

THE LONE INN

By FERGUS HUME.

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[CONTINUED.]

CHAPTER VI.

Having made up my mind what course to pursue, I returned to Marshminster, took leave of my relatives and left that evening for London. There I remained two days reviewing the strange events in which I had lately been an actor. At one moment it was in my mind to abandon what certainly seemed to be a hopeless search, for I could but see it a matter of great difficulty to lay hands on the assassin of Francis. It would be better, I thought, to place the matter in the hands of the police and let them thrash it out for themselves. Two reasons prevented my taking this ignoble course.

One was that Francis Briarfield had been a college friend, and I was unwilling that his death should go unavenged. The story of his love for Olivia, which he had told me at the inn, contained the elements of a strange romance fitly capped by his tragic end. I felt certain that Felix, through his hired bravo—for I could call Strent by no other name—had encompassed the death of his brother. Felix was passionately in love with Olivia, and the unexpected return of Francis not only threatened to sweep away from him, but also to reveal the scoundrelly fashion in which he had loved and respected. There he would lose her love and respect. There his motive for avenging such a catastrophe was a strong one. That he should determine on fratricide was a terrible thought, but there was no other course left to him by which to secure the woman he loved and the respect he valued. It was the mad action of a weak, passionate man, such as I knew Felix to be. Too cowardly himself to strike the fatal blow, he had hired Strent to carry out his plans, and the death had been duly accomplished, though in what way I was quite unable to say. It was sufficient for me to know that Francis was dead, and I felt myself called upon to avenge his death. The other motive was perhaps the stronger one of detective fever. I was a bachelor. I had a good income and nothing to do. Therefore this quest was of great interest to me. I had often read of beasts, but this man hunt was a more powerful incentive to exertion. I could hardly sleep for thinking of the case and was constantly engaged in piecing together the puzzle.

As yet I had no clear clew to follow, but the first thing to be settled was the identity of Felix at Marshminster with Felix at Paris. Once I established that point and proved conclusively that Felix had never left England, I would be in a position to prosecute the search in the neighborhood of Marshminster. I own that there was an additional reason in the pique I felt at the scornful belief of Olivia. She evidently considered my story pure fiction, and the strange disappearance of the corpse from the inn confirmed her in this belief. Irritated by such contempt, I was resolved to bring home the crime to Felix and prove conclusively to her that he was masquerading as her lover, the dead Francis. It would be a cruel blow when assured of the truth, but it was better that she should suffer temporary pain than drag out a lifelong agony chained to a man whom I knew to be a profligate and a murderer.

The end of two days I confirmed myself in the resolution to hunt down the criminal and decided as the first step to go to Paris. Leaving Victoria by the night mail, I arrived in the French capital next morning. Anxious to lose no further time, I hastened at once to the Hotel des Etrangers, in the Rue de St. Anre, and there took up my quarters. Scarcely recovered from the fatigues of the journey, I partook of luncheon and then made inquiries about Felix Briarfield. To my surprise, I not only discovered that he was in Paris, but that he was at the hotel at that moment.

"Has he been staying here for any length of time?" I asked the manager. "For six weeks, monsieur, and now he is going to Italy," was the astounding reply. "I was surprised would be a faint idea of what I felt. The assertion of Olivia should thus be almost impossible of being true. Felix was here and had been so for the past six weeks, it could be possible for the whom I had met at Marshminster. Assuming this to be the man, who was the man of the Fen inn who called himself Francis? My head was whirling with the endeavor to appie with these thoughts. Suddenly an idea flashed into my brain which might possibly account for the mystery. "Can it be," thought I, "that it was Francis whom I met at the inn—Felix, who tried to pass himself off as Francis and then invented that lying story? Perhaps he was not dead, as I thought, but only plunged into a trance. When he awoke, seeing the uselessness of fighting with Francis, he fled back to Paris." At this time I stared hard at the manager. In reality I was puzzling out the mystery and not paying any attention to the man before me. He, however, grew weary under my regard and yawned uneasily.

"Mr. Briarfield is now in his room, monsieur. Shall I take to him your message?" "If you please," I answered mechanically and handed it to him. In a few moments a waiter came with a message saying that Mr. Briarfield would be glad to see me. I followed the man in the state of the utmost bewilderment and found myself in the presence of Felix before I knew what to say or do. He was so like Francis, whom I thought I had seen lying dead at the Fen inn—so like him who passed as Olivia's lover—that the moment I could do nothing more than stare at him. Yet he could be

neither the two, for one was dead, and the other I had left behind at Marshminster.

"How are you, Denham?" he said, somewhat surprised at my strange conduct. "And why do you stare so steadily at me?"

"Are you Felix Briarfield?" I gasped. "As you see," he answered, raising his eyebrows. "Surely you know me well enough to dispense with so foolish a question."

"And your brother?" "He is at Marshminster, I believe, with Miss Bellin, to whom he is engaged. Why do you ask so strange a question?"

I sat down on the sofa and buried my face in my hands. Either I was out of my mind or the victim of some terrible hallucination. I certainly had met Francis at the inn and beheld him dead under its roof. As surely had I seen the man I believed to be Felix at Marshminster. Yet here in Paris I beheld an individual who was neither the dead friend nor the living lover, and he called himself Felix Briarfield.

"I must be mad! I must be mad!" was all I could say for the moment. "What is the matter, Denham?" asked Briarfield, touching my shoulder. "Are you ill?"

For answer I seized first one hand and then the other. On neither appeared the least scratch. Yet the man whom I believed to be Francis had a ragged wound on the right hand. My theory of a trance vanished into thin air at this proof that the men were distinct. Astonished by my action, Felix drew back in some alarm.

"How strangely you act, Denham!" he said uneasily. "Is there anything wrong?"

"Do you think I am mad?" I asked irritably. "Your action just now was scarcely the act of a sane person. Why did you examine my hands?"

"To see if they were cut in any way." He turned the palms of his hands toward me and shook his head with a slight laugh.

"You see," he said, smiling, "they are absolutely free from cut or wound. Why do you expect them to be marked?" I made no reply, but passed my hand across my brow. The situation in which I found myself was so strange and embarrassing that I did not know how to proceed. In the presence of facts I could not but admit that my story would sound but a wild invention.

"Come, Denham," said Briarfield soothingly. "You are doubtless in some trouble and have come to me for help and advice. I'll give both to the best of my ability."

"I want neither," I muttered in a low voice, "but if you will answer some questions I wish to ask you will oblige me greatly."

Briarfield drew back with a queer look in his eyes, as if he thought my madness was increasing. However, he overcame the dread my actions apparently caused him and answered civilly enough:

"Certainly, if it will do you any good. What is it you wish to know?"

"Were you in England within the last seven days?"

"No; I have not been in England for at least six weeks."

"Do you know the Fen inn?"

"Never heard of it in all my life."

"Are you acquainted with a girl named Rose Strent?"

"I don't even know her name."

"When did your brother Francis return to England from South America?"

"Three months ago."

"Have you seen him since his return?"

"Frequently in London, but he is now, I believe, at Marshminster."

"Do you know he is engaged to Miss Bellin?"

"Of course I do," said Briarfield. "The marriage takes place shortly, and I am to be the best man—that is, if I return in time."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I'm going to Italy tomorrow," said the young man, shrugging his shoulders, "and it is just possible that I may prolong my tour to the east. In that case I may be absent from England for at least six months or more. During that time Francis will doubtless marry Olivia, and I shall not be able to be at the wedding."

"You have not been in England within the last six weeks. You don't know the Fen inn nor of the existence of Rose Strent," I summed up. "Then I am the victim of some extraordinary hallucination."

"You are very extraordinary altogether," retorted Briarfield. "Now I have answered your questions, pray answer mine. Why do you ask all these things?"

"It is a strange story and one which you will scarcely believe."

"Let me hear it."

Thus adjured, I told him the story of my adventure at the inn, but suppressed all mention of the belief I then entertained that the brothers had changed names. He listened attentively and eyed me with some concern. At the conclusion of the narrative he considered for a few moments before making any reply.

"I hardly know what to say," he said at length. "Your story is very circumstantial, yet you must have been deceived by the chance resemblance."

"I swear that the man I met at the Fen inn was your brother Francis."

"How can that be when Francis was at Bellin Hall, and Olivia said he had not been out of the house. Besides, you

"I swear that the man I met at the Fen inn was your brother Francis."

"I thought Francis was you."

"Ah! Deceived by our resemblance, no doubt."

"Yes, I think so," I replied, not wishing to tell him my suspicions.

"Well, you see you made a mistake. Francis is at Marshminster, and I am here, I suppose," he added jokingly. "You are quite convinced that I am Felix?"

"I was quite convinced the other man was Francis."

"Great heavens, man, you surely don't doubt that I am Felix Briarfield?" he cried irritably, rising to his feet. "I don't! I can't!"

"Perhaps you thought it was I whom you met at the inn?"

"No, because the man I met at the inn is dead. Besides he had a wound on his right hand, and you have not."

"It's a queer business altogether," said Briarfield, walking to and fro. "I cannot but agree with your idea of hallucination."

"I tell you it is too real for hallucination."

"Then how can you explain it?" he demanded sharply, passing before me. "I can't explain it," I replied helplessly.

"If you had discovered the corpse when you returned to the inn, there might be some chance of solving the mystery. But you admit there was no corpse there."

"Not the vestige of one."

"Then that proves the thing to be hallucination," he said triumphantly. "If the man was murdered, who would take the trouble to remove the corpse?"

"Strent might have done so to conceal the evidence of his crime."

"He fled the previous night by your own acknowledgment. The whole thing is ridiculous. If I were you, Denham, I would see a doctor. That brain of yours is in a dangerous state."

"In spite of all you say, I am certain it was Francis I met at the inn."

"How can that be when he whom you met is dead and Francis is alive? It could not be Francis, and as I have not been out of Paris it could not have been me."

"Then who was it?"

"Some stranger, no doubt, in whom you saw a facial resemblance to us."

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"Impossible!"

"So I think," said Briarfield significantly. "For my part, I think you are subject to delusions. Do not pursue this case, my friend, or you may find yourself in a lunatic asylum."

"Will you come over to Marshminster and help me to solve the mystery?"

"Certainly not, Denham. My plans are all made for Italy, and I go there tomorrow. I certainly don't intend to put them off for such a wild goose chase as you wish me to indulge in."

I took up my hat and prepared to go. The matter was beyond my comprehension.

"There is nothing for me but to return to England."

"Do," said Briarfield in a pitying tone, "and give up following this will-o'-the-wisp."

"It seems hopeless enough."

"Well, so far as I can see, it seems madness—nothing more nor less. My brother Francis is at Marshminster. You see me here, so it is absolutely impossible you could have met either of us at that inn, the more so as the man you met is dead, and we are both alive."

"Yes. Facts are too strong for me," I said, holding out my hand. "Goodby, Briarfield. Many thanks for your kindness; but, oh, man," I added, with a burst of bitterness, "what does it all mean?"

"It's hallucination," said Briarfield. "Place yourself at once in the hands of a doctor."

CHAPTER VII.

After that interview with Felix I returned forthwith to London. I had accomplished the object of my journey and did not care about staying longer in Paris. My mind was much perturbed, and I was quite unable to come to any conclusion respecting the episode at the Fen inn. Beyond all doubt I had proved that Francis was at Marshminster, Felix in Paris. Who, then, was the man I had met at the inn? It was impossible that I could be mistaken in the identity of my college friend, yet in the face of such evidence as I had gathered it was ridiculous to cling to my first impressions. There could not be three brothers exactly alike in personal appearances, and yet I had beheld three men—at the Fen inn, at Marshminster and in Paris—who resembled each other in every respect. The more I pondered over the mystery, the deeper did it become, and the more confused grew my brain.

I began to think that I was the victim of some hallucination, as I could explain the matter in no other way. With this idea, which was the only feasible one left to me, I took the advice of Felix and on my return to town went to see Dr. Merrick. He, a specialist on diseases of the brain, listened to my story with great attention and questioned me closely on all points.

"There is some trickery about this, Mr. Denham," he said after consideration. "You do not, then, think my meeting with Francis Briarfield was a hallucination?" I asked eagerly.

"There is no hallucination about you, sir," was the comforting response. "You seem to me as sane and matter of fact a person as I ever met."

"Then, if it is not hallucination, how do you account for my having met three men all exactly alike when I know there are only two with that special appearance in existence?"

"I think it is trickery," repeated Merrick, nursing his chin. "This is more a case for a detective than for a doctor. Were I you, Mr. Denham, I would employ a good detective and probe the mystery thoroughly. The matter

seems miraculous to you now, but I re-assure when you learn the solution you will be surprised at its simplicity."

"If I am sane, as you say and as I believe myself to be, I will thrash out the matter myself."

"Better get a trained man, Mr. Denham. From what you have told me I see you have to deal with a criminal of no ordinary intelligence. It is an extraordinary case," mused the doctor, "and I do not wonder at the fascination it seems to exercise over you. Were I in your place?"

"Were you in my place?" seeing he hesitated. "Here am I setting up for a lawyer," said Merrick quaintly. "To tell you the honest truth, Mr. Denham, you have inoculated me with detective fever. I should like to solve this problem myself. Criminal investigation has always been rather a hobby of mine. In my business I meet with some queer experiences. There are more insane people in the world than you think."

"Tell me your ideas, doctor, and I'll carry them out and report progress."

"Good! I'll be the sleeping partner," he said in an amused tone, "but I warn you, Mr. Denham, that from what I see of this case it will be one of great difficulty and may take months to work out."

"I don't mind that. It is nothing to an idle man like myself, but I am afraid, Dr. Merrick, I take up your valuable time."

"Oh, I can spare a few minutes," said the doctor quickly. "I work hard enough, so it is permitted to even a professional man to indulge occasionally in some amusement. This case is so to me."

"Well, and your idea?"

"In the first place, I am inclined to agree with your ideas of Felix passing himself off as Francis."

"I have abandoned that idea," said I dolefully. "I saw Felix in Paris."

"Wait a moment," replied Merrick. "We'll come to that later on. Furthermore, I believe it was Felix you met at Marshminster—Felix, who called himself Francis and posed as the lover of Miss Bellin."

"But I saw him in Paris," said I, again clinging to that undeniable fact.

"I know you did, but the pretended Francis of Marshminster and the real Felix of Paris are one and the same person."

"You mean that he followed me over," I cried, suddenly enlightened.

"Precisely, and suborned the manager of the Hotel des Etrangers."

"But why should he do that?"

"Can't you see?" said Merrick impatiently. "Felix wants to put a stop to your following up this case. From your story it is quite probable that he killed his brother through Strent. The whole circumstances of that lone inn are very suspicious. Your unforeseen arrival on that night complicated matters. You saw how unwilling they were to admit you. Had you not arrived Francis would have vanished from the world, and none would have been a bit wiser. But when you came to Bellin Hall Felix saw a new source of danger not only to his character, but to his life. He asked for a night's grace. During that night he went himself to the Fen inn and hid the corpse in some bog hole."

"Impossible!"

"I'll stake my life that it is so," said Merrick calmly. "Make inquiries as to the movements of Felix Briarfield on that night, and I'll lay anything you'll find he went to the Fen inn."

"That, then," said I, "was the reason he was so ready to go there next morning with me."

"Exactly! He knew well, thanks to his forethought, that there was no evidence there to convict him of a crime, and he could still keep up his imposture. So far all was in his favor, but your obstinacy raised a new danger. You said you would go to Paris and satisfy yourself of the existence of Felix. Now, then, you remained two days in London."

"Yes. I was not quite sure whether it was worth while carrying on the matter."

"It was a pity you wasted so much time," said Merrick, "for Felix took advantage of your negligence to slip to Paris and lay a trap for you. In plain words, he disappeared from Marshminster as Francis and reappeared in Paris as Felix."

"He might have done so. But don't you think I would have guessed the identity of the one with the other?"

"How could you," said the doctor, "when the twins are alike in every respect? And, moreover, you firmly believed Olivia Bellin's lover was in Marshminster."

"But if I go down at once to Marshminster I'll detect the absence of Felix and so guess what has taken place."

"If you go down to Marshminster, you'll find Felix back again in his old place."

"Then Paris?" I queried uneasily. "I was beginning to see I had been duped. You forget Mr. Felix of Paris has gone to Italy and left no address. It's all safe there, and as he said he was going to the east for six months or so there will be plenty of time for the pretended Francis to marry Olivia."

"You don't believe that Felix of Paris has gone to Italy or the east?"

"Of course not. I believe he arranged all these matters to baffle your prying

and then calmly returned to Marshminster."

"But the manager of the hotel?"

"He is in the pay of Felix. You'll get nothing out of him. Now, I am certain that is the explanation. Are you not surprised at its simplicity?"

"Yes, I am. It is astonishing I never thought of it before."

"Columbus and his egg once again," said Merrick grimly. "Well, what are you going to do next?"

"To drive to Marshminster and find out the movements of Felix on the night after the murder."

"Quite so, but first satisfy yourself on the subject of Francis."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "What day of the month were you at the Fen inn?" continued Merrick.

"On the 10th of June."

"Good! Francis there told you that he had just arrived from Chile. Now find out what boat he came by, look up his name in the passenger list and ascertain the date on which the true Francis arrived in England. That point established, you can prove the false Francis to be an impostor."

"An excellent idea," said I, starting to my feet. "I'll see about it at once."

"And mind," said Merrick, raising his forefinger. "I expect to be kept fully advised of the case."

"Never fear, doctor. You are excellent at solving puzzles. When I find another nut, I'll bring it to you to crack."

"Do! I take great interest in this sort of cases. I ought to have been a lawyer instead of a doctor."

"I'm thankful for my own sake you are the latter," said I, shaking his hand. "Goodby, doctor. I am greatly obliged for the kind interest you have taken in this case."

"Pure selfishness, I assure you," replied Merrick, and so I took my leave. Before searching the shipping lists I sent two telegrams, one to the manager of the Hotel des Etrangers, asking if Mr. Felix Briarfield was still there; the other to my Aunt Jane, inquiring whether Mr. Francis Briarfield was in Marshminster. This business having been dispatched, I took a hansom to the city and saw a merchant of my acquaintance. He was an old friend and willing to oblige me in every way.

"Chambers," said I when in his office. "I want to find out a ship that arrived in London from Chile during the present month."

"During June," said Chambers. "Well, there's no difficulty about that. What is her name?"

"That is one of the things I wish to find out; also the names of the passengers."

means of pointing the way to his own destruction. But then fate is so ironical.

That afternoon I received answers to my telegrams. The first, from Paris, stated that Mr. Felix Briarfield had started for Italy; the second, from Marshminster, informed me that Francis Briarfield was staying at Bellin Hall.

"No," said I, on reading these telegrams, "Felix Briarfield did not leave Paris for Italy, but for Marshminster, and Francis Briarfield, poor soul, is not at Bellin Hall, but lying in the Essex marshes."

That night at 5 o'clock I left for Marshminster.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

BUILDERS MAY STRIKE.

The Chicago Council Decides to Assist 'Locked-Out' Cornice Men.

CHICAGO, Sept. 10.—At a meeting of the building trades council last night, the representatives of the various unions declared that they would support the union cornice makers now being locked out, and that no member of their organization would work on a building where non-union cornice men were employed. In consequence of this decision it is believed that the trouble will spread to thousands of men during the next few days. Union men say there is not a building of any importance under construction in the city that is not controlled by the unions, and that wherever a non-union cornice worker is put to work the other trades will leave their places.

FISHING BOATS WRECKED.

Fifteen Men Drowned in a Terrible Gale in Finland.

LONDON, Sept. 10.—A dispatch from Helsingfors, capital of Finland, tells a story of dreadful sufferings experienced a few days ago by men employed in the Baltic fisheries. The fishing fleet were all at sea when a terrific gale sprang up forcing the boats to run for shelter. The islands are principally desolate rocks, whose frowning, jagged fronts menace the destruction of anything that is caught ashore upon them. As the seas swept over the wrecked fishing boats before the latter broke up, they carried away fifteen fishermen, whose bodies have not been recovered.

National Encampment G. A. R.

At Pittsburgh, Sept. 10th. The Union Pacific has been selected as the Official Route.

For rates and other information see Union Pacific Agent, 1044 O street.

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J. FRANCIS, G. P. & T. A. Omaha, Neb.

Tobacco Destroyed His Nerves, and Stomach and Injured His Health.

VALPARAISO, Ind., Nov. 26, 1892.

Sterling Remedy Company, No. 45 Randolph St., Chicago.

GENTLEMEN:—I used three boxes of NO-TO-BAC, and it destroyed my taste for tobacco. Before I began its use I had very poor health, heart trouble, and my nerves were all gone; in fact, my health was so bad that I sold my store and spent a year out of doors to improve my health; I was too nervous to work. NO-TO-BAC