

The Tenant of the Narrow House

By HOWARD FIELDING.

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CHAPTER III.

Horace Riddle Tells the Truth.

In the pause which followed the detective's declaration, both men heard the sound of a door opening.

"There is Dr. Maxwell," exclaimed the clergyman. "I know the bells. Can we not prevent his useless journey?"

At the first words the detective had run out of the room. Mr. Warren hurried after him. When he reached the front door, Mulligan was returning up the walk.

"I called to him but he did not hear me," said the detective. "At any rate he did not stop. I should say that there wouldn't be much use in chasing the team his driving."

Mr. Warren shook his head. "The doctor's horses were much the best in Williston."

"He'll drive to the junction, I suppose," said Mulligan. "That's the only place in those parts that a man can get away from in winter. Very good. I have half an hour to spare, suppose I tell you what I know about this case."

"Do, in Heaven's name! I can never rest until it is all made clear."

"If you expect me to make it all clear tonight," rejoined the detective, "I may as well warn you that you will be disappointed. This is at once the simplest and the most complicated puzzle I ever saw, and I've had a hand in the best that Boston could afford, including the famous Bell case."

"How do you know that the crime was committed in this town?" demanded the clergyman. "I hold Edward Ames guilty, and you say that the story that he was here was a lie. Why did my daughter come here? Where did she meet her murderer? Why did she not come to me?"

"She came to you," said the detective, gravely. "Indeed, the fact that she did so is almost my only clue."

"What she came here for?"

"Mr. Warren, I don't want to startle you, but it is an unquestionable fact that, a little after nine o'clock last night, your daughter stood outside that window and looked in upon you as you sat at work."

"What would the grief-stricken man have given in exchange for the power to take that knowledge back with him such a little way into the past? His life, gladly, for it would have saved hers."

"You can guess how I know this," continued the detective. "It was not a difficult problem. Assuming that the crime was committed here, I thought it fair to believe that the girl came to this town of her free will. People are not

"Exchanged! Then you believe that Ned Ames is really dead?"

"I don't know," he barely possible. However, the essential point is that your daughter's body was put into that coffin in the Ames house on Thursday night."

"While Samuel Ames sat by and permitted it?"

"Not while he was asleep—drugged of course."

"Drugged? Are you sure of that?"

"What he says makes it practically certain. He remembers the first hour alone beside the coffin. Then he knows nothing until he found himself sitting there with the light of early morning streaming into the room. He was ashamed to own that he had slept, and so he said nothing about it until I questioned him. Then he described his experience, and his sensations as awakening in such a way as to make me perfectly confident that he was drugged, and the thing that makes his story certainly true is that he described the effect of a drug about which I'm sure that he knows nothing at all. It's a mixture of chloral and one or two other poisons of that class."

"How was it administered?"

"Easily enough. There's a pitcher of water and a glass on the table in the dining-room of the Ames house every morning. Mr. Ames drank from that glass about ten o'clock. Of course the drug was in it. Now, the man who put it there is the murderer, but the trouble is that any man in town could have done it. Secret entrances to that room was perfectly easy on the evening."

"Might not the drug have killed Mr. Ames?"

"That's beyond me, but they can. However, there wasn't much danger of killing Mr. Ames. The man who used the drug was evidently skilled in its use."

"Could anyone not trained in medicine?"

"The detective looked keenly at the clergyman.

"I see what you mean," he said. "No, no, it was merely a horrible fancy. My mind is strained to the verge of madness."

"His flight looks bad," said Mulligan. "Flight? Whose flight?"

"Come, Mr. Warren, let's not fence with each other. Dr. Maxwell has got out of town in a hurry."

"I won't hear of such a thing. What motive is possible? The mere fact that a drug was skillfully employed is not enough."

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him, but I can't get a trace of him. Who's there?"

"I hear nothing."

"There's some one at the door. Not that one; the back door of the house."

Mr. Warren went to the window and looked out.

"A man and a boy. Who can they be?"

He hurried out of the room; and presently returned with Horace Riddle and old Abner Riddle, the boy's father.

"My son's got something to say to you, Mr. Warren," said Riddle. "Speak up, and tell the truth for once in your life."

This tender parental admonition appeared to make little impression on the boy. He was staring at a book on the study table.

"That's the Bible, ain't it?" he said. "It is," replied the clergyman.

"That's the book you swear on, and it makes it worse for you if you don't tell the truth. I'm willing to do it. You know I wouldn't lie to you, any more, Mr. Warren. I never did. And if I put my hand on that book, and cross my heart, you'll be sure that what I say is true."

"If you mean to tell us that you lied in the cemetery," said the clergyman, frowning upon the young barbarian.

"It's unnecessary, your man has already told me all about it."

"That's what I came here for," said the boy firmly. "I told father that the man would tell, and you'd think what I said wasn't so. It was this way: That man came to me, and asked me if I'd tell for a dollar, and I said I would."

"Then he told me to say what I did say in the graveyard, and when he put those words in my mouth, you could have kicked me down with a feather. I didn't want to tell him, for fear that I wouldn't get my dollar, but the man was what I really did see. Ed. Ames in the woods back of High street, not half an hour before this man spoke to me."

"I say this with my hand on the book, Mr. Warren, and it's true—it's true as what's in the book, every word of it."

The little fellow's manner carried conviction.

"Well, I've run up against a good many queer things in my life," said Mulligan, "but this beats them all. Young man, I believe what you tell me, and I want to say that it'll be worth more than a dollar to you, before we're through with this affair."

"Mr. Riddle," he continued, "you take your son home, and keep an eye on him all the time. What he says is likely to convict somebody of murder, and I don't suppose it's necessary to tell either of you that it isn't a thing to be talked about yet."

(To be continued.)

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