

The Altenburg Case

By GEORGE DYRE ELDRIDGE

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By George Dyre Eldridge

(Continued from Page 5)

but you still kept the fact to yourself. "I had not the slightest chance of determining who the man was. I could give no information on that subject. There was nothing in the little I did know."

"That was for others to determine, not for you," said Trafford, sternly. "It might have been the unraveling of the mystery for me to know the next day what you knew, and it was because of what you feared the solution was, that you kept silent. Moreover, what stands out before all else is that to have told would have been to tell that you were on the ground almost at the moment the crime was committed, and that you did not tell!"

Again Grimbleshaw felt that Trafford was driving the case home, and again he felt that his own course might have been a blunder. At the same time, he knew why he had acted as he had, and that, given the same conditions, and the same suspicions with equal lack of knowledge, he would do the same thing again. He had accepted it as assured that Judith and Horace had ground for their fears, and he had been willing to take the consequences be they what they might, of standing loyally with them—or her, he more honestly amended. Perhaps the mere fact that there had been no ground for suspicion was a minor factor, so long as this man was on their track.

"Now," demanded Trafford, breaking in on his line of thought, "will you tell me what your business with Altenburg was?"

"No," answered Grimbleshaw. "You have asked me that once before, and I told you that it was personal business, having no possible connection with this case. It was a matter which I accomplished with him alone, if living, and he being dead, it concerns nobody, and I don't purpose being driven into revealing my private matters for a gossiping village to tear to tatters."

"In a case like this," retorted Trafford, "there is nothing personal. Whatever concerns Altenburg in those last hours concerns the public until justice is done. Concealment doesn't conceal at a time like this."

Again Grimbleshaw was driven to silence, and again Trafford waited with imperturbable patience. Convinced that no answer was to be expected, he finally said: "At least you may be able to clear David, for I take it you are willing to do that. Can you fix the hour, or rather minute, that you knew Altenburg was alive and had some one with him?"

"I don't even know he was alive. I don't even know that he was one of the two men in that room. I saw two shadows and heard men talking. That is all I know. If there were two men concerned in this murder, two men already have been done to death, and the voices I heard may have been the voices of the men who did the job."

"They may have been the men you encountered two hours later," Trafford suggested. Grimbleshaw, as well under restraint as he had held himself thus far, felt his face change at this thrust. Trafford had his eyes on him, and he knew that his confusion could not fall of detection by any observer. Then there came to him what he had said to Judith not an hour before.

"That is mere guesswork. I take it you are not interested in my guesser." "Unless what you choose to call a guess is in reality a judgment based on something you know, as for instance, the recognition of a voice."

"A thing," said Grimbleshaw, not taken by surprise, as Trafford had clearly intended, "of no value whatever, in my opinion. One hears a voice and fails to carry the tone. He hears another, under circumstances that suggest, the first, or perhaps is asked if he recognizes it, and promptly says yes, when really it is simply an association of ideas. Nothing, it seems to me, could be more baseless or utterly worthless."

"Do you think that quite a fair presentation?" Before Grimbleshaw could answer there was a hasty rush of steps up the stairs, the door was thrown violently open, and Fry burst in. "We've got Calden and he's confessed!" he cried.

"Which one?" demanded Grimbleshaw, leaping to his feet. "How did you come to arrest him?" asked Trafford, sternly. "He had left the camp and was making for Canada in charge of a disreputable fellow named Billings."

"I know," interrupted Trafford. "I asked about the arrest." "I went up to the sleigh and said, 'Mr. Calden, you're wanted.' 'For what?' he asked. 'The Altenburg murder,' I said. 'You've got the right man,' he said."

"You should have warned him," said Trafford. "It was out before I had a chance." "As an officer it was your duty to warn him before you answered his questions."

"You don't seem to find this arrest to your taste," cried Fry, his elation turned to bitterness, which he did not scruple to show. "I've no doubt it will prove of great importance," said Trafford.

idea, indicated knowledge of the arrest. His first words confirmed this: "It's terrible awful," interrupted Grimbleshaw, resolved in no way to shield himself; "I blame myself—then he, in turn, stopped dumb with surprise at Calden's expression of sudden terror, which showed clearly that he had not known and even now did not understand."

"What do you mean?" he gasped. "Is there something new to be alarmed over?" However the blunder had arisen, the opportunity for explanation had been made, and there was no choice for Grimbleshaw but to tell the facts, so far as he knew them.

When he finished Calden came up to him, white and trembling. "Grimbleshaw," he said, between his set teeth, "let me tell you, you are an infernal scoundrel! I have most unjustly suspected my father. I know now why you wanted his arrest and planned to bring it about!"

"Calden," exclaimed the doctor, terror-stricken at the accusation, "you are crazy! You don't know what you're saying!" "God knows you may be right!" he exclaimed, "for I am talking to the man who would see my father murdered, if so he could purchase safety! You advised him to leave the camp, didn't you?"

"Yes, but—" "He was safe there, wasn't he?" "I incline now to think so, but—" "I want none of your buts! I repeat, you're an infernal scoundrel! You're at liberty to take the words up any way you want to. You had to have him or some one arrested, did you? A blind man can see why! I'll see to it that your scheme don't save you! You seem to have forgotten that I was at the house as well as yourself, but I haven't—"

With that he flung himself out of the room, leaving Grimbleshaw appalled, not alone at the accusation, but as well at the danger to all that might easily grow out of Calden's present mood and irresponsible state of mind. Nor did he hesitate to face the personal element involved. Already was he under suspicion in the village, and while an accusation from young Calden would carry with it something to its own discredit, it must still add to the stigma now resting on him and make doubly difficult his position. Especially would this be the case as he must and would maintain the secret of Judith's presence at the house that night.

Judith! The instant her name came in his head, that was where the matter stood. Of course, she would side with her brother and think that he had betrayed her father. As far as he was concerned that was sentence already passed. The temptation to reach her and explain before Horace could give his version of the matter was strong upon him, and he started up to carry it into effect. But that was, perhaps, to set them at difference among themselves, when of all times her safety demanded unity of purpose and action. At that he seated himself again, the prisoner of his fears for her.

None the less it was not like him to sit with folded hands and await his fate. Young Calden, in his present mood, was capable of anything, and whatever he did might be the spark to the powder train to blow them all skyward. If, indeed, the spark had not before been applied. He had got to have advice, and advice that would profit him, and with that he seized his hat again and started for Beckwith's office.

That as he reached the street he saw Reed turn the corner. His impulse was to avoid him. Then, telling himself that it was time he learned to face what was sure to come to him in constant increase in the future, he threw his head up and marched straight on. To his surprise Reed rushed toward him with beaming face and extended hand.

"Ah, doctor," he cried, "I was just on my way to see you! Mrs. Reed insists that she can have no other doctor but you. She declares she'd rather die on your hands than live for any other doctor. Boyce says you understand the case better'n any other doctor can in a year and he advises bringing you back at once. He says he'll consult with you, if you want, but that you're the man to handle the case."

Reed had rushed on with his torrent of words, so that Grimbleshaw was unable to stop him until he had finished all that he had clearly prepared to say. At least, it had given the doctor time to recover from his first flush of anger and to think of the situation exactly as it was, rather than as he would willingly have it. The impulse to refuse to take up the case again died on his lips, and he understood that there was something in the affair that he had not yet fathomed.

"Mrs. Reed's wish will, of course, be controlling with me," he said, somewhat stiffly. "As I am certain it is with you, though I am not your personal choice."

"Oh, but I assure you you are and always have been," Reed exclaimed, with eager earnestness. "By the way, what a fortunate thing that Altenburg's murderer's been run down! It makes us all feel better. Smart man that Trafford!"

"If he has been," said Grimbleshaw. "Oh, but he has! I'm surprised you haven't heard the news. It's—"

"I'll be bound to see Mrs. Reed at eleven," said Grimbleshaw, leaving the astonished Reed to stare after him in anger as he rushed down the street. So this was what Reed's change meant, was it? He vowed he'd never step foot in Reed's house and then laughed at himself for a fool. Reed had really made the most absolute of apologies, the only one he could make, in fact, unless he told him to his face that he had suspected him of murdering Altenburg, and, of course, that would never do. Besides, Mrs. Reed wasn't at fault, and he had no right to punish her for the sake of striking at her husband, Beckwith, and Beckwith, with dumb acknowledgment of what the village had believed, congratulated him on Calden's arrest and confession, "though it'll be a tough one for young Calden, my client," he added.

"I was coming to see you," said Grimbleshaw, angry in spite of himself that the lawyer did not stoop to

concealment. "I don't believe that Calden has confessed, and I don't believe his confession if he has." Beckwith looked at him quizzically. "Perhaps you know something that don't jump with the theory of his guilt," he said. "My client has kept me in the blackest of ignorance of what he knows. However, if Calden isn't guilty, you can trust Trafford to find it out and let it be known, even if Calden has confessed on a stack of Bibles a mile high."

"Trafford!" exclaimed Grimbleshaw. "All he wants is to find somebody he can convict, guilty or not guilty." "Don't you believe it," said Beckwith, with a force that surprised Grimbleshaw. "Trafford's after the guilty man. Nothing less will satisfy him."

"I wish I believed it," said Grimbleshaw. "Well you can. Believe it as most folks don't believe their Bibles! Hold to it as most folks let go the Ten Commandments! Trafford's sharp; Trafford'll resort to any trick to learn the truth, but the truth's what he's after and that's the saving grace of the man. Moreover, he doesn't rest till he gets it."

"I was coming to consult you," said Grimbleshaw, remembering his errand. "To do with this case?" asked Beckwith. Grimbleshaw nodded. "I can't take it if your interests in any way conflict with young Calden's."

"They don't, but he'll assert positively that they do. Just now young Calden is in anything but a pleasant frame of mind toward me."

To be Continued.)

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