



CHAPTER IX.  
THE PRESCRIPTION.

I traced myself for the shock of this evening. I expected Miss Lawrence to scream and fall in a dead faint. I prepared to receive her in my arms and to face the mother with my astounding explanation.

For two or three seconds the stillness of the room was as that of death. Then there was a faint rustling of skirts, and I gazed upon the young woman beside me.

Her face was slightly paler, and there was an expression in the eyes that was unfathomable.

Without a word by either of us, she gently rose to her feet, and leaning over, placed both arms round my neck, with a tenderness of compassion like that of a mother for a dying son.

"Dear Harold," she murmured, "you need rest. Go home and think no more of this."

Her words and manner were a revelation. They told the whole story.

She had heard my declaration, but not for an instant did it cause a doubt in her mind. Had I not falsified with my statement of the effect produced on my brain by the shock of the fall she might have been disturbed, but she laid it all to that. I was not clear in my head. That had been proved by several trifling incidents in our conversation, the cap sheaf coming when I turned upon her and squarely denied my own identity.

"I will do so. You are right," I said, grasping like a drowning man at the straw which enabled me to terminate the distressing interview. "You will understand, Jeanette, if you do not hear from or see me for some time."

"Yes," she replied, in the same gentle voice, holding up her cheek for the good-by kiss. "Will you not consult some specialist?"

"If necessary." And a minute later—I hardly know how it was—I was outside the house and walking homeward.

"If this goes on, I shall begin to doubt my own personality. She will not be convinced until Harold and I walk into her presence, side by side."

It was all like a horrible opium dream—a mixture of delirious happiness and hideous terrors, more vivid than reality itself. But as I walked briskly in the cool night air, my thoughts clarified.

I regretted the revelation I had attempted to make, and yet had I failed to make it my self scorn would have been intolerable. It was the remembrance of my rally from the seductive revel and my resolute meeting of duty which saved my honour, in my own estimation.

"There is but one course before me, and that is a plain one. I cannot straighten out this frightful tangle of myself. She will not believe me, though I make oath 1,000 times. Only the presence of Harold can convince her of her error. I will cable to him to return by next steamer, giving him knowledge of the truth. Meanwhile at all costs I will keep away from his betrothed. I will send her word that I am about to leave town for a few weeks, and will not come back until Harold arrives on the ground and makes it all clear."

This course was so obviously a common sense one that I wondered it had not presented itself before.

It was comparatively early in the evening when I entered the elevator at my apartments.

"Have I had any calls?" I asked. "One—a gentleman."

"How long since?" "Shortly after you went out."

"Did you tell him I was not in?" "No, sir, for I didn't know it. Jim had just gone off, and I took his place. The man got out of the elevator, walked to your door and touched the bell. I went on up to the top storey, and when I came down he was waiting for me."

"Did he have anything to say?" "He said as how you wasn't in. Then I happened to remember that I had a letter for you and was going to step out to drop it in your box, when he said he would do it for me. I handed it to him, and he walked across the hall and dropped it through the door."

"Describe the man." "Rather small, stepped quick, had a gray suit of clothes and a Derby hat."

It was enough. Cover Cone had been watching on the opposite side of the street until he saw me leave the building. Then, when the coast was clear, he went up to my room.

What was his object? Although he had my fee in his pocket at the time and was in my employ, the scamp was shadowing me. He was working for someone else and against myself.

Who was his employer? It was impossible to conjecture at this stage, but it looked as if some one held a suspicion of the truth, and he was plotting in such person's behalf.

His visit to my rooms when sure I was absent was with the purpose of getting possession of a letter, and his little scheme had been successful.

What letter was it? While these thoughts were flitting through my brain I had entered the outer room of my apartments. There lay a letter, where it had fallen to the floor after being dropped through the slit in my door, for Harold had arranged that his mail should be delivered in that fashion.

Ripping open the envelope, I saw that the few lines were a petition for money. Some youth had just conceived an invention so wonderful that all he needed was the funds with which to secure a patent, when he would make everyone concerned so wealthy that, as he expressed it, none

of the Vanderbilts, Astors, or Goulds would be in it.

Hardly pausing to read the signature I tore the missive into fragments and flung it into the gaping wastebasket.

Perhaps my recent experience had sharpened my wits, but as I sat quietly smoking my cigar the whole plot, as I believed it to be, unrolled before me.

The letter received a couple of days before from Chicago, and signed "Budd," was written by a second-hand with whom Harold was guiltily connected. A suspicion of that fact was in the mind of Detective Cone when he called at my rooms. He suspected the envelope in the wastebasket and the glimpse which he caught of it fixed the handwriting in his mind.

Without knowing that I had telegraphed to "Budd," he believed that another letter would soon be due from the same quarter, and he adopted a bold plan for securing it.

It is the very audacity of such schemes that brings success. I had withdrawn at the critical moment, and he secured the letter just as the elevator boy described.

When he stepped to my door, with his back toward the waiting lad, he slipped my letter into his pocket, while the one brought with him for just such an emergency was dropped through the door into the room.

The begging missive from the inventive young man was a blind. It had been prepared by Detective Cone and took the place of the important letter.

I had telegraphed to "Budd" to write me the particulars, and the time had elapsed for him to do so. Doubtless the whole plot was revealed in that letter which infernal fate had sent astray. Had it reached me as intended I would have been forearmed against a most serious danger.

"Well, if the storm breaks on my head, I must take it. The only way of escape that I can think of is to take Covey Cone into my confidence and tell him everything."

"Suppose I did so? He wouldn't believe me, and since no one can be convinced of I am not Harold Westcott, the whole thing will be looked upon as a miserable dodge by a criminal to save himself."

"I am dead set against revealing this unprecedented state of affairs to anyone, and I am mighty sure not to do so until certain it will effect some good."

Resolutely forcing the matter from my thoughts for the time, I addressed myself to the other equally important phase of this extraordinary business.

The course of cabling to Harold, as it presented itself to me on my way home from the Lawrences, with a statement that Miss Lawrence had arrived, that I had seen her, and that it was imperatively necessary he should return at once, seemed to be so simple and straightforward that, as I have said, the wonder was it did not present itself to me at first.

But now, in the light of later events, more than one obstacle obstructed. As matters looked Harold was hopelessly involved in the criminal scheme of "Budd," of Chicago, and, much as he might wish to return, he would not dare do so.

Nevertheless, I would not have hesitated to cable him had it been in my power.

Again, what seemed a very ordinary matter proved to be hopelessly difficult. Seemingly, all that was necessary was to telegraph to Liverpool, so that the message would meet him before he touched land. Had this decision been made a few days before that would have been the true course.

Over a week, however, had passed since Harold sailed in the Lucania, and by looking at the papers I found she had reached Liverpool more than two days before. A telegram, therefore, to that city could not be delivered, for it was not to be supposed that Harold had left any directions except for his mail, and even that was doubtful.

"No," I said, grimly, "I must wait till I receive a letter from him, and there's no saying when that will be. He may have dropped me a line from Liverpool, or it is more likely he has thought that unnecessary and will put it off for several weeks."

"But he must learn before long, if he has not already done so, that Jeanette and her mother are on this side

of the world. What, then, will he do? He can't content himself for a year in Europe. If he undertakes to do so, he will send for her to join him."

"Heavens, what will she think when his letter arrives? Of course he will soon write to her. She will believe that it is her brain that is topsy turvy. When

she goes awake to the fact that I am not what I seemed to her, she will be ready to die of mortification, but," I exclaimed, rousing up, "away with all this speculation! The house is afire, and I must get out."

The electric bell tinkled, and a card was handed to me. It was "J. G. Shippen, M.D."

"Show him up. What the dickens does he want?" I asked myself.

He was a pleasing, middle-aged gentleman, smooth shaven, with a genial face, and from behind his gold spectacles a pair of pleasant blue eyes beamed upon me.

"How do you do, Harold?" I took the warm hand in my own and returned the honest pressure. I had never seen the physician before, though it was apparent that he was an old acquaintance of Harold.

"Miss Lawrence and her mother ask me to call on you. I called there this evening just after you left. They said your head troubled you since that fearful fall in the park the other day. If I understand it, your memory is at fault?"

"Bless the heart of the good Jeanette! This was her doing."

"I have read of queer freaks of the memory due to some violent jar."

"Several remarkable instances are recorded. I knew of a case in Cincinnati where a man stepped through a hatchway. He seemed to have fully recovered, when it was found that he had lost his memory for names. He could not remember those of his wife or children, nor, indeed, his own."

"Did he regain his memory?" "That is one of the most extraordinary features of the case. There was no change in his affliction for nearly a year. Then one day the precise accident was repeated. He fell through the same hatchway, he was struck senseless, and, when he recovered, his memory was normal and never afterward caused him trouble."

"Similar similitudo curantur. I will take another ride on a vicious horse. Better to use that Jack, who I am sorry to say, did not break his neck; be thrown, and, presto, I shall be all right again."

"Hardly that," smiled the doctor. "My prescription is rest and change of thought. Take a run for a week or two out of town, and my word for it, you will find your brain in as good working order as ever."

"Your advice is good, and shall be followed."

(To be Continued.)

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The stores will be compelled to have a bargain sale each day, And for chewing gum and soda you will not be asked to pay. Oh, great reforms will be projected, all the wrongs will be corrected, When Maria Jane's elected to the mayoralty chair!

—William West in Chicago Record.

DOCTORS AND SUICIDE.

Statistics Show a Peculiar Bond of Sympathy Between the Two.

During the last three years, says The Medical and Surgical Reporter of Philadelphia, nearly one-fiftieth of all deaths among physicians have been by suicide. This is a conservative estimate, as many instances of death are attributed to accidental overdosing, as the tendency is always to hush up a suicide whenever possible. But without including such cases, the fact remains that the medical profession is more prone to suicide than any other. These statistics may be explained by the development of morbid fancies in the mind of a doctor on account of his constant association with the sick and dying, or of an actual indifference to death, or because he has the requisite knowledge of how to die conveniently and painlessly.

Poisoning is a favorite method, but it does not appear from statistics that the cyanides or morphine have the preference which would exist if epicurean philosophy were carried into the choice of drugs. At the same time, physicians usually put their knowledge of drugs to a practical execution in selecting a poison for suicide. But if the mere knowledge of the painlessness of death by certain means is not a determining factor in leading so many physicians to suicide, probably the accessibility of poisons is.

Suicide is largely a matter of insane impulse, and such an impulse can often be ascertained even in the case of those who have long been indifferent to life and have contemplated suicide. If a man must put on his hat and overcoat, walk to a drug store and tax his ingenuity for a lie with which to explain his desire for poison, he may postpone the fatal act from mere inertia, or he may meet a friend or have his interest in life aroused by one of a multitude of everyday occurrences or physical exercise may bring him to his senses. If, as is the case with almost every doctor, he has simply to feel in his pocket or walk across his office to get a deadly poison, the impulse may be carried into execution before anything can happen to supplant it in the brain.

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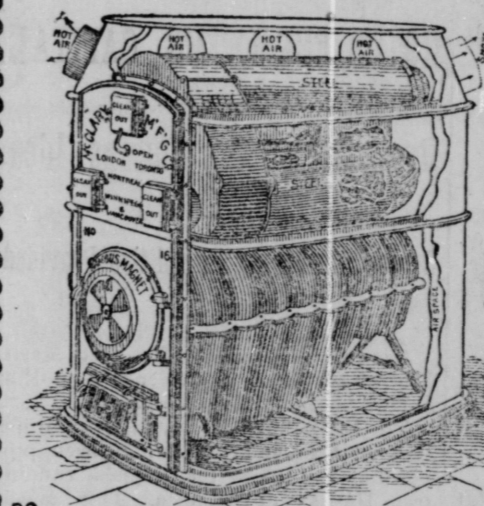
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