FIVE MILLION POUNDS

OUR SERIAL STORY.

by T. W. H. CRAIG REID.

CHAPTER XV.

LOOK THROUGH WHAT.

It was late at night when I got back to York, excited and elated by the great discovery I had made. A letter from Harding awaited me, in which he told of the arrest he was making for the purpose of finding Gregson. Through the celebrated detective Max Shalski he believed that he might at last get on his track, though the chase would undoubtedly be a difficult one. I did not go to bed until I had answered the letter and given Harding a full account of my visit to the hall. I concluded by imploring him to come to me at once, if that were possible, as that we might act in concert in the next momentous move in the game.

"A gentleman is waiting to see you, sir, downstairs." It was early the next morning, while I was at breakfast in my private room at the hotel, that I received this information.

"Do you know his name?"

"Yes sir; he would not give me his name, but he said I was to tell you that he came from Mr. Harding."

"Show him up at once."

The stranger was a short man, with powerful frame, resolute face, shrewd face, and bright eyes that seemed to see everything at once.

"Beg pardon, sir, for intruding," he said, addressing me with a business like air; "I thought you might not wish to have my name spread over the house, for you see it is rather a well known name now, sir; I am the detective Mr. Harding has been employing on your account, I believe."

"Mr. Shalski!"

"Yes, Max Shalski at your service, sir." He paused a note-book out of his pocket and opening it continued: "I understand you want to meet with a party of the name of James Gregson, aged about thirty, tall and fair haired. Well, Mr. Fenton, don't be offended, but I must tell you at once that that description won't give me any help in finding the man. You see, sir, there are thousands of tall, fair haired men of thirty walking about the streets, as for the hotel, you may be sure that Mr. Gregson is not Mr. Gregson now, if he has any reason to wish to keep in hiding. You will have to tell me something more."

"But I am afraid that is just what I cannot do."

"Well, well so, sir. You must excuse me putting you through your catechism, Mr. Fenton. It must be done if I'm to lay hold of your man."

And in a surprisingly short space of time Mr. Shalski had made himself the master of all the particulars, good, bad and indifferent, which I knew about Gregson, including even the story Daisy had told me. When I told him of the photograph of Daisy I had passed up to the railway carriage after Gregson left, he at once asked me for it; and—very reluctantly, for it was the only portrait of my darling which I possessed—I parted with it to him.

At the end of an interview of three-quarters of an hour the detective pulled out his watch, and rising hastily said: "I must be off, sir. I've just time to catch the express back to town."

"But are you going to London to find Gregson? My own opinion is that you'll find him somewhere about here."

"That is my opinion also, sir; and no doubt if I had three months to spare I could lay a heavy wager that I should 'nab' him in this very city of York before the end of that time. But you see, sir, it is a matter of life and death; and a single day might make all the difference, so I must follow the safe clew you have given me, and not the uncertain one."

"And what is the safe clew?"

"The time about which Gregson landed in England from Melbourne. This is all I have to go upon. I must track him down from that hour to the present. Good day to you, sir." And in another instant he was hurrying off to catch the ten o'clock express to town.

The remainder of that day I spent in consultation with our solicitor, and in awaiting the arrival of Harding. He came to York by an evening train, and greeted my heartily enough when we met upon the railway platform.

"What do you say, Harding; shall we apply to the home secretary at once on the strength of the discovery of the strychnine?"

"No, we must wait. Don't look disappointed, my dear fellow. As soon as I received your letter this morning I hurried off to Belmont's chambers and was fortunate enough to get five minutes of his precious time. Indeed, I believe he gave me fully fifteen minutes if the truth must be told. I read your letter to him and asked him his advice. 'I should like to consult Grange before I say anything,' was his answer."

"You mean the judge."

"Yourself. Our one hope, you know, is in the judge. It will rest with him in the end whether there is to be a pardon or not; and Belmont, who knows that all his sympathies are on our side, is anxious to take him along with us in every step."

A consultation as I had been to see in a judge only the awful being clothed in a mediæval costume, who disposed life and death, liberty and slavery, from the judgment seat, I could hardly realize the fact that such a man should be full of active human sympathy, even in behalf of a fellow creature who he had but doomed to the gallows. So it was however.

"Well," continued Harding, "I had a note at four o'clock from Belmont to say that Grange was very much pleased to hear of this discovery, which would of course need to be properly authenticated; but that something further must be obtained—something if possible bearing to break down the evidence as to motive—failing any steps were taken at the home office. You see it is not a commutation of the sentence that we want—it is a free pardon."

"Yes," I answered, feeling depressed and disappointed, for I had thought that all our troubles were at an end now that we had discovered the strychnine. "I suppose we must press, but I confess that I seem to be at the end of my resources."

"Now, my good fellow, you must not give up in despair. Let us wait until we have caught Gregson. Who knows what he can tell us?"

I sat in gloomy meditation. Four precious days had already passed. It is true that they had not been wasted; but Daisy still lay under the awful doom, which was hourly drawing nearer to her. A heavy sigh broke from my lips.

Harding evidently anxious to divert my thoughts, asked me to tell him all the particulars of my visit to the hall, and I complied with his request.

"Have you got the memorandum book you picked up in the room Flinter had been using?"

"Yes," I said, and threw it across the table to him.

He opened it and looked at it long and carefully. Albeit Nothing was to be made out of it. Page after page was filled with hieroglyphics.

Harding studied the book for nearly half an hour, often making jottings on a sheet of paper and referring again and again to particular pages. He laid it down wearily at last.

"I can do nothing with it," he said. "It is evidently some very intricate form of cipher. Such things are to be read, however, and we must have this read. We cannot afford to lose any chance of letting upon a clew."

"But whom can you get to read it?"

"We must think that over. Perhaps Shalski may be able to give us some assistance."

The next day was spent in a journey to Barton at the request of Eastwood. From Barton we went with Eastwood to Little Loxton for the purpose of seeing Smith, the chemist. That person immediately recognized the parcel found in the secret staircase at the hall as being that in which he had sold some quantity of strychnine. On removing the sealed outer wrapper he showed us an inner covering, on which the label was repeated, with the address, and, in addition, the date, "Oct. 7," in the chemist's own handwriting. There was, therefore, no longer any doubt that, so far as the mere possession of strychnine at the time of the murder was concerned, the evidence given against Daisy at her trial had been absolutely neutralized. Affidavits describing the discovery and identification of the parcel were duly made on the same day by Sparks, Eastwood and myself before one of the Barton magistrates.

Two days passed without any further news being made. It was a whole week since Daisy's condemnation, and only two days remained to us in which to save her. My impatience was at fever height, and Harding had a hard task to keep me in any degree calm or self-possessed. I had not dared to seek another interview with my darling. Until the question of life and death was settled in one way or the other, I felt that to see her only more would only be to unman her unnecessarily and to rob me of the little strength which I still had left. But through the chaplain of the jail I was in constant communication with her. Every day I wrote to her, and she knew that I was living for her sake and her's alone.

This first week, I say, had come to an end before we heard anything more of Balski. It was Sunday evening, and I was sitting by myself, wearily seeking for some fresh clew which might, if there have escaped my attention, when the detective was suddenly ushered into my room.

"Good evening, Mr. Fenton. I'm afraid you think I have been a long time over my work; but it has been as stiff a job as I have had for some time. The fellow has done nothing but dodge and take fresh names. If it had not been for that photograph you lent me I should have been baffled at last."

"And you—have you found him?" I cried eagerly.

"Yes, sir, he's here at your service; but before I bring him in to see you I should like to give you a hint. I don't know whether you'll find him a willing witness or the reverse; but if the latter, just ask him if he remembers Smith & Sharp, of Gracechurch street. That will bring him soon enough, sir. You see he got into trouble there ten years ago, and has been wanted ever since. I'll wait outside till you have had your talk with him."

He was leaving the room, when Harding, who had just heard of the detective's arrival, entered, and in a few words was informed of the situation.

"Let Balski make himself useful while he is waiting," said Harding; "give him that memorandum book."

I handed the little note-book to the detective. He looked at it gravely.

"I wonder if I can crack this nut? It's a hard one; but I'll try."

We withdrew, and in two minutes the door was opened, and Mr. James Gregson entered with the impudent smile upon his face which I knew so well. Bowing with an air of familiarity, which was not without a distinct touch of insolence, he looked from me to Harding, as though inquiring the reason which had led us to take so much trouble to find him. Beneath this outward assumption of self confidence I thought I could catch signs that the fellow was not quite so much at his ease as he wished to appear. I invited him to take a seat, and gravely stated to him the object I had in seeking him out.

He looked at me with a satirical smile on his lips when I had finished my statement.

"So you think I can clear your friend Miss Stancliffe, do you?"

"I hope you can throw some light upon the mystery that surrounds Mr. Manleverer's death."

He laughed outright. "Of course I can do that, but you have come to the wrong man for information that will clear Miss Daisy. Have you forgotten what I told you in the railway train when you were on your way to the old man's house?"

"It is precisely because I have not forgotten it that I have desired to see you again. You spoke then of a conspiracy to commit murder. I want you to be kind enough to tell me frankly what you meant by your words. You remember that you charged not only Miss Stancliffe, but Flinter and Dr. Branksome, and myself as well, with being in some plot. What did you mean by it?"

"O, don't be afraid on your own account, Mr. Fenton. I know now that you were not in the plot. You were only the dupe, and a very simple one, too."

I was determined that, come what might, I should not lose my temper during this interview of such vital importance to my darling. The more I saw of the man the more certain I became that he did not speak without knowledge, and when I observed the growing gravity of Harding's face I felt sure that he also entertained the same conviction. I took no notice, therefore, of Gregson's sneer but repeated my question.

"Tell me, if you please, what was the nature of the plot of which you spoke?"

"Is it possible," he retorted, "that you are so dull as not to see the nature of the plot for yourself now? I should have given you credit for being not quite so stupid as you appear to me. Good Lord! The whole thing has been carried out under your nose, and now that it is finished you come to me to tell you what it means."

"Pray take pity, then, on my stupidity, and tell me all."

"Oh dear, no!" he said with a mocking laugh. "My secret is worth a good deal more to me than it can be to you."

"Is it money that you want for telling the truth? If——"

"Yes, it is money; but I don't want any from you. You are a very clever fellow, I dare say, in your own opinion, and a very knowing one; but you must not think you can buy me."

"Well, kindly say what you are prepared to tell me without being bought."

"Just this, Mr.—Mr.—I declare I forget your name. What I told you would happen when I saw you in the train has all come true. Manleverer has been murdered by the gang who have been plotting against his life for years, and who are now going to get clear off with the swag—all but one of them; and thanks to some stupid bungling on their part—or perhaps I ought to say on your part, mister, for I'm told you have meddled a good bit in the business—she'll be hanged. That's all."

The malice of the man revealed itself in the tones in which he spoke. I kept my temper, however, but I say at the same time that the moment had arrived when I ought to use the weapon intrusted to me by the detective.

"Mr. Gregson," I said, "does that be the name by which you choose to call yourself, you are making a great mistake in supposing that I am quite so helpless as you imagine. I have the means of making you speak, and by heaven, sir, I'll use them, and quickly, too, or make you pay dearly for your silence."

He looked up at me with a startled air. The fellow was a coward, and at the first straight blow he appeared to be more than inclined to surrender. But he recovered himself after a momentary pause.

"I don't know what you are talking about. First of all you want to bribe me, and then you try bullying. I'm not come here to be either bought or sold."

"Then, perhaps, as you don't want to be sold, you will tell me your story without compelling me to summon the detective who is waiting in the next room, in order that I may make a communication to him about yourself and Smith & Sharp, Gracechurch street."

The stroke told even more quickly and completely than I had dared to hope. A ghastly pallor overspread the fellow's face, and he sat for more than a minute speechless, staring at me with eyes full of terror.

"You don't mean to bring that up against me after all these years! Good God! how have you got to know anything about it?" After a pause he continued: "Well, I'll tell you as much as I can if you'll promise not to give me up."

"If you tell me everything, you will be quite safe—so far as I am concerned. If you do not, then you must take the consequences."

All his assumed ease had vanished, and he sat before me now an object a craven as I have ever seen. Balski's record had worked like magic. In a faltering voice the wretched creature asked if he might have "a crop of swamy" before he began his story, and I was by no means sorry to supply him with it. Then he began and unfolded the marvelous tale which I shall repeat in his own words, merely omitting his redundancies of oath.

"They have been plotting against Manleverer ever since I've known him, and that is seven years. Whom do I mean by they? I mean Dr. Branksome and his gang; that is, Flinter and the girl Daisy, and a lot of fellows in Australia, and now they have got this Footyke in the business. You see it has been a regular company, and they have been working it for years. Talk of gold mining; but there is no gold mine in all Australia that will yield half so much as Mr. Manleverer. So you need not wonder that the whole party—there are some of them still over there—have been working at the business for years past. At one time I know they meant to make an end of the old man in his own house at Wangaora. But you see some of them had got a bit thrown upon there, and they were afraid that if anything happened it would not do; so then the doctor hit upon a plan of bringing him away to England and getting rid of him quietly, at a time when the worst members of the gang were at the other side of the world."

"But how could it profit Dr. Branksome to kill Mr. Manleverer? He was not his heir."

"No, that is just it. But the plot began a great deal sooner than you seem to suppose, it began nearly twenty years ago. At that time Manleverer had no heir. His only sister had died childless, and there was neither kith nor kin to come after him."

"His sister childless! Why, Miss Stancliffe had been born then."

"Just so, only in those days she was Miss Somebodyelse; Miss Stancliffe, as you call her, had not been thought of at that time."

Harding uttered a low cry of amazement. I found it difficult to put the next question.

"What in heaven's name do you mean?"

"I mean," he said doggedly, "that it was a plant from the very beginning! Dr. Branksome and his party were determined to get every farthing of the old man's money. He had no heir, and so they found one for him, and planted her on him successfully."

"But why should they have fixed upon Miss Stancliffe? What good did they imagine it would do them, supposing that he did leave everything to her?"

The sneering smile appeared on the fellow's face again.

"Really," he said, "you are not very bright. They must have found it easy to make a fool of you. Daisy was adopted by the doctor's wife when she was little more than a baby. She lived in the doctor's house for a dozen years or more, and Branksome got such an influence over her that he knew he could twist her round his fingers exactly as he pleased. Why, I bet you two to one that she has made her will in his favor since her arrest."

I could not command my countenance entirely when I heard this direct guess at the truth. It brought with it to my mind a terrible confirmation of the truthfulness of this unwilling witness.

"I see you know something about it," he continued. "Well, it is just as I thought it would be. They never meant the girl to share with them. She was to have all the kicks, while they got all the ha'pences. It would have been different, though, if she had let me1 to me."

"I don't want either to throw doubt upon your story or to seem to accept it without further inquiry; but I must ask you to tell me who, in your belief, Miss Stancliffe is?"

"Did I not tell you just now? No. Well, she is the daughter, I am told, of a poor old parson named Sheldon, who died at Melbourne twenty years ago. His wife lived twelve or eighteen months after him, and then she died, too, and Daisy was left a little child, without a friend in the world. It was then, as I've said, that Mrs. Branksome took pity on her, and adopted her. She was a good woman, was the doctor's wife, and he never dared to carry out his plot about Daisy until she was gone. God knows whether he did not help her off in the end. He was equal to it. At all events, as soon as she died, Branksome goes to poor old Manleverer, and tells him the whole tale—the tale he had made up—how he had kept the secret of Daisy's real birth until then, partly because of his promise to her mother, and partly for his wife's sake, as she would never have parted with the girl. Manleverer swallowed the bait whole, and from that time Branksome had complete command, not only over Daisy, but over the old man also."

"How have you got to learn all this?"

"That's my business," he said in sullen tones. But immediately some swift fear of the consequences of giving me offence took possession of his mind. "If you must know, I learned it all from an old servant of Branksome's whom I got hold of. I always suspected there was something wrong, and after Branksome quarrelled with me, and got me dismissed by Manleverer, I wormed the truth out of the old woman."

Harding and I were so much astounded by the extraordinary revelation thus made to us that neither of us felt capable of carrying Gregson's examination further. Strange as it may seem, we had no doubt as to the truth of his story. Rascal as the fellow unmistakably was, he had told his tale in a manner which compelled our acceptance of it. I sat bewildered, almost paralyzed, by the nature of his statements. Daisy not the niece of Manleverer! And Branksome the head of a gang of scoundrels, whose diabolical plot against the life of the millionaire had only now been carried out, after years of careful preparation! It seemed incredible, and yet in my heart I felt certain that it was true.

Harding was the first to recover the full use of his faculties.

"Will you be good enough," he said, addressing Gregson, "to give us your opinion, if you have one, as to the way in which Mr. Manleverer was murdered?"

"I thought you knew all about that. Daisy Stancliffe gave him the poison instead of his powder that night."

By a look Harding warned me to keep calm. "Do I understand," he purred, "that, in your opinion, Miss Stancliffe—for so, I think, we may still call her—administered the poison knowingly?"

"Why, put it to your own sense, sir. Somebody gave the old gentleman his dose that night. It was not done by Branksome, or by Flinter, or by Footyke, nor by Mr. Fenton here. Who did it? Not any of the English servants at Great Loxton. There's none of them in the secret, I am sure. Don't you see it must have been done by the girl who had been brought up for that very purpose—ever since she was a baby?"

"No!" I cried, regardless of Harding's appealing glance. "I do not see it. God only knows how the thing was done, but if Miss Stancliffe was the accomplice of these villains, she was an unconscious and innocent one."

"Then will you tell me how the thing was done? Why, you know yourself that neither Branksome nor Flinter had been near the hall for weeks before the old man died, and they were a thousand miles away when the dose was given."

I put my hand to my forehead wearily.

"Ah, if I could only tell you how it was done! I have thought, and thought over everything till my brain has grown giddy. There is only one theory that has even a chance in its favor, and of that, alas! if it be the true one, we can never obtain the proof."

"And what may that theory be?" asked Gregson, with an air of interest.

I hesitated as to whether to reveal my idea to him. It was one which had occurred to me more than once during the long sleepless watches of the night; but I had said nothing of it to any one, chiefly, I think, because it was but, and in the nature of things never could be anything more than, a theory. Unless a miracle were to happen, no proof of it, short of the confession of the criminals, could ever be adduced. Still, it might be well to hear Gregson's opinion of it.

"May it not have been possible," I said, "for a powder containing strychnine to have been secretly substituted by Flinter for one containing Mr. Manleverer's proper medicine? In that case Flinter might be able to prove an alibi, although he was really the culprit; and Miss Stancliffe may have given the poison to Mr. Manleverer, although perfectly innocent of any knowledge of its nature."

I heard a low chuckle and looked up. Balski had entered the room while I was speaking and had heard my theory.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen. I knocked twice, but I could not make you hear me. You'll excuse me, Mr. Fenton, but I should like to tell you that you have got on the right track at last. As soon as Mr. Harding told me the facts I saw the trick had been done in that way. But lor! What a pity Mr. Belmore didn't bring it out before the jury!"

"Got all you want out of this gentleman?"

"I hinted at it to him," I replied, "but he seemed to think it would only damage our case, as no proof could be tendered in support of it."

"True, that is the weak point; but you know, sir, I suppose, that murder has been done that way before? Aye, and an innocent man guillotined for the crime of which he knew nothing. I think, after all, Mr. Belmore was right not to suggest this while the mystery of the strychnine that the young lady had bought was unexplained. It would have been too far-fetched then. But things are different now, and the home secretary will have to think whether, after all, the evidence will justify him in refusing a reprieve. For my part, Mr. Fenton, I'll put my money on a respite."

Balski looked round at Gregson and evidently judged from the state of that gentleman's features that the screw had been applied to him not ineffectually.

"Got all you want out of this young gentleman?" he asked. "Enough for the present, eh! Well then, my good fellow, take your hook into the next room and wait there till I come to you. Don't trouble yourself about the door. It is locked and I have the key in my own pocket."

The detective winked knowingly at the unlucky Gregson and in this unceremonious manner dismissed him from our presence.

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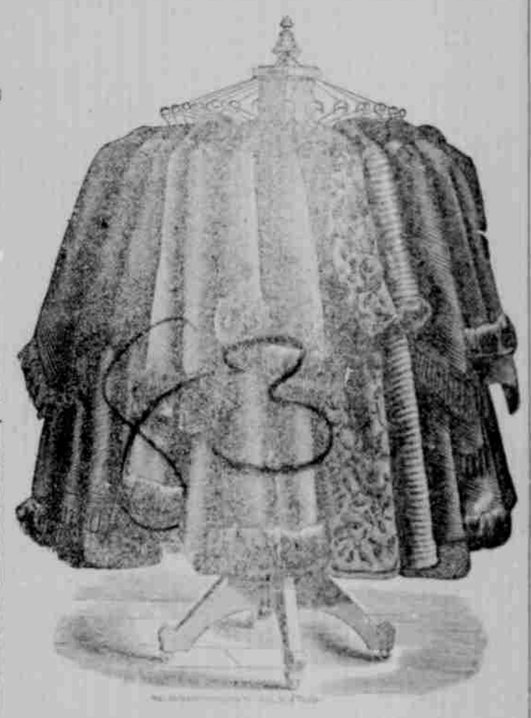

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D. L. DOWNEY, M. D., Detroit, Mich., Medical Record, Spring Co.

I order your water in a great variety of cases, and find it a most valuable diuretic. In Bright's disease, albuminuria, and dropsy, it has proved a most valuable remedy. In one case, where the patient had been bedridden for years, and was reduced to a skeleton, with anasarca, ascites, albuminuria, and a weak heart, after using your water for a few days the urine increased in quantity, the anasarca disappeared, the patient left his bed, and is now able to walk about the room. I shall use your water in my practice.

D. L. DOWNEY, M.D.

Pittsburgh, Pa., Medical Record.

For the benefit of those afflicted with Bright's disease, I feel bound to state that I had a patient, a lady of my acquaintance, who was given up by the best physicians in the city of Pittsburgh, and was expected to live but a few days longer, as she was suffering, as they said, with the worst form of Bright's disease. I had the pleasure of recommending your water to her, and she has now been a sound and healthy woman for two years. I feel that I owe your water the credit of the cure in my case, and shall use it in my practice. I shall also use it in other cases of Bright's disease, and shall take pleasure in recommending it to my brethren.

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MERRICK TWIN, Lockport, Medical Record, Spring Co.

I report herewith a case in the hotel where I am now staying. The patient is a gentleman, 70 years of age, who has been suffering with Bright's disease, and dropsy for the last three years. He has been under the care of the best physicians in the country, and has taken all the medicine they could give him, without any benefit. The water he was using when I first saw him was very high colored, and very scanty. The patient was bloated with dropsy, and was so short of breath that he could not lie down. I gave him your water, and it has done him more good than any other medicine he has taken. The quantity of urine has increased, the dropsy has left him, and he is now able to lie down and sleep. I have also used your water in my own family, with marked benefit in a case of albuminous kidney disease, and shall use it in my practice.

D. L. CHAPMAN, M.D.

CHICAGO, ILL., Medical Record, Spring Co.

I have been using your water in my practice for some time, and find it a valuable diuretic, and in albuminous kidney disease, and dropsy, it has proved a most valuable remedy. I have also used it in other cases, where it has been indicated, and always with marked benefit. I shall use it in my practice.

A. W. HELLMUTH, M.D., Kingston, Ont.

VALPARAISO, IND., Oct. 15, 1881. Medical Record, Spring Co.

Although I have not had a case of Bright's disease, I have used your water in my practice, and find it a valuable diuretic, and in albuminous kidney disease, and dropsy, it has proved a most valuable remedy. I have also used it in other cases, where it has been indicated, and always with marked benefit. I shall use it in my practice.

M. O'REILLY, Agent St. Paul's C.C.A., Chicago, Ill., Chicago, Ill.

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