when she made that lemonade, I stood on the stairs outside and looked through the glass over the top of the door, so that I could see her in a mirror at the end of the room.'

'And you saw her put something into it?'

'Yes, sir. She took a paper out of her bosom and poured in a very little of a stuff that looked like flour. Then she put the

paper away again and stirred the lemonade a great deal.'

'Well, if you will get me some of that powder, I will give you five dollars.'

The girl drew herself up indignantly.

'No, sir. I don't want any money. If I can save Robert Sidney's life, I shall be repaid. He bought me, sir, in Cuba, when I was a child, and took me away from a place where I should have been a farm servant all my life. He brought me here, sir, and educated me, fed me, clothed me, gave me a home, sir, and did everything for me. He is just the kindest, best, noblest man alive, sir; and my notion of God, sir, is that he is just like Mr. Sidney.'

'He is a fine man.'

'Yes, indeed, sir, but it was a dark day for him when that woman crossed his door-sill. She has laid her nets and lines all about him—she pretended to love his poor little wife so much, all the time she was killing her by inches, and cried so, at the funeral, you would have thought she couldn't be making believe. But she was, sir, and she's playing the same game now, only, sir, please God, she'll never live to see the end of it!'

The girl had worked herself up into a prodigious state of excitement in narrating this story and trembled like a leaf at the idea of Mrs. Bellair murdering her beloved master, the worship of whom had grown to be the largest half of her religion. Tom quieted her down as best he could, gave her much consolatory advice and sent her off with an earnest demand that she should bring him some of the powder and some of the lemonade also, if possible.

The next day he called on Mr. Sidney quite early, after passing an almost sleepless night. As he entered the invalid's room Mrs. Bellair appeared at another door with a pitcher of lemonade, which she filled out for the patient.

'You look fatigued, Mrs. Bellair,' said Tom, stifling the look of suspicion that he felt was creeping over his face; 'a little of that drink would not harm you—it's very refreshing.'

The lady smiled and filled a glass for herself, as if she took pleasure in disarming suspicion. Tom watched her narrowly and saw that shortly after drinking she took a few swallows of water from a tumbler on a table near.

'I don't think so much lemonade is good for you, Sidney,' said the doctor, as he saw his patient was about to drink of it; 'it might disorder your stomach. You had best take cold water alone or let me mix you a draught.'

'I will get some water for you, Robert,' said Mrs. Bellair quickly; 'I will get some fresh and cold for you.'

Tom tried to find an excuse for calling the servant to get it instead, but Mrs. Bellair had already gained the door.

'I wouldn't drink too much of anything,' began Tom. 'I don't believe—hallo! what's this?'

A groan, a few hurried steps and a heavy, rumbling fall had interrupted him. He ran out to the stairs and saw Mrs. Bellair lying at the foot in frightful convulsions. Filled with horror, he sprang down to her and found her dreadfully changed. Her face was livid and contorted, her body spasmodically bent backward and her mouth foaming. Just as he reached her and raised her up a little the quadroon girl glided up to him with a strange, sneering smile on her face.

'Didn't I tell you?' she said hurriedly, 'I got hold of some of that powder and stirred a whole lot of it into the tumbler of water on the table. Ah, ha; she has got the wrong dose this time. But it is a good thing for master!'

Tom, more and more horrified, dashed water on the woman's face and opened her dress a little, as she seemed to be unable to breathe. But his exertions were in vain—by the time he had done this much she was dead.

He had the body taken into an unoccupied room, and on examining found a small packet of powder, as the girl had said, concealed in her corsage. He took possession of it and returned to Sidney's room.

'What is the matter? Why do you look so pale? What has happened?'

'Mrs. Bellair,' said Tom, 'has fallen down stairs in a fit and is dangerously ill.'

'What kind of a fit?'

'Apoplectic.'

'Can I see her—is she dying? My God!'

'No; you had best remain quiet now; but I think it doubtful if she can live.'

Poor Sidney was overcome with grief. The excitement threw him into a fever; and he was unable even to sit up before Mrs. Bellair was buried, under a certificate from Tom that she died of apoplexy.

I do not know that I can justify my hero for this wilful deception in concealing a murder and shielding a murderer; but the retribution was so like the work of Providence—it seemed so just for the woman to die by the very means she had provided to take life with; and, withal, it seemed so natural for the poor quadroon girl to average the wrongs done to those who had been more than parents to her that his own