

The Tenant OF THE Narrow House

By HOWARD FIELDING.

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CHAPTER V.

The Mystery of Ned Ames' Body.

The Maxwell home on High street was a hundred and forty years old. Little of the original structure remained except the great oak framework, which might stand some generations longer. It was untenanted. The young physician—the last of his race—had abandoned it about a year before. He had built a modern house and furnished it luxuriously in anticipation of his marriage with Anna.

Dr. Maxwell was a man of considerable means for that part of the country. He was not in the least dependent upon his practice, otherwise he would have gone to a more favorable location for money making. But situated as he was, he much preferred to remain in Williston. He loved the town for its great beauty, and for the quiet which favored his studies.

The old Maxwell place was on High street, about a hundred yards from its junction with a thoroughfare called Broadway, as the Williston people said, because it was the narrowest street in town. The Ames house was on Broadway, which, in its lower part, was the business street of the place. There were three residences on its upper portion, and Samuel Ames was the last of them in the direction of High street. Clustered about the junction of Broadway and High street were many great trees, some of which extended their branches almost across one or other of the two thoroughfares.

It was more than half a mile from Mr. Warren's residence to the abandoned house in which Frank Ames had found his brother's body. There was courage enough displayed in Anna Warren's visit by night upon that dreadful errand to furnish forth a dozen martyrs.

They avoided the observation of chance passers on the street. It had been agreed between them that they should make all haste; and, after Anna had been convinced of the truth of her companion's story, they should go to his father's house. There was little chance that the discrepancy in time would ever be discovered. It was much safer than a return to the Warren house would have been.

"When I think of this discovery," said Ames, as they trod the silent street, "I am amazed that it had not been already made. What more convenient hiding place was possible? No one visits the old house. Had the grave closed over your sister's body there would have been no suspicion, and my brother's corpse could have lain there until its removal was convenient or until time served for its burial in the old cellar."

"If this detective had not been convinced that my brother's death was only a pretense, he would have solved the mystery at once. My belief in its reality made the solution easy. I went to the house this evening. I secured entrance by means of an upper window."

"All the doors were locked," murmured Anna, shuddering. "Yes, and you know who had the keys. Oh, Anna, believe me I do not speak heartlessly, nor am I moved by jealousy. The facts are to blame, not I. Some day when you are able to see my conduct in a clear light I believe that you will know it to be good, that you may even learn to love me as one who—"

"Hush! I cannot listen. Tell me how you found him." "I know where to look. I put myself in the murderer's place. Where would he hide it? I thought at once of the cellar. There is a great old-fashioned furnace there in which a human body could be burned. Why he did not do it that night I could not at first understand. Now I know that he must have been forced to attend to his horse—remember he had ostensibly gone driving—and that having done so he dared not return to the house that night."

"My conclusions were correct. My poor brother's body lay on the cellar floor. There was scarcely a pretense of

concealing it. Anna, can you bear the sight?" "I can and will. There is but one difficulty. How can I get into the house?" "I have unfastened one of the windows on the lower floor. All the doors are locked or nailed up. You must enter that way."

She did not hesitate. When they had reached the house, she made him enter by the window first, and then he drew her in after him. The lantern which he had used on his first search was hidden

in the room they entered. He lighted it, and carefully shielding the flame so that it would attract no attention if anyone chanced to be passing, he led the way to the cellar. It was divided into two parts by a partition of brick with a light wooden door. Frank laid his hand upon the latch.

"Summon up your courage," he said. "But why should I say that? You tremble less than I do. No words can express how I admire you for what you are doing this night. Courage is the sum of all the virtues. Yet I must warn you. When I open this door, his body will lie before you."

"Open it," she whispered, awestruck. He obeyed. The lantern's light flashed into the darkness. There was a moment's pause. Then, with a hoarse cry, Frank sprang forward.

"It is gone!" he shouted, utterly oblivious of caution. "The body is not here."

"It never was here," breathed the girl. "Why have you brought me?" "I swear to you that I saw it lying there this night. Bend down!" He held the lantern down to the floor.

"There! In the dust do you not see the outline of his form?" She saw it. Dust and ashes lay thick upon the floor, and it was possible to trace something like the imprint of a human body.

"In heaven's name who can have done this?" cried the girl. "Frank Ames, if you have a heart in your breast, answer me: are you speaking the truth?" "If ever a man swore to an oath to which credence could not be denied, Frank Ames did it then. It would have been madness to doubt his word. The truth flashed out of him, and there was no gaining it."

Hurried search convinced them that the body was not in the old house. Having failed they went out as they had entered. They reached the street by the little side gate which they had used when they came in.

"I will return and obliterate our foot-

prints," said Frank. "Hold! How blind I have been!" He led the way toward the main gate which admitted to the walk leading to the front door. Two men's foot-prints were visible. They had entered and left there in that way.

"Not yet, but work! I shall need a friend. He will need a friend. I do not believe him guilty, but it would be folly to deny that he is in peril. Save him, and I will never forget what you have done."

"That is worth working for," he said. "But it is not all. A man demands more. If I save him, though you yourself believe him guilty, or if he never returns, thus confessing his guilt, what shall be my reward?"

"Urgo me no further. I am utterly incapable of thought. Come with me to your father's house. We must be seen there. Then you must take me home."

Seeing that she was indeed yielding to the horrors of that night, he silently obeyed her, fearful that his resistance might actually distract her.

They found the Rev. Mr. Warren at Ned Ames' house, and with splendid self-command the girl told him the story that had been agreed upon. She had come to take him home.

"But you were so interested that you did not hear me. Can I come in? Thank you, Miss Warren. And what have you to say in reply to me, Dr. Maxwell?"

Frank Ames did not wait for Maxwell's reply. He turned upon Mulligan. "So it was you who removed the body?" he exclaimed.

"No, it wasn't. I found it, but somebody relieved me of the trouble of removing it. It was there at nine o'clock this evening. It isn't there now. Where is it, I'd like to know? And by the way, Dr. Maxwell, what time did you drive by the house on your way back from the Junction?"

"A little before ten." "Returned from Boston rather sooner than you suspected, didn't you?" "You know why," he said, angrily. "I was dogged by one of your men. If you want me watched, do it yourself. Here I am."

"Quite so; and I'm pleased to see you. Now, let me briefly state the facts. I didn't believe that Eddie Ames was dead. I believe Horace Riddle's story. But all the same it was my duty to search this town for Ames' body, which might have been in that coffin, you know—and I did search. I found it this evening in the cellar of your old house, doctor."

"From the appearance of the body I have no doubt that he died of diphtheria as the record said. Now, how did the body get into that cellar? Thank heaven for the hardened snow under the soft feathery stuff that fell in the latter part of Thursday night. I did a little scurrying outside the house and found some foot-prints. They were unquestionably those of the man who brought the body. He wore rubbers, and that's unfortunate. It's in the nature of a disguise. Still by measurements I was able to learn something."

"Will you oblige me with your foot, Mr. Ames? Thank you. Ah, it's much too long. What a long narrow, aristocratic foot you have, to be sure! Those rubbers never went over your feet. Of course I knew that before. I'm only showing you my method. Now, Dr. Maxwell. So; a very different foot indeed. Those rubbers would have fitted you nicely."

(To be continued.)

Before Frank could frame a reply, a new voice broke into the discussion. "I beg to disagree with you," it said. "Eddie Ames is dead, and I have seen his body."

All turned toward the door into the hall, and there stood Mulligan, bowing apologetically. "I knocked several times," he said.



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