

There were deep breathing and shuffling of feet as Allan completed this part of his statement, but only the coroner found his voice. "Most remarkable evidence," he ejaculated. "Most extraordinary evidence. I have never heard anything so obviously sincere and at the same time so altogether unexplainable."

"Perhaps it's not so unexplainable," said a quiet voice; and Mary Harris made her way through the circle of men to the side of the bed. She sat down on the coverlet and took the boy's hand in hers. It mattered not how many were looking on; he was her little boy again.

"You will understand, Doctor, and some of you men are parents," she began. "Allan will be twenty-five years old this coming winter. A little less than twenty-five years ago my husband was obliged to leave me alone for a considerable period in our little sod shanty on the homestead where we had located down in Manitoba. There were no near neighbors, as we count distance in well-settled districts, and I was altogether alone. I stood it all right for the first day or two, but my nerves were not what they should have been, and gradually a strange, unreasoning fear came upon me. I suppose it was the immensity of the prairies, the terrible loneliness of it all, and my own state of health, but the dread grew from day to day and from night to night. I tried to busy myself, to keep my mind active, to throw off the spectre that haunted me, but day and night I was oppressed with a sense of impending danger. We had no wooden door on the house; we hadn't money to buy the boards to make one, and all my protection was a blanket hung in the doorway. I used to watch that blanket at night; I would light the lantern and sit in the corner and watch that blanket. My fear gradually pictured to itself an attack through that doorway—I didn't know by what; by white man, or Indian, or wild beast, or ghost, or worse, if that is possible; my mind could not balance things; nothing seemed too unreasonable or terrible to expect. So I took the gun, and sat in the corner, and waited.

"And then at last it came. I didn't see anything, and I didn't hear anything, but I knew it was there. I still remember how frightened and yet how cool I was in that last moment. I held the gun to my shoulder and wait for it to thrust itself against the blanket. In another moment I am sure I should have fired. But before that moment I heard my name called, and I knew my husband's voice, and I came out of the nightmare."

She brought her eyes slowly from the face of the Doctor over the group of men assembled in the room, and then dropped them to meet Allan's. He was breathing her name softly. "If it was a wrong thing for Allan to shoot this man," she said, "don't blame Allan for it. Let me pay any price that must be paid."

"Most extraordinary," the coroner repeated, after a silence. "It seems to account for the shooting of Riles, but it leaves us as much as ever—more than ever, I should say—in the dark concerning the disappearance of the money, and the part which has implicated the young man Travers in the affair."

The banker gave his evidence. It was not unusual, he said, for considerable sums in bank-notes to be handled among speculators and land buyers, but the amount withdrawn by Harris was so great that it had left him somewhat ill at ease, and as Sergeant Grey had happened his way he had mentioned the matter to him.

The policeman shed little new light on the case. He had followed the party into the hills as best he could, taking the off chance of something sinister afoot. He had found Harris, with his wounded son, and a prisoner, and a man dead in the doorway. He had notified the coroner and taken Travers in charge. Here his eyes met Beulah's. "I don't

think there is anything more to be said," he concluded.

During the hearing of the various witnesses Gardiner had attempted an air of impersonal interest, but with no great success. His demeanor, studied though it was, betrayed a certain anxiety and impatience. He was dressed just as he had dismounted from his horse, having removed only his hat. But he smiled confidently when asked for his evidence, and told his story calmly and connectedly.

It was quite true that he was associated with Riles and Mr. Harris in the coal-mine investment. He was acting for the owner of the property, but had seen that a large profit was to be made from the turnover, and had been glad to place the opportunity in the way of two old friends. The offer from the New York concern was entirely bona fide; he had the telegram in his pocket at that moment, notwithstanding the suggestion made by the coroner, which, if he might say so, he thought was hardly warranted, and would not have been made with a full knowledge of the circumstances. The owner of the mine could be produced at the proper moment, if that became necessary.

"I feel a grave responsibility in this whole matter," Gardiner protested, with some emotion. "I feel that I am, at least indirectly, responsible for the serious loss that has befallen Mr. Harris, and for the injury to his son. But when you have heard the whole circumstances you will agree that the situation was one I could not possibly have foreseen. Let me give them to you in some detail.

"The day before yesterday, in company with Riles, I met Mr. Harris and his son, and found that their money had arrived. The remittance was not as large as they expected, but I believed that I could raise some money privately, and that we would still be able to put the deal through. I advised against losing any time, as I knew that if the owner should meet anyone else interested in a proposition of a similar nature we would find it much harder to make a bargain with him. It was arranged that the two Harrises were to drive ahead, taking the money with them, and that Riles and I would follow. We were to overtake them at the old building where this unfortunate tragedy occurred. As it happened, I had a sick horse at the ranch, and, as I was delayed in getting some medicine for him, Riles suggested that he would ride out to the ranch—that is, where I live—and wait for me there. Up to that time I had no suspicions, and I agreed to that.

"Well, when I reached the ranch, I could find nothing of Riles, and, on further search, I could find nothing of Travers, who was working for me. Their riding horses were gone, and so were their saddles and bridles. I found that Travers had taken his revolver out of the house. I confess my suspicions were then somewhat aroused, but I found myself with the sick horse on my hands, and I could not very well leave the place. Of course, I never thought of anything so bad as has happened, or I would not have considered the horse, but I admit I was at a loss to understand their conduct. But when I heard, early this morning, what had happened, it was all clear to me."

During the latter part of this evidence Travers had fixed his eyes on Gardiner, but the witness had steadily avoided him. Jim was now convinced that he was the victim, not of a coincidence, but a plot. Of course, he could give his evidence, which would be directly contradictory to that of Gardiner, but he was already under suspicion, and anything he might say would be unconsciously discounted by the jurors. But he began calmly, a quiet smile playing about his thin lips and clean teeth.

"I am sorry I cannot corroborate all the last witness has said," he commenced. "I did not leave the ranch with Riles; on the contrary, I was fishing down by the river when I

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saw Riles and Gardiner ride by. Gardiner was talking, and I heard him mention Mr. Harris's name. I worked for Mr. Harris not long ago, but I did not know he was in this part of the country. I heard Gardiner say—"Jim colored a little, and stopped.

"Well, what did you hear him say?" said the coroner. "That is what we are anxious to know." "I heard him say something about Mr. Harris losing all his money that night, in the old shanty up the river road. (To be continued)