

THE ONE IN THE FEN INN BY FERGUS HUME

CHAPTER VII.

After that interview with Felix I returned forthwith to London. I had accomplished the object of my journey and did not care about staying longer in Paris.

"There is some trickery about this, Mr. Denham," he said after consideration. "You do not, then, think my meeting with Francis Briarfield was a hallucination?"

"I think it is tricky," repeated Merrick, nursing his chin. "This is more a case for a detective than for a doctor.

"Better get a trained man, Mr. Denham. From what you have told me I see you have to deal with a criminal of no ordinary intelligence.

"Tell me your ideas, doctor, and I'll carry them out and report progress."

"Good! I'll be the sleeping partner," he said in an amused tone, "but I warn you, Mr. Denham, that from what I see of this case it will be one of great difficulty and may take months to work out."

"Oh, I can spare a few minutes," said the doctor quickly. "I work hard enough, so it is permitted to even a professional man to indulge occasionally in some amusement. This case is so to me."

"Well, and your idea?" "In the first place, I am inclined to agree with your idea of Felix passing himself off as Francis."

"I have abandoned that idea," said I dejectedly. "I saw Felix in Paris."

"Wait a moment," replied Merrick. "We'll come to that later on. Furthermore, I believe it was Felix you met at Marshminster—Felix, who called himself Francis and posed as the lover of Miss Bellin."

"But I saw him in Paris," said I, again clinging to that undeniable fact. "I know you did, but the pretended Francis of Marshminster and the real Felix of Paris are one and the same person."

"You mean that he followed me over?" I cried, suddenly enlightened. "Precisely, and suborned the manager of the Hotel des Etrangers."

"Can't you see?" said Merrick impatiently. "Felix wants to put a stop to your following up this case. From your story it is quite probable that he killed his brother through Strent. The whole circumstances of the Fen Inn are very suspicious. Your unexplained arrival on that night complicated matters. You saw how unwilling they were to admit you. Had you not arrived Francis would have vanished from the world, and none would have been a bit wiser. But when you came to Bellin's Hall Felix saw a new source of danger not only to his character, but to his life. He asked for a night's grace. During that night he went himself to the Fen Inn and hid the corpse in some bog hole."

your obstinacy raised a new danger. You said you would go to Paris and satisfy yourself of the existence of Felix. Now, then, you remained two days in London."

"Yes. I was not quite sure whether it was worth while carrying on the matter."

"It was a pity you wasted so much time," said Merrick, "for Felix took advantage of your negligence to slip to Paris and lay a trap for you. In plain words, he disappeared from Marshminster as Francis and reappeared in Paris as Felix."

"He might have done so. But don't you think I would have guessed the identity of the one with the other?"

"How could you?" said the doctor, "when the twins are alike in every respect? And, moreover, you firmly believed Olivia Bellin's lover was in Marshminster."

"But if I go down at once to Marshminster I'll detect the absence of Felix and so guess what has taken place."

"If you go down to Marshminster, you'll find Felix back again in his old place."

"Then Paris?" I queried uneasily. I was beginning to see I had been duped. "You forget Mr. Felix of Paris has gone to Italy and left no address. It's all safe there, and as he said he was going to the east for six months or so there will be plenty of time for the pretended Francis to marry Olivia."

"You don't believe that Felix of Paris has gone to Italy or the east?" "Of course not. I believe he arranged all these matters to baffle your prying and then calmly returned to Marshminster."

"But the manager of the hotel?" "He is in the pay of Felix. You'll get nothing out of him. Now, I am certain that is the explanation. Are you not surprised at its simplicity?"

"Yes, I am. It is astonishing I never thought of it before."

"Columbus and his egg once again," said Merrick grimly. "Well, what are you going to do next?"

"To drive to Marshminster and find out the movements of Felix on the night after the murder."

"Quite so, but first satisfy yourself on the subject of Francis."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "What day of the month were you at the Fen Inn?" continued Merrick. "On the 10th of June."

"Good! Francis there told you that he had just arrived from Chile. Now find out what boat he came by, look up his name in the passenger list and ascertain the date on which the true Francis arrived in England. That point established, you can prove the false Francis to be an impostor."

the month there was not much difficulty in finding what I wanted. "Here you are," said Chambers, beckoning to me. "Only one ship this month from Chile—a steamer, the Copiapo. Arrived on the 6th of June. Dane & Paxton, 45 Devereux lane."

I copied this down in my notebook, refused Chambers' hospitable invitation to luncheon and went off at once to Devereux lane. Here I had no difficulty in seeing the passenger list of the Copiapo, and one of the first names I set my eyes on was Francis Briarfield.

"This puts the matter beyond all doubt," said I, making a note of this. "If Francis Briarfield did not arrive in London till the 6th of this month, he cannot be the man now bearing his name at Bellin Hall."

I was now perfectly satisfied that Merrick's idea was correct. In order to confuse and throw me off the scent, Felix had followed me to Paris and appeared in propria persona. But for the doctor's suggestion of the shipping list I should not have been able to prove this, but now I held incontrovertible evidence in my hands to prove that Felix was trading on the marvelous resemblance between his brother and himself.

Francis had arrived in England on the 6th of June, he had met me at the Fen Inn on the 10th and had then been found dead to death by his brother through a third party. But I was now on the trail and hoped to run to earth both the unnatural brother and his vile tool. I felt like the hero of some wild romance.

On returning to my rooms in Duke street I wrote off at once to Merrick, telling him of my success in proving the identity of Francis with the man who had been slain at the Fen Inn. It now remained for me to go down to Marshminster and there make inquiries as to the movements of Felix on the night of this murder.

I felt confident that I could pursue such a search without hindrance, as he would be quite satisfied that I would now rest after the Paris episode. No man in his senses would search for a dead man when that man had been conclusively proved to be alive. So Felix doubtless thought and rejoiced in his cleverness in thus putting an end to my inquiries. But mark how ironical is fate. Felix advised me to consult a doctor about my hallucination, as he chose to call it. I took that advice and saw Merrick. Merrick had nullified all his plans by solving the riddle with which Felix was trying to baffle me.

It was hard on Felix to thus be the means of pointing the way to his own destruction. But then fate is so ironical. That afternoon I received answers to my telegrams. The first, from Paris, stated that Mr. Felix Briarfield had started for Italy; the second, from Marshminster, informed me that Francis Briarfield was staying at Bellin Hall.

"No," said I, on reading these telegrams, "Felix Briarfield did not leave Paris for Italy, but for Marshminster, and Francis Briarfield, poor soul, is not at Bellin Hall, but lying in the Essex marshes."

"That night at 5 o'clock I left for Marshminster."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Struggling with English. The unhappy man in all Chicago was a young German cook, who has been the Richelet for a few weeks. He made several trips from the office to the cafe, and wandered aimlessly about the hotel exclaiming now and then, "Effery time I opens my Seberman mouth I says some thing."

"The count speaks English recklessly, and he suffered Saturday for a mistake made the evening before, which was quite amusing to all but him. He was one of a jolly theater party that visited the restaurant after the performance. A very merry time was passed, and before the supper was over a non-day luncheon was planned for Monday. Of course the count was one of the first to be invited, and that honor was intrusted to Mrs. Woodrow, of the Hotel Woodruff. The young man was delighted to accept the kindness, and answered with adjectives profusely. Presently he said to Mrs. Woodrow: "You'll pardon me off I got some information."

"With pleasure, count."

"Das luncheon do kom at noon."

"At 1 o'clock."

"I don't like to ask, but I'm inaccredited to American ways I want to learn something about the time of day."

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Pleasant Speech. It was said of Edward the Confessor that he could deny a request so severely that his "No" was pleasant to the "Yes" of other people.

An Answer Worthy of Solomon. Golden Days says if happened in Sunday school, and the subject under discussion was Solomon and his wisdom. A little girl was asked to tell the story of Solomon and the women who quarreled over a child.

Problem in Motion. A correspondent asks: If A and B are standing at the rear end of a train half a mile long and A walks to the front end, will he get to his destination before B, or does he travel faster? He is informed that if A's destination is half a mile forward from the place at which A and B stood together, and the train stands still, A undoubtedly travels faster than B and will get to his destination before B.

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