

# THE FATAL REQUEST OR FOUNDOUT

By A. L. Harris Author of "Mine Own Familiar Friend," etc.  
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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### The Enigma.

He turned and saw behind him none other than that same James Ferrers, whose narrative and confession he held in his hand; and again, lurking behind him in the shadow of the doorway, he saw the pale, narrow, furtive countenance of Perkins, the housemaid. For a moment there was an intense silence, during which both seemed to hold their breath and nerve themselves for the struggle that lay before them.

"The letter!" he cried, advancing towards the other, threateningly. "The letter, or—"

"There are five chambers in the revolver still undischarged," was the calm reply. "Is that what you are thinking of?"

The other man fell back a step and his face became ashen in hue.

"What do you mean?" he gasped.

"Who are you, and now do you dare to defy me? You a thief!—"

"You asked my name this morning," was the answer, "and for reasons of my own, I refused to give it you. Those reasons no longer exist. Do you still wish to know it?"

The master of the house contemplated the man he had that morning discharged from his service with feelings he could not have put in words.

Such utter fearlessness, such a total disregard of the consequences of the act in which he had been caught red-handed, seemed to point either to the most hardened criminal, or to one who knows he is possessed of some secret power. His voice faltered him, and once more, with a mingling of suppressed fury and incomprehensible apprehension, he gasped. "The letter—"

"I insist—and your name!"

The young man advanced a few steps. "My name," he said, "is—"

and he whispered the rest in his ear.

No need to ask whether he knew

such unmitigated physical weakness. "What is that you say?" he repeated. "And how can you deny aught in the face of this confession which I hold in my hand?" And he shook the envelope in his face.

This action stirred the other powerfully.

"Give it me!" he cried. "I command!—I implore! That confession—though how you know it to be such I cannot tell—is sacred. Or, no—with a sudden change—'keep it and read it after I am dead! I am a dying man—no hear me out! Not long ago an eminent physician uttered my sentence. He gave me a year to live—a year, that is, if I kept myself free from all excitement and received no sudden shock. To-night, I feel, has reduced my term of existence to days or hours. It is not for myself that I ask this—it is for my child."

He had touched the one responsive chord. Ted laid the envelope which contained the secret, down upon the table.

"If I consent to spare you the punishment due to the deed," he said slowly, "I must first know all. Your written confession, to be perused after death, will not satisfy me. How shall I know then that you have not lied? I must have it from your own lips now, or—"

"And have you not already had it from my own lips?" exclaimed Mr. Ferrers, with sudden passion. "Have I not declared to you that I am not your father's murderer? Am I not ready to swear it, however much appearances may be against me? I swear I never murdered him!" The young man put his hand to his head, bewildered.

"Do you deny that you are the man who wrote the letter which summoned my father to Dover?—or that you are the other passenger who traveled by the 4:30 train and occupied a com-

per, covered with writing, in the heavy scrawling hand, which he now knew well.

"THE TRUE NARRATIVE AND CONFESSION OF MR. JAMES FERRERS, OF THE STRANGE TRAGEDY OF THE 25TH OF APRIL."

"I arrived in England on the 23rd of April, after having been absent twenty years. The reasons for that prolonged absence I do not propose to enter into at length. Suffice it to say that I had committed an act which brought me within reach of the law, and, but for the influence of friends, I might have expiated the deed by transportation.

"Reckless extravagance, betting and gambling, with a mad attempt to recover my position by speculating with money which was not my own, brought me to this shameful pass. The matter was allowed to blow over—to be hushed up—and the actual sum made away with was reimbursed. But I was a Pariah—an outcast—shunned and despised by all but one. One friend stood by me, one man still gave me help of his countenance and extended the right hand of fellowship towards me, and he was my old friend, Silas Burrill. He alone was there to bid me farewell as I left England, a disgraced man. He alone bade me hope for better things and look forward to retrieving the failure of the past in the promise of the future. So I set sail for America, with the expressed resolve of not returning until many years had elapsed and those who were acquainted with my shameful history were either dead or else had forgotten it and me.

"At last the term of years which I had set as the limit of my voluntary exile having all but expired, I ventured to return. I lingered purposefully on my journey, so that when I landed at Dover, it was twenty years to the very day I had first set sail.

"At Dover I waited the arrival of my old friend.

"He came, and the meeting was a painful one on both sides.

"After so long a parting, there was a sense of restraint between us, such as there could hardly have failed to be. But, after a while, this feeling became less noticeable. We had much to say, and I, for my part, had many questions to ask and much to learn. One thing I did learn—the most important of all—which was that, with one exception, I might consider myself free from the fear of any witnesses of the past appearing to blight the prospects of the future.

"It was agreed that I should spend the next night under his roof, and make the acquaintance of his wife and family, and we agreed to travel by that ill-fated train known as the 4:30 express.

(To be continued.)

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## CHAPTER XXV.—Continued.

"The train started on the journey which was to end in its destruction, and mile after mile sped away in silence. Once more the feeling of restraint had settled down upon us, and this time heavier than before.

"Then I remember a sudden, awful, never-to-be-forgotten crash, followed by cries and shrieks such as have rung in my ears ever since.

"I found myself flung violently forward against the opposite side of the compartment amid the smashing of woodwork, and with the presentiment of some awful doom upon me. I was half stunned, but recovering myself, found that I was not much hurt. Then I remembered my companion and turned my attention to him.

"'Silas!' I cried. 'Are you hurt?'"

"But before he could reply, another sound was added to the awful babel of cries and groans all around.

"'Fire! fire!' we heard shrieked in voices mad with terror, mingled with agonizing cries for help. The atmosphere became stifling, a sickening, insupportable odor was wafted towards us and clouds of thick, black, suffocating smoke began to drift past.

"'Silas!' I shouted, in mad terror, to my friend; 'come! exert yourself, if you wish to escape instant death!'"

"And I caught him round the body and tried to compel him to move; but in vain; he only gave a scream of agony.

"'Save yourself,' he groaned. 'I cannot stir; and I think my leg is broken.'"

"I was almost demented, and tore at the shattered woodwork which made his prison, with my fingers; but only to increase his agony, without freeing him from his horrible position. And already the atmosphere was like that of a furnace, and hell itself seemed to be open. I could not save him, but I might save myself. I knew the door on the other side was unlocked, so that I might attempt to escape that way.

the face of the revelation which had burst upon him. "My God! To think that I should know the truth at last! But how marvelous! How utterly beyond the realization of my wildest dreams!"

Not for an instant did it occur to him to think the narrative false. It was too astounding and, what was more, it agreed so exactly with all the strange, and hitherto mysterious, circumstances which had attended the tragedy. And the man he had wronged—the man he had hunted down and would have betrayed to death, believing him to be the vilest of his species—whose whole nature he had read falsely by the light of his unjust suspicions! His eyes were closed—he seemed to be hardly breathing. Had he fainted—or—was this death?

Was he to be left alone, and in the dark, with a dead or dying man?

He rushed to the door and dashed out of the house in search of a doctor.

James Ferrers was not dead; but the nearest medical man, on being summoned to the house, shook his head over the case.

"Heart!" he said, briefly. "Get him to bed. I do not think he will ever need to get up again."

By this time the whole household was roused, and the sick man's daughter was hanging in speechless grief, over her father's unconscious form.

At one time it was feared that he would pass away unconscious, but the untiring application of restoratives was at last productive of some effect, and two or three hours later the dying man opened his eyes.

He saw his daughter kneeling beside his pillow; and, not far away, his old friend's son, who, by some means, had asserted and maintained a right to remain in the sick room.

The doctor, seeing that the patient had regained consciousness for a while before the end, stood aside, so as not

ally grave. "By-the-by," he said, slowly, and with a noticeable tendency to avoid his friend's eye, "about that bill of mine."

Ted looked surprised.

"Bill?" he repeated.

"Yes, bill," continued the doctor. "You didn't suppose I was going to let you off, did you? You haven't forgotten what I said a little while back about sending one in, have you?"

The young man looked and felt non-plussed.

"I have made up my mind to take it in kind."

"What I mean is," continued Dr. Cartwright, "that instead of receiving payment for whatever services I may have rendered, in ready money, I am willing to take it out in some other article."

"And what might that article be?" was the natural but still perplexed inquiry.

"Your sister," was the brief and much to the point response.

"By Jove!" was the exclamation it called forth—followed by, "you don't mean it?"

"Don't I, though!" was the determined reply. "I've been meaning it for some time past. What's more, I've sounded the young lady—I don't mean with a stethoscope—and she wasn't half so much surprised as you seem to be."

The brother of the young lady in question burst out laughing.

"I suppose I shall have to give in, and I may as well do it sooner than later."

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About three months later a gentleman in the most irreproachable attire called at the residence of the late James Ferrers, Esq., of Belmont House, Hampstead, and requested to see Miss Ferrers.

That young lady, who had descended to encounter her visitor quite in ignorance as to his identity, was confounded beyond measure to discover, in the supposed stranger, none other than that same individual whom she had first met at the Royal Academy and who had afterwards occasioned her the greatest perplexity of mind by doubling the part of the young man who waited at table and cleaned the plate. Only—he had grown the loveliest moustache and it seemed perfectly impossible to imagine for a moment that he had ever done such a thing as polish the forks and spoons and make himself generally useful.

Ted plunged at once into the object of his visit.

"I should have called much sooner," he remarked with a compassionate glance at her deep mourning, "but was afraid of intruding upon your retirement. I have a statement to make—an explanation to give, which I cannot withhold any longer."

He came nearer to her and—oh, the presumption of the creature!—actually ventured to take her hand.

"Do you remember being at the Academy, one day last June, and dropping your catalogue?"

Did she not? But she made no audible reply, and the explanation thus propitiously commenced was continued without any interruption beyond an occasional stifled exclamation on the part of its recipient.

It is not necessary, however, to report the whole of what passed during the interview. A certain portion only of it need be referred to as being of some interest.

"And you really mean to say," said Miss Ferrers to the young man, "you really mean to say that you fell in love with me then and there, and took the situation, and put up with everything, just for the sake of being under the same roof with me?"

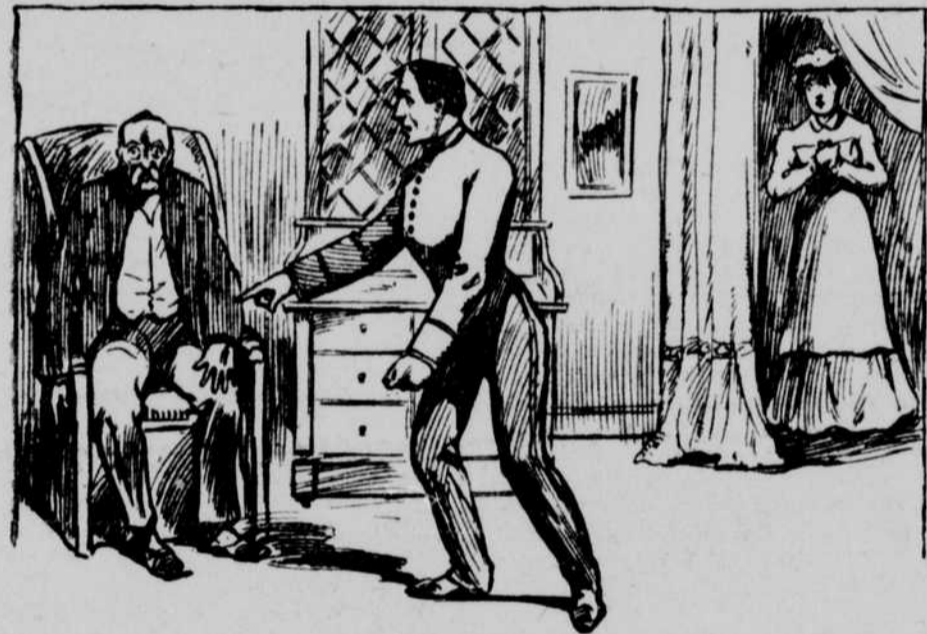
He looked at her strangely for a moment before answering.

"What other reason could there have been?" he asked.

She clasped her hands together in delight.

"Whatever will the girls at school say to this?"

(The End.)



"Cruel, cowardly, cold-blooded murderer!"

it. No need for further explanation.

With a sudden cry, his hand pressed to his heart, and a ghastly greenness settling down upon his face, Mr. Ferrers dragged himself to the nearest chair.

"The medicine—the medicine!" he whispered, in a dreadful tone, pointing with one hand towards the mantelpiece. The other, following with his eyes the direction of his gesture saw a bottle and glass.

Ted made a couple of strides in the direction signified and was back again with the medicine bottle and glass. He read the directions on the label, measured out the proportion prescribed and held the same to the lips of what seemed the almost dying man.

Mr. Ferrers, apparently revived by the draught he had swallowed, partially recovered his voice.

"Lock the door!" he said to his old friend's son. He obeyed, and the two were left alone face to face. They confronted each other in silence, the one still seated, the other standing opposite to him, with folded arms, looking down upon him.

"What have you to say to me?" asked the former, in a feeble, broken voice.

"What have I to say to you?" repeated the latter never moving his eyes from the face of the man before him. "What should a son have to say to his father's murderer?"

Mr. Ferrers rose from his seat as the infamous title was hurled at him, and, despite his pallid countenance and evident weakness, there was a natural dignity about him now as he faced the furious and menacing countenance opposed to him.

"This is not the first time you have applied that shameful word to me," he said. "This must not be."

"What!" cried the young man. "After having once admitted the crime, do you now seek to deny it? Then hear me repeat it again," and rising his right hand, he emphasized each word by pointing with his forefinger—"Murderer! Cruel, cowardly, cold blooded murderer!"

The other man staggered as though struck, and supported himself with one trembling hand on the back of his chair.

"It is false," he said—"false! I am guiltless—in thought—if not in deed!"

He spoke with difficulty, and again his hand was pressed to his side.

"What is that you say?" asked his opponent, who had not caught the last words, but who involuntarily lowered his voice in the presence of

partment in the fourth carriage from the engine?"

The other man bent his head. "I do not deny it."

"And you deny that the bullet that was discovered in the padding of the same compartment, which the fire only partially consumed, was discharged from the one empty chamber of the revolver which lies yonder?"

"I do not deny it," was the same monotonous answer.

"Then tell me," cried the young man, in a frenzy, "tell me, whose was the hand that fired that shot?"

Mr. Ferrers raised his head and answered clearly, and without hesitation, "Mine!"

The effect of the answer was electrical.

"What!"—in a tone that thrilled through the hearer—"you admit all this, and yet, in the same breath deny that you killed my father?"

"I never denied that I killed him," was the calm reply of the elder man, as his eye encountered that of his inquisitor without flinching, and he seemed to have cast aside for the moment all agitation and alarm.

Edward Burrill tried to frame the next question and failed. His lips moved, but no voice proceeded from them until—

"Liar!" he muttered, hoarsely, with his eyes glaring, "to try and fool me like this! How can you have killed my father and yet not be his murderer?"

"Because," said the other, "I shot at his own request!"

## CHAPTER XXV.

### The Narrative.

These remarkable words were followed by another silence, during which the younger man seemed turned to stone, and the other, who appeared completely exhausted by the strain of the last few minutes, let himself fall back into his chair and breathed heavily.

Then the first, recovering himself, and speaking in a hoarse, strange voice, which even to his own ear sounded unnatural, asked—

"What do you mean? That horrible story is this? What foul lie—"

The other man pointed to the letter lying on the table between them.

"Read it," he said, with an effort, and, even as he spoke those two words, the greyness began to return and deepen, and his face seemed to fall in.

Thus adjured, Ted stripped off the outer cover.

Within were several sheets of pa-

## WILL SHAKE NO MORE.

Savage Handgripping Now the Fad in English Society.

I have made up my mind absolutely, to shake hands no more. The stupid custom never appealed to me, but I have complied with it, hitherto, in order to avoid hurting people's feelings.

Now that the "grip" has become fashionable, however, I shall have to be callous. After an, it is far better that I should hurt someone's feelings a little than that they should hurt my hand a great deal.

At a reception I attended the other night, there were three acquaintances of mine sitting in a group. I went up to them and shook hands all round.

The first man ground together all my knuckle bones. The second squeezed my fingers until they were reduced to a mere pulp. The third, not to be balked, twisted my wrist and almost jerked my elbow out of the socket.

I cursed them, root and branch, and hurried away to the far end of the room. When I looked back, they were regarding each other with open-mouthed astonishment. I could see that they had meant well; the new fashion was to blame.

A few years ago, you will remember, it was considered rather smart to hold your hand high in the air and wave it to and fro in gentle contact with the hand of your acquaintance. That fashion, too, was idiotic enough, but it was infinitely more civilized than this furious, insensate grip—Sketch.

### Made Speech to Amuse Wife.

A great many speeches have been delivered in the house of representatives without any apparent excuse at all, so the New York member who spoke merely to entertain his wife undoubtedly had ample justification.

The New York member was in the gallery with his wife, but the lady grew tired of the humdrum proceedings and announced her intention of departing. He coaxed her to stay, but she was insistent, until her husband made a proposition.

"If you will stay an hour," he promised, "I will go down on the floor and make a speech."

She agreed to stay and the New York member kept his promise, making, in fact, a very creditable argument about something in which he had not the slightest interest.

### Might Be Worse.

Biffbang—They say Meekler leads a regular dog's life at home.

Cumsoe—Unhappily married, I suppose?

Biffbang—Well, not exactly; but his wife shares her affection equally between him and her poodle.

### Brief, But Pointed.

"Say, pa," queried little Johnny Bumperscale, "what's a fool-killer?"

"A fool-killer, my son," replied the old man, "is the gun he blows in."



"I have nothing to forgive," was the broken answer.

"I had prepared for flight, but before I had taken the first step I was stayed by my friend's voice—"

"'James,' he cried—and the roaring of the flames almost drowned his voice, which was sharp and shrill with horror—'put me out of my misery. Save yourself, but shoot me through the brain first! Quick! quick!'"

"It was the most merciful death, and, without pausing a second—which on that awful day might have meant a human life—I drew the revolver, placed it to his temple"—("My God!" from the reader)—"and pulled the trigger. Even as I heard the report a thin tongue of flame curled upward through the splintered flooring, and without even looking back—without even a glance at the face of my friend, I forced open the door and sprang from the now burning carriage with the smoking weapon still grasped in my right hand. In doing so I trod upon some smouldering timber and wrenched my ankle severely, so that for a long time I was lame.

"A few hours later and I was conveyed to town, together with a company of the other survivors, and as soon as I reached my destination my strength forsook me and I was prostrated for days by a nervous illness, the result of my late terrible experience.

"When I recovered, it was to find that there was a hue and cry already after me—that the partially consumed corpse of a first class passenger had been discovered shot through the head, and that all the evidence pointed to the crime having been committed by a fellow traveler who had made his escape during the terror and confusion of the catastrophe and who was being eagerly sought for.

"Since then, I have had to submit to the ordeal of seeing myself confronted by the reward of one hundred pounds offered for my detection; and have lived in daily and hourly fear of being charged with the commission of this crime—if crime it can be called—of which I was guiltless, in thought, if not in deed. It is this which is killing me, and I do not regret it.

"Sometimes I regret nothing; not even the shot which took my best friend's life and branded me with the brand of Cain!"

to interfere with those last solemn moments.

The dying man's gaze rested upon the young man—who, in obedience to a gesture, approached and bent over him—with a strange intensity, and his lips moved.

"Do you forgive?" he murmured close to the other's ear, so that the words might be heard by none but him for whom they were intended.

"I have nothing to forgive," was the broken answer. "You acted for the best, and I bless you for it."

A look of peace fell upon the corpse-like countenance upon the pillow, and he turned his eyes again upon his daughter.

"Don't grieve much for me, my child," said he; "and when I am gone—"

He gave a deep sigh, his eyes closed, and his head fell a little to one side.

The doctor pressed forward.

"This is the end," he said, "and a very peaceful one."

But it was not quite the end.

Once more the dying eyes opened, and fixed themselves upon the pale, remorseful face of the young man who had once hoped to see him expiate his deed upon the scaffold.

Then he turned them from him to the bowed head of the girl who knelt, with her face hidden, upon the other side of the bed, and back again. His lips moved for the last time, but no words issued from them.

He tried again, and this time—though there was no sound—it seemed to the other, who had his eyes fixed upon them, and his ear strained to catch the lightest whisper, that the motion of the lips might be translated into the words, "Keep my secret!"

"I will—I will," he answered, and even as he uttered these words the end came.

• • • • •

The next day Ted Burrill returned home unexpectedly.

The first thing he did was to write a brief summary of events to Dr. Jeremiah Cartwright, who, in spite of the very short time which had elapsed since his last visit, again made his appearance at Magnolia Lodge—ostensibly to hear further details, but more particularly to carry out a deep laid scheme of his own.

"And what do you mean to do—eh? I mean, about the young lady? Oh, you needn't look as though you don't understand what I am talking about! I've not forgotten what you told me about her. What a beautiful blush!"

And the little gentleman chuckled; then, all at once, became preternatural-

### Beecher's Deacon Went to Sleep.

"Pew sleepers are one of the bugbears of preachers," said the Rev. Robert Collyer, the veteran New York minister. "I can speak feelingly from experience. On one occasion when Henry Ward Beecher asked me to go to Plymouth Church to talk to his people, he remarked—jokingly, let us hope—that most of them were hard working folk who needed plenty of rest on Sunday, and he felt that a sermon from me might be gratefully received.

"In the course of my talk I mentioned this, and said that it was, however, a matter upon which my feelings could not be hurt, and that I owed this imperviousness to Mr. Beecher himself. I told them that, one Sunday, years before, when I was attending a service at old Plymouth and Mr. Beecher was thundering forth, I saw one of his deacons asleep in a front pew.

"I went on to say that always after this, whenever I saw a man slumbering peacefully through my most stirring efforts in the pulpit, I would say to myself: 'Well, let him sleep; even the great Beecher can't keep 'em all awake.'—Success."

### The Vogue of Pantalets.

Pantalets came into vogue about 1820. They were loose, flapping frills tied on under the knee and hanging over the foot. The strings generally broke or slipped down, and one learns of a young mother's trials with those horrid things in a letter quoted by Mrs. Earle, which says: "My finest dimity pair, with real Swiss lace, is quite useless to me, for I lost off one leg. I saw that mean Mrs. Spring wearing it last week for a tucker. My help says she won't stay if she has to wash more than seven pairs a week for Myrtle."