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# NO PROOF

A DETECTIVE STORY

By the AUTHOR of "SHADOWED BY THREE" "MOINA" &c &c

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knew, as he knew, just where to find that other weapon, I think the instinct of self-preservation would at once prompt me to place that weapon where it was placed, and —I give the captain credit for quite as much astuteness as I myself possess."

"Yes; and the bridal robe. How do you account for that?"

"Easily. It is not the first time she has donned it so. She knew how much I admired her in it, and on two or three occasions has put it on for my inspection, and played at a reception. She had so many girlish little ways." His voice sank to an almost plaintive tone, and for a moment the image of sweet Doris Grey was clear in the minds of the two men, and both involuntarily, and together, sighed.

"Merrick," Jasper said, after a short silence, "I wish you could hold your mind in abeyance for a time and let me look into this thing. Let me present to you another theory, quite as plausible as yours. Had your wife much money in her possession?"

"Yes; several hundred dollars, at least. I left it with her when I set out for the city."

"And—have you seen it since?"

"Why, no. But doubtless it is locked in her writing-desk."

"Oh!" There was a sudden tightening of the lines about Jasper's strong mouth and an alert look in his eye. He knew well that there was no money in the desk.

"Now, let us suppose that you find no money in that desk, and none elsewhere in those rooms; will you not then be ready to admit another possibility?"

"What other?"

"That, for instance, a stranger—you say there have been such about the house and grounds—suppose this person has gained access to the house in some way, say by that open pantry window, and has concealed himself in those rooms while their occupant is at dinner. She returns, and, let us say, assumes her bridal robes. Then, as she moves about from one room to the other, his hiding-place is discovered. Now, she has been packing for a journey. What more natural than that she should have laid the little pistol, your gift to her, somewhere where it is seen

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"I may depend upon you? You will do what you can? All you can?"

"I will find the truth about this matter," replied Kenneth Jasper firmly. "All of it if it is in my power to do so. I shall spare no pains—no labor."

"Thank you. And I am glad to see that at least you agree with me that my wife did not destroy herself."

"Stop! You must not misconstrue my meaning. I neither agree nor disagree. I simply do not know. And, Merrick, let me advise you to harbor no hard thoughts. Don't let doubt or prejudice outweigh your own experience and knowledge of human nature. And remember those bits of torn writing can be construed into a variety of meanings. Don't rely too much upon them."

When Merrick had at last gone Kenneth Jasper lighted a fresh cigar and began to smoke and think.

"A queer complication this is going to be," he mused as he stretched himself out luxuriously, "and Merrick? Jove! but he was getting dangerously close to the thing he will never know if I can prevent it. Oh! yes, I shall work now to fathom this mystery, and lose no time, by the way, lest that excitable, incomprehensible fellow may bring some one else into the field. *Was* it suicide or murder? I wish I knew."

He went to his desk after a time and, tossing away his cigar, sat down before it, spread out the fragments of torn manuscript and began to scrutinize them carefully with a strong lens.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### "COLORS SEEN BY CANDLE-LIGHT," ETC.

Kenneth Jasper spent the entire day in going over the case which seemed to be taking such strange shape in the minds of those most interested. He had agreed to take the matter in hand for both the captain and Merrick, but, in truth, he would have given all his time to the hard task before him had there been no call for his services,

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It is a case that seems to begin nowhere and to have no visible or possible end. If you feel that, after all, the thing to do is to accept the facts as they are I shall be awfully cut up, but—I shan't feel hard about it."

And then Kenneth had interposed his strong young optimism.

"Captain, look here; what you need is a tonic. You must go to see Roth and leave this perplexity to me. It hasn't knocked me out; not yet. I'm going to begin straightway to pull at the threads of this coil, and it will go hard with me if I do not unravel something. Yes," in answer to the captain's look of inquiry. "I am really going to begin. I have a notion that it is a business that should be looked into at once to save further complications. And now—" He got up and stood before his friend; his face was very serious and his voice firm and full of decision. "Now, Captain, we must agree upon certain things. To begin, you must promise me, from first to last, neither to question nor interfere in any way. If I need help or advice, and you can give either, be sure I will call upon you. But even in that case, you must advise, or act, without question. When I have done my best I will let you know the result, whether it be success or failure; until then—you understand?"

Captain Wayland did, and was in just the mood to accept the terms and to feel that, for a time at least, he need rack his brains no more over the mystery which hung about Waylands.

Within the same twenty-four hours Jasper had uttered almost the same words in the hearing of Eugene Merrick, and the latter, after hesitating for a little time, yielded finally and ended by admitting that it "might even be best so."

"I feel," he said dejectedly, "that I am not fit to think or reason. I am like one stunned. To fall from the heights of happiness to such sudden loss and barrenness of life as this of mine is too much! And yet—there are times when I can not realize it; times when I won't believe it; and then, Mr. Jasper, I trust that you, that all of my friends and hers will bear with me in my present mood. I cannot bring myself to the point of mingling

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possessed enough for all her wants. But if she had a weakness it lay in the direction of economy, and the reason and justice of permitting her nephew to defray the expenses of a journey made at his own suggestion and in his interest was clear enough to her practical mind.

"And since I'm to go so soon," she went on, "and there being no business on my hands for this afternoon, I'll take it kindly if you will just bring round your horse in, say about an hour, and take me out to see Mrs. Wayland. I shan't be likely to have another chance to say good-by to her. Besides, I want to see how Glenn Wayland looks by now. There's been a queer look in that girl's face ever since her cousin's death that I don't like." She shot a keen glance at her nephew, who just at that moment was looking fixedly out of the window, and who for a moment seemed not to have heard. Then, turning from the window and with a glance in her direction, quite as covert and keen as her own, he answered:

"It's awfully good of you, Aunt Jem, to set out at a minute's notice on such a long journey, and"—getting up with great show of alacrity, he turned to go out—"I'll have the horse at the door at the very moment, and I'll give the order at once." He put out his hand for his hat, then—

"Aunt Jem," he asked, with his shoulder toward her, "do you think Miss Wayland knows—guesses anything about her cousin's death?"

Miss Jasper shut her lips suddenly as if she never meant to open them again. Then she did open them. "I know she's got something on her mind," she flashed, and was out of the room before the words had ceased to sound in his ears.

* * * * * *

That afternoon they spent an hour at Waylands, Miss Jasper sitting with Mrs. Wayland in that lady's own sitting-room and Kenneth smoking a cigar with the captain in the study.

As they entered the grounds Miss Jasper had said curtly:

"By the way, you needn't say anything about my going

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"When papa announced his coming at the table it did not come to your ears for the first time."

"Well—and what then, my child?"

"Mother—are you three, father, yourself, and Kenneth Jasper, about to begin an investigation—an inquiry into the cause of my cousin's strange death? Are you?"

"And if so, what then? Do you not long to understand it?"

"Many times," Glenn went on, ignoring her mother's question, "I have heard my father say that Kenneth Jasper had a wonderful talent for investigation. He is right, as I happen to know. Do you know who will be accused if he enters this house?"

"Accused? No one in this house."

"You are wrong, mother." Glenn withdrew her hands from her mother's clasp and held herself erect. "You do not know, I see, what he has already discovered. Kenneth Jasper is coming into my home to spy on *me*."

"Glenn! are you out of your senses?"

"Not yet. But it is true. Mother, shall I tell you what he has already learned?"

"If you can, do so."

"He has learned that the weapon found under Doris Merrick's dead hand was mine, instead of hers, as the others thought—and think."

"Great heavens! Glenn."

"And he has found that, during that first night, when you thought me sleeping and too ill to leave my bed, I visited the room where my dead cousin lay, alone, and by stealth."

"You?" gasped Mrs. Wayland.

"Yes—I!"

"Glenn! What does it mean?"

"I can not tell you, mother; that is, about the visit at midnight; as to the pistol, I do not know how it came where it was found."

"But—Glenn, I know you well—you have a suspicion—an idea?"

Both were very pale now, and both spoke in low tones of enforced calm; but in one eye there was weariness and constraint, in the other eagerness and anxiety mingled.

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out a word, Glenn turned toward the rear door opening upon the rose-garden and the terrace beyond, and went before him until she had reached the portico. Then she turned, paused a moment, and walked beside him until they were upon the terrace, when, seeing him turn toward the rustic seat where she had last talked with Kenneth Jasper, she said in a tone of decision:

"Not there—let us go to the little summer-house," and turned at once in the opposite direction.

"As you like," he said. And once more she led the way.

When they were seated side by side in the arbor, which was open upon all four sides, only the pillars at the corners and the roof above being wreathed and covered with vines, she turned and faced him.

"Now," she said, "what is it, Eugene?"

He bent upon her a long, sorrowful, questioning gaze, and his face looked pathetically pale in the summer twilight.

"Glenn," he began, in those slow, mellow tones so charming to womankind, so expressive always, and just now so almost hopelessly sad, "you were the one friend whom Doris trusted and loved beyond all others; the one in whom she would have been most likely to confide. You were ill when I came back, and I was too distraught to think, even had you been able to talk freely. Your mother assured me that you knew nothing, and the doctor said you must not be disturbed or agitated. But I want to ask you now to tell me what you can—be it little or much—concerning your last hour with my wife. How she appeared to you—you are keen of observation—and just what she said and did when you saw her last."

His eyes were fixed upon her face as he spoke, and when he ceased he did not withdraw them, but held her own with a more and more intent gaze.

For a short time she returned it in kind, then slowly turning her face as if to see if they were observed or likely to be interrupted, she said, composedly, and with no apparent hesitation:

"Your request is certainly reasonable, Eugene, and quite natural. You should not hesitate to ask for any information concerning dear Doris that I can give. But I can

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be missing, or at least absent? Ah!" He suddenly crossed to the trunk in the corner, between two windows, both of which, as he knew, were usually kept open in summer. The trunk was a large and heavy affair, set upon rollers, which, he found, after a trial or two, did not work, and after looking down for a moment at the lid, noting the heavy bands and strong clasps and hinges, he stooped quickly, caught at one of the handles, and with a strong tug lifted one end from the floor and left the trunk standing upon the other. Then, with a smothered ejaculation, he stooped and picked up from the floor, where the trunk but now stood, first a key and next a small scrap of note-paper.

The scrap of paper corresponded exactly with the one taken up from the floor of the dressing-room. But the key—it was unlike any of the other keys upon the key-ring given him by Mrs. Wayland. It was unlike any key he had ever seen. As he looked at it his lips set themselves in firm lines, his face grew hard and stern. "Ah!" he said to himself, "here is an important possibility!" And he put the key carefully away between the leaves of a fat little note-book.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### "I WANT SOME INFORMATION."

As he stood with the little book still in his hand, there came a soft tap at the door of the outer room, and Jasper went hastily to it.

"Well?" he questioned, storing away the new discoveries with a quick hand.

"Merrick has just come out from the wood. If you want to get out and around the curve before he comes you have no time to lose."

Jasper sprang back into the dressing-room, replaced the trunk in its original position, and was quickly back and outside the chamber.

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der. "Make her fast where she stands, and look out for her heels." And he followed his friend, who was already across the threshold.

It was their first meeting, save in the presence of others, since Jasper had taken up his seemingly hopeless task, for the doctor was a busy man, and had given his time to the affairs at Wayland at the expense of other claims and interests, yet gave it willingly, and Jasper was eager to hear his comments upon the present situation, for he meant to be quite frank with the doctor, knowing that his knowledge of the case, as well as his loyalty to the family at Wayland, entitled him to the same. More than this, Jasper knew that in all probability he should need, more than once, such aid as Roth, and only Roth, could render. In fact he meant to come at once to as complete an understanding with his friend as that friend would allow. And he lost no time in making a beginning.

"Shut that door, won't you, Roth?" he said, as he paused beneath the portiere the doctor held back to admit him to the inner room. "I'm thankful to find you in, for I want to have this matter out with you at a sitting."

"Very good," said the doctor briefly, and favoring his visitor with one of those keen, swift glances which read so much in a moment and were so discomfiting to some of his patients. "Make yourself comfortable." And he passed on to an inner room, coming back in a moment divested of his out-of-door gear and with a box of cigars in his hand. These he opened without a word, and then, drawing a straight-backed chair toward the window at which Jasper had seated himself, he held out the box of cigars, and when his guest had selected one, seated himself and proceeded to light his own.

"Now," he said, "if you don't mean to light your weed, begin."

"I'll light mine later; just now I want to talk—and to hear you talk; and, first, what is this?"

He took from his pocket the little twist of tissue-paper, opened it with a twirl of his agile fingers, and held one of the white powder-papers out before him upon the palm of his hand.

The doctor put the tip of a forefinger to his lips and

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then to the contents of the paper, glanced at it, touched it with his tongue, and spat viciously.

"Bah! It's a very good quality of sulphate of morphia —morphine."

"I thought so."

"Where, may I ask, did you get that?"

"This, and the other," indicating the remaining powders, "I found while searching Doris Merrick's writing desk. The little parcel was tucked back in the far corner of a small drawer, which was partly filled with stationery, cards, etc."

"When?"

"Less than an hour ago."

"So," said the doctor, after a moment of silence; "I was sure you would go into it. Do you, perhaps, fancy those things some of my prescribing?"

"Upon my word," declared Kenneth, "I never thought of that." And then the two men smiled into each other's eyes in perfect mutual confidence. "Perhaps," Kenneth went on, "you won't mind telling me how strong a dose one of these contains?"

Roth glanced again at the powder still in Jasper's hand.

"Enough to put you to sleep and keep you so twelve hours at least," said the doctor."

"Good!"

"I'm glad you think so. What else did you discover?"

"I'll tell you later. Just now I want your opinion of present conditions. Precisely, what do you think of my undertaking?"

"You were bound to do it—of course. One could see that from the first."

"Well—grant that; and you, what is your opinion? Do you approve?"

The doctor's face became grave and stern. He was silent a long moment; then, "Yes," he said deliberately, "I do—now. It had to come to this. No one could rest with such a mystery fairly eating up the mind and clamoring for a solution. It's to be a private investigation, I take it?"

"Of course. As you say, we couldn't let the thing rest.

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I want to tell you just how we stand, Doctor; and—I want you, at need, to help me."

The doctor nodded soberly, then, as Kenneth was about to speak, he threw up his hand.

"One moment. Captain Wayland—does he know what you are about to do?"

"Captain Wayland has given me carte blanche. He is not even to know what I am doing until I choose to enlighten him. Do you think I would take up such a delicate job on any other terms? And—is that satisfactory?"

"Yes. You have taken the right course."

"I have taken the *only* course. There is no other. Now—"

"Now, tell me your story."

"That means—"

"Look here, Jasper! That you can trust me you have my assurance—if you need it. That we shall agree at all points I am not so sure."

"I won't ask impossibilities, Doc; and now I'll tell you how I stand."

He rapidly reviewed his interviews with Merrick and the captain and the promise he had given to each, and he finished with an account of his search in Doris Merrick's rooms.

But he did not at all points indulge in details with even this chosen friend.

"I can see," commented the doctor, when all was told, "how it might seem best to you to keep your dealings with Merrick from Wayland, and vice versa, but I must say I do not see where either of them could have found the motive for doubting the other, unless, indeed, each, in his eagerness to fix the blame somewhere, if only to afford his mind and imagination some relief, has settled upon the scape-goat nearest at hand. Can you see an atom of reason in either charge?"

"Well—" Jasper hesitated a moment. "I suppose that many a case has been worked to a solution with no more foundation in the way of circumstantial evidence than that tale of the burglars about the place, and the pistol habitually carried by the captain in his walks after

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eyes gleaming strangely, his face pale. "Jasper," he said hoarsely, "as a physician I can see how such a nature as Doris Merrick's, suddenly confronted with some terrible shock, sorrow, or loss, might, in the despair of the moment, and with the weapon close to hand, take her own life, but it was never because of sin or shame of hers. Whether she died by her own hand or by the hand of another, she died a martyr! And the man or woman who casts one shadow upon her fair name before the world is my enemy henceforth!"

"Roth, I understand you, I respect the feeling behind your words, and this effort of mine is made because Doris Merrick's friends can not rest content until they know the truth, which they believe will be her vindication. There is no judge, jury, court or gaping public behind this attempt at clearing up a mystery, and should I succeed, and in the end hold in my hand the key to the strange affair, it will be my secret and yours, and after that the property of those who in love or justice have the right to possess it; and we who are her friends will decide then how much farther our knowledge should be allowed to go. It is to vindicate Doris Merrick and one other that I have attempted this work."

"And one other?" The doctor came a step nearer. "I think we understand each other, Jasper," he said in a milder tone. "You may count on me, of course."

"Then I must ask of you what I have already demanded of Wayland and Merrick. You are to expect no confidences and ask no questions. I am to call upon you for aid at need, and I will say frankly that you will be likely to hear much more of my doings than will either of the others, for reasons which must be obvious to you."

"Yes?"

Jasper drew a chair close to the one lately occupied by the other and placed himself in it.

"Sit down," he said. "I am going to take you at your word at once. I want some information."

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### WHAT THE POWDER MIGHT DO.

The doctor seated himself once more and bent upon the younger man a grave and expectant look. At the moment Jasper was the more controlled and composed of the two. He reached out his hand and took up one of the powders from the little table where he had placed them after the doctor had examined them.

"I want to know the effect of one of these upon a person not accustomed to the drug," he said.

Doctor Roth took the tiny paper, looked at it again and carefully smoothed out the particles, spreading them loosely upon the paper.

"Is it a fatal dose?" asked Jasper.

"For a child, a young child, yes. For an adult, only a strong soporific."

"Taken by a person who was about to retire, how long would it hold him asleep?"

"You must be more definite. It would hardly affect two persons in just the same manner. A strong, nervous temperament, say of a robust man, would not sleep so long as one less strong. A weary person, or one taking the drug at the end of a fatiguing day, would sleep all night if the drug were taken early, and perhaps would need to be awakened in the morning."

"I see. Now tell me—how would this powder affect, say Miss Wayland, if taken at 9 or 10 o'clock p. m.?"

The doctor looked at him in silence for a moment. "I see your meaning," he said slowly, "and—yes, her late sleep and subsequent illness might have been the result of one of these very powders. Mind, I do not say it *was*."

"May I ask you how you diagnosed the case that morning?"

"I suspected morphine, I admit, and it surprised me, for I knew that Miss Wayland was sure to be affected, after the dose had reached its secondary stage, just as she was affected that day; and she knew it."

"Ah!" There was a sudden gleam in the young man's

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flushed cheeks and eyes that were hard and unwavering. "You have made out your case; spare me the rest and let me go. It is quite clear to me. Doris Grey first came between her cousin and her fortune and then deprived her of a lover, and for this she was shot by that cousin, who, leaving her pistol, goes to her room and takes a dose of morphine to ward off a night of remorse and induce sleep until the discovery should have been made. It's an ingenious theory, and it would no doubt be adopted at once by the average professional. It is doubtless because I am such a mere novice that I am able to see certain discrepancies in the evidence. You will excuse me if I drop this discussion for the present. I—I am expected at Waylands."

He made a quick stride toward the door, but the tall, wiry figure of the doctor interposed between it and him.

"Kenneth!" The tone was reproachful, gentle, almost humble. It brought the younger man first to a stop and then to a realization of his own folly and weakness, but he could bear no more, and he faced the elder man with a look of boyish pleading.

"Pardon me, old man, but I must go. Don't detain me."

"I won't. Only—think it over, Ken, and ask yourself is all this easy to bear *for me?*"

"Lord forgive me, Roth. I'm a selfish brute. Good-by for now. I don't want to be a bigger fool than I have been," and he sought his friend's hand, wrung it fiercely, and darted away.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### "DO YOU THINK SHE WILL LET ME SPEAK?"

In the days to come, when Kenneth Jasper was known to a large and select circle of chiefs of police, heads of bureaus, lawyers, judges, and business men, he was accounted one of the most methodical, the most rational workers in his line, as well as the most successful, and these traits, inherent in his nature, stood him in good stead now as he drove away from the doctor's office, at

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