

CLOSE QUARTERS;

OR, THE HOUSE IN THE RUE BARBETTE

CHAPTER V.

Once clear of the Albert Gate mansion, the barrister was bound to confess to a sense of indefiniteness, a feeling of uncertainty which seldom characterized either his thoughts or his actions. He admitted as much to his companion, for Brett was a man who would not consent to pose under any circumstances.

"It is quite true," he explained, "that our first duty must be to find Mr. Talbot, and it is still more certain that we will be able to accomplish that part of our task; but there are elements in this inquiry which baffle me at present."

"And what are they, sir?" said the detective.

"I fail to see why Mr. Talbot was dragged into the matter at all. On the straightforward assumption that Turks were engaged in the pleasant occupation of taking other Turk's lives—an assumption to which, by the way, I attach no great amount of credence—why did they not allow Mr. Talbot to go quietly to his own home? It was not that they feared more speedy discovery of their crime. The hour was then late; it was tolerably certain that he would make no move which might prove injurious to them until next morning, and then the whole affair was bound to be discovered by the police in the ordinary course of events."

"I don't quite follow you, sir," said Winter, with a puzzled tone in his voice. They had, for the sake of quietude, turned into the Park, and were now walking toward Hyde Park Corner. "What do you mean by saying that Mr. Talbot would make no move in the matter until next morning?"

"Oh, I forgot," said Brett. "Of course, you don't know why the diamonds were stolen?"

"For the same reason that all other diamonds are stolen, I suppose."

"Oh, dear no," laughed the barrister. "This is a political crime."

"Political!" said the amazed policeman.

"Well, we won't quarrel about words, and as there are perhaps no politics in Turkey, we will call it dynastic or any other loud-voiced adjective which serves to take it out of the category of simple felony."

"What beats me, Mr. Brett," said the detective, viciously prodding the gravel path with his stick, "is how you ferret out these queer facts—fancies some people would call them, as I used to do until I knew you better."

"In this case it is simple enough. By mere chance I happened to read this morning that there had been some little domestic squabble in royal circles at Constantinople. I don't know whether you are acquainted with Turkish history, Mr. Winter, but it is a well-recognized principle that any Sultan is liable to die of diseases which are weird and painfully sudden; for instance, the last one is popularly supposed to have plunged a long sharp scissor into his jugular vein; others drank coffee that disagreed with them, or smoked cigarettes too highly perfumed. In any case, the invariable result of these eccentricities has been that a fresh Sultan occupied the throne. Now, don't forget that I am simply theorizing, for I know no more of this business than you do at this moment. But I still think that you will find some connection between my theory and that which has actually occurred. At any rate, I have said sufficient to prove to you the importance of not being too ready to make arrests."

"I quite see that," was the thoughtful rejoinder. "But you must not forget, sir, that we in Scotland Yard are bound by rules of procedure. Perhaps you will not mind my suggesting that a word from you to the Foreign Office might induce the authorities to communicate officially with the Home Department, and then instructions could be issued to the police which would leave the matter a little more open than we are able to regard it under the existing conditions."

"I will see to that," said the barrister. "When does the inquest take place?"

"This evening at six."

"It will be adjourned, of course?"

"Oh, yes; no evidence will be given beyond that necessary for purposes of identification, and this can be supplied by the police them-

selves and an official from the Turkish Embassy."

"Very well. You will mention to no one the theory I have just explained to you?"

"Not if you wish it, sir."

"I do wish it at present. Which way are you going?"

"Straight to the Yard."

"In that case I will accompany you a portion of the distance."

They had now reached Hyde Park Corner, and, hailing a hansom, Brett told the driver to stop outside the Carlton Hotel. The man whipped up his horse and drove in the direction of Constitution Hill, evidently intending to avoid the congested traffic of Piccadilly and take the longer, but more pleasant, route through the Green Park and the Mall.

"By the way," said Brett, "did the driver of the hansom which conveyed Mr. Talbot and his companion from Albert Gate on Monday night tell you which road he followed?"

"Yes," said the detective, "he went this way."

Brett rubbed his hands, with a queer expression of thoughtful pleasure on his keen face.

"Ah," he said, "I like that. It is well to be on the scent."

He did not explain to his professional confrere that it was a positive stimulant to his abounding energy and highly strung nerves to find that he was actually following the path taken by the criminal whom he was pursuing. The mere fact lent reality to the chase. For a mile, at any rate, there could be no mistake, though he might expect a check at the Carlton. Arrived there, Brett alighted.

"Are you going to make any inquiries in the hotel, sir?" said Mr. Winter.

"Why should I?" said Brett. "You have already ascertained from the management that no person even remotely resembling any of the parties concerned is staying at the hotel."

"Yes, confound it, I know I did," cried the other, "but I never told you so."

"That is all right," laughed Brett. "Come and see me at my chambers this evening when the inquest is finished. Perhaps by that time we may be able to determine our plan of action."

Once left to himself, Brett did not enter the hotel. He made it an invariable rule in conducting inquiries of this nature to adopt the French method of "reconstituting" the incidents of a crime, so far as such a course was possible in the absence of the persons concerned. He reasoned that a very plausible explanation of the unexpected appearance of the three strangers in the Albert Gate mansion on Monday night had been given to Jack Talbot. This young gentleman, it might be taken for granted, had not been selected by the Foreign Office to carry to a successful issue such an important and delicate matter as that entrusted to him, without some good grounds for the faith in his qualities exhibited by his superiors. Brett thought he could understand the brother's character and attributes from his favorable analysis of the sister, and it was quite reasonable, therefore, to believe that Talbot was a man not likely to be easily duped. The principals in this crime were evidently well aware of the trust reposed in the Assistant Under-Secretary, and they, again, would not underrate his intelligence. Hence there was a good cause for Talbot to accept the explanations, whatever they were, given him during the conclave in the dining-room; the effect of which, in Inspector Sharpe's words, had been to "puzzle" the young Englishman. Further, there must have been a very potent inducement held out before Talbot would consent to drive off with a stranger at such a late hour, and when the cab was dismissed at the Carlton, the excuse given would certainly be quite feasible.

"It must surely be this," commended Brett. "The man explained that he was a stranger in London that he lived quite close to the Carlton Hotel, and that he found it convenient not only for the purpose of giving directions that would be understood, but also for paying fares, to direct the drivers of hire-vehicles to go there and not to his own exact address, which he had found by experience many of them did not recognize, whilst his know-

ledge of the language was not ample enough to enable him to describe the locality more precisely. It follows, then, in unerring sequence, that Talbot was conveyed to some place within a very short distance of the spot where I now stand."

He looked along Pall Mall, up the Haymarket, and through Cockspur street, and he noted with some degree of curiosity that there were very few residential buildings in the neighborhood. Clubs, theatres, big commercial establishments and insurance offices occupied the bulk of the available space. It was a part of his theory that none of the other great hotels in this district could harbor the criminals, otherwise there would have been no excuse to stop the hansom outside the Carlton.

Brett did not take long to make up his mind once he had decided upon a definite course. A call at the Foreign Office procured him an official authorization from the United-Secretary to inquire into the circumstances of Talbot's disappearance and a promise that the Home Office should be communicated with.

He desired to review the whole of the circumstances attending this strange mystery of modern life, and the result of his reflections quickly became apparent when he reached his residence, for in the first instance he dispatched a telegram, and then made several notes in his private diary.

The telegram, in due course, produced an elderly pensioned police inspector, a quiet, reserved man, whom the barrister had often employed. He explained briefly the circumstances attending Mr. Talbot's disappearance, and added—

"I want you to find out the names, and if possible the business—together with any other information you may happen to come across—of every person who lives within a distance, roughly speaking, of two hundred yards from the Carlton Hotel. The Post Office Directory and your own observation will narrow down the inquiry considerably. It is the unrecorded balance of inhabitants with whom I am particularly anxious to become definitely acquainted." The man saluted and withdrew.

Brett imagined that he would now be left in undisputed enjoyment for a few hours' rest before the Earl of Fairholme kept the appointment fixed for seven o'clock. But in this he was mistaken.

Smith brought in some tea, which was refreshing after his walk, for the engrossing nature of the morning's occupation caused him to forget lunch. A cigar and evening paper next claimed his attention, but he had barely settled down to the perusal of a garbled account of events at Albert Gate when his man again entered, announcing in mysterious tones the presence of Mr. Winter. Smith's attitude towards the myrmidons of Scotland Yard who occasionally visited the barrister on business, was peculiar. He regarded them with suspicion, tempered by wholesome awe, and he now made known the arrival of the detective in such a manner as caused his master to laugh at him.

"Show him in, Smith," he said cheerily: "he has not come to arrest me this time."

Winter entered, and a glance at his face brought Brett quickly to his feet.

"What is the matter?" he cried when the door had closed behind the servant. "You have received important news?"

"I should think I have," replied the detective, dropping into a seat. "I was just writing a report in the Yard when I was sent for by the Chief, and you could have knocked me down with a feather when I heard the reason. I suppose I am acting rightly in coming at once to tell you, although in my flurry at the time I quite forgot to ask the Chief's permission, but as you are mixed up in the case at the request of the Foreign Office, I thought you ought to learn what had happened."

"Well, what is it?" cried Brett, impatient at the other's careful provisos.

"Simply this," said the detective. "Mr. Jack Talbot bolted from London on Tuesday in company with a lady. They crossed over from Dover to Calais by the midday boat, and went direct to Paris. Mr. Talbot calmly booked rooms for himself and the girl in the Grand Hotel, had the nerve to write 'Mr. and Mrs. Talbot, 118 Ulster Gardens, London, W.', in the register, and both of them disappeared forthwith. But we will soon lay hands on the gentleman, no fear. I have somehow suspected, Mr. Brett, that your notion of a political crime was all wrong. It is a good big brass-faced steal."

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"Is it?" said Brett, his face glistening with excitement at the intelligence so suddenly conveyed to him. "Would you mind explaining to me how this precious information reached you?"
(To be continued.)

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That the Cuticura treatment is the most successful and economical for torturing, disfiguring affections of the skin and scalp could receive no more striking proof than the remarkable statement made by William Whyte, 325 Tudor road, Leicester, England.

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TRUE TO HIS PROMISE.

"Dearest, will you let me share your every sorrow after we are married?" she whispered as she cuddled her cheek against his.

"Yes, darling," he replied, again plucking a delicious kiss from her sweet lips.

It was the same lady who two years later wearily cried out:

"Oh, Tom, why can't you ever come into the house without bringing a tale of trouble with you? I'm so sick of hearing about how hard you have to work to keep the bills paid."

A MINISTER'S TRIALS.

Some "If's" That Count Against Him—His Character.

If he delivers a written sermon, he is a backnumber. If he preaches extempore, he's a shallow thinker.

If he is not constantly calling upon his people, he is unsociable. If he visits to any extent, he is a gad-about.

If he is married "he is an awfully nice fellow, but his wife doesn't amount to much." If he lives in single blessedness (?) woe be to him. All the eligibles and many of the others—never speak to each other at the guilds and parish socials, or else they do speak—gossip!

If he is content to serve his Master and his people on a small monthly sum (paid at irregular intervals) he is "cheap." If he timidly asks for a large enough stipend to keep his household "decently and in order," he is worldly-minded.

If he would be "all things to all men," he is a hypocrite. If he is somewhat reserved, it is a cloak to conceal his sly attempts to foist a mediaeval priestcraft upon his people.

If he quotes the sources from which his best ideas are drawn, he is lacking in originality. If he fails to give due credit for these various ideas, he is dishonest and a thief.

Girls should take the remarks of a fresh young man with a grain of salt

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