

Crystal Gray's Legacy

Taken from the
Notebook of an Old Detective

by Charles Edmonds Walk

And With Names and Places Hidden Published as a Proof That
Truth Is Stranger Than Fiction

It is not invariably that a detective is called upon to match his wits against criminal cunning. Many of life's most intricate and perplexing complications flow out of acts that are innocent enough in themselves, or even inspired by the most praiseworthy of motives; but, of course, whose distant results could not possibly have been imagined, much less anticipated. Cases like these form pleasant breaks in the depressing, monotonous procession of such as owe their origin to criminal activity or illegitimate practices.

At the same time the domestic problems are often the most difficult to cope with; all of the operative's resources of intelligence, skill and experience are sometimes baffled; but many of them offer phases of interest that are quite as compelling as when he is trying to solve, say, an unusual murder. All sorts of eccentrics are met with; queer traits of character play their part; sometimes the participants are plunged into tragedy, or else tragedy is averted only in the nick of time. The archives of the Sutherland Detective agency conceal the records of many cases of this description.

One of these unusual cases was brought to the attention of Felix Hazard in a rather remarkable way.

Nearby the Sutherland offices was a shabby little shop, whose proprietor dealt in all sorts of curious odds and ends, though his tastes ran chiefly to old books. The shop, in truth, reflected the proprietor's quaint character, and most of his curios were so extremely bizarre that they attracted purchasers by their striking and fantastic oddity. Thus the old man, whose name was Philo Godall, prospered.

One morning when Hazard was in the shop Godall spread upon the dirty showcase a bookseller's trade journal and pointed to a certain advertisement.

"Here is something peculiar," said he. "I have seen that advertisement, or one just like it, in four or five different papers during the past week." Hazard looked where the old man's finger was pointing, and read:

"I WILL PAY \$1,000 FOR TWO CERTAIN BOOKS."

"The title pages of the two books show them to be:

"1. 'Principall Navigations, Volages and Discoveries of the English Nation,' by Richard Hakluyt, London, 1582.

"2. 'A Particular Discourse Concerning Western Discoveries,' by Richard Hakluyt, London, 1584.

"These two volumes are not genuine, but spurious, first editions, and are intrinsically worth only the paper upon which they are printed.

"As heirlooms, however, they have a value to the undersigned, who will pay \$1,000 (\$500 for each volume) upon delivery to him in an unutilized or otherwise undamaged condition.

"When the library of the late H. Sydenor Gray was disposed of in June, 1913, the two books specified were included in the catalogue by mistake. I am extremely anxious to recover them.

"Address: Edward S. Gray, R. F. D. 14, Unaminee, Ill."

Hazard looked at the old dealer. "Well," said he, "what's so peculiar about that?"

Before replying, Godall stooped and fished something from underneath the counter. He laid two dinky, scratched and battered leather-bound volumes upon the showcase.

"There," he announced, "are the very books the young man is so eager to get."

The detective examined them curiously, and as the conversation proceeded he ran through the pages with deft fingers, now and then pausing to examine one or another with more particularity.

"Why young?" he asked. "Do you know him?"

"I've seen him. It was I who bought most of old Sydenor Gray's library—these two among the rest of the books. He had very little that was worth a good deal, and so of course they didn't add much to the estate.

"But the funny part about it is that several weeks ago I sold these very same books, and after seeing the advertisement for the first time, to save my soul all I could remember of the transaction was that I had accepted a dollar apiece for them; I hadn't the faintest recollection of who had bought them.

"I didn't worry much about it, though; I thought, 'If the purchaser should chance upon this advertisement he'll find he's made a good investment,' and dismissed the matter from my mind.

"Well, sir, what do you think? Not more than an hour ago he came blustering in here and slammed them down on the counter in a towering rage—said I'd cheated him, and so on. Tried to sell 'em, I guess, to somebody that knew more about old editions than he did.

"I didn't argue with him; I gave him back his two dollars and he went away apparently satisfied." Godall chuckled in high good humor.

Hazard congratulated him on his windfall and thought no more of the

This story throbs with realism in the word's narrowest meaning. It is a faithful rendering of an authentic experience in the career of a high official of a detective agency whose name is a household word throughout the English-speaking world. Real names of persons and places are sometimes disguised. In all other respects the amazing, often thrilling, always gripping facts are recorded just as they happened.

incident until, some hours later, it was recalled to his mind in a surprising manner.

A card was brought to his desk by one of the young men whose duty it was to intercept callers the instant they stepped from the elevator into the reception room. The card bore the name, "Miss Crystal Gray," and in a moment the name's owner was ushered into Hazard's presence.

He beheld a tall, slender blonde woman, pretty and smartly gowned, who carried herself with a quiet, assured air. He rose at her entrance and indicated the chair where all callers were invited to sit; one that faced, across Hazard's wide table-desk, two high, uncurtained windows. Thus were disingenuous persons placed at a disadvantage, for the glare beat upon them like a searchlight, while Hazard, his back to the windows, was in comparative shadow.

As he returned to his own seat the girl gravely surveyed him.

"This is a novel experience for me," she began, "and I hope I haven't been driven to calling on you because of my stupidity; but, really, I am at my wits' end."

Hazard smilingly encouraged her.

"Suppose you tell me what is worrying you. Sometimes it is possible to clear away another's troubles by a word."

The fair visitor appeared thoughtful for a moment, then she asked:

"Is the name of H. Sydenor Gray familiar to you?"

"I have heard the name," was his reply, "but it is not familiar to me."

"Well," the girl pursued, "he was my uncle. He was an active man of affairs until about eight years ago, when, his health failing with advancing years, he returned to the old family home at Unaminee, where he remained till his death last May.

"Mr. Gray never married, but during his life he acquired a considerable fortune—or, at least, he was so reputed, and he led others to believe that he had; but if he left any fortune nobody has been able to find it.

"Before we go any further I want to make my position clear. When Mr. Gray returned to Unaminee I was thirteen years old, living with my widowed mother in the old home place. We were very poor and unable to maintain the property in anything like the style it was intended for, and it had run down shamefully. Indeed, mother made no attempt to keep it up. It was much too grand and imposing to attract a tenant in a small town like Unaminee, and we were obliged to cling to two or three of the smaller rooms because we had nowhere else to go.

"Well, all this was changed when Mr. Gray appeared. A landscape gardener and a host of assistants were hired and the extensive grounds cleared and beautified, and the house was repaired and refurnished throughout. In short, he spent money lavishly to put everything in order, and I daresay there is no country place anywhere more beautiful than 'Gray Gables.'"

"Poor mother enjoyed the restored splendors of her old home little more than a year, when she died. It was then uncle informed me that I was to be his heiress, intimating that it was in his power to make me rich. I have much to be grateful for to my uncle. He provided the best musical education available, so that I am now able to make a fair living. I'm not a grand opera star, nor ever shall be; but summer chautauquas and lyceum engagements during the winter keep me employed.

"During the last three years I have been much away from home, and something over a year ago a nephew of Mr. Gray's, Edward Gray, showed up at 'Gray Gables.' Years ago Edward got into some sort of trouble that involved uncle; but he must have given promises of reformation and in some way made amends so that uncle forgave him.

"Uncle, however, repeatedly assured me that Edward's coming in no way would affect my position; as a matter of fact, he told me less than a year before he died that he could provide suitably for his nephew without diminishing my inheritance.

"I am going into this so fully because I want you to see clearly that from the beginning I was imbued with the idea that some day I should inherit the bulk of uncle's money, and he made no secret of the fact that it was no inconceivable fortune. Indeed, nobody could have kept up an

establishment like his without ample means.

"Now, to be entirely frank, uncle in many respects was—well, queer, eccentric. Practically nothing was known of his past life, and he always avoided talking about it. He used to rail at banks, a firm belief of his being that their chief aim was to defraud their depositors.

"So where was his money? "The sequel showed that his bank balance was comparatively small.

"The rest I can tell you in a few words. Four days before he died he summoned Edward and me together to his room. He handed each of us a sealed envelope, instructing us that they were not to be opened until he was dead. 'There are your legacies,' said he, in effect. 'I have converted everything into money and negotiable securities; there's no use paying heavy probate and inheritance fees and being mulcted by unscrupulous lawyers. The old home already has been transferred to you, Crystal, and the deed recorded.'

"Well, after uncle was buried Edward and I opened our envelopes—and I might add that it was only shame at my contempt of his greed that made my cousin keep his envelope intact that long. His contained a check for \$10,000, and mine—what would you guess?—a check for \$686.50! Nothing else.

"As I say, I make a fair living; but here I am saddled with a huge mansion and acres of ground that require an army of servants to keep it up, something that is utterly beyond my means. At the same time the idea of parting with it is too repugnant to be thought of. My grandfather built it; my father was born and lived there till he died; it is the only home I ever knew. And, oh, it is a paradise! "However, I would have accepted the situation, bitter as was the disappointment, and been resigned to make the best of it, had it not been for the conduct of Edward Gray. On one pretext and another he has remained at 'Gray Gables' since uncle's death. I don't object to that, because under present conditions I can't be there much myself; but whenever I have a day or two I run down to Unaminee, and at such times I am being confronted on every hand by evidences of Edward's prying inquisitiveness.

"This unpleasant trait first manifested itself when he revealed a desire for the cancelled check which my uncle had given me. Why in the world should he want that? Purely out of sentiment, he assured me; he wished to keep it as a memento of his dead uncle. "To be perfectly candid, I dislike Edward; I don't trust him. I believe him to be sly and tricky; so I doubted his motives. I told him that for the same reason I might want to keep the check myself, and reminded him that he had one of his own that would serve the same purpose. A day or two later he again asked me for the check, this time declaring that he wished to have both of them framed and hung in the library. When I again refused to give it to him he began making love to me and finally proposed marriage.

"But the climax revealed itself about ten days ago. At that time I missed my check from the desk drawer where I kept it. Edward was supposed to be in Chicago, so I couldn't speak about it to him. Yesterday I went unexpectedly to 'Gray Gables' and found the check back in its proper place.

"Have you the check with you?" Hazard inquired.

Miss Gray opened her hand-bag and produced it; it was precisely like any other check that has been properly drawn, indorsed and presented for payment. It appeared thus:

"To the Unaminee State Bank of Unaminee, Illinois:

June 9, 1913.

"Pay to the order of Crystal Gray \$686.55 (Six Hundred Eighty-six and 55-100 dollars).

"H. SYDENOR GRAY."

Conspicuous upon the face of the instrument was the bank's cancellation stamp, which showed that the check had been paid June 21, 1913. As it stood it represented nothing but a record of the transaction; it was worth just so much waste-paper, and no more.

The detective, however, subjected the slip to a careful examination. On the back appeared merely the indorsement, "Crystal Gray;" but this side of the paper he scrutinized for several minutes through a magnifying lens. By and by he laid it aside and regarded the girl curiously.

"Well," he said at last, "what do you think about it?"

"I don't know what to think—unless it is that Edward suspects a hidden hoard and is moving heaven and earth to find it."

"That's obvious enough. But—"

Hazard's eyes narrowed—"how did Edward learn that your check—this slip of paper—bore the secret of the treasure's hiding place?"

The expression of bewilderment and incomprehension that overspread

Miss Gray's countenance was too real and convincing to have been assumed. Hazard added:

"If you did not know yourself that the check bore such a message, how could he have possibly discovered the fact?"

"What do you mean?" returned the girl blankly. "I—I don't understand."

Smiling, Hazard pressed a button. "I think I can make everything clear in a few minutes," he explained; a rash declaration which subsequent developments were to contradict so emphatically that he was goaded to his best endeavors to justify what was tantamount to a promise.

He was hurriedly scribbling a note when a youth appeared at the door. He paused to direct: "Bring me the alcohol-lamp," and by the time the youth had fetched the lamp the note was finished and sealed in an envelope addressed to "Philo Goodall."

"Deliver that and report immediately," were his instructions as he handed the message to the young man.

The door closed behind the messenger and Hazard lighted the wick beneath a metal plate.

Shortly he extinguished the flame and spread the cancelled check face down upon the heated plate. "Come over here and watch," he invited.

Profoundly curious, Miss Gray came round his desk and watched across his shoulder. In a few seconds faint, reddish lines began to appear upon the blank surface, and a little exclamation of surprise burst from her lips as here and there a letter became clear until the lines resolved themselves into this sentence:

Hakluyt's "Principall Navigations" "Western Discoveries" are the gateway to your inheritance.

"Sympathetic ink," Hazard explained. "The inference that the check bore some sort of message was pretty manifest and I looked for evidence of it. My lens brought to light numerous slight abrasions where the pen-point scratched the glaze.

"And now," he added, as the messenger re-entered and laid a brown-paper parcel and a folded trade journal upon the desk and at the same time handed him a note, "with the key

mean to intrude. Nobody seemed to hear my knock, I—"

Hazard interrupted.

"Come in, Helen. This is Miss Gray; she has brought rather a pretty problem for us to solve." And to Miss Gray he explained: "Miss Bertel is one of our operatives."

But Miss Bertel did not seem very curious respecting Miss Gray and her problem and the latter, after promising to return the next forenoon, gave Helen Bertel a final doubtful, inquiring glance, and departed.

"A very pretty girl," Hazard commented.

"Was she?" was Miss Bertel's indifferent response. "I didn't notice. I came to learn whether the papers in the Minch case—"

Hazard cut in: "I mailed them two hours ago. What about them?"

"That's all. The chief told me to ask."

She was moving toward the door again when Hazard stayed her. He indicated the two shabby volumes and began telling her about the enigma whose elucidation he had undertaken. By degrees professional zeal excited the girl's interest and, sinking into the chair recently vacated by Miss Gray, she lent an attentive ear to the recital.

And all that evening, and till the small hours of morning, the two labored side by side over the two volumes. Thin, cunning instruments searched the covers for hidden recesses: X-ray photographs were taken; page by page, line by line, word by word, the text was gone over in search of a cryptographic message; heat and various acids were applied on the chance that invisible ink might be made visible, as had been accomplished with the check; but all to no purpose. Tired, worn and sleepy after hours of concentration and application, Hazard impatiently pushed the books away from him and owned himself baffled, beaten.

Helen smiled at him slyly.

"Cheer up, Felix," she encouraged; "Miss Crystal Gray can come again another day—and again and yet again."



"Well," He Said at Last, "What Do You Think About It?"

in our hands, let's see whether we can't unlock the gates. First, though, look at this," and he spread the journal open at Edward Gray's advertisement.

Miss Gray read her cousin's extraordinary offer with growing wonder and astonishment.

"Whatever in the world!" she presently marvelled, meeting the detective's grave regard. "How did Edward know—where did he learn the check's secret, when I, the one most interested, had no inkling of such a thing?"

Felix Hazard shook his head. "That's immaterial now. The important fact is that he did know about it, and his efforts to unearth the hiding place confirm our conclusion that the treasure does exist. We should try to find it first—or, watch your cousin, and in case he locates it get it away from him somehow. He might be able, though, to throw the matter into the courts and exact a division.

"Here is our chance. I have a note from the present owner of the books in which he says he has answered the advertisement and that if the offer is genuine he expects to deliver them at once and collect the thousand dollars.

"My suggestion is that I try to wrest the hidden message from the books by an application of my methods. I shall devote this evening to it. Return here tomorrow morning and perhaps I'll have good news for you."

Miss Gray was still standing close to Hazard, and in a sudden burst of enthusiasm she impulsively caught his hands in both of hers.

"Oh, how splendid!" she cried delightedly. "And I shall be generous—indeed, indeed I shall!"

At the sound of a soft voice in the doorway both turned and beheld a tall, lovely girl with a wealth of chestnut hair and wide gray eyes, which just now glanced with cool indifference from one to the other of them.

"Pardon me," she repeated; "I didn't



mean to intrude. Nobody seemed to hear my knock, I—"

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Edward Gray had had a caller, an old man, who brought with him a brown paper parcel, which he did not carry away again. Since the arrival of the parcel Helen had seen Edward Gray only at rare moments, and he was growing so pale and haggard with anxiety that she was beginning to feel pity for him. Manifestly, he was no more successful at digging out the books' secret than she and Felix had been.

What little she had seen of Edward Gray, however, confirmed Miss Bertel's estimation of the young man's character; and thus a bond of sympathy and understanding was created between the two girls. To tell the truth, Helen was thawing toward the other girl, who, like herself, was independent and self-reliant, and undismayed by the necessity of wresting a living from the world. She sincerely hoped Miss Crystal would find her inheritance.

On the fourth day Felix Hazard was shown into the vast room at "Gray Gables" that had once served as its library. Both Helen and the pretty mistress of the house greeted him. His first words were addressed to the latter.

"Where is your cousin?" he curtly asked.

"Locked in his room, fighting with the musty old books. I'm afraid he will be ill unless his efforts are rewarded pretty soon."

"He'll gain nothing," Hazard averred, "if he pores over them till doomsday. Meanwhile, we may get busy ourselves without fear of interruption from him."

This room was Mr. Sydenor Gray's library, I suppose?

His glance skirted the walls, which were bare save for a few pictures. The proportions were large, the shape irregular; that is, its lines were broken by two wide and deep alcoves, an enormous fireplace and three large bay-window embrasures. The shelves with their hundreds of queer and mostly worthless old books were gone, and the room had been redecorated and refurnished.

"Yes," Miss Gray acknowledged.

"Have you any recollection of where the two Hakluyts stood on the shelves—with reference to the wall, I mean?"

"Mercy goodness, no!" was the emphatic reply. "Every inch of wall space, almost to the ceiling, was completely hidden by books; nobody, not even uncle himself, could have told you precisely where any particular volume was."

"Then," Hazard solemnly announced, "if you want to secure your legacy, you will have to wreck the walls till you find it. And at that the labor may be in vain; my theory may be wrong again, you know."

Now, at Hazard's last question Helen Bertel's expressive eyes kindled, and her pretty face grew animated with a light of comprehension; but she waited till he and Miss Gray got deep into a discussion of probable expense, likely damage to the house, structural difficulties to be met and overcome, the danger of following another false and this time a costly trail, when she rose and stole quietly from the room. By and by she returned and interrupted the colloquy by dumping a score or more of large photographs upon the library table.

Miss Gray and Hazard looked at them inquiringly, and then at Helen for an explanation.

"These pictures," Helen began, "were taken for the Suburban Home magazine, so Miss Gray informed me when I found them and asked about them. There are two exceptionally clear views of this very room as it was before it was dismantled and the books taken away."

In a twinkling Hazard ran through the pile until the views were found. The two did, in truth, prove to be unusually sharp and clear cut. With his pocket lens Hazard scanned them intently. At last he looked up with an air of triumph.

"Eureka!" he cried. "Sufficient of the titles is legible to obviate any chance of error."

He bounded to his feet, and, referring to the photograph from time to time, and comparing it with certain definite points of the room, he walked to the west wall and laid his hand upon a spot on its surface.

"There," said he, "if it is anywhere, lies your legacy, Miss Gray. The two books were, in very truth, the 'gateway' to your fortune, and not the repository of the secret of its hiding place."

And this time they were not disappointed. When Hazard and Helen said their farewells to Crystal Gray she was richer by some \$300,000 in valuable bonds and stock certificates, besides gold and currency. The reward of the two operatives was commensurate with the service rendered, and the girl proved herself generous as well as grateful.

To Helen, as Hazard and she rode back together to the city, he explained:

"Cousin Edward packed his belongings when he learned what was in the wind, and quietly stole away. I had a word with him, however, before he left."

"You discovered, I suppose, how he learned the secret of the check," said Helen.

"Yes," Hazard handed her a small fragment of paper. In Sydenor Gray's handwriting was the direction: "Preserve this cheque; it holds the secret of your inheritance."

Hazard pursued:

"He meant to pin that to his niece's check, but pinned it to Edward's instead. It puzzled him for a time; but he finally arrived at the correct conclusion, though like myself he failed to consider the true meaning of the word 'gateway'; he believed the answer was to be found inside the books instead of behind them."

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