

Continued from First Page.
"Perfectly. A check for the sum of eighty dollars. Well?"
"Very good, there seems to have been some difficulty or misunderstanding—probably the cashier at the bank made some stupid mistake; but, anyhow, the check was returned yesterday, marked 'no good'—I thought you would wish to know about it."

CHAPTER XXIII. THE SHADOW LITTE.

At 10 o'clock the next morning all Inspector Byrnes prepared to go on duty. He had come down to the least detail, and there was nothing left to do but wait for the fly to walk into the web.

Horace Dupe, after receiving his check, put it in his pocket with the intention of getting it cashed at the bank. But in order to do this it would be necessary to be identified. This would not be a particularly easy matter in any case, and the less so because the name on it was not his own. At length he decided to get it cashed through some friend. He was reluctant to have it known to any one that he had any dealings with Judge Kettle, and it was partly on this account that he had given 'Grush's name. But it was an annoyance and a risk even so, and he prudently sought for a way in which he could get a check again in a hurry.

That night he succeeded in cashing the check over the bar of an inn in the lower part of the city, where he was lodging. The landlord of the inn was a depositor at the bank on which the check was drawn. This was on Wednesday. The next day, Thursday (the day of Pauline's interview with the inspector), the check was sent to the bank to be turned in with the other receipts. On Thursday the check came back marked 'N. G.' Dupe was not in the hotel at the time, but he entered about 11 o'clock. The hotel keeper called his attention to the dishonored check, and demanded from him payment of the face amount. Dupe had by that time spent a good deal of the eighty dollars; but rather than have any disturbance he deposited fifty dollars, and promised to go to the bank the next day and have the thing straightened out.

But though he carried it off with a composed face, he was in reality filled with rage and apprehension. What could be the meaning of it? A check signed by Judge Kettle refused to be cashed? Was it a mistake, an accident, or a deliberate plan? A mistake it could hardly be; there was nothing ambiguous in the wording of the check, and Dupe had made sure that the date and the name were correctly and distinctly entered. The probability was greater of its being an accident. Judge Kettle might have inadvertently overdrew his account. If this were the case, the matter could be easily rectified. But on the other hand, the third contingency remained—that the check had been stopped by special direction. If that were so, it meant that Mrs. Kettle had desired it. She had received to defy him? She fancied, perhaps, that he would not have the courage to carry out his threat and return to her the intruder's husband. Well, if that were her idea, she would discover her mistake. He would reveal her shame, whatever the consequences to himself. He would blast her life; not only her husband, but the whole world should know what she had done; and if he suffered imprisonment for it, at any rate the free world come when he would again be free, and then he could seek her out and treat her with the ignominy of a felon for time would bring no freedom to her.

This bitterness of mind on his part was partly characteristic of the nature of the man, but there was in it an element of exceptional animosity. Almost all criminals who have fallen from a higher social position lay the responsibility of their degradation at the door of some person or combination of circumstances outside of themselves. So it was with Dupe. He dated the beginning of his misfortune from the day when he was arrested on the charge of murder by the father of Jerrold Nolen. Pauline and her mother were the only living representatives (as he believed) of that man. They should suffer a vicarious punishment. So strong was his desire to see this punishment inflicted that he half hoped Mrs. Kettle had really played him false. The longer he thought over the matter, however, the less likely did it seem that this could be the case. Whatever she might think as to the probability of his failing to carry out his threat, the possibility that he would carry it out was too serious a one to invite. Recognizing this, Dupe prepared himself for either contingency. He would go to Judge Kettle's office and inform him of the refusal of the check, as if he supposed it to be an ordinary business error. If the judge released the check, well and good; the matter might as well be settled at any rate, where it was. If, on the contrary, resistance should be offered to his claim, he would know how to defend himself.

It was about 11 o'clock when he mounted the steps of the judge's office on Pine street. The rooms were on the first floor; there was an outer office and two or three inner rooms opening into one another. Two or three clerks were sitting in the outer room when Dupe entered. He asked in the name of if Judge Kettle were within.

"I'll see, sir," replied the clerk, looking up. "What name shall I say?"
"Say Mr. Grush wants to see him a moment—Mr. John Grush."

"The clerk went into the inner room and soon came back with the request that Mr. Grush would step inside. Dupe passed through the door, which was closed behind him. He found himself in a handsomely furnished parlor, seated at the desk of which Judge Kettle sat at his desk. The judge turned in his chair and asked him to be seated. He thought you were up at my house the other evening," he remarked. "I recognize the name and the face."

"You are quite right, judge," replied Dupe, assuming an easy air, "and it is on a matter connected with my visit to you on that occasion that I have ventured to call here."

"Very good, and now," said the inspector, lowering his voice and leaning forward, "but you had better not say a word to any one about this. I have formed for bringing this thing to a head."

"I am fortunate able to do that," answered the judge, "because the gentleman in question happens to be at my house. I will summon him." And stepping to the door of the inner room, he partly opened it and said, "Come in."

The next moment the figure of a tall young man appeared on the threshold and advanced into the apartment. He was the very man whom Dupe had seen waiting here? What was the meaning of it? It was the gentleman you speak of?" inquired the judge of Dupe, indicating the newcomer.

"Yes, I suppose they have fooled you with some clever lie or other," said Dupe, with a snarl. "All the same, what I tell you is the truth, and the world will believe it, if you don't."

"You seem to know so much, sir," answered the judge, "that you probably do not need to be informed that Mrs. Kettle was formerly Miss Nolen and that she had two brothers. One of them died in the effect of injuries received mysteriously, while in the company of one Horace Dupe, several years ago. The other brother, Percy by name, was accused, a year since, of a robbery at Castellani's jewelry store. He left New York and was reported drowned; but the report turned out to have been an error. He returned to New York about ten days ago, but his presence was not generally made known, owing to the fact that the true perpetrator of the robbery had not yet been identified. The identification has now been made, however, and therefore the necessity of concealing Mr. Percy Nolen's presence no longer exists."

"Well, and what has all this signification to do with me?" demanded Dupe defiantly. "What have I to do with Percy Nolen?"

"I am Percy Nolen," said the gentleman in question, regarding Dupe with a very stern expression, "and this lady is my sister."

Dupe saw at once that he had been outwitted and trapped. The check had been stopped in order to induce him to come to Judge Kettle's office; and it had been previously arranged that Mrs. Kettle and Percy were to meet him there and effect his discomfiture. There was nothing left for him to do except to retire like the baffled villain in the melodrama, muttering, 'Toiled! but I will be avenged!' or words to that effect. Dupe, however, failed to grasp the dramatic opportunities of the situation; but he said, as he moved towards the door, "You have been known as a pickpocket, Percy Nolen, and it's still stuck to you." With that he opened the door, and would have gone out of it, had he not been confronted there by a broad shouldered, athletic gentleman, with a brown moustache and piercing eyes, who was accompanied by a dejected personage wearing the familiar aspect of Mr. John Grush, the only true and genuine proprietor of that name.

The broad shouldered man, after handing Grush into the room, followed him through the door. "Good morning, Mrs. Kettle and gentlemen," he said, cheerfully. "Well, Horace, you see I have a friend of yours here. Jack has been complaining to me of you. He says you not only stole his name, but infringed his patent blackball machine. And so, by way of retaliation, he has been telling very bad tales of you. I'm afraid you are in for a good deal of trouble, Horace."

"There's no need of making a fuss about this affair," said Dupe, assuming a nonchalant air. "There's no blackball that I know of. It is true that Judge Kettle paid me a worthless check the other day; but there has been no pecuniary transaction, properly speaking, and I don't know what this man, indicating Grush, is grumbling about. I know very little of him."

"He has the advantage of you, then," returned the inspector. "For he knows a great deal about you. I have been waiting for you for a year. I mean to get you back here, so I'll let you go to-day. You'll have to go to the States, and I'll be waiting for you in San Francisco, but I've got that thousand dollar note up at the office, and Grush has filled up all the gaps in the chain, though we could have done very well without him. Hold out your hands."

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It was now three weeks since their engagement, and already something of Adenbrooke's calm happiness was beginning to be reflected in Lydia's face. She appreciated, what only woman can appreciate, the consciousness of making another's happiness by the mere fact of her presence. That of Lydia's a pleasant surprise to the masculine palate. As she laid her hand lightly on his, she enjoyed, as it were, a reflection of the delight which she knew herself to be conferring by the act.

"Johnny," she said, "will you let me tell you to-night what I have always meant to tell you? About myself and about other people?" She finished her phrase thus vaguely, not doubting that Adenbrooke had mentally rounded off with great accuracy; somehow her lips refused to utter the name of Lawrence Fleming.

"My dear," he answered gently, "tell me nothing which distresses you. I don't want to know. I know you have been very unhappy—but one day, I assure you, you are going to be happier than ever."

"That's not it, Lydia, perhaps you'd better tell me!"

"I'll never do you wrong for your own sake," said Adenbrooke. "I'll never do you wrong for your own sake."

Lydia could not help wondering why on earth Adenbrooke should be so anxious to marry her.

She was standing at the window, her eyes mechanically following the familiar, insignificant figure of the professor as he plodded down the gravel walk to the gate; and when he had passed from view she sat down in the nearest chair and continued her reflections. It was strange, she had no love to give him, and had told him so, quite frankly; he must know, as every one knew, of that miserable affair with Lawrence Fleming; was he not Fleming's intimate friend, the last person who had seen him before he went to Africa?

And if he had no other right over Lydia, had he not that of his own free love and her three weeks' tolerance of it?

"The door opened to admit Lawrence Fleming. He had changed his pipe, and bore a bundle of papers and a coat in his hand.

"Any tobacco?" he said, taking the empty seat at the writing table.

"No, thank you," said Lydia, looking up at him. "I am looking out for my people. Can't stand much of that, you know. I am looking out for my people. Can't stand much of that, you know."

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