

PROFESSIONAL BRETHREN

BY GEORGE E. WALSH

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None whatever except that I had a message for you, and this Indian wouldn't let me in," I answered quickly.

"Well, it's his business to keep strangers out. These are my instructions."

"Then he was right, and I was wrong," I said, "and if that's the case I'll withdraw."

I turned my back on the two and started for the door, but the words of the doctor called me back. He had perfectly recovered himself and realized that he was making too much fuss with a servant over a trivial matter.

"Come, come, don't get huffy," he said pleasantly. "Your sudden entrance annoyed me, that's all. What is the message that your master sends?"

He looked at me through a pair of eyeglasses, his dark, searching eyes taking in every part of me. I felt uncomfortable under close scrutiny.

"Let me see. You are the man who spilled the salad dressing over me, aren't you?"

He laughed heartily, as if the incident amused him.

"Well, well, this is the second time you have given me offense," he added finally. "Look out for the third time. I might not let you off so easily."

I made the delivery of the message as long as possible, for while he was studying me to no particular purpose I was critically examining everything for a definite end.

When I finally left, I had a pretty clear impression of most of the articles in the room. It was decorated and furnished in true oriental style. Rikins and rugs were scattered over the floor; teakwood cabinets and desks, loaded down with miniature elephants in the same wood, were standing in corners and in the middle of the office; sandalwood ornaments, peacock feathers made into exquisite fans, Bagdad curtains and couches, Renares bronzes and spears and shields were placed in various nooks and corners to give the effect of an eastern scene. A red glow from a lamp suspended from the center of the ceiling must have added greatly to the prettiness of the room at night.

But in the midst of the oriental furniture and bric-a-brac were many modern articles, which gave an incongruous effect to the room. Grinning skulls stood alongside of disintegrated Egyptian mummies; a stethoscope was lying next to a spear head that must have been wielded by some Indian prince of long ago; medical books and implements were piled promiscuously upon hand carved tabourets of wonderful workmanship. In short, the room was a typical oriental scene, overlaid and topped by the necessary articles of a modern practicing physician.

The whole effect was interesting from one point of view, but for me there was little of that I cared about. I could discover nothing that would give me a clue to the doctor's mysterious work. Furthermore, I could not understand why so much care should be exercised in keeping intruders out or why the servant was so inquisitive. I should not enter his master's office. But my failure to make any discovery intensified rather than lessened my desire to fathom the mystery which Dr. Squires had chosen to surround himself with, and as I rode homeward my mind was busy planning some way of circumventing him and his oriental slave.

CHAPTER IX.

THE indisposition of Mr. Goddard was of short duration, but the attacks became more frequent after my first visit to Dr. Squires, and I was occasionally called upon to carry notes for him which announced the breaking of engagements. There was nothing serious about his complaint except that he appeared weak and languid and unable or unwilling to attend to his social duties. He would spend the day at such times resting on the bed or couch either smoking gloomily or closing his eyes in a moody, dejected manner. He would lie in this way for hours without moving a muscle, but he was not asleep. The slightest noise would arouse him. He would merely open his eyes and ask, "What's the matter, William?" Then without even waiting for my reply he would close them wearily and relapse into his former languid condition.

By this time I was considerably attached to him, and it gave me as much anxiety as a relative to see him slowly going into a decline. The dread of the inherited disease intensified my feelings for the man. I had no faith in Dr. Squires, but I could offer no good substitute.

Left to myself a great deal, I took to reading the books which I found in Mr. Goddard's study. Many of these were medical treatises. Evidently the man had tried to make a study of his complaint and had collected all the literature possible upon the subject. These books were handsomely bound and copiously illustrated, but they were too technical for my limited understanding. Nevertheless I frequently found myself turning over their leaves and aimlessly reading paragraphs here and there.

One day I was engaged in this idle amusement when I happened to open the book at a chapter headed, "Poisons and Their Administration." I had not read many lines before I suddenly

closed the book with a bang. An idea had occurred to me that fairly startled me. I was instantly positive that I had at last a clue to the sickness of my master and possibly the reason for Dr. Squires' mystery.

The doctor was slowly poisoning Mr. Goddard while pretending to help him to ward off an inherited disease.

This accounted for the peculiar languid condition of my master at certain intervals. After every dose of the insidious poison he was made weak and listless. Each attack helped to break down his naturally rugged constitution. It was merely a question of time before he would succumb to the poison instead of to any mythical disease.

Confronted by this thought, I was uncertain for a time just what to do. My first impulse was to go to my master and tell him my suspicions so he could be placed on his guard, but as my life has never been guided by impulse I soon dismissed this from mind.

Besides, I had nothing but my suspicions to reveal—not a single fact to prove anything. It was my duty to collect facts and then to confront the doctor with them and have him arrested. If he was determined to put my master out of the way and gain the hand and fortune of Miss Stetson, I was equally determined to thwart him in his little game. The stakes were high for him, and I knew that he would play a cunning, skillful hand, but as he would suspect no danger from me I had the advantage of working secretly and without much fear of discovery.

A professional burglar has a little of the detective spirit in him, and I soon found myself enjoying the scent with all the keenness of an experienced officer of the law. I had hunted detectives before, oiled their tracks, penetrated their disguises and followed up little clues that they left behind in their work, but all in the interest of crime. Now, however, I had turned reformer and was legitimately pursuing a criminal whose evil genius had been directed toward the destruction of one whom I had learned to like. It was no ordinary man that I had to fight against, and this gave more zest to my undertaking.

I discovered that my master had a night appointment with Dr. Squires about once a week. These appointments were irregular. Sometimes they were early in the week and, again, in the middle or the end. Evidently the doctor told him each time when to come again.

Upon reflection I was satisfied that there was a strange coincidence between these weekly night calls and my master's periodic attacks of languor and sickness. Almost every time after he had met the doctor at night he had been in bed a good part of the following day. This convinced me that the poison was administered at the doctor's office and was not intrusted to his patient.

This conclusion was reached one day when I was considerably dejected. I had been working up the case for nearly a week, and everything seemed to point to the fact that I had made a mistake in my reasoning. I could discover nothing to corroborate my suspicions. On that very day I had managed to secure the medicines my master was in the habit of taking, and, carrying them with me to the city, I had them analyzed by an expert chemist.

I was so confident that poison was contained in some of them that I was greatly surprised and perturbed when he told me that they were composed of harmless herbs and oils.

"You mean to say there is no poison in any of them?" I asked in astonishment.

"None whatever," he replied.

I did not believe he understood his business and probably said as much to me, but I took them to another chemist, and I spent \$5 more just to have a correct analysis made. The same conclusion from this man convinced me that I was mistaken.

I walked home, dejected and baffled. The doctor was too shrewd for me, and he had scored the first victory.

Nevertheless I was not discouraged. I reasoned with sense that the man would not adopt ordinary methods to poison my master. He was too shrewd for that. Then I thought of hypodermic injections, which might be administered while in his office.

It was while speculating upon the possible methods of giving him poison that I reached the conclusion that my master's night visits to the doctor's apartment for everything. It was at these meetings that the harm was done. I would be present at the next meeting or I would relinquish all claim to the possession of abilities of a certain order necessary for success in my line of work.

CHAPTER X.

BY accident, in the meantime, I discovered the secret of my master's fatal illness. It happened in this wise:

One afternoon when I was free for a few hours I strolled down the road toward Dr. Squires' house, habit generally drawing my footsteps in that direction. I was intent upon no particular purpose, I was merely walking along for the change, frequently like to get off by myself and lie down in the woods or on the green grass and think. I am a great lover of nature. The birds and grass and flowers always appeal to me.

When alone in the woods, I will watch the birds by the hour, finding more enjoyment therein than in the company of man, or an army of busy ants will amuse me for half a day. I would not hurt one of these insects for anything or permit them to be disturbed in their work, and yet I have raised my hand against my fellow creatures, partly in self defense, it is true, to wound them or to take their lives if necessary.

On this particular afternoon I walked down the country highway for some distance, and then, attracted by the song of a wood thrush, I concealed myself in a thick clump of bushes and listened. The bird could not see me, and for a long time I lay there with my eyes half closed listening to the sweet music of the dainty singer. I do not know how long I remained there entranced by this private concert, but suddenly the bird hushed its song and flew away.

The noise that had frightened her came from the hoofs of two horses, which were cantering down the road at a rapid pace. I peered through the leaves of the bushes at the riders, and instantly all my gentle thoughts fled. The spell of the bird was no longer upon me. All my evil, crafty nature returned. The approaching riders were Dr. Squires and Miss Stetson.

Not a dozen paces from me a small stream bubbled up from an underground spring, and it was quite customary for riders to give their horses a drink at this place. A wooden trough had been sunk into the ground to receive the water and to form a drinking vessel for the beasts.

I was consequently not surprised when the two drew up their horses just in front of me and led them to the spring. The doctor dismounted and held the horses while they drank in the cooling draft. The two had been engaged in conversation, and I judged that she had been trying to extract his secret from him.

"I do not consider it an honor to keep your work so secret until you have completed your discovery," she was saying. "Then all the world will know it, and there is no special interest in it for me."

"But I have promised to tell it to you before any one else hears of it," the doctor answered.

"How long before—one day or one hour?"

There was a look of annoyance in his face at her reply.

"Any number of days beforehand you wish," he answered.

"Well, then, I wish to hear it now," she replied quickly, a bright smile reinforcing her words.

"Woman's impatience," he muttered. "It has caused half the trouble in the world."

"That is unkind. I don't like such reflections upon my sex."

"Nothing personal was intended, Miss Belle. I was merely uttering my reflections aloud."

"Well, please don't do so any more." The doctor watched the horses drinking for a few moments and then, leaning against the saddle of his black steed, he said:

"Can you keep the secret if I divulge it to you?"

"Can I? I don't think that question is necessary."

"No, probably not. But I want your promise that you will never reveal it to anybody," he persisted.

"Well, you have it. I will never mention it until you give me permission."

"All right, then. I will tell you a sin. I was a young man, I went to India as a surgeon in the English army. There I met so many lepers that my attention was called particularly to this disease. At first they disgusted and alarmed me. Their rotting fingers and toe joints, their running sores and their emaciated bodies were so loathsome that I could hardly stay in their presence, but in time I got used to them, and we do to everything. I even found myself pitying them and wondering if something couldn't be done to alleviate their sufferings and even to cure and stamp out the horrible disease. This was the beginning of a career that I have studiously pursued ever since. I spent all my time in studying leprosy in its worst forms. I determined to find some remedy for it. I was limited in funds, but managed to get along by living near them. I could not exist in the same house with them. The thought of it nearly stifled me. But I could live near them and help them and in time perfect my discovery.

"My secret is already out, Miss Belle," he added after a pause. "I am devoting my time and life to the discovery of a positive cure for leprosy, that most dreaded of all diseases that ever scourged a wicked world. I am on the right track. In fact, I have about perfected it, so that I will be ready to announce the results to the world in a year. There is only one thing that bothers me. I am experimenting with this continually."

"Experimenting with whom?"

"The words were so hollow and unnatural that I turned my eyes from the doctor's face to that of Miss Stetson. I was startled at the sight. Her face was livid—paler than that of any corpse. A look of horror shone from her eyes.

"Whom are you experimenting with, Dr. Squires?" she repeated in the same strange voice.

"With—why—my dear Miss Belle, have I divulged any family secret?" stammered the doctor. "Did you not know? I thought your father knew that you knew that."

"That Charles had leprosy in his system—that he was a leper?" she said slowly.

"Your father knew it; his father knew it; Charles knew it when he met me. I understood that both families made no secret of it among themselves."

"No, I never knew what the disease was. Father never told me. Oh, can it be possible?"

She swayed in her saddle, and if the doctor had not caught her she would have fallen to the ground. I could hardly contain myself. The news nearly made me desperate. This accounted

for everything. I was all wrong in my conclusions. The doctor was, after all, a good man, holding the secret of my master's life in his possession and trying hard to help him.

"But he gave you some water, Miss Belle," the doctor said as he steadied her in the saddle. "Dismount a moment, and let me bathe your forehead."

"No, thank you, doctor. I will be all right in a moment. The suddenness of the news startled me."

"I know it, I know it, and I was a brute to tell you. I should have been more thoughtful. I shall never forgive myself. But, Miss Belle, believe me, I thought you knew it all. He should have told you."

"No, no; I am glad he didn't. How could I have been the same to him? How can I in the future?"

She shuddered and covered her face with her hands.

"Don't go on so, my dear Miss Belle," the doctor said in a low, winning voice. "There is hope for Charles yet. You



The two had been engaged in conversation.

forget that I am close upon the greatest discovery of the age. If it succeeds, Charles will be a new man, free from all taint of leprosy."

"But you could not eradicate the germs of the disease from his body; they might not know themselves in him, but in future generations they would come out."

"We can only hope for the best," he replied. "Who can tell what medicine may not accomplish? It has done wonders in the world already, and there are new worlds that it is conquering every day. We must look forward hopefully for results that it would be daring to predict now."

His words were intended to be encouraging, but she did not raise her head. From the slight shuddering of her delicate body I knew that she was sobbing.

"Do not yield to this weakness, Miss Belle," he added a moment later. "I tell you I will cure Charles. I can do it, and I will do it. If not for his sake, I will do it for yours."

A faint smile was visible through her tears as she looked at him and answered slowly:

"You are good, doctor, to sacrifice so much for either or both of us. Cure him by all means for his sake, not for mine. I could—no, I could never marry him; I would be afraid."

Again she covered her face and sobbed.

"Not if I cured him entirely?" he asked in a voice that had a curious tension to it. "Not if I assured you positively that the disease would never show itself while either of you lived?"

"No, no; I loved him and yet I loved him, loved him!"

The words in my own eyes, but those of the doctor were dry and exultant. These words from her lips would give him the clear field. He could honorably try to win her love. With Charles no longer a possible rival, what was there to prevent him from winning a beautiful bride and a princely fortune?

A few moments later they gathered up their reins and rode away. She was pale and beautiful; he was strong and robust—and exultant.

CHAPTER XI.

IT is not often that conflicting emotions trouble me. But on that afternoon as I walked back to Mr. Goddard's house I experienced the strangest contradiction of feelings. One moment I thought I would pursue the tragedy no further, but decamp immediately and let my master work out his own fate. After all, he was nothing to me, and he probably cared less for me than I did for him.

But the next moment I would have a revulsion of feelings. I would fall to pitying and sympathizing with both my master and Miss Stetson. Her love for him was genuine, and it must be a terrible blow to receive such intelligence. Was she not to be pitied more than Mr. Goddard? On the other hand he was conscious of the terrible doom that awaited him and was buoyed up only by the thought that possibly Dr. Squires could cure him. But now he could never gain his prize. Would she marry him even though pronounced cured?

What would be the result? Mr. Goddard would go away to some foreign country, and after grieving over him for a time Miss Stetson would yield to the importunities of Dr. Squires and marry him. I saw the climax of the tragedy, which, after all, would prove a tragedy only to my master, and it made me more faithful in my devotion to the unfortunate man. This decided me to stay by him until the time should come when my expectations would be fulfilled. Then I would return to my old ways. Meanwhile I was leading an honest life and making the money which I spent.

I had become quite efficient in my duties, and was trusted in many ways that never fell to the lot of my predecessor. I was more than butler—I was my master's confidential secretary in many respects. But there were some secrets that he would not reveal to me, and one was the dread disease which brought him so much care and sorrow.

After hearing the truth from Dr. Squires' own lips my attention was drawn more closely to Mr. Goddard's appearance. I watched his languid manner, his pale face and all the symptoms of disease that he showed during his periodical fits of sickness. More than this, I read up all the medical books about leprosy and then watched for the signs. To an excited imagination these were readily visible.

About this time Miss Stetson and the doctor took lunch at the house again, and my attention was called to the matter by an incident that greatly affected all of us. I had not seen Miss Stetson since that afternoon when I watched her from my hiding place at the wayside brook. She was paler than usual, and her manner was nervous and excited, especially when Charles was near her.

During the progress of the lunch I caught her studying the hands and face of her host on every occasion when his eyes were turned away from her. I could not at first understand the reason for this secret scrutiny, but it suddenly dawned upon me that she, too, had been reading on the subject and was looking for symptoms of the disease.

The doctor, as usual, was the life of the party and kept the conversation flowing freely from one to the other, never being at a loss for words. Nevertheless there was an uneasiness in his manner which seemed very unnatural. My master alone appeared to be perfectly at his ease and normal.

When the conversation lagged a moment, he suddenly rubbed the back of one of his hands with the palm of the other and said:

"Doctor, I think I must have run up against some poison ivy or sumac in the woods, for I'm sure that my hands and face are poisoned."

"Very likely, very likely," the doctor replied quickly, but with a little tremor in his voice. "There is a great deal of it around, and one of your nature would be very susceptible to it."

"My hands and face itch terribly, and blotches are breaking out on my face and forehead," Mr. Goddard continued.

I looked at Miss Stetson. She was staring at my master with horror written all over her face. The hand that held her fork trembled so that she had to put it down.

My master displayed his hands and added: "These red spots on the back of my hand. Are they not the result of poison? And over my eyes and forehead. They seem to be breaking out all over."

"Probably, Charles. I will investigate after lunch," the doctor said hurriedly, glancing toward Miss Stetson.

For the first time Mr. Goddard turned his eyes toward her. Feeling that she was attracting attention, her overwrought nerves could stand the strain no longer. She had been thinking as I had—that the brown spots were the first and earliest symptoms of leprosy. We both knew just enough to be carried away by any symptoms that resembled those which indicate the beginning of the dread disease.

"Belle, what is the matter? Are you ill?"

Mr. Goddard had hardly spoken these words before she dropped her hands and fainted. She would have fallen to the floor had I not caught her in time.

They deposited her on a couch and rubbed her hands and moistened her brow with water. She slowly recovered consciousness.

"You should not have mentioned being poisoned to her," the doctor said admonishingly to my master. "To one of her sensitive disposition the mere mention of a thing like that might cause her to faint."

"How careless and brutal of me," my master said in tones of repentance. Then as she opened her eyes he knelt down by her side and, drawing one of her hands into his, said:

"Did I frighten you? I was a brute to do it. Look at me, Belle, and tell me that you forgive me."

For reply she turned her head away from him with a shudder and withdrew her hand from his clasp.

"What is it, dear?" he continued. "Do not draw away so. Tell me what it is that I have done. I will do anything to repair it. Speak, Belle."

"Leave me, please; leave me," she gasped.

"I'm nervous and excited. Let me alone for a few minutes, and then I'll be better. But I must go home. Doctor, will you help me to get on my things?"

"Belle, you're not going to leave me like this," pleaded my master, approaching her again.

But she moved aside and said in a wavering voice:

"Let me go now, Charles. Maybe I can explain some day. I'm not myself now. Goodbye!"

She did not extend her hand or offer to take his, but walked quickly out of the room.

Mr. Goddard stood quite still for some time, puzzled, perplexed, discouraged.

CHAPTER XII.

I WAS probably as much troubled as my master over this sad state of affairs. Miss Stetson's treatment hurt him more than he cared to confess. He seemed so perplexed and worried over the matter that I was several times on the point of telling him the reason for her sudden aversion for him.

There was but little doubt that he had noticed her dislike for him, but he was too proud and sensitive to mention the matter to any one. He was not a kind to speak of such personal questions even to Dr. Squires. For several days he remained away from the Stetson mansion, sending me over twice a day to inquire after Miss Stetson's health. I never saw her myself in any of these visits except the last. Then, instead of sending the message down to me by one of the servants, she called me up to her library.

The first thing I noticed about her

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was a peculiar careworn, suffering expression on her face. Under the dark eyes and around the lips there were delicate lines and tints which revealed more than words. She had suffered more than she would admit. Pa-thetic acceptance of her lot was apparent on every lineament of her face. She had evidently battled successfully with herself and had become resigned to her fate.

(To be continued.)