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PROFESSIONAL BRETHREN

BY GEORGE E. WALSH

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CHAPTER XX.

MISS STETSON was considerably agitated and nervous when she finally appeared in the library. Her facial lines were drawn and haggard, indicating the strain she had just passed through. When she entered, I stood before her as I said: "You must pardon me for telling you an untruth, but I could not do otherwise in the presence of your guest. I do not come with a message from my master, but with one from myself." She looked inquiringly at me and waved her hand toward a seat while she dropped wearily into another.

"No; I will stand," I said, "until I find out whether my request will be granted." "Your request? What is it?" Her mind was still dwelling upon the interview that had just closed, and the purport of my words had hardly attracted her attention.

"Oh, I see!" she added a moment later, with the faintest indication of a smile on her face. "You have come to ask me to fulfill my promise of the other day."

"Exactly," I said. "Well, what is it?" "As I told you then, it will seem very strange to you, and I now repeat

"And keep your promise better than you did the other one." I could not refrain from saying, for her lack of trust in me had piqued me a little.

She colored and at first would have resented my bold words, but an afterthought checked her.

"Yes, I will redeem my promise this time without question."

"Thank you. Then on Tuesday at a quarter to 9 Mr. Jaimson will call for you, and you will be ready to accompany him. I will call for both of you at 9 o'clock. I will guarantee that you will return to your home without hurt or injury."

I hastily withdrew then. She accompanied me to the door. She was watching me peculiarly, trying to decide, I imagine, whether I was a crank or a sane man and whether she had made a mistake or not in promising to accompany me.

CHAPTER XXI.

I WAITED with feverish anxiety for Tuesday night. It was natural that I should experience constant fear about the success of my little

scheme. If either my master or Dr. Squires got a hint of my intentions, the game would be up and I would have all my labor for nothing. It would be such an easy matter, too, for either Miss Stetson or Mr. Jaimson to drop a word to some relative or intimate friend which would ruin everything.

I had not learned what Dr. Squires' mission was in leaving the mansion on Tuesday afternoon and evening, but I concluded that it had something to do with his prospective fortune, and this fortune, I felt reasonably certain, consisted solely of the stolen goods which had accumulated in his house. He had evidently reached the point where he thought it advisable to ship them away to some more convenient place where they could be disposed of to advantage. It would be comparatively easy to send them off by express to some distant city and melt up the silver pieces and sell the metal for what it would bring.

While he was making arrangements to escape with his unlawful goods I was planning to capture him and rob him of his sole title to a fortune. I did not doubt but he would take the lion's share of the spoils, leaving my master only a small portion, or probably he would at the last moment escape without dividing at all with him. He was capable of such a trick.

Shortly after dusk on Tuesday I approached the old mansion on foot. I had made sure of the doctor's disappearance. I saw him get on the train about noon and leave for the city.

As soon as it was dark enough to conceal myself from view I approached the house and looked through the kitchen windows. The old Indian servant was alone and seemed to be busily engaged in cooking his supper. When I had made sure of this, I hurried around to the front piazza and began to climb the post which had once before served me a similar good turn.

Knowing the way well, I made quick work in climbing on the roof of the house, and I reached the cupola without mishap. Here I found everything as I had left it during my previous visit. I opened the window without difficulty and proceeded to lift the trap door in the floor. The lock had not been tampered with, and nobody had ever been the wiser for my first visit.

In a few moments I found my way down the ladder and stood in the upper hall. The house was wraped in dark-

ness, except for the light in the kitchen. This all helped to make my plan easier. I descended the front stairs noiselessly, and through the half open door I could catch a glimpse of the old servant. From this position I could measure his probable strength and powers. It was necessary that I should be able to cope successfully with him, and I was not going to run any risk.

For some time I watched his slow movements about the kitchen. He prepared his supper and ate it in silence.

Then when he proceeded to wash the dishes I found that it was getting late, and for the success of my plan it would be necessary to expedite matters. I purposely dropped a heavy book in the front hall and then glided quickly behind the office portieres. The noise, as I expected, attracted the old man from his work, and he came catlike into the hall, peering intently ahead of him.

He did not expect to find any one in the house. The noise sounded as if it proceeded from the front piazza. The old man glanced through the plate glass of the front door before he opened it. This was my opportunity.

I sprang out of the darkness and landed plump upon the man's back, carrying him to the floor by my weight.



I had grasped his two arms.

As we fell together I had grasped his two arms and held them securely locked behind him. For a moment he was so frightened by this sudden attack that he did not struggle, but when he felt me running a rope around his elbows and wrists he summoned all of his strength and fought desperately.

I had not underestimated his strength. He was thin and lithe, but powerful and sinewy. He was like a serpent in his wriggling, and I had the greatest difficulty in the world to hold him. We struggled and scuffled about the hall floor for ten minutes before I could tame him. Once or twice I felt that the battle was going against me, but I renewed my efforts and finally pinioned his arms behind him with the rope.

With his arms securely tied the man gave up the struggle and lay there panting and trying to speak. I saw that he was really dumb, although not deaf. He could not speak, but he could hear.

"Be quiet now, and I shall not hurt you," I said in answer to the question which I could plainly read in his eyes. "I'm not going to harm you; only you must submit to being bound for the rest of the night. I will make you as comfortable as possible."

I picked him up and carried him with difficulty to one of the bedrooms upstairs. After placing him in an easy position on the bed I tied him securely to the posts, running the ropes round and round his body and the bed. He looked more like a bandaged mummy than a living being when I had finished.

"Now, you'll remain there until I call for you," I said. "If I catch you attempting to escape, I'll shoot you." I placed my revolver at his temple as I spoke to emphasize my words. He looked frightened and shook his head vigorously.

Then I left him, locking the door and windows securely, and returned to the scene of our recent struggle. I lighted a lamp long enough to give me an opportunity to clean up things which we had displaced in our struggle. I wanted everything to appear natural when the doctor returned home.

Leaving a dim light burning in the kitchen, I took the front door key with me and stepped out into the cool night air. "So far so good," I said to myself. It was then half past 8, and I had half an hour in which to reach the Stetson mansion in time to meet my appointment.

CHAPTER XXII.

IT WAS at Miss Stetson's promptly at 9 o'clock. Mr. Jaimson was waiting there for me, and Miss Stetson was all prepared for her strange journey.

"I don't like this at all," she said, biting her lip. "I don't know whether to regard it as a joke or not."

"It is not a joke," Mr. Jaimson replied seriously. "I fear it is far from it."

"Why not tell me all, then? I don't like mysteries."

"It is for him to tell you," he answered, pointing toward me.

Knowing that he took me for a detective, I answered evasively: "We'll soon be there, Miss Stetson, and then you will know all."

I led them a brisk walk down the old highway until we reached the ground surrounding the old mansion. When I turned to go up to the house, Mr. Jaimson started and exclaimed: "Is it Dr. Squires?"

I nodded affirmatively and increased my pace.

"Of course this is where Dr. Squires lives, but what of that?" inquired Miss Stetson, looking from one to the other. Neither of us made reply, but trudged

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on in gloomy silence.

Without any formality or explanation I produced the key and opened the front door of the old house. I stepped inside and lighted the hall lamp. Then as they followed me I closed the door.

"Dr. Squires is not at home tonight," said Miss Stetson, "and I do not see why we should enter his house in this way. Where did you get the key and where is his old servant?"

"One thing at a time, Miss Stetson," I replied. "I will explain everything in a few moments. Please be seated in the hall until I light more lamps."

I left them in the hallway while I bounded up the stairs to see if the old servant was all right. I unlocked the room and glanced in. He was propped up in the same attitude on the bed, and his bandages were secure.

I closed and locked the door and turned then to the treasure room. I put two or three extra lights in this place, placing them so that the rays would glisten on the silverware and jewels. I drew off all the coverings of the stolen goods and even arranged many of them so they would show off to the best advantage. With the lights shining down upon them they made a feast for the eyes that was dazzling. It was a spectacular effect that gratified my little vanity.

I returned to the hall, where I had left my two companions, and said: "If you will accompany me upstairs, I will make all this mystery plain."

They both eagerly followed me, even Miss Stetson showing more than her ordinary curiosity. She preceded Mr. Jaimson, and as she reached the door of the room I threw it open and said: "Behold, Miss Stetson, Dr. Squires' secret! Here is the mystery which he has safely guarded from you and all the people around here."

She stepped into the room, shaded her eyes with one hand and then stepped back with a little cry of amazement.

"What does this all mean? What beautiful things? Where did they come from?"

"Examine some of them, Miss Stetson," I said. "Look at this handsome silver teapot and water pitcher."

She stepped forward and took them out of my hand and then nearly dropped them in her agitation.

"Why, they are mine! They have my mother's initials on. They are the ones stolen from my house."

"Yes, they belong to you, and if you will look around you will see plenty of others that you may recognize—not only these which belonged to you, but to your neighbors."

She picked up one after another, handling them with such eagerness that she nearly dropped them. Then she turned helpless toward me and Mr. Jaimson.

"What does it mean, Mr. Jaimson?" she asked in a trembling voice.

"That we have at last run the robbers to earth," he replied sternly.

"Who are they?" she gasped while her face turned white and red. "Not—surely not—Dr. Squires?"

"Yes, Miss Stetson, I fear Dr. Squires is one of the guilty parties."

"It can't be. How could he do such a thing? I—I—don't understand it."

She leaned against the wall for support. Mr. Jaimson put his arm around her waist.

"You must not give way to your feelings," he said tenderly. "You must be brave. There is more to do tonight. We must tell you the whole story, and you must be equal to the emergency. It is difficult."

I interrupted him by touching his arm. The sound of wheels on the gravelly drive had attracted my attention.

"Somebody is coming," I said. "Go down to the office. I will follow you."

I turned the lights out quickly, locked the door and bounded down the stairs two at a time. Had the doctor unexpectedly returned earlier than he had promised?

When I reached the office, I shoved them into a closet shut off from the rest of the room with soft, sheeny curtains. The place was barely large enough for all of us to squeeze in. I warned them to keep quiet until I gave them permission to speak. Through the soft curtains we could see any one in the office, but nobody could see us.

We had barely closed ourselves when the sound of a key in the lock of the front door announced the coming of the owner of the house. Heavy steps in the hall followed, and the voice of Dr. Squires could be heard saying: "I suppose my man has retired. Charles, I told him not to wait up for me. Ah, he has left a light burning for me in the office. It always seems more cheerful to have a light waiting for you."

He entered the office, followed by my master. After turning up the light into a brighter blaze he removed his overcoat.

"No, Charles; you're wrong in imagining that I do not help you in my treatment. I can see marked improvement in you every week."

The doctor took a bottle from the mantelpiece and poured out some brandy, swallowing it with a gulp.

"But you know the effect your hypnotic treatment has upon me," my mas-

ter replied. "Every morning after you subject me to it I'm so weak and languid that I do not care to do anything."

"Merely temporary—merely temporary, Charles. Nobody can be reduced to the hypnotic state without feeling some ill effects of it afterward. But they are merely temporary and not lasting; they leave no permanent illness. You soon rally from your fatigue?"

"Yes, I'm all right after a long rest, but it does not seem natural that such a reaction should follow."

"On the contrary, it is very natural—most natural. I should be surprised if it were not so. I cannot enter into a detailed explanation of hypnotism; it would require too much time, but I can assure you that it effects the nervous system for the time, and under the intense strain the nerves are subjected to the body must afterward feel worn and weary. That is all there is to it. If you were a weak, nervous person, I might hesitate, but one with your strong, vigorous constitution ought to stand it."

My master did not reply, but remained passive, looking intently at the fire in the grate.

"Why should you be so discouraged tonight?" the doctor added a moment later. "Has anything occurred to make you dissatisfied with my treatment?"

"No, except that I'm getting skeptical. I believe at times that I'm entirely well. I would never know that anything ailed me except when I'm reminded of it by my engagements with you. Then I go home from here and wake up the next morning with all the feelings of a man who had been through a severe fit of sickness. I don't understand it."

"My dear Charles, that is the peculiarity of your disease and of my treatment of it," the doctor replied. "I have succeeded in warding off any attacks of the disease itself, but at a slight expense of nerves. That you must expect. No medicine can cure an inherited disease without giving some counter shock to the system."

"So you've told me before, doctor, and I've accepted it trustfully. But now I want to know how much longer you will have to experiment with me? You admit yourself it is only experimental?"

"It was at first, but not now. I'm positive about the results. So well have I succeeded that I'm ready to announce that in half a dozen more treatments you will be entirely cured. There will then be no more danger of phthisis, and you can feel that you are free from any taint of heredity."

"That is consoling, and under such circumstances I will permit you to continue the treatment for another month. Then I will refuse to submit longer to these hypnotic trances."

"Very well; I accept the conditions, and I have reason to believe that you will always thank me for my perseverance."

"I shall if you succeed."

"Shall we make another experiment, as you call it, tonight? It will shorten your month by a few days."

"Yes, I'm willing."

Then a most remarkable scene occurred.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE doctor busied himself with some medical implements, while my master remained perfectly quiet, staring gloomily and abstractedly at the fire.

In about five minutes the former seemed to have found what he wanted and said:

"Now, if you will take a seat in the chair, Charles, I will hurry up, so you can return home early and have a good sleep. It is rather late now—after 11."

He looked at his watch as he spoke, and my master took a seat in a large, comfortable operating chair. He threw himself back into it and closed his eyes for a moment.

"Now, Charles, look at me and yield yourself to my influence," Dr. Squires said. "Remain in as passive a condition as possible."

My master sat up and looked drearily at the man, while the doctor slowly made passes before his eyes.

He was hypnotizing him not against his will, but with his full consent. Miss Stetson breathed hard and with difficulty restrained a scream. I placed a warning hand on her arm. She controlled herself with marvelous power and waited patiently for further developments.

In a few moments my master was reduced to a perfectly helpless condition. He was merely an automaton obeying the will of Dr. Squires. The latter smiled quietly to himself.

"Now, Charles, you do not remember any of your past life, do you?" he asked.

"No. Only the present."

"You feel tired and weary, don't you?"

"Yes; very tired."

"Well, rouse yourself and do my bidding with alacrity."

"Certainly. What is it? I feel fresh enough for anything."

"I thought so."

Then after a short pause:

"I want you to be as shrewd and alert as possible tonight, for I have a very difficult mission for you. You know the large mansion on the main road just as you turn off from Gates avenue?"

My master nodded.

"Well, that house is occupied by Dr. Chalmers, a rich old fogey, who has plenty of valuable articles in the mansion. I want you to go there and bring back to me all that you can collect. You must then go down the main highway until you reach the house with two elm trees in front of it. Open the front door with a key you will find in your pocket. Dares it and go into the first bedroom on the right on the upper