

THE STRANGE FOOT-PRINT.

A DETECTIVE STORY.

By Malcolm Bell, Author of "His Fatal Success," "Roanoke of Roanoke Hall," etc.

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A WILD THEORY.

He had not proceeded far on his way to the beach when he perceived at some distance in front of him a trim little figure tripping lightly along, a little figure recognized at once as belonging to the charming Mary Carne. He hastened his pace immediately in order to catch her up, for he was determined to speak to her, although he was not unnaturally doubtful as to the nature of the reception which his advances would meet with. He had by no means forgotten the looks of indignation that had flamed at him from those sparkling eyes, when his identity and occupation had stood plainly revealed at the afternoon interview. There was no doubt in his mind that Mary Carne was seriously angry with him for the part he had played and for what she could not but consider the underhand way in which he had entangled her into admissions which might have proved, any, which still might prove so damaging to her beloved young mistress.

Mr. Padger, however, was not easily daunted, and a little opposition seemed to excite and inflame his determination, rather than to quench his ardor.

"Good afternoon, Miss Carne," he said, politely raising his hat when he had overtaken her.

"Don't speak to me if you please, Mr. Padger," interposed that unabashed individual cheerfully.

"Padger," she repeated in a tone of ineffable contempt, flinging at him at the same time a glance of indignant scorn. "Padger, or Badger, or Brander, or—fifty other names I dare say."

"No," he replied coolly to this expected outburst. "Padger, only Padger. Yours affectionately and devotedly—Joshua Padger."

"Oh, that I dare say," said Mr. Padger, with the undaunted Padger.

"Don't Mary me, sir, if you please," burst out the enraged beauty.

"But that is just what I intend to do, my dear," said Mr. Padger, punning atrociously.

"Oh, indeed? Not without my consent I should hope," answered the maiden, somewhat mollified by his unflinching good humor.

"Well, not if I can get it," said Mr. Padger, with a mischievous twinkle.

"And that you never will, never," said Mary, with a long, low, and ominous growl.

"Never's a long time," remarked Mr. Padger, sententiously.

"I wonder you aren't ashamed of yourself," said Mary, after they had walked for some time in silence side by side.

"But I am," replied Mr. Padger, lamely, though his secret soul was filled with exultation. She was leading the conversation in the very direction which he desired it to take. If he could only once get her to argue the question of his original subterfuge he felt assured of overcoming her wrath.

"Coming spying around on the sly like that? I don't see how you could," said Mr. Padger, with a mischievous twinkle.

"I'd do it again to-morrow if I was sure of meeting you," said Mr. Padger gallantly.

"Taking the words off a poor girl's lips, too," said Mary, with a mischievous twinkle.

"Well, you know it was your fault that I didn't take anything else," said Mr. Padger, with a mischievous twinkle.

"Get along with you," said Mary obviously not displeased.

"All right," said Mr. Padger promptly.

"Stop!" exclaimed Mary, as he moved away, "you needn't be in such a hurry."

"Hurry?" cried Mr. Padger, who had no intention of parting just then. "Lord bless you! I would stay with you all day long if I could let me."

"And that you don't believe that Miss Gertrude did it," said Mr. Padger, with a mischievous twinkle.

"Believe it? Of course not," said Mr. Padger, with an assumption of certainty on the subject which he neither felt, nor was warranted in feeling.

"Because she didn't," said Mr. Padger, with a mischievous twinkle.

"Of course she didn't," persisted Mary, who had completely forgotten Mr. Padger's disgraceful behavior.

"Well, you must own, Mary, my dear," said Mr. Padger, without seeking any further remembrance from that young lady, "that things did look rather fishy. That little bit of obstinacy about her proceedings between half past twelve and a quarter to two had an ugly look, you must allow."

"I don't know where she was," exclaimed Mary hotly. "And what is more I don't care. I know she was after no harm."

"No, my dear, no, of course not," said Mr. Padger, soothingly. "But you can't expect other people to look at it in the same light."

"Why you don't mean to say they suspect—" cried Mary, and stopped abruptly.

Mr. Padger nodded assent, with a shrug, and a rueful scowl of his mouth.

"It's disgraceful," said Mr. Padger, with a mischievous twinkle.

"So it is, my dear, so it is, but there is only one way to stop it."

"What's that?" said Mr. Padger.

"Find out—" suggested Mr. Padger, insidiously—"where she was that day between the time she left the bathing machine and the time she returned home. Where she was, and what she was doing."

"Surely, Mr. Padger—" she said with reticent indignation—"you don't expect me to go snooping and spying about."

"No, my dear girl, certainly not," replied Mr. Padger, who had at length arrived at the opening he wished for.

"Only don't be so hard on me if I do," said Mr. Padger, with a mischievous twinkle, "suppose it's your business."

"And a jolly good one, too, I can tell you," said Mr. Padger, with a mischievous twinkle.

"What are you going to do now?" said Mr. Padger, with a mischievous twinkle.

"I am going to find out who committed that murder," said Mr. Padger, with a mischievous twinkle.

"And clear Miss Gertrude?" cried Mary, joyfully clasping her hands.

"And clear Miss Gertrude," repeated Mr. Padger, not without hesitation.

temptuous toss of her pretty little head.

"Secondly, a hundred pounds," ejaculated Mary, opening her blue eyes to their utmost width.

"Thirdly," and Mr. Padger paused and looked tenderly at her.

"Fourthly," she queried, with an air of the most unconscious innocence.

"Well, we'll talk about that when the time comes. Won't you come for a turn on the beach. It's a lovely afternoon for a stroll."

"Oh, I haven't time," said Mary regretfully, as they came to a halt at the head of the steps leading down to the shore.

"What a pity!" said Mr. Padger, with a mischievous twinkle.

"Good-bye, Mr. Padger," continued Mary, smiling sweetly and holding out her berry hand.

"Good-bye, Mary, my dear," he returned, tenderly pressing it. "If I was to drop around your way to-night, should I happen to find you at home?"

"Well, I don't say you might if you cared to try. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, my dear."

Mr. Padger made his way down the steep wooden steps, and onto the crowded sands in a most unenviable frame of mind. He had expressed unreservedly to Mary his disbelief in her young mistress's guilt with the utmost assurance, but he knew that he did not feel, and had nothing to support such an assumption. Suspicion such as this was, pointed strongly at present to Miss Ennis, and he could not conceal from himself that his theory that the criminal was a man was merely conjectural, and presented many almost insuperable difficulties.

What he thought, if, as he continued his researches, he should find them leading him surely and inexorably towards a conclusion he dared not contemplate?

What if they served to strengthen the net, and draw it closer and closer round Miss Ennis?

In that case he felt certain that, unjust as it would be to saddle him with the consequences, Mary would nevertheless insist that it was his doing, and would never again speak to or look at him.

He was surprised to find how much this prospect horrified him.

Should he at once and forever abandon the pursuit? This would avail him little now. He was practically pledged to Mary to sweep away the cloud of suspicion that overshadowed Miss Ennis. It was moreover, he felt beyond his powers. He would not believe, in spite of appearances, that the girl was implicated, but he felt the result that it might be would carry the business he had commenced several years ago.

His professional pride was concerned, and would not allow him to turn back. The danger his dearest hopes incurred did not deter him any more than the mere money reward incited him. He had determined to solve the mystery and he would do it. If the worst came to be worst, he must make the most of the fact, and the consolation of having done his duty, for both Mary and the reward would be lost to him. He could not claim from the father the price of the conviction of his daughter.

In the mean time he would adhere resolutely to his unshaken theory that the murderer was a man, and would endeavor to find some way out of the first of many doubtful points. "How could a man have effected an entrance into that machine?"

There were very few people bathing, but a post imbedded in the sand marked the boundaries of the gentlemen's bathing place, and starting from the spot where the fatal machine had stood he began to pad the distance between the two points. When he reached the limit he sank upon the warm dry sand with a groan.

"It is impossible," he murmured, "utterly, absolutely impossible."

The idea had flashed across him that a man might have swum under water from one place to the other, but the distance between them was at least one hundred and fifty yards, and he knew that no man could cover that. He was himself a more than average amateur long distance diver and his experience told him that it could not be done.

Three times he paced the distance without making any appreciable difference in his calculations. Finally he gave it up as hopeless. His wild theory had been no sooner formed than undemanded and irresistible distance had crushed it. He knew that no man could cover that. He was himself a more than average amateur long distance diver and his experience told him that it could not be done.

There was no other way of escape from the dilemma? Vainly he asked himself this question. Vainly he raved his bewildered brains for a satisfactory answer, an available solution.

There was no way, and he groaned as he realized the inevitable result. If the murder had not been committed by a man, and that now seemed perfectly certain, it must have been a woman's hand that struck the cowardly blow, and if a woman's, whose should it be but Miss Ennis?

There was no avoiding this reasoning. No quibble, no quirk, would invalidate it.

He returned home in a very despondent condition. He had spent several hours of valuable time, and had gained nothing by it. He had exhausted the ingenuity of his imagination in the fabrication of untenable hypotheses, while a series of plain, indisputable facts stared him remorselessly in the face.

Still he would not admit their cogency. Still he persevered in his struggle to make ropes of sand, though he was aware that he was in all probability seeking a mystery where there was none, and willfully turning his eyes from a broad and unmistakable path to find a blind trail which would conduct him nowhere, or lead him tollously a short distance to land him finally in an impassable quagmire.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. PADGER HEARS SOMETHING.

"There's a young person a-waiting to see you," said Mr. Padger's landlady as he admitted him, in a tone of the strongest disapproval.

"A young person! Who is she?" he said, for an extensive experience of landladies and their ways assured him that that contemptuous tone could only attach to one of her own sex.

"I don't know, I'm sure," she replied with a scornful sniff, "seeing as

she positively refused to tell me 'er name."

"How long has she been here?" he asked, for a moment's consideration.

"About half an hour," she said, retreating to her own domain.

Mr. Padger's usual avocations had served to render him suspicious, and he hesitated for some time before entering the sitting room. In his own house he could easily have obtained a surreptitious inspection of his unknown visitor, but here that was out of the question, and he was consequently reduced to mere conjecture. The only young woman he knew in the town was Mary Carne, and he had seen sufficient of her to be certain that a visit to him in his own apartments was the last thing she would dream of. Who then was the unknown, and which way of more importance, what did she want with him? More than once he had had his schemes overturned, or his success taken from him by spies, and he had learnt caution. Failing, however, to discover any other method of ascertaining her identity he walked into the room.

A hasty glance showed him that the drawer, the repository of his precious secrets was apparently tampered with, and he turned to the stranger who had risen from a seat near the window on his entrance.

"Mr. Padger?" she queried in a strongly marked foreign accent.

"Who are you?" thought Mr. Padger, as he acknowledged his claim to that appellation. Her pale, vindictive face was quite unknown to him. She was rather a good looking girl of three or four and twenty, simply dressed in some plain black material.

"You want to know something?" The accent conveying the question which the construction of the speech failed to indicate.

"I want to know a good many things," remarked Mr. Padger, as he offered her a chair and took one himself.

"Oh, yes, a good many," she repeated, with a grim, sardonic laugh.

"Have you got anything to touch me?" he asked, as she sat regarding him without making any further remark.

"Perhaps," she answered with a peculiar falling inflection.

"Well, for goodness sake! hurry up and tell it, then," thought Mr. Padger with considerable irritation, but he only said, with an air of extreme indifference—"What?"

"About Miss Gertrude Ennis, is it not?"

"What about her?" exclaimed Mr. Padger, his interest and curiosity fully aroused.

"You want to know what she do between half past twelve and a quarter less two the day of the murder?"

"Can you tell me?" said Mr. Padger, answering one question with another.

"Perhaps."

"Will you?"

"Look here," said Mr. Padger, stung by her cool deliberation: "if you've got information, fire ahead. If you want anything for it, out with it. If you will give me to me?"

"Give who?" said Mr. Padger, surprised out of his grammar.

"What I want."

"What is it?"

"Revenge," hissed the girl, and such a baleful gleam of poisonous hatred shot from her eyes that Mr. Padger started.

"Oh, ho!" he thought to himself. "This is likely to prove interesting."

"Will you, then?" she persisted.

"Well, I don't know. Revenge on whom?"

"On her, on Miss Ennis."

"On her?" said Mr. Padger, amazed at her eagerness. "Who are you?"

"My name is Natalia Rozart."

"Why do you want to be revenged on Miss Ennis?"

"I was her mother's maid. It was a good place, but Miss Ennis found me out, and insisted on my dismissal."

"Humph," reflected Mr. Padger. "A discharged servant. Evidence to be received with caution."

"Found you out in what?" he said aloud.

"That makes nothing," she said hurriedly. "You will act on what I tell you."

"Of course I shall," said Mr. Padger. "If there's anything to be made of it."

"I was sitting that day, you know, at 12:45 o'clock in the public garden near the esplanade. It was empty, but behind me was some shrubbery. Presently I hear a voice, a man's voice. He says, 'how long you have been,' and a voice of much agitation replies, 'I could not manage it before.' That voice, it was Miss Ennis."

"What?" cried Mr. Padger. "Are you sure?"

"I would swear to it," exclaimed the girl, extending her right hand melodramatically, and speaking with almost an exultation of gratified hate. "Then he says 'Make haste now, we have no time to lose,' and she cries, 'I am so frightened. They talk for some time, but I cannot hear what they say. He is eager, earnest, almost roars. She cries much. Presently they walk away. At a distance I follow. I do not deceive myself—it is Miss Ennis. I follow—still at a distance. At length I turn a corner—they are gone."

"Are you sure?" said Mr. Padger, a terrible apprehension growing up in his mind.

"I tell you I could swear to it."

"At what corner did you lose sight of them?"

"From high across into the market place."

"Five minutes from the gardens," said Mr. Padger, half aloud.

"It is true—at five minutes to one."

Mr. Padger made a rapid mental calculation. From five minutes to one to a quarter to two—fifty minutes. From the corner of the High street to Monplaisir—twenty minutes walk at the outside. Half an hour still unaccounted for.

"Who was the man?" he asked at length.

"Oh, for that, I don't know."

"You did not recognize him?"

"I do not say. I could not see him too well."

"You did not know his voice?"

"I could not swear. It might have been her father."

"No, it mightn't," said Mr. Padger, bluntly. "He was in London at the time."

"Are you so sure?" she drawled, looking at him askance under her half-closed eyelids.

"What do you mean?" he cried.

"What should I mean, but what I say. Are you so sure?"

"Look here," said Mr. Padger, "Do you know that her father was not in town that day?"

"I know nothing of him. I say it might have been him."

"You are not sure that it was not?"

"I am not sure."

"Do you think it was?"

"What?" she asked, "What does it matter, my friend, what I think?"

"That is no answer," said Mr. Padger roughly.

"Well, yes, then, I think it was."

Mr. Padger paced the room for some

minutes in a state of the utmost bewilderment. What was he to make of this terrible piece of evidence? Was this ill-considered investigation about to end, as he had feared, in the destruction of all his hopes of happiness? No, he concluded without some better confirmation, he would not believe this woman's assertions.

"Have you anything more to say to me?" he said presently returning to the girl, who still sat watching him beneath her half-closed eyelids, with a cruel, cat-like smile.

"Mon dieu!" she cried. "What would you have? Is it not enough?"

"Enough!" groaned poor Mr. Padger to himself. "Too much! I fear, far, far too much."

"You will not forget?" she said fiercely, at the door. "I shall watch. Have no fear, and some day, my friend, I shall see in the papers—my revenge."

Mr. Padger returned slowly to his room to carefully consider the value of this latest guiding light. The evidence of a discharged servant, animated undisciplined by the most venomous and suggested passion for vengeance, was scarcely a promising basis for a case, and he was obliged to receive with the greatest caution. And yet, allowing for a certain amount of morbidness and conscious distortion, there was a certain stamp of veracity about the woman's revelations.

"I could not manage it before. I could not manage it before."

The sentence rang in his distracted brain, and he asked himself what was it? He scarcely dared to propound the question to which there was but one answer. What could it be but—that?

"No," he cried, vainly struggling to overwhelm his growing convictions. "No, I will not believe it."

He tried to insure himself that the improbability of her insinuations that Mr. Ennis never went to town that day was sufficient to destroy all confidence in her previous statement, but he was compelled to admit to himself that the strictly guarded expression she gave to what was a more suspicious tendency to inspire belief in what she declared to be a fact.

A discharged servant, he said again, "I asked for some discharge of fact that she is assigned to own. What is her evidence worth?"

But it was unavailing. He felt an inward conviction that she had spoken the truth. It was hopeless to try to evade the facts. Everything pointed more and more plainly to Miss Ennis. To have any information, fire ahead. If you want anything for it, out with it. If you will give me to me?"

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AFTER TRAIN ROBBERIES.

Postmaster-General Wanamaker Offers Good Rewards for Them.

Quite a Number of Postmasters Appointed for Texas—Read to be Speaker—Harrison and McKinley.

Special to the Gazette.

WASHINGTON, Aug. 30.—Mr. Adolph Zadeck wanted to be consul at Hamburg, Germany, but couldn't quite reach it, but his commission was made out to-day which will authorize him to conduct the Consular postoffice. Other postmasters appointed are George W. Dawson at Tyler, Thomas Breen at Mineola, J. D. Leonard at Lubbock, B. W. Martin at Ellinger.

Frank Clark now thinks he has a sure thing on the El Paso custom house, though he may have to wait several weeks longer before official action is taken.

There is a rumor afloat that Col. De Gress has been offered some first-class appointment, but when interviewed he would not affirm or deny its correctness. That the colonel will be left out in the cold is surely probable.

TOM REED'S CHANCES.

The impression is growing that Tom Reed will be elected the next speaker of the house. His chief rival, McKinley, will be at the disadvantage of having to participate in the Ohio campaign, and can't therefore, in the event of an extra session, leave his state duties to manage his race for the speakership. Realizing this, McKinley has repeatedly urged the president not to call a session in October. What the latter's real purpose is nobody can say, since he has kept his intentions profoundly secret, but it is fair to presume that the Ohio statesman's representations were not without effect.

WASHINGTON, Aug. 30.—Postmaster-General Wanamaker has issued the following order:

WASHINGTON, Aug. 29.—Ordered in consequence of frequent armed attacks made by highway robbers upon the United States mail in the Western states and territories for some time past, the postoffice department for the year ending June 30, 1890, will pay the sum of \$1000 as a reward for the arrest and conviction in the United States court of any person found guilty of making an armed attack upon any stage coach or railway train having mails in transit. This reward will be paid to any person or persons causing such arrest and conviction on the presentation of satisfactory proof thereof to the department. Order No. 139, of date of July 16, 1889, offering \$200 reward in like cases, is hereby rescinded.

JOHN WANAMAKER,
Postmaster-General.

Internal Revenue Appointments.