Mystery of the Bayou Woods

By WALKER KENNEDY.

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"Perhaps it was politics?"

"Couldn't haven't been. I happened to have been one of the most active supporters of the present mayor."

"What causes you to think that your activity in the Wright case brought about your dismissal?"

"I first asked the chief on what grounds I was retired. He replied very warmly that he had received a peremptory note from the mayor to discharge me from the service. I looked up the mayor and put the same question to him. He replied that no fault was found with me whatever, and he could give me no reason at all. Now, while the mayor controls the chief, he is in turn controlled by the boss."

"The boss?"

"Pat Kernigan, you know; the man who can vote the slums as he pleases, who knows every wharf rat, every den keeper and every criminal that haunts the Rest and other places of the same order, and who can make and unmake mayors. This man virtually appoints the police. He is shrewd enough not to abuse his power. He knows that there must be good men on the force, but he draws the line at any interference with his followers. Last night Billy McGee resumed his place behind the bar at Peter's Rest, and the place is now in full blast again. This morning I saw McGee in close consultation near the mayor's office. At noon came my dismissal."

"That is only a case of circumstantial evidence," said Everett, "but I believe I am getting infected with the theories of you two. If there is anything in it, however, some other influence than Billy McGee's must have persuaded Kernigan to this step, and it must have been a pecuniary or very peremptory influence. McGee would have stopped when he secured permission to reopen his dive. There is something beyond."

"There always is in this beastly case," said Warde.

"If this organization can, in addition to its power to commit crime, discharge at will members of the police force, why nobody—nothing—is safe from it. I can hardly imagine any cohesive power that can bind together such diverse elements."

"A great prize must be at stake, for which some one is willing to spend vast sums of money, and to take very ticklish risks."

"I see that it will be necessary to have some detective work done in this case, and if you are willing to continue in the line you have begun, I will pay you enough to keep you going, and if the result of the Wright estate settlement is favorable you shall have a handsome fee beside."

"That will suit me," said Fenton, "for to tell you the truth, I have become interested in this case, and there are a few points which have suggested themselves to me, and I would like to work them out."

"You had better do your work as quietly as possible, and when you have anything to communicate come to my home after dark. If the theory we are working is correct, your life will be in danger the first time it is known that you are pursuing the case. And you, too, Irving, must be careful. I think you had better let it be understood that you have had enough of it, and that your interest in the affair has ceoded. If it is necessary to you both, suppose you meet me at my house to-morrow night at eight o'clock. I shall see Wright in the morning, get his theory of the murder, and then, perhaps, we can make some use of the disjointed facts in our possession."

The next evening Warde sought the residence of Mr. Everett, on Union street, some distance out. He took care to muffle himself up considerably, and as it was a very dark night and no lamps lighted, because the almanac called for a moonlight night, he felt safe from identification. He was ushered into the lawyer's library, which was very cheerful and inviting. All the walls were lined with books. A few ornaments graced the mantlepiece, and from the generous grate came the warmth that filled the entire room.

Hardly had Warde taken off his overcoat and ensconsed himself in a chair, when the bell rang and Fenton was announced. He came in disguise, wearing a heavy beard, which at night would easily prevent anyone from recognizing him.

Mr. Everett was by nature a hospitable man, so he made his guests welcome, and before they proceeded to business he told a few remarkably good anecdotes, interlining them with a choice punch of his own making, the recipe for which was a native of Virginia and had been in the family for more than 100 years. The lawyer was in exceptionally bright spirits, and his whole manner indicated that he had something to tell which would surprise them. In a dignified, lawyer-like way he seemed to relish the fact that he had a sensation to communicate.

"I have seen Herbert Wright today," he said, "and he has put me in possession of his defense. It is of such a character that I must pledge you both to secrecy, but I must also put you in possession of it, because you can both help me. If we should publish it in the papers of Nilus tomorrow I have no doubt that nearly everybody in the city would dismiss it as the invention of a very clumsy liar. You also may declare it to be utterly incredible, but the events with which you are familiar and which have been withheld from the public are corroborative of Wright's story. But there are many links missing, and only the most painstaking labor will enable us to complete the chain. The mystery that surrounds the death of John T. Wright also pervades his entire business career. The man who in the public estimation was a millionaire, died apparently almost a pauper. I am satisfied that somewhere the two mysteries blend to- that the same key will both. John T. Wright and he made large usiness. Where swer to this vears ago gallows.

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was even excited. Here was something worthy of his mettle.

"I think I can do something in this case," he said, quietly, but with something in his tone that indicated a subdued enthusiasm.

The gleam in his eye and the compression of his lips were significant. Fenton had a score to pay off, and it was not in human nature that he should not be glad at having the opportunity to "get even." He was convinced that he was the victim of too much interest in the Wright case, and he felt his resolution nerved anew in the desire to clear up the affair. In this way he would have a royal revenge.

"I am convinced of one thing thoroughly," said Mr. Everett as they were about to break up, "and it is this: Herbert Wright's story furnishes the ground work from which we must work to clear up the mystery, and it is useless to follow any other theory; or else there is no mystery, and he is his father's murderer. So I would advise you both to keep his story clearly in mind whatever you do."

Irving now took his departure, Fenton remained a few minutes longer to discuss some of the details of his work, and then he, too, left, taking a direction different from that taken by Warde. The three men were now thoroughly alive to the importance of working quietly and free from observation.

CHAPTER X.

It is now proper to touch upon a different element in this story. It may seem strange to the reader that Warde should have developed so ardent an interest in the case which we have been considering, and the writer would not be quite frank if he did not admit that the young reporter's activity was not purely professional. From the very moment that he beheld Miriam Wright, the mystery had possessed for him a fascination that would not be put aside. So far as Herbert Wright was concerned, it cannot be said that Irving was absorbingly interested in his affairs; and it was at first more an instinct than anything else which caused him to believe that the young fellow was innocent. It was the intangible influence



"WHEN EVERYTHING HAD BEEN SAID ABOUT HIM, THEY BEGAN TO TALK ABOUT THEMSELVES."

of Miriam Wright that enlisted him ardently in the case, and that intensified his eagerness over each new development. There was something about her loneliness that appealed to him, and from the very first her beauty had stirred him as he had never been stirred before. His interest in the case gave him an excuse for seeing her frequently, and as he was a man of intelligence and of many attractive qualities, his visits were always acceptable. There were features in the Wright case which were rather repulsive to him. The character of the murdered man was such that he would have felt very much like saying that his taking off was hardly worth investigating with a view of punishing the murderer. But it seemed at first to involve the punishment of an innocent man, and that appealed to Irving's sense of fair play. In the next place it introduced into his life the element that transfigured and transforms the world.

A friendship soon became cemented between himself and Miriam. Perhaps at first each was a novelty to the other, and therein lay the charm. Miriam's life had been narrow and introspective. She knew the world only through the medium of books. She seldom received or paid visits, and she had obtained her education at the hands of a governess; and had she been cast upon a desert isle her idle life could hardly have been more restricted. She was so unlike the other women whom Irving knew that he was attracted to her from the start.

At first his visits were taken up with the latest news about Herbert's case, the value of the testimony, the probable action of the jury, the evidence that could be introduced for Herbert, and various other features of the case. But there came a time when this topic was pretty nearly exhausted. All the events in Herbert's life had been reviewed, his disposition had been analyzed and every probable possibility and possible probability in connection with the case had been canvassed. Up to this time their acquaintance had been based on their joint concern for Miriam's brother, but when everything had been said about him and his affairs that could be said, they began to talk about themselves; and like the timid skater venturing rather warily upon the new ice, they were decidedly shy at first; but when they found that the ice would hold them, as it were, they became braver and more daring. Confidence begat confidence. The acquaintance ripened apace, and it was not very long before each of them was aware of the tender touch of an unseen influence.

When Christmas came, Irving spent a good deal of his time at the Wright place. He was received on a footing of a friend, and he did much in a quiet, unobtrusive way to make the holidays less sad for Miriam and her mother.

CHAPTER XI.

Some time after New Year's Nilus was busy entertaining an eastern capitalist by the name of Frederick Merivale. Just why it did so, perhaps, Nilus would have been puzzled to explain if an explanation had been asked; for nobody seemed to know the object of his visit or in what way all this wining and dining could assist the prospects of the city. But Nilus was naturally hospitable and when Mr. Merivale's presence was made known it was surmised in a general way that he was seeking an outlet for eastern capitalb Perhaps he might be induced to take up an important railroad project that had been abandoned for lack of funds, and which would open up a splendid new territory to the trade of Nilus. Or perhaps he was looking for a place to establish manufactures of some kind, and Nilus had a well-defined idea that without manufactures she could never hope to be a great city. But whatever Mr. Merivale's projects were, he kept them largely to himself. Some of the wealthy cotton men may have been in his confidence; the assiduity of their attentions to him favored this idea; but nothing definite got into the papers except the fact that Mr. Merivale had been entertained by the clubs and banqueted by some of the business men.

Merivale was the sensation of the day, and the appetizing odor of mystery that clung about him added to the interest which his visit had excited.

Yet there was absolutely nothing interesting in the man's personality except the fact that he permitted no one to understand him. That which is unintelligible seldom fails to awaken an interest, and it was so with Frederick Merivale. In appearance he was anything but remarkable. He was cold and dull-looking, with a fishy eye, a neatly trimmed beard, a flushed face, and sparse hair on the top of his head. His yellowish brown beard was parted with great precision. His manners were nice but not affable. He seldom laughed, and when he did the intention was not mirthful.

People knew that this man had made a great deal of money, but they could not guess how. His manner gave no indication whatever of his methods, and there was no way to determine the process of his thoughts from his conversation, which was dry as parchment. Merivale had very little to say, and what he did say was not worth remembering either for its brilliancy, its depth or its perspicuity. But whatever may have been his deficiencies in the conversational line, there could be no doubt that he was a gourmet of marked ability, and that he gave his tailor carte blanche. Every detail of his toilet was carefully considered, and he would have been pronounced a well-dressed man in the most fashionable city of christendom.

Nilus knew there was something in Merivale, even though she could not define it, because he had been known to squeeze Wall street pretty hard several times to his own profit and glory; and it is hardly necessary to say that the man who is a success, but does not disclose his secret, possesses a charm for the curious that no merely fortunate man could have.

Naturally, Irving Warde, as a wide-awake newspaper man, was interested in finding out the object of Merivale's visit, and soon after his arrival secured an introduction. As a member of some of the leading clubs of the city, he contrived to see a great deal of Merivale, and though he made several adroit attempts to learn from him the business which brought him to the city, he found himself baffled at every point by that apparently dense and unsuspecting person. Then he turned his attention to the rich cotton men who were most frequently in Merivale's society, but they were, evidently as much in the dark as Irving, although they assumed an air of mystery and pretended to be in the secret. Irving was not deceived by the show of mystery, however, and he dropped his investigations in this line.

There was one person in the city upon whom Merivale called frequently, and this was Col. James Franklin. As has already been intimated in this story, Col. Franklin was a man who dabbled in a great many enterprises, but he had considerable reputation as a chancery lawyer. He was a man whom it was worth while to consult about real estate investments, quea- in olving titles and intricate is- connected with the settlement of es and the rights of ownership. uent consultations with Franklin only be explained on the ground



HE RETIRED AT ONCE TO READ THE PAPER WHICH HE HAD OBTAINED FROM FRANK HILLSMAN.

to participate in your beastly revels. But I want to see this drunkard here," indicating Frank, "if you can spare him."

"All right." And Irving leaned heavily, but gratefully, against the door of a store, while Franklin rather coldly demanded of Hillsman:

"What have you done with the paper Morris gave you for me?"

"What paper, colonel?" said Frank, sobered and frightened at the suddenness of the question.

"You know what paper I mean. I have heard from him to-day by letter from china, and he writes me that he gave the paper to you, and I propose to have it!"

Irving broke in here: "Come, gentlemen, don't quarrel here. Lesh all have a friendly drink."

"Oh, go to grass!" said the colonel angrily.

"Colonel, I won't do it," said Irving with dignity. "I've got to take Frank home."

"Never mind Frank. I'll take him home. You've got a big enough job to take yourself home."

"All right, Colonel. I'll hold you personally responsible when you sober up. Goodby. I'll see you later."

And he reeled away, leaving Frank and the colonel to fight it out. As soon as he reached a cross street he turned into it, straightened himself up, and walked briskly to a hotel; for he did not care to be found in his room that night. The clerk gave him a room without entering his name on the register, and he retired at once to read the paper which he had obtained from Frank Hillsman.

Warde's intoxication that night was of course all a trick. Though he had ostensibly disposed of several drinks of whisky, he had as a matter of fact simply ejected the liquor into the glass of water which accompanies each drink. So when he reached his room at the hotel he was as sober as he had been when he met Hillsman.

Reflections of a Bachelor.

There is no way of getting out of a love affair that succeeds like not getting in.

The way to praise anything a woman wears is to tell her how pretty she looks in it.

The fun that a woman gets out of an argument is the chance to cry and a man to get mad.

When a woman confesses her age she thinks to let you know how much younger she is than her younger sister.

A woman can stand being kissed against her will all right, but it makes her very indignant if you don't pretend to use force.—N. Y. Press.

Modern Education.

The old-fashioned uncle was holding Ethel on his knee and asking about her kindergarten.

"And I suppose," said he, with the interest of one who had "spelled down" many a line of competitors, "that you study your spelling-book faithfully?"

"I have no spelling-book," said Ethel, loftily. "We're taught by the pathetic system."

"Phonetic," corrected mamma.

But when uncle got Ethel's first little letter, he decided that she was nearer right than mamma.—Youth's Companion.

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Treasurer, Portland Economic League

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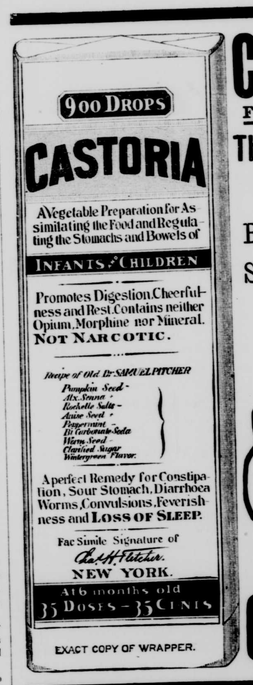
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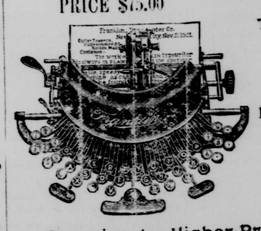
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