



A NIGHTMARE TRAGEDY. OR THE CRIME OF THE BROKER'S OFFICE. BY W. E. MOTT.

CHAPTER I.

At the time of the startling occurrences which are to be herein recorded, the office of Jason Garrison, a broker of New York, was situated in a rather unpretentious structure on Wall street.

The building was very old and its internal arrangement was rather obsolete. To enter the broker's office you first passed into a hall which extended through the building and thence through a side door. From the hall just inside the street door a flight of stairs led upward.

At the rear end of the passage a second flight, much more narrow than the first, also reached the second story, while at their foot a door opened upon an alley in the rear.

At this date it chanced that the third story over the broker's office was unoccupied, but the second story was tenanted as it had been for many years by John Oakburn, the old cashier, who had been employed by Jason Garrison since he first began business in Wall street years ago.

John Oakburn was a man sixty-odd years of age and a widower, but he was not childless. One daughter, Marion, by name, remained to cheer and brighten his home with the sunlight of her presence, and the aged cashier's little family consisted only of himself, his daughter and Judith Kredge, a female domestic of uncertain age, who was the sister of the office janitor.

The second-floor flat was much too spacious for the needs of the cashier's family, and furnished apartments were consequently let to such of Mr. Garrison's clerks as desired them, provided always they were approved by the old cashier.

On the night of the 23d of March, 18—, but one of John Oakburn's furnished apartments was occupied. The room was directly over the main office, and its tenant was Stuart Harland, one of the broker's clerks.

The street door was a massive one, as was also the door of the office proper. At night both were always securely locked and bolted. The keys of the office as well as the street door were always in the possession of John Oakburn, who was implicitly trusted by the broker in every way.

For twenty years John Oakburn had been celebrated for his rigid integrity and unvarying scrupulous honesty, and "on the street," where one desired to vouch in the most positive terms for the character of another, he would say, "He is as honest as old John Oakburn."

Perhaps no man more perfectly deserved the title which he had won, which was far more honorable than any patent of nobility—the title "an honest man."

On the day at noon a few days previous to the night of which we are about to write, while John Oakburn was alone in the office, having been detained by some important account, an incident occurred which will serve to illustrate the man's character perfectly.

Mr. Pratt, of the firm of Pratt & Weeks, entered and approached the old cashier in a cunning way in order to sound him with a view to inducing him to become a director of one of those "soap-bubble" stock companies which are organized every year to inflate themselves with the money of the unwary and collapse when such a consummation will result to the profit of the "promoters" without bringing themselves within the reach of the law's arms.

side of the bed he listened for a moment.

No sound broke the absolute quietude of the night within the dwelling. From without the sighing wind wafted to his ears the unaccountable noise of the streets of the streets of a great city which are never hushed to silence throughout the night.

"Strange this. Could I have been dreaming? Well, it matters not. I am awake in time; that is the important point," the young man reflected.

Then he began to pace a few feet in a light traveling-bag, and as he did so he quite unconsciously gave expression to the thoughts which were in his mind.

"I must not miss the 1 o'clock train or all is lost. The discovery will not be made until to-morrow. Perhaps there is getting time. Oh, what consummate scoundrels those men Pratt and Weeks are, and yet they are beyond the pale of the law. It cannot reach them," he said.

He was a handsome, noble-looking young man, this Stuart Harland, one upon whom nature had set the stamp of a true gentleman, and his fine, honest eyes, which met yours frankly, inspired you with confidence at the very first glance.

In the office they would tell you that Stuart Harland was inclined to be rather careless and inattentive to business, but they would add that he was the best fellow in the world, unless you happened to question Levi Kredge, the janitor.

It was no secret that Stuart Harland was engaged to his employer's daughter, Miss Edna, and if you were to ask how it came about that Jason Garrison had consented to the suit of a young man who was "only a clerk," and to whom the duties of a broker's office were not the most agreeable, and who had exhibited but little aptitude for the business designated on the street, would have said:

"The young man has great expectations. Therein lies the secret. At the death of a certain aunt, a maiden lady of rather more than mature age, he will inherit a fortune."

This was quite true, though Stuart never counted in the least on dead men's shoes, and Edna Garrison loved him without a mercenary thought, no matter what may have been the secret sentiment of her father.

Having hastily thrust the few articles into his traveling bag which he desired to take with him, Stuart Harland quitted the apartment.

It was undoubtedly something which he regarded as most important which induced him to undertake a secret midnight journey, as we have gathered from his mutterings.

There was no light in the hall without Stuart's room at this hour, and the passage and the stairs leading down to the street door were enveloped in gloom.

"I do not wish to disturb any one. In fact, I desire that no one should know of my departure," said Stuart to himself as he silently descended the stairs in the darkness.

At the foot he paused suddenly, for he thought he heard a noise from the office, and it sounded to him like a half-stifled groan.

Stuart was startled. At this hour he thought there could be no one in the office unless burglars had clandestinely entered, and with bated breath he listened in profound silence for an instant.

There was no repetition of the alarming sound, but a faint tremor through the nerves as he thought:

"John Oakburn may have left the money he drew from the bank just before closing hours in the safe in the office."

"This is murder and robbery, too, I think. See the safe is open."

As she spoke she pointed to a large safe in the side of the office, the door of which stood wide open.

With an effort which cost all the will power of which she was capable, Marion regained her strength and sprang to her father's side. With the lamp in her hand she knelt beside him and scanned his livid face.

"If there had been a hope in her mind that the vital principle was not yet extinct, it was crushed as she gazed upon her beloved parent's features, for she saw that he was indeed dead.

"Poor father! Poor father!" wailed Marion in heart-broken tones, and bitter tears streamed down her cheeks and fell upon the livid face where the dread white shadow rested.

Judith Kredge stood watching the bereaved girl, and there was a strange expression in her venomous eyes.

"They have killed my father to rob the safe," said Marion, presently, and the sound of her voice seemed to arouse Judith Kredge, for she cried:

"Yes; and we must not delay. The alarm must be given."

"Run to the door and call the police. You may be heard; and call Mr. Harland," said Marion.

"Yes, yes. To think that your father should be murdered here in his office and we could not help him, answered the woman. And, muttering herself in an excited way, she ran to the street door and thrust it open.

The next moment her shrill, harsh voice rang out upon the night.

"Help! Police! Murder!" she shrieked. It was a cry which, heard at the dead of night, might well startle and thrill the stoutest heart.

Three Judiths might have uttered this terrible cry, and then she saw a police officer hurrying down the street toward her.

Waiving not for his arrival, she darted up the stairs to Stuart Harland's room, and knocked loudly on the door, at the same time screaming:

"Awake! Awake! Mr. Oakburn is killed—murdered."

Of course she received no answer, and she tried the door, which opened readily, and entered the apartment in which it chanced Stuart Harland had left the gas-burning safe.

Judith Kredge gave utterance to a surprised exclamation as she saw that the room was untenanted, and with an expression of blank amazement on her features she flew to a closet in which she knew Stuart Harland kept his valise, and threw it open.

Suddenly a look of intelligence and cunning supplanted the expression of perplexity which her features had momentarily assumed, and she ran down stairs and gained the office again.

"Mr. Harland has gone, and taken his valise with him," she cried. Marion seemed thunderstruck.

She had risen, and, starting forward, exclaimed:

She possessed infinite force of character. Indeed, we might say that she had almost a will of her own. It was a gift among ourselves that beautiful and-eyed Marion Oakburn was composed of the material of which heroines are made."

But now that there was no reason for further delay Harland unbolted and unlocked the street door and passed out. Then softly closing the door he looked it by means of a night-key, and casting a glance up and down the street which seemed just at this time to be deserted, at least in this immediate neighborhood, he walked swiftly away.

The night was cool and Harland wore a spring overcoat, which he buttoned closely, as a stiff night breeze swept up from the water and struck him chillingly.

He was aware that he had barely time to reach the Grand Central Depot in time to catch a certain train on which he wished to leave the city, and he delayed not on the way.

Meanwhile a quarter of an hour elapsed and all was silence and darkness in the house which Stuart Harland had just left. But presently the stillness was broken by the sound of an opening door, and Marion Oakburn emerged stealthily. In her hand she carried the lamp as before, but the paper and the wick something from which the light had glistered when Harland saw her was no longer in her possession.

For a moment she stood motionless as a statue and listened, while she noted how extremely beautiful she is.

Marion Oakburn possessed a form above the average height of women, which might have been the ideal of a Grecian sculptor, and her rare brunet curls, which fell in soft waves around her face, were as lovely as Egyptian's.

But there was an expression of sadness upon her perfect features—a look of melancholy that was pitiful, and it led one to think that sorrow had entered her young life; that in the heart of the beautiful girl there was some blighting grief. And yet Marion was ever cheerful, as though sustained by sorrow's pale star—hope.

Marion Oakburn was twenty-four years of age, and therefore in the full bloom and perfect development of a gorgeous womanhood.

As she stood at the door of her bedroom listening, she detected no breach of the silence, and so she glided along the passage to the back stairs noiselessly and gained the lower hall. There she passed directly to the office door, which she unlocked, and, removing the key, she proceeded to the street entrance.

Then she discovered that the bolts were drawn, and that only the night-latch secured it.

Marion seemed started at this, and she reeled back against the wall, where she stood for a moment trembling slightly, but with her brow contracted, as though in deep thought.

If she was mentally debating some question, she arrived at a conclusion almost instantly, for with a hand that no longer trembled she unlocked the street door.

Then leaving the entrance to the office unguarded by bolt or bar, Marion again retreated her steps to the rear stairs, which she ascended. Half way up she clutched the handrail in a convulsive way and paused for a moment to listen, for she fancied she heard footsteps in the hall above.

She did not hear the sound again, and believing she was deceived by her imagination she continued up the stairs.

Could her eyes have penetrated the darkness as she paused upon the stairs she would have seen the dark, cruel face of Judith Kredge, the female domestic, peering down at her from the passage above.

When she reached the landing Marion saw no one, but she did not return to her own apartment. On the contrary she went to the door of the sleeping-room occupied by Judith Kredge.

Marion knocked, and a moment subsequently the woman who had just played the part of a spy, opened the door.

She was clad in a loose, dark wrapper, which she seemed to have hastily donned.

"What is it, Miss Marion? You are not ill, I hope?" she said, feigning surprise and solicitude.

"The murdered man's name was... and overturned it as he fell... the clock stopped. I infer that the shot which killed him was fired twenty minutes of one o'clock, or thereabouts, in the morning."

"The ink yet on the pen. It is accepted as proof that the victim's crime was engaged in writing... the crime was killed. Let us see if we can discover what he wrote?" continued the detective.

He then examined the papers on the table, but he could find none that had been recently written.

Paxton shook his head as if he was not fully satisfied.

The office was divided into two compartments, and having now concluded their investigation of the outer office, the police and the detective entered the interior room.

This apartment was the clerk's room, and it was provided with the usual desks and other necessary office fixtures. There was also a small safe in the interior office which was found to be locked.

Marion and Judith Kredge had followed the investigators into the interior office, and when the latter turned their attention to the small safe, Marion said: "That is my father's private safe."

"I congratulate you, then, for its contents are probably secure," said the detective. [TO BE CONTINUED.]

Seamless Boats. There is a growing demand for the seamless boat, which seems to be able to stand any amount of rough work.

DUNRAVEN'S STATEMENT. It May Not Be Given Out Before Wednesday Next. New York, Sept. 16.—The New York Yacht club headquarters at 87 Madison avenue are deserted to-day and no information can be had there as to when "Lord Dunraven's epistle to the Americans," as it has been dubbed, would be made public.

DEATH OF COL. WALKLEY. Fought in the Civil War and Did Good Service. Westfield, Mass., Sept. 16.—Col. Lucius B. Walkley, aged 73, died yesterday of blood poisoning after a long illness.

Mr. Gould Decides To Dispose of the Championnet. New York, Sept. 16.—George Gould has decided that "Vigilant," the champion steamboat of the Niagara River, which he will offer for sale.

To Easy Matters at Home. London, Sept. 16.—Lord Dunraven yesterday called to Mr. Grant, secretary of the Royal Yacht Squadron, his correspondence with "New York Yacht Club" on the events in connection with the contents for the America's Cup.

TOWED INTO PORT. Steamer Bridgeton After Drifting For Two Weeks Meets Assistance. Colon, Sept. 16.—The steamer "Louisiana," which arrived here towing the steamer "Bridgeton" of Boston, which was bound from Kingston, Jamaica, for Cayenne.

Shot and Killed While Hunting. Greenfield, Mass., Sept. 16.—Cecil I. Allen of Montague, aged 31 years, was accidentally and fatally shot by Leonard Bell yesterday afternoon.

Work for 1,500 Men. Chicago, Sept. 16.—The Calumet Furnace of south Chicago will "blow in" to-day, after having remained idle since the autumn of 1892.

Attent Starts for Gray's. Colon, Sept. 16.—The United States cruiser "Alert" has gone to Gray's Aqueduct.

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