Mystery of the Bayou Woods

By WALKER KENNEDY.

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and when my father learned that I was about to marry her he moved heaven and earth to break off the match; but I would not listen to his objections, and he accordingly disinherited me and forbade me to ever come again into his presence."

"You have sometimes solicited aid of him, have you not?"

"Yes; I have been very unfortunate in business. My wife's continued illness has been the cause of my losing several good positions, as I have always thought that my first duty was to her. At times we have been in great distress, and I have gone to my father to see if he would not relent and help us. The last time I went was a few days before his body was discovered; indeed, it was the day before he was murdered."

"Did you quarrel with him and threaten him on that day?"

"Our interview was a little stormy, but I was half crazy with hunger and despair. I am certain, however, that I never threatened him, and I never entertained any idea of wreaking vengeance upon him; for, of course, it was his privilege to make himself granite toward me if he so chose."

"Can you think of anyone who would have a motive for committing this crime?"

"I suppose I could; but I decline to give my surmises for testimony."

This answer created considerable speculation, but insist as they would, the witness could not be made to say whether he had any suspicions, or what they were. His testimony divided sentiment, some thinking that he was the guilty person, others siding with him because they believed he was innocent, or because they could not blame him much if he had rid the earth of such a man as John T. Wright.

The next witness was a young man by the name of Frank Bradley, who had been out hunting the same day as Wright. He was asked whether he had hunted anywhere in the vicinity of the murder. He replied in the affirmative.

"I dropped in at Uncle Dick's cabin to get warm," he said, "and after I had left him and was going to the city, I met Herbert Wright between there and the city."

"Who is Uncle Dick?"

"He is an old hunter who lives by himself in a cabin in the Bayou Woods. Doesn't have much to do with the world, but he's always very glad to see anybody who comes to his place."

"Where is his cabin?"

"It's on the long road through the Bayou Woods."

"You know Herbert Wright?"

"Yes; I have known him since we were boys."

"Did you stop and talk any?"

"It was bitterly cold, and he seemed almost frozen. I spoke to him and asked him where he was going; that was all."

"Did he reply?"

"He did."

"What did he say?"

"He said he was going to Uncle Dick's."

"What time was it when you saw him?"

"It was about a quarter past five, I think."

"Did you notice any weapon or shotgun about him?"

"I think he carried a stout stick."

While this witness was giving his testimony, a detective came hurriedly into the room and called the chief of police aside. They engaged in eager conversation for some minutes. When the chief returned to his place he whispered something into the ear of the coroner, who listened attentively, bowed, and then resumed the proceedings.

A witness was next produced who had seen Herbert Wright in town about 6:30 o'clock of the day of the murder. The witness was in a saloon at the time, had seen Wright enter, pour out a very large drink of whisky and gulp it down.

"Did he pay for it?"

"Yes."

"What was his appearance?"

"He was either nervous or very cold. He had a bundle under his arm which I took for groceries."

After this witness had been examined, Warde whispered the chief that he considered it a pretty lame case against young Wright.

"You still hanker after the mysterious arctics, do you?"

"Yes."

"Of course your theory is more sensational and picturesque, but as a general thing murder is a rather prosaic affair. Wait till you hear all the testimony and I think you will say that we have made out a pretty fair case."

Warde himself was next called upon to testify. He told all about his investigation of the footprints in the snow, but his testimony was received with a smile, and it was evident that the auditors looked upon his discoveries as of no importance, and considered him a harmless young man who labored under the impression that he was cleverer than other people. Even Col. Franklin did not appear to attach any importance to Warde's investigations. So the mysterious arctics walked out of court as a joke.

There was a moment's pause ere the next witness answered the summons, and an expectant hush fell on the crowd when Miriam Wright, the daughter of the deceased, stepped into the room. Decidedly her appearance on the stand was thus far the most interesting event of the trial. Warde studied the face of the young woman with not a little curiosity, for the secluded life which her taciturn father had forced his family to lead made her the object of much speculative curiosity throughout the community. She was slender and graceful of figure, with a rather pale face, refined features and dark gray eyes. Although dressed in mourning, the expression of her face was haughty and self-possessed, rather than sorrowful. It would have been somewhat difficult to imagine her as having shed many tears over the crime that had been committed. Warde fancied that her features contained the proofs of a domestic tragedy; for the face that ought by right of youth and beauty to have been soft, was somewhat cold and emotionless; and one gifted with psychologic powers might have been able to construct a family history with its secrets, its injustices, its cruelties in the set lines of that young girl's fair and beautiful face.

It was soon evident that whatever sympathies she had were enlisted in behalf of her brother. Several times in the course of the examination she seemed on the point of saying something condemnatory of her father, but the tragic character of his death restrained her. Her self-possession was faultless in its frigidity, and she answered all the questions put to her with the clearest precision.

After the usual preliminary questions she was asked: "What were the relations existing between your father and your brother?"

"My father entertained a feeling of the most uncompromising hostility toward Herbert; in fact, he seemed to hate him more than he did any being on earth."

"And your brother—how did he feel toward your father?" asked the coroner, promptly.

"That you had better ask him."

"Did he ever express himself vindictively toward your father in your presence?"

"No; he has complained at times of my father's treatment, but that was all."

"Do you know of any reason why he should have been interested in bringing about your father's death?"

"I do not. He could hardly have expected my father to leave him anything."

"Have you examined your father's will?"

"No, sir; I have not given the subject a thought."

"You do not know then, whether he left a will or not?"

"I do not."

"Do you know, Miss Wright," asked the coroner, quietly, "what kind of a watch your father had?"

"Yes, sir."

"Describe it."

"It was a plain gold watch without any ornamentation whatever. I don't think it had even his name on it. It was presented to him a few years ago by a Creole friend of his."

"Was there any sort of inscription on it?"

"Yes; the French word 'Amitie' was engraved inside the case."

"You would know the watch then if you saw it?"

"Certainly."

From a small bundle which had been handed him by the chief of police the coroner took out two watches. One of these he examined for a moment and then passed it to the witness with the question: "Can you identify this watch?"

"Yes: it is my father's."

"Did this other one also belong to him?"

A second watch of a handsome design was handed to her, which she was positive she had never seen before. This watch had no inscription of any kind, but it bore the number 5,999 and was of a Swiss make.

The coroner then handed her a pair of sleeve buttons, a diamond pin and a pocket knife. Miss Wright identified the sleeve buttons and the knife as her father's, but did not think the pin was his. He never wore jewelry of any kind, and she had never seen the pin before.

While this part of the examination was going on, Miss Wright was nervous and wore a startled air, which might be interpreted either as an admission that she had been subjected to a line of examination that she had not expected, or a fear that she was giving testimony to the detriment of her brother in some way which was inscrutable to her. Groping thus in the dark, she was growing more and more agitated, and her self-possession was near to breaking down completely. Fortunately she was not subjected to any further inquisitorial process, and, half dazed with fear and uncertainty, she left the stand and quitted the room, casting as she did so a glance full of questioning despair upon her brother.

The full significance of this testimony was now brought out by placing on the stand Detective Fenton. He told a very plain and damaging story.

"Yesterday afternoon," he said, "Herbert Wright was arrested on suspicion, and, as is customary, he was taken to the police station and searched. All the papers and articles found on him were taken charge of. Among these were two pawn tickets. These tickets did not arouse the slightest suspicion in my mind, for there are hundreds of poor people in the city who have such tickets in their possession. It has, however, always been a custom of mine to take the pawn tickets found on all prisoners and ascertain what articles have been pawned. This has in a good many instances enabled me to bag some very important criminals. More from force of habit than anything else I went to Rosenthal's and Neckar's pawnshops. At the first I found that the ticket called for a watch, a pair of sleeve buttons, a diamond pin and a knife. The clerk who took in these articles remembered that they had been brought in by a seedy looking young man named Abraham Jowatt about six o'clock on the day the murder was committed. The clerk was just getting ready to close up shop when Jowatt came in, and the transaction was therefore made about six o'clock, as that was the closing time. The description given by the clerk tallies with young Wright's appearance, and the giving in of a fictitious name aroused my suspicions. A visit to Neckar's pawnshop revealed the fact that under like mysterious circumstances Wright had pawned another watch under the name of Jowatt, and it was done shortly after six o'clock. I obtained from the pawnbrokers the various articles and turned them over to the chief."

The witness then identified the articles already offered in evidence as those which he had obtained from the pawnbrokers.

Neckar and the clerk from Rosenthal's were then introduced, and they identified Wright as the young man who under the name of Jowatt had pawned the watches and other articles.

The testimony was completed with the evidence of the sheriff and the chief of police. The material point in their testimony was that they, with the permission of Mrs. Wright, and in her presence, had gone through all the private papers of her husband and had found no will. The significance of this fact was, of course, brought to the attention of the jury by the coroner, who stated that in the absence of a will Mr. Wright's property would be divided without prejudice between his children, and consequently Herbert Wright was a direct beneficiary by his father's death.

The testimony given by the officers produced a profound impression not only upon the jury, but on the crowd assembled there. Even Warde, who had been inclined to entertain a belief in Wright's innocence, was staggered for a moment. It was not an easy matter to conceive an explanation of the damning facts that had been brought to light. As for Herbert Wright himself, he seemed to be dazed by the chain of circumstantial evidence which had been wrought around him. His face was a strong psychological study, and upon it a growing horror depicted itself. Was it the despair of innocence surrounded by a network of apparently unanswerable accusations? Every bit of testimony seemed to embody a charge. Or was it the stupor of guilt detected that appeared in his face?

The coroner's jury made no attempt to construct any theory of innocence, but brought in a verdict that the deceased had come to his death from blows and wounds inflicted by his son.

CHAPTER VI.

Irving Warde could not have explained the impulse which caused him to seek an interview with Miriam Wright when the coroner's jury had finished its investigation. It was certainly not idle curiosity, nor the mere professional instinct of the newsgatherer; but some occult sympathy seemed to draw him to the cold, emotionless young woman whose beauty had been as great a revelation to him as her personality had been a mystery.

Miriam Wright had had no experience with newspaper people, and had no horror of the interviewer. At that time he had not attained the pinnacle of caustic opprobrium that has since then been erected to his industry and his discredit. So when Irving Warde sent up his card she came down immediately to the parlor to see what was wanted of her. He had the appearance and manners of a gentleman—for he was one—and so Miss Wright's suspicions of a prying newspaper reporter were never aroused.

From her appearance it was evident that she was the victim of a nervous relapse from a great mental strain. Her behavior on the witness stand, her marvelous self-possession until she was led to testify in the dark, had visibly been the result of an intense benumbing excitement. The iciness had gone from her face, and it was a helpless, feverish woman who confronted him.

Warde found himself, strange to say, endeavoring to allay her alarm.

"Miss Wright," he said, "I am one of those who believe that your brother's innocence will eventually be established, and I have come to ask you whether I can be of any assistance whatever to you."

After he had said this it sounded very foolish; but she evidently appreciated his good intentions, for she said: "It is very kind of you, Mr. Warde. I hardly know what to say. It has come upon us so suddenly, so horribly that I cannot tell what we shall do. If, however, we should see a way in which you could assist——"

"Believe me, I shall be only too ready to do so."

"Herbert and I have been peculiarly attached to each other since childhood, and I need hardly say, Mr. Warde, that his implication in the murder is to me more terrible even than my father's death, and I cannot conceive how it would have been possible for him to bring himself to commit such a crime. It is true that he was always high-strung and passionate, but that he could have taken his father's life, I—I cannot believe it."

"I have become deeply interested in this case, Miss Wright, because I am satisfied that the mystery has not yet been solved. It has taken hold of me completely, and I have thought of making some investigations in an entirely new line. The police have taken up a plausible theory, and have made out a strong case without a doubt; but it is not a complete case, for the reason that there are several minor clews which they have ignored entirely."

He then went on to give her an account of his operations in the snow, and then continued: "The police dismiss this circumstance with the clumsy explanation that the man with the arctics stumbled across the corpse by accident, examined it through curiosity, then rambled about the woods awhile, took the short way for town, met the company following the coroner's jury, and then went back with them to the inquest. I have made a number of inquiries and ascertained that this unknown person was not out hunting, because there was no hunter in the crowd that went to see the body. Now on a bitterly cold day no one would be apt to go rambling around in the Bayou Woods for pleasure; so this man must have had some clearly defined object in view. Coming upon the corpse, he either realizes his object or is diverted from it and goes back toward town by another route. If an innocent man should stumble on a corpse in the woods he would either go on his way or turn back immediately by the route he came and notify the authorities. But our unknown did neither. Take the hypothesis that he shot your father and left him for dead. The next day, drawn by some horrible fascination that frequently assails murderers, he revisits the scene of his crime, perhaps to assure himself that his victim is really dead. Possibly it was important that he should know this beyond the shadow of a doubt. Having satisfied himself and not wishing to be seen on that pathway, he crosses to the short cut and returns to the Devil's Den. There he falls in with the crowd going to the scene of the murder, and to throw suspicion completely off the track, he goes back with them to witness the proceedings."

Miriam's interest deepened visibly as Warde developed his hypothetical case.

"But," she said breathlessly, "my father's watch, knife and cuff buttons traced to Herbert—how can that be explained?"

"I can offer no solution as yet, but there is one thing in connection with that which requires explanation. The same afternoon that your brother pawned your father's watch he also pawned another watch at another shop. It could not have been his own, for in his destitute circumstances he would have pawned or sold that long ago. Whose watch, then, was it, and what part does it play in the tragedy? When that question is answered perhaps we shall have the key to unlock the mystery."

Miriam Wright was easily imbued with some of Warde's own belief in his theories, imperfect as they were. They went over the whole ground carefully together, and when at last he arose to take his departure she begged him earnestly to continue his task and help her brother. She had an idea that the police were in league against him, and Warde seemed to be the only friend they had.

When Irving Warde returned to the city he began to realize that he had shouldered a big job. Here was a case so plain as to stagger almost any one. The hand of fate seemed to be in it. By having in his possession those pawn tickets calling for the murdered man's articles, Wright's doom had apparently been sealed. How could they have come into the young man's hands unless he had taken them from his father? The old man had been murdered and robbed, and the articles of which he had been robbed and for which he had apparently been murdered had been traced to Herbert Wright.

As an offset to this he had as pegs on which to hang a theory:

1. The arctics.
2. The unidentified watch.

If he could find out who wore the arctics, it would enable him to determine what part the wearer played in the tragedy, if any; but he had little hope that he would be able to make any progress in this line of inquiry.

And the watch? Even suppose an owner were found for it, he might be some one who had been robbed, and another crime would be laid up to Wright's account without helping his case at all.

That afternoon Warde called at the jail and sought an interview with Wright. The latter was evidently very much bewildered over the drift of affairs, and he showed it in his face as well as his speech. Warde assured him that he believed in his innocence and that he would try to establish the fact; but Wright declined to say anything regarding the case that could help the reporter in his researches.

"I am entirely innocent of this crime. My father was killed with a pistol, and I have not had such a weapon in my hand for months.



"SAY, IRV," SAID HILLSMAN, FAMILIARLY, "THAT'S A HUMMING MURDER CASE THAT WRIGHT BUSINESS, AIN'T IT?"

There is an old pistol in my house that has been lying there untouched for over a year. I can see that in order to clear myself, Mr. Warde, it will be necessary for me to establish the guilt of another man. That is a hard part, an injustice I may say, of circumstantial evidence. Without offering direct proof of a man's guilt, it weaves a network about him so plausible and so apparently convincing that it is almost impossible for him to establish his innocence. Circumstantial evidence assumes that I am guilty, and then challenges me to prove that I am not. It would be impossible for me to prove an alibi, because the time of the killing is not exactly located. I have a suspicion of my own about this case, but I do not feel warranted in telling what it is. You would declare it too wildly improbable to merit a moment's belief. I must think the whole thing over before I say anything to anybody."

At this moment all further conversation was interrupted by the appearance of Wright's wife. Warde saw that she was a pleasant-faced, rather good-looking young woman, who had evidently undergone a hard spell of sickness. He further saw that the meeting between husband and wife was of the tenderest character, and then he went away.

There was at least one person, he thought, who believed in Wright's innocence absolutely.

On his way back to his office, he stopped at the office of Col. Franklin.

"The colonel will be back at three," said his clerk, a young man by the name of Frank Hillsman. "You've only to wait 15 minutes. Better take a chair. Have a cigar?"

Hillsman was a knowing young man with a gay, dissipated look, not a bad-hearted fellow one would say, but with an unmistakable tendency to surrender very promptly to temptation. He wore jaunty clothes, smoked villainous cigars, played poker recklessly, and knew every saloonkeeper in town by his Christian name. He plumed himself on his wickedness, and had a vague idea that he was a man of the world.

Warde accepted his invitation to wait, but declined the cigar. He had suffered from Hillsman's cigars before. "Say, Irv," said Hillsman, familiarly, "that's a humming murder case, that Wright business, ain't it?"

"I should say so. It's a very mysterious affair," replied Warde.

"Mysterious? What are you giving me? Why, it's as plain as the nose on a man's face. The colonel heard all the testimony, and he says he can see no hope for Wright."

"Is the colonel satisfied of Wright's guilt?"

"Not a doubt of it."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Does he intend going into the prosecution?"

"I think not. It is scarcely intricate enough for him. His forte is digging truth out of a well, not picking it up on the ground. Besides, since the facts have come out so strong against Wright, he does not feel like having anything to do with it. He's always been a great friend to the family, you know; and he dislikes the idea of prosecuting the son for the murder of the father, who was his friend."

"Yes; I see."

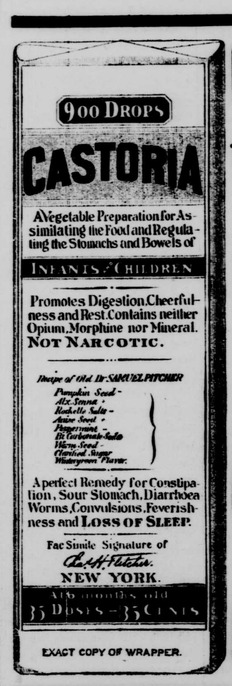
"Between you and me, I believe Wright's family were blamed glad to get rid of him, and the colonel knows it."

"What makes you think so?"

"Why, I'll tell you. Old Wright was as hard a piece of cobblestone as you ever saw. He treated his wife as if she had been his nigger, and he never had a pleasant word for anybody at home. He kicked his son out, you know, and there's his daughter, Miriam, a perfectly scrumptious girl, that he didn't take any more notice of than if she had been a mummy. The only decent thing he ever did was to get himself killed, and he couldn't help that."

"What did he ever do to you, Frank?"

"Nothing at all; but didn't I know him? He used to drive up to this office every day, never looking to the right or left, or speaking to a soul. All day long it was cotton reports, sampling cotton, thinking cotton, and, for all I know, eating cotton. Every now and then he'd go off to one of his plantations and spend a few days cussin' out his manager and niggers. In fact, he was a perfect hog if there ever was one."



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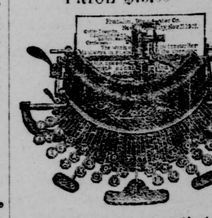
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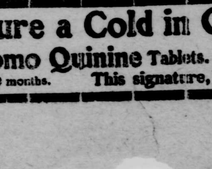
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It stops the Cough and heals the lungs. Prevents Pneumonia and Consumption.

MR. G. VACHER, of 157 Osgood St., Chicago, writes: "My wife had la grippe and it left her with a very bad cough on her lungs which FOLEY'S HONEY AND TAR cured completely."

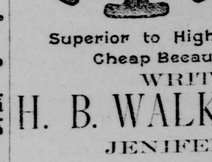
Every Trapper Needs The ONEIDA COMMUNITY JUMPTRAP



because it is made by the oldest Trapmakers in the world, and is thoroughly tested and guaranteed before leaving the factory. Your dealer will replace any that break.

ASK FOR THE ONEIDA COMMUNITY JUMPTRAP

and look for the name on the Treadle
Made by the Largest Trapmakers in the World.



THE ONLY GUARANTEED TRAP

If one of our traps should break your dealer will replace it free.

TWO MILLION MADE LAST YEAR.

To Cure a Cold in One Day
Take Laxative Bromo Quinine Tablets.
Cures Grip in Two Days.
Seven Million boxes sold in past 12 months.
This signature, E. W. Grove
on every box. 25c.

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