

(From Chambers Journal.)

A Cast of the Net.

THE STORY OF A DETECTIVE OFFICER.

CHAPTER III.—CONTINUED.

The bony ferryman, in his tarpaulin coat and hat, was there this afternoon; and very sloppy and miserable all the boats looked; and as the tide fell lower and lower, the great broad bed of river-mud grew broader, and the path to the ferry-boat grew longer, and still I kept my watch, and meant to keep it. I must own, however, that I did not expect to see anything worth notice, for what could there be? But sometimes, you know, in our business, it is as necessary to watch to make sure there is nothing being done, as it is to make sure that some important movement is going on.

There was an oyster-smack not fifty yards from me that was left on the shingle or mud when the tide went down; and there was a man smoking his pipe on the deck of that oyster-smack, just as I was smoking mine in the arbor, and when night came, and the river got dark, and you couldn't make anything out of it but a great black space, with a hollow sound of the wind moaning over it and of the water lapping on the shore as the tide rose again—then there was a lantern burning on the deck of that smack, and there was a similar lantern burning in my arbor; but the light was shown open on board of the smack, and mine was a dark-lantern (so was the other) with the light hid. But I was perfectly well aware that the man aboard the smack never took his eyes off me while it was light, and that after dark he watched me to see if I showed my lantern. I didn't show it; but if I had, there would have been a Thames police galley and five armed constables alongside of that hard in a couple of minutes.

CHAPTER IV.

Long after it had grown quite dark, all remained quite, and at last I resolved upon making a move. I had determined upon fetching Peter Tilley. I had plenty of assistance, but I thought I should like to have Peter with me. So I went down to the ferry; a gas-light which burned at the corner showed me before I left my post that the bony ferryman was not there; and choosing a pretty good boat, with a strong young fellow to pull, I got in. It was a most unpleasant night; as dark as pitch, which was bad enough, but every now and then it lightened, which was worse, as it dazzled my eyes, and made me think we were running smash on board some great vessel which I had not seen a moment before, and couldn't see a moment after. However, the boatman was used to all kinds of weather, I suppose, and knew the river thoroughly; so, through the darkness and the rain, which never left off for a moment, we reached the other side.

I left the boat to wait for me, and ran up to the Yarmouth Smack. I looked in, and saw Peter leaning against the bar and smoking a short pipe, as a laborer ought to do; and he was talking in a friendly way to some rough-looking fellows. I slipped in, and using the name we had agreed upon, spoke to him. He knew my voice of course; but seeing me so changed, for my make-up was really splendid (it was, although I say so that shouldn't), it gave him such a shock that he was obliged to put the pewter down he was going to drink from and look steadily at me before he answered. "I'm a-comin'," he said at last, and we got outside; when, as we walked down to the ferry, I gave him a sort of idea of what was going on, and how I expected to make a great catch that night. Peter of course was very glad to be in for such a big thing as this, for he had never been mixed up with anything so important.

Not to trust the boatman too much, I kept Peter back a few yards from the water while I finished my story, standing a little on one side, so as to be out of the way of the people who came and went to and from the ferry. While I was talking to him, a wherry ran in; we heard her grate on the pebbles and the sculls rattle as the men laid 'em in; but that we had heard before. It's a part of my habit to notice little things however, and I looked to see who had come in by this boat. There was only one passenger, a woman, and she passed us walking quickly; but quick as she walked, I saw her, and she saw me. Blessed if it wasn't Miss Doyle! My being there was no odds to Miss Doyle, nor could it have signified to her if she had seen me fifty times; yet I felt I would rather not have met her just then; it looked unlucky, and she was such an uncommonly sharp one, too. Sharp or not, I couldn't see what she could make out of my standing under a wall on a wet night talking to another laborer.

To be Continued.

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