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THE KNIFE THROWERS

By FREDERIC VAN RENSSELAER DEY,
Author of "Not Like Other Men," Etc.

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CHAPTER XI.

THE GRAVE CHARGE OF MURDER.

WYNDHAM left Carmen Pendleton at her hotel after lingering long enough to have a conversation with Pancho, who was as simple and direct, as straightforward and honest then as he was with Burr Pendleton the night when he took him on horseback to the dueling ground.

Before leaving the hotel Craig instructed him not on any account to leave the apartments of his mistress, and at the desk down stairs he gave explicit instructions that Carmen was to be denied to all callers, no matter what name was given. After that he felt easier, for now he also feared that the enraged Mexican might attempt a summary vengeance upon the sister of Burr Pendleton.

From there he went directly to the district attorney, who, fortunately, was a personal friend and had stood in the same relation to Burr, and to him he related the whole story in detail behind closed doors.

He omitted nothing. He began at the moment of his meeting with Burr after his arrival from Mexico and told of every incident that had occurred which could in any way relate to the crime. He graphically explained the discovery of the body, the consternation of James, his own deep perplexity, but also the absolute certainty he felt in his own mind of the innocence of the valet. He related how he himself when a boy had passed many months in Mexico and had witnessed the knife throwing exhibitions that are frequently held there; how it had occurred to him that this Mexican might have thrown the knife, and that when he more minutely examined the position of the body and the position of the knife the suspicion became a certainty.

Then he told how utterly hopeless had seemed to him then the possibility of fixing the crime upon Escudera if he were at once accused, but that he believed if he could for the time being cause suspicion to rest upon another and thus allay the fears of the guilty one he thought it might be accomplished.

He explained how and why he had sent James away and admitted that the valet was at that moment in his own rooms awaiting gladly arrest or anything else that would lift from his shoulders the burden of constantly living a lie, and then he told enough of the family history of the Pendletons to make his point. He explained the presence of Carmen in the city and told as much of what she had told him as was necessary, and finally he described the scene in the restaurant and told how this same man had attempted to assassinate him by the throwing of a knife.

"That knife," he concluded, "is the exact counterpart, so far as the hilt is concerned, of the one that took the life of Burr Pendleton. I have it with me. If you will produce the other, we will compare them, for I have not the slightest doubt of the result."

The district attorney sent his clerk to the cabinet for the weapon with which Pendleton was killed. They were placed side by side and found, as Craig had prophesied, to be precisely alike.

"There is still another test to be applied," continued Craig. "People who are adept in the art of knife throwing are most particular regarding the weight of their weapons. The more expert the thrower the more particular he is regarding this point. I have known them to file away substance from one in order to make it weigh precisely like the model from which it was made, so that placed upon either side of delicate scales they would perfectly balance. Send for an apothecary's scales and let us test these. If they do not weigh alike to a hair, I miss my guess."

The scales were sent for, and they proved that Wyndham was correct.

"You have a strong case," said the district attorney. "It is circumstantial, but it is strong. I will have this man arrested on your complaint."

"There are two others who are accomplices, who are accessories before and after the fact—Juan Rodriguez and Emilio Bustamente. They are in the city, but I do not know where."

"We will find them," replied the officer. "It will be strange if we cannot get state evidence out of one of them."

They were interrupted at that moment by the entrance of a clerk, who laid a card on the desk before the district attorney.

"Show him in in exactly five minutes," said the official to the clerk, and when the door had closed he added to Wyndham: "We're in luck. Your Mexican friend is outside, and unless I am greatly mistaken he has his two friends with him, for he can only have applied to me for one reason."

"To charge me with the crime."

"Precisely. Step behind that screen, Craig, and take a seat. Don't sneeze or cough or betray your presence in any manner, and you shall hear how I finish with this man. Wait just a moment. You have a minute or two to spare before John brings them in."

He drew a pad of paper toward him and wrote rapidly. When he finished, he passed the sheet to Wyndham, and this is what he read:

Have warrants issued immediately for Carlos de Escudera y Romero, Juan Rodriguez and Emilio Bustamente, charged by this office with the murder of Burr Pendleton. One of them at least is here now; possibly the others. Send in three officers to make the arrest. Lose no time.

The district attorney's signature was appended, and the note was addressed to one of his assistants.

"Now get behind your screen, Craig," he said while he folded the document and placed it in an envelope. "Time's up."

Wyndham had scarcely taken his seat when there was a rap at the door and the clerk entered, as the official had prophesied, followed by three men, the foremost of whom was Escudera.

"I have taken the liberty of bringing these gentlemen with me," he said, with the utmost suavity and politeness, "because they are able to substantiate what I have to say. I have a very grave charge to make, Mr. District Attorney."

"Be seated, gentlemen," was the reply, not less suave than the introduction. "What is the charge, Mr. Romero, and whom does it concern?"

"Pardon me, sir. My name is Escudera. Romero is the family name of my mother."

"Ah, yes! Well, what is the charge, and whom does it concern?"

"The charge, sir, is murder. It concerns a prominent citizen of this city, one Craig Wyndham, who, I have strong reasons to believe, murdered his friend, Burr Pendleton."

"What!" cried the district attorney, evidently astonished out of his official calm. "The Pendleton case? Craig Wyndham the murderer? Impossible!"

"You will believe it to be more than probable, sir, when you have heard all that I have to tell you."

The district attorney rang the bell sharply and when the clerk appeared said:

"Send in my stenographer." Then to Escudera he added: "You make a grave accusation, Mr.—er—Escudera. Not a word of the evidence you have to give shall be lost."

The stenographer appeared at once, and then he added, "Now, sir, begin."

"I arrived in New York from Mexico one day in advance of Mr. Pendleton, whom I had known in the City of Mexico. I performed a few slight services for him there, and we became warm friends. I had announced to him my intention of visiting New York, and he gave me a card of introduction at his club, so I presented it at once. I was in the club when he arrived, and I saw him meet Wyndham on the steps outside. They went to a quiet corner together and talked for a long time. Presently I walked past them, and Pendleton, recognizing me, rose at once. We left the club together within a few moments of that time."

"Why did you go out of the club?" asked the official.

"At his request. He wished me to go to his rooms with him, for no other reason, I think, than that we might talk together uninterruptedly."

"Had you business together?"

"None whatever. I think that Pendleton wished to get away from Wyndham. In fact, he intimated as much."

"Ah, I see."

"I remained in his rooms about or nearly an hour. He agreed to meet me at the club again that night. I then went to my hotel."

"What time did you leave the club to go to Pendleton's rooms?"

"A little after 5."

"What time were you to meet at the club again?"

"There was no definite time—that evening. He did not come. I called at his rooms the following morning, but, receiving no answer to my summons, went away. I did not know of his death until it was announced in the newspapers."

"Then how do you connect Wyndham with the crime?"

"Wyndham went to Pendleton's rooms the same evening that I was there, but about 9 o'clock. He was there more than an hour. While he was there Pendleton's valet came out and went away. He was sobbing, and he appeared greatly frightened. Some time after he had gone Wyndham came out. He paused on the steps and looked carefully around him. His face was very white, and he seemed to fear to be seen. He soon started up the street and turned the first corner he came to."

"How do you know all this, Mr. Escudera?"

"Pardon me. I have unconsciously given the testimony of these gentlemen who are with me. Personally I do not know it."

The district attorney wheeled like a flash upon the others.

"Were you watching Mr. Wyndham?" he demanded sharply.

"Not watch"—

"What is your name?" interrupted the official.

"Juan, or John, Rodriguez."

"And yours?" turning to the remaining witness.

"Emilio Bustamente."

"Now, Mr. Rodriguez, proceed."

"We were not watching him in the sense that you use the term, but we were watching for him."

"How was that?"

"We were passing the house when he entered it. Bustamente believed he recognized in him an old friend for whose address he had vainly sought. He accordingly inquired of the hallboy for that friend, but was told that no such person lived there."

"What is the name of your friend, Mr. Bustamente?"

"John Cuthbert," replied Bustamente promptly. "He is an Englishman."

"Proceed, Mr. Rodriguez."

"When he found that no such person resided there, he decided that his friend was making a call and resolved to wait till he came out. As it was getting late then he believed his friend would not remain long. I demurred, but he prevailed upon me to wait with him."

"And you waited more than an hour?"

"While we were waiting an old man came out sobbing. He seemed dazed and frightened. We at once thought something was the matter. I spoke to the old man, but he did not reply. After that we waited awhile longer and ultimately saw the man, whom we now know to be Wyndham, come from the house. His behavior was precisely as Mr. Escudera has described it to you."

"Why did you not accost your supposed friend, Mr. Bustamente? Or did you?"

"No. I saw at a glance that I was mistaken. The light shone in his face when he came out. I could not be deceived then."

"How do you know now that it was Wyndham you saw?"

"Because I have seen him many times since in the company of my friend, Escudera."

"And you also, Rodriguez?"

"Yes."

"What time was it when he came out of the house?"

"I cannot say exactly."

"Well, approximately."

"Somewhere about 11."

"It was 11 o'clock or a little after that when he re-entered the club," interrupted Escudera.

"How do you know that, Mr. Escudera?"

"I went into the club immediately behind him."

"Was that the time you were to meet Mr. Pendleton there?"

"There was no stated hour, but it was understood to be late in the evening. I think I so stated."

"So you did, so you did. Excuse me."

There was a rap at the door, and the clerk entered again. He laid a card upon which there was writing on the table, and the district attorney snatched it up with a furious scowl.

"You should place messages like this in my hands, John," he said severely. Then he glanced at the inscription and added:

"Tell them to wait at the door and to come in when I ring. I will call them as soon as I have finished with these gentlemen."

He turned then again to Escudera.

"And upon this you base your charges of murder against Craig Wyndham?" he asked in the pleasantest tone imaginable.

"I do."

"Why?"

"Because it is proved that he was the last person in the rooms of Pendleton. Burr Pendleton was never seen alive after that time. The inquest determined that he was murdered about that time; because the servant went away while Wyndham was still in the house and has not been seen since, and he was publicly accused of the crime, and the police are still searching for him, I understand."

"That is quite true. Is there anything more?"

"Because Wyndham was made sole heir of all that Pendleton possessed, and he above all others had a motive for the crime. He could easily bribe the servant to assist him or to go away and leave him to do the work alone."

"That has a reasonable sound. Have you any more reasons, Mr. Escudera?"

"Yes, one more, the weightiest of all."

"What is that?"

"That old servant James is living in the house where his master was murdered and is acting as the valet of Wyndham."

"What!" cried the district attorney again, and he added mentally: "By Jove, if I had heard this before Wyndham told me about it, it might have impressed me—all but the evidence of these two lying scoundrels with you, Mr. Escudera. Nobody with any sense would believe the story they tell."

"It is true," said Escudera, replying to the exclamation.

"How do you know that?"

"I have seen him there. I saw him there last night. I know him well. I have often seen him in Mexico, and I also saw him the night of the murder, you will remember."

"Now, Mr. Escudera, and you, gentlemen, what object have you in pursuing Mr. Wyndham with this terrible accusation?"

"Simply that justice be done, sir," replied Escudera. "I was Pendleton's friend. I would like to see his murderer punished."

"You want justice, then?"

"I do. I demand it."

"Then, by thunder, you shall have it!"

He struck the bell sharply. The door opened, and three officers in plain clothes entered the room. The district attorney waved his hand.

"There are your men. Take them," he said. "Come out, Wyndham. These fellows make me sick."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

THE MAN WHO DID.

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