

A MIDNIGHT TRAGEDY.

OR—
THE CRIME OF THE BROKERS OFFICE.

W. E. MOTT.



CHAPTER XIV.—Continued.

I will suppose that John Oakburn had saved the money, his daughter proposed he did, and that it was in his hall, private safe. Kredge, knowing that this money, might have opened the safe, taken the money, relocked the strong box, and returned the key to Oakburn's pocket. Or, it is possible that he may have privately provided himself with a duplicate. Though the safe was not found open, it does not follow that it was not opened. I was very far committing an oversight in neglecting this point in the case," thought Paxton.

Paxton shadowed Kredge back to the apartment. The detective next instituted an investigation which elicited the information that Donald Wayburn, the author of the threatening letter found among the Oakburn's correspondence, was a young man who had been obliged to flee from New York on account of having been the promoter of a gigantic swindle, which had resulted in the financial ruin of a large number of people.

Some of his information the detective derived from Jason Garrison, who remarked in the course of the conversation: "Yes, Wayburn was a scoundrel. My cashier, John Oakburn, could have told you more about him than I can, for he had several thousand dollars in the hands of which that man was the head, or old John! He was never tired of denouncing Wayburn as a villain."

"That," thought Paxton, "this information favors my theory that Wayburn may have been the assassin, but stay! the name Pratt & Weeks gave the man who carried the skeleton keys was Garrison, and yet that does not prove that he is not really Wayburn. Garrison may be an alias."

Paxton continued his investigation relating to Wayburn, hoping to thereby arrive at a revelation of the truth regarding the secret of the supposed assassin's identity. He did not succeed in establishing the fact which he had hoped to prove, that Wayburn had returned to New York and was in the city at the time of the murder. This failure left his theory wanting in the most important link of presumptive evidence.

But Paxton thought: "If Donald Wayburn returned to the city he would have the best possible reason for concealing the fact, since discovery would no doubt result in his arrest by the parties whom he swindled as a rule. Even if he did return it is surprising that I have been unable to establish the fact."

A day or two later one of Paxton's agents shadowed Judith Kredge to a savings bank, where she was seen to deposit money, and inquiry solicited the fact that the woman had opened an account there.

At Paxton's request an examination of the books was made, which resulted in the discovery that all the money to which Kredge's credit had been deposited since John Oakburn's murder. This the detective regarded as significant.

The bank had received no marked money, however. Prompted by a suspicion which he had along entertained, Paxton visited the bank at which Stanmore and himself had spied when the detective was shadowing Kredge.

He had been able to trace Kredge for every moment of the night of the murder with unerring certitude, except for the one fatal hour of the murder, the detective inferred that Kredge must have surrounded his movements for that one hour with every precaution of secrecy.

CHAPTER XV.

The agent to whom Paxton had entrusted the task of ascertaining where Levi Kredge was on the night of the murder, and at the hour when the crime was committed, had neglected one proceeding which his principal had advised. He had failed to search the janitor's room.

Paxton resolved to visit this apartment in person. The next evening the detective repaired to his boarding place. The landlady admitted him, and he said: "I called to see Mr. Kredge."

"He is not at home, sir," replied the landlady. "In that case I will wait, if you please; I have an engagement with Levi. He asked me to run up to his room and make myself at home in case I arrived before he returned."

"Very well. The second door on the right at the head of the stairs," Paxton ascended to Levi Kredge's room, entered and closed and secured the door.

The janitor's room was a small sleeping apartment, with a closet opening from it. Besides the usual furniture, the room contained Kredge's trunk. It was locked, but Paxton opened it by means of a skeleton key, and searched it. He discovered nothing to reward his quest.

Then he ransacked all the drawers, and still he made no discovery. Completing the search of the sleeping-room, he entered the closet.

Presently Paxton emerged from the closet with a small canvas bag, such as gold coin is packed in at the mint, in his hand.

"I thought some discovery might be made here," said the detective to himself, in a tone of satisfaction, as he placed the small canvas bag in his pocket.

Then he ran down stairs. The landlady met him in the hall. "Are you going, sir?" she asked. "Yes, I'll run round and see Levi at the office."

Paxton was well satisfied. He had made something of a discovery; he fancied, but regarding it he maintained the most profound secrecy.

At the time when Paxton undertook the solution of the mystery of John Oakburn's murder, he was engaged in another investigation which related to certain affairs which do not interest us. Some business pertaining to the matter induced Paxton to make a visit to a certain obscure East Side street, where the dangerous undercurrent of the great city's human tide was ever to be dreaded, one night soon after the occurrence last recorded.

The detective was elaborately disguised, for he was too well known to the criminal classes, and he had too many enemies among them to think of venturing among them in his own proper person.

As he traversed the dimly lighted way, Paxton noticed a female form fitting along before him, and he fancied there was something familiar about the woman's appearance.

In a moment or so he was at the woman's side, and as she passed beneath a street lamp at a corner the night wind lifted a veil which she wore, and he caught a glimpse of her face and recognized it.

The woman was Marion Oakburn. Of course Paxton was surprised at finding Marion alone at night in such a dangerous locality.

But his curiosity and his detective instinct prompted him to follow her. A few blocks further down the street, the detective saw Marion pause before the door of a gloomy building.

The cashier's daughter glanced about as though she expected to meet some one, but she did not discover the detective, who had promptly stepped back into the alley.

A moment elapsed, and, peering from his hiding place, the detective's espionage was rewarded by the appearance of a man who came skulking stealthily along the street as though fearful of discovery, and joined Marion at the door.

The girl gave the man both her hands and seemed to greet him warmly. The detective was so near that, as the man presently raised his voice a trifle, he heard him say: "Come, let us enter the parlor. I have much to say to you."

Then they opened the door and disappeared within the house. Paxton remained where he was. He did not follow Marion and her companion into the house, for, as it was not an ordinary public resort, he deemed it advisable to proceed with caution.

A moment or so elapsed, and then the detective saw a faint light reflected through the opening between the blinds of a couple of windows in the side of the building fronting the alley.

He glided to the nearest window, thinking it might be the window to the little back parlor mentioned by the man who had met Marion Oakburn. Paxton hoped to see and hear more of the parties who had just entered the house, but as he reached the window heavy inside curtains were drawn, and he was unable to see anything, neither could he hear a word.

for Marion and her companion to reappear on the street.

At the expiration of half an hour, perhaps, the door through which the subject of Paxton's surveillance had entered opened, and they came out.

A brightly burning gas-jet in the hall, which must have been lighted since they entered the place, reflected a brilliant light upon the couple as they stood for a moment in the open door addressing some remarks to a person within.

For two minutes Paxton scrutinized the face of Marion's companion under the glare of the gas light. He saw that the man was in disguise. The next instant Paxton believed that he had made a great discovery.

He saw a scar on the man's eyebrow, and from this as well as his general appearance, which corresponded with the general description given by Stuart Harland, the detective believed that Marion's companion was the suspected assassin of her father—the man called "Garnar" by Pratt & Weeks, who carried the skeleton keys and wax impressions in his overcoat pocket.

Marion and her companion walked away, but at a neighboring corner they parted.

But Paxton did not mean that the man who had thus far evaded discovery and whom the most skillful of his agents had failed to "loose," should escape now.

He bounded forward and seized his man. But, like a flash, the other wheeled and dealt the detective a blow that staggered him.

Then the stranger darted away and vanished in a passage between two buildings.

Paxton pursued, but he did not overtake or even sight him. Enraged with himself at his want of caution in attempting the arrest, and fully satisfied that he had a desperate man to deal with, Paxton retraced his steps.

All thought of the business which had brought him to that locality was, for the time, banished from his mind, and he hastened in the direction of Jason Garrison's office, hoping to intercept Marion Oakburn.

Meanwhile, after parting with her mysterious companion, Marion hurried homeward.

She had reached the door and was about to enter her home when Paxton overtook her. The detective had resolved upon a bold and determined course, and, gliding forward, he placed his hand on Marion's arm.

The girl turned with a frightened exclamation, and by reason of his disguise, she did not recognize Paxton.

"Who are you, sir?" demanded Marion, as she indignantly confronted the detective.

"I am your friend, Miss Oakburn, and I am seeking to discover your father's assassin. Tell me who the man was whom you met to-night, and who escaped me?"

Marion leaned against the door and her form trembled with agitation, but she did not speak.

"Will you not answer me?" persisted Paxton.

Still Marion was silent. Paxton became impatient. "I will tell you who the man you met is. He is Donald Wayburn!" he cried, suddenly. "I am Gerald Paxton," he added.

He sought to surprise Paxton into some confirmation of his statement, if it was the truth.

"I believe that man is your father's murderer. Miss Oakburn, I warn you that the time has come when you should explain the cause of your mysterious conduct since your father's death. You are venturing into peril, it may be. Will you not save yourself! Will you not trust me?" the detective continued, as Marion made no sign in confirmation of his statement that her recent companion's name was Donald Wayburn.

"What is there in my conduct that you regard as mysterious?" said Marion at last.

"This night meeting. Your having given your inheritance to Judith Kredge. Your positive declaration that Harland is an innocent man," replied Paxton.

"You wrong me cruelly. I can explain nothing; but, by my dead father's memory, I swear that Donald Wayburn has no knowledge of my father's murder. He is innocent!"

With these words she unlocked the door and entered the house.

"Now, indeed, is my cup of misery filled to the brim. Too late I discover that I have made a fatal mistake, but I cannot determine to abandon my purpose yet," thought Marion, as she crept to her room.

Paxton made no attempt to detain Marion, and as the evening was not far advanced and he had concluded to abandon the business which had taken him out that night, for the present, he proceeded to visit certain shops devoted to the sale of curiosities in the way of ancient coins, weapons, and the like. In every shop he exhibited the bullet which had caused John Oakburn's death, and asked if they ever had a pistol which the ball would fit.

In every instance the detective received a negative answer, until at last, he entered a little shop whose proprietor informed the detective that he had sold an ancient air pistol provided with such bullets as the one Paxton exhibited.

"Can you tell me the purchaser's name?" asked Paxton, thinking a positive clue to the solution of the mystery was found at last.

"I keep a memorandum of purchasers' names and addresses when, instead of taking the goods with them at the time of the sale, they order them to be sent home. I believe I wrote the name of the man who bought the air pistol in my book. Yes, here it is," answered the shopkeeper.

"Read it!" cried Paxton breathlessly. There was a surprise in store for him he little dreamed of.

To Be Delivered to-day.

The name of the murdered man was the very last one—the detective anticipated hearing announced as that of the purchaser of the air pistol, and he was completely surprised.

Paxton had entertained the hope that the fatal bullet which had occasioned the death of John Oakburn would serve as an important clue in tracing the unfortunate man's assassin.

From the first it had been the detective's purpose to trace the weapon of death to the assassin, by means of the bullet.

Now the purpose of the man-trailer was no longer possible to be executed, and the hope which the possession of the death-missile had given him was destroyed.

So John Oakburn was murdered with his own weapon. The assassin probably found the weapon in the office and used it to kill Oakburn, very possibly, with the intention of perplexing the investigator, should the weapon be traced, thought the detective.

He recalled to mind the fact that no one had mentioned having ever seen such a weapon as the air-pistol in the possession of John Oakburn, and as a new idea entered his mind he cried: "I have it! The strange weapon with which Oakburn was murdered formed one of his collection of curious, ancient weapons."

"The assassin had opened the old cashier's little safe, robbed it, and secured the air-pistol when he heard Oakburn coming. The wretch had discovered that the pistol was loaded and ready for use. He used it to kill his victim because it made no sound."

Paxton was satisfied with this theory. On this very evening, while Paxton was visiting the curiosity shop, Levi Kredge was on his way to visit his sister. The treacherous scoundrel had taken the alarm, and he was thoroughly on his guard.

From the evening when Paxton had shadowed him to the office of Pratt & Weeks, Levi Kredge had experienced the keenest anxiety for his personal safety.

"They are on my trail! Do they suspect the truth?" he asked himself over and over again.

For the present he did not visit Pratt & Weeks, for the wily brokers had instructed him not to do so.

Levi Kredge met his sister in the rear of Garrison's office by appointment, and the moment Judith saw his face she knew that he was troubled.

"What is it Levi; you look frightened?" said Judith.

"I am frightened, Judith; the detectives are shadowing me day and night." "Is that a fact?" cried Judith, starting.

"Yes. They surely have some suspicion against me."

"What do you fear?" "You know well enough, I fear I shall be charged with John Oakburn's murder."

"That should not alarm you. You didn't kill the old man."

"No, that's a fact. But there are circumstances against me, Judith, of which you do not know."

"Ah, you have secrets from your affectionate sister, eh?" "I tell you I fear I shall yet be placed in peril of my life, on account of John Oakburn's murder."

"If it comes to that, I'll save you. I'll point out the real assassin, and prove that person's guilt."

After this, they conversed at some length, but they discussed personal affairs, of no interest to our readers.

Paxton's faithful auxiliary, whose duty it was to track Kredge, overheard this conversation, for he had not neglected to track the janitor on this occasion.

The detective agent repeated what he had overheard of the conversation just recorded to his principal.

This intelligence seemed, at the first view, to overthrow the detective's theory of the guilt of Kredge. But Paxton was not yet ready to admit that Kredge was not the assassin or his accomplice, and he thought:

"Kredge may have been concerned in the crime, and Judith be ignorant of the fact."

One point, however, seemed established. Judith Kredge was sincere in believing she could produce enough to procure the conviction of some one, who was not Stuart Harland.

The perplexing complications and mysteries with which the case abounded would have confused a non-professional, but Paxton saw his way clear. His next step was indicated by the intelligence he had just received.

Judith Kredge must be compelled to reveal the knowledge of the crime which she was concealing.

To accomplish this, Paxton resolved to arrest Levi Kredge and charge him with John Oakburn's murder.

He meant to thoroughly frighten Kredge, and lead them to believe that the danger of conviction, as Oakburn's assassin, was imminent, and he counted on Judith keeping her promise and revealing what she claimed to know, thinking only by such a course could Levi be saved.

But meanwhile, during the time occupied by Paxton in making the investigations recorded, the Grand Jury had held a session. Stuart Harland's case had been considered, and a true bill was returned against him.

"Your aunt, whose prospective heir you are said to be, resides in Albany. Very good. You made your midnight journey to visit her."

"Some one had informed you that the first train in the morning would take Weeks to Albany to see your aunt, to whom he meant to reveal that you had become involved in stock gambling, to the extent of ten thousand dollars."

"You had obtained a sight of your note for one thousand dollars, which you had given the scoundrel, and when you saw it had been raised to ten, you knew Pratt and Weeks meant to swindle your aunt."

"You secretly took the midnight train in order to see your aunt and explain matters before Weeks came."

"You did not tell the truth at the Coroner's inquest, because to do so would have been to lead to the betrayal of the person who had warned you of Weeks' intention of visiting Albany, on the morning following the night of the murder. That person was a young clerk, John Sand by name, employed by Pratt & Weeks, and the sole support of a widowed mother and invalid sister."

"You knew that if it came out that he had warned you, he would be discharged by Pratt & Weeks. In that event, you thought the helpless ones dependent upon his salary for support might suffer. This consideration prevented your risking the betrayal of your friend by telling the truth. Besides you will add that you did not act at the time of your examination fully realize how great your peril was."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

HIS FUTURE OCCUPATION.

One Bad Boy Thought He Would Drive a Coach and Preach.

Ex-Attorney General Miller was born and spent his early life in a small New York village. At the little school house where he first learned to read and play "hokey" there was a fellow pupil, who, although about the same age as Mr. Miller, was noted throughout the village for his pure cussedness.

That boy, according to Mr. Miller's statement, would sit up of a night to concoct some scheme to make the people of the town miserable. He would chase the cows, stone the dogs and pigs, put ropes across the path at night, set pins on the seats at church and scare the wits out of all the old maids for a mile around.

Whenever any devilment was done it was laid at the door of this one boy, and usually correctly. At school he was a terror to all. Stubborn and defiant, there was no restraining him, and the schoolmaster was in despair. One day he thought he would make a last effort to reform the boy by argument, and he called him up to the desk.

"Now, Tom," he began, "you are a bright fellow, but you are spoiling your future. Just think what you can make of yourself if you only behave yourself. Now, have you ever thought of what you will do when you grow up to be a man?"

"Yes," said he, "I 'lowed I would drive a coach an' preach some."—Indianapolis Sentinel.

Hunting the Seal.

The Eskimo in his "kaiak" is indeed great, for he faces the roughest seas, dodges the heavy waves, and some of the more expert kajak men receive a heavy roller by capsizing and receiving the blow on the bottom, righting themselves afterward. The skillful fisher rights himself with the paddle, while some can do it with the clenched hand.

"I have seen," says Nausent, "a man take a stone in his clenched hand before capsizing, and come-up-with-it still in his hand." Nor must we forget that he has to tow his prey besides performing some of these feats, and a hunter will sometimes bring three or more seals to land safely.

His chief weapon is the harpoon, which he throws either with his hand or the ingenious throwing stick; it has an easily detachable head with a line and bladder attached. Besides these, he has lances and bird darts, all being kept in readiness under hoops of leather on top of his kajak. Surely he must be cool and daring, for he must not miss a wounded and enraged seal, nor must the slightest hitch occur in the line when the prey rushes away with the harpoon. The greatest achievement in the hunter's art was to be able to dispense with bladders and to let the seal tow the kajak man by his waist.

Canned at Sea.

Talking of houseboats, another New York idea is a floating cannery. A schooner has recently been fitted with every facility for cooking and canning fish, game and fruit, for the purpose of cruising in southern waters and collecting these delicacies and canning them at sea. This novel enterprise is expected to yield encouraging profits, since many of the goods canned in this way may be brought into the country free of duty. There are six cannery men and a chef in addition to the regular crew. The materials to be canned will be turtle, pompano, guava jelly and fish, game and fruit of many kinds. The turtles will be caught in the West Indies and off the Florida coast. Much of the material will be secured by exchanging for them various manufactured articles, with which the ship is well supplied.

New Jersey is by no means poor. Its real and personal property is valued at \$700,000,000.

May 24th, 18—
John Oakburn, No. 111 Wall Street, City.
One agent's air pistol \$5.