

THE DIAMOND BUTTON

FROM THE DIARY OF A LAWYER AND THE NOTE BOOK OF A REPORTER.

By BARCLAY NORTH.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

TOM MAKES A LONG STEP FORWARD.

OM was not displeased to be alone for a time, in order that he might give himself up to thought.

When he parted from Holbrook he had little idea of going to Fountain—that is, little definite idea of what he could accomplish by seeing and talking with him.

The truth is, he was much disturbed. The bitter disappointment in finding that he had not detected the murderer had gradually gone on to a full conviction, and had discounted his triumph.

Now everything was astray. He had never failed so before. He had never been foreseen so far upon a false scent.

He began to fear he was losing his cunning.

If the story were to become known, how they would laugh at him at police headquarters, what gleeful stories of his defeat would his competitors have to tell; he would be compelled to leave town because of their jokes and laughter; his prestige would be gone in the office of the Sol; he was now conscious, with a feeling of self contempt, that he had of late been assuming airs of superiority upon his fellows.

Then he considered himself with the thought that after all no one else had made the progress in the affair that Holbrook and himself had made. Then he reflected, with another wave of self contempt, that when he thought triumph was theirs he had attributed all to his own efforts and prowess, and now in failure he was quite willing to take Holbrook into partnership. After all, what might be said, the affair was deep, intricate and mysterious, back of which lay a mass of facts which must be ascertained, arranged and digested.

Finally he said, with an inspiration of hope:

"All is not lost yet, and my commission has not been recalled."

By that time he had reached the City Hall park, with a view of hunting up the Shadow and relieving him from duty for a time at least, or until he was wanted again.

As he passed the city hall he saw the old attorney, George Parker, descending the steps.

"There's the Shadow's friend," he thought, "that old fellow is slouching around with a claim against Preston's estate, not knowing against what momentous affairs he may be knocking. If there is anything crooked in his proceedings on behalf of that driving, drunkard in Varick street, how he will take to cover when we light the fuse—if we ever do."

Tom chuckled; presently an idea struck him.

"I'll give him an interview. Perhaps I'll elicit something."

As the old man was about to pass, Tom checked him.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Parker. I've heard that notice of a claim to Preston's estate has been made before the surrogate. What is the story in it?"

"The old man looked at him sharply and with a pleasant expression.

"What do you mean?"

"By 'the Sol'?"

"Ob, a reporter, hey," replied the old man, with a grin and an expression of relief. "You reporters are very sharp. The notice was only filed within the hour."

"Oh, yes, you lay pretty close for the news. But what is it in it?"

"Well, I think there is a good deal in it, or the notice wouldn't have been filed. A lawyer would naturally say that after he had taken up a client's case, wouldn't he? However, the matter is not in such form yet that I can talk about it, especially without conference with the counsel who are leading part. I can say this, that the notice was filed merely as a precautionary step. I don't care to say anything about it or have anything said now. If you will promise to say nothing now, when the matter comes up I'll give you the inside of it exclusively. That's all, you young men want a beat—don't they?"

"Yes, that's what we are always looking for," replied Tom. "I'll keep my promise, if you will. I know there will be a great story. The old man Preston lived a double life."

"What do you know about it?" inquired the old man fiercely.

"Not very much, to be sure. I know he used to pass under another name at one time."

"You do? What name?"

"Fountain," coolly replied Tom. This was a reckless and audacious assumption upon the part of Tom. He knew nothing of the kind.

"Fountain, did you say?" queried the old man, knitting his brows, deeply interested. "When, and how long ago?"

"Oh, that is my secret."

"What else do you know about Preston?"

"That's about all. I learned it by accident. I know who he assumed it is—because he wanted to marry a woman under that name."

The face of the old man took on an expression of serious alarm. Tom watched him narrowly.

"Ah, had he any children?" asked the old man.

"Yes, I think so. A son and a daughter."

"A daughter," repeated the old man, and now he seemed puzzled. "I think, Mr. Bryan, you have information of great value to us—more value than you know. Cannot we go to some quiet place where we can exchange confidences? I should not be surprised if your information were worth paying for handsomely."

Tom felt that he was getting into shallow water, for he had been drawing upon his imagination for his facts, led to go on from the evident alarm he was causing the old man.

It was not his purpose to go further. He said:

"I am always on the make, if I can do it squarely, Mr. Parker. I have no objection to giving you all the information I possess on the subject. But I cannot go now; I have an important engagement at which I am already overdue."

"Can we not meet this evening?"

"No—engagement again."

"To-morrow, then. No, not to-morrow. The engagements out of town. This is Thursday; make it Monday next, at 11 o'clock."

"All right. This place is convenient for me."

"One moment, Mr. Bryan. Do you know where the son—Fountain, you know—is now?"

"I do not know, but I could obtain knowledge easily, I think."

"Very well. Don't fail me on Monday."

Tom hurried away, glad to escape, for from a sense of pure mischief he had been led into this encounter.

"I may concoct a story," he said to himself. "I will have something of value. But what was it in my head that disturbed him so? Let me see; he is making a claim on behalf of that old drunkard on the ground that the old one is a brother of the late Preston. Now, if that is so, one of them bears an assumed name. What? From the circumstances when I said Preston had once been known as Fountain, it must have been the dead man. Now what? Why, he is frightened about the idea of the marriage and wants to know about the issue. Um."

Just then he crossed the path of one of New York's most eminent lawyers.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Bryan," said the distinguished ornament of the bar.

"Good afternoon, Judge," returned Tom, as he stepped him. "Judge, I want a worded opinion."

The distinguished man laughed.

"They are often the most expensive kind of opinions, even if you do get them for nothing, Mr. Bryan."

"Nevertheless, I'll risk it, with so great an authority. I am on the hunt of a mysterious affair. Not five minutes ago I had a conversation with a man who touches the matter slightly, and I made a remark or two which disturbed him greatly. He was not at all frank or communicative, as I tried to reason it out, and I ran against a legal wall."

"Well, if I can assist I should be pleased."

"Let me put a supposititious case: John Smith marries a woman under the name of Jacob Brown and raises a family of children. A certain fortune under the name of John Smith—living a double life—and dies without a will. John Smith is supposed to be childless. Can his children under the name of Brown claim to inherit the property?"

"There is no other or previous marriage of which there is issue?"

"No."

"Well, I should say if the identity of John Smith and Jacob Brown could be established that the Brown children could inherit and the mother take her dower rights."

"Notwithstanding there was an undisputed brother of John Smith claimant to the estate?"

"Yes, notwithstanding there was a claimant in the person of a brother. But you understand that this is an opinion given on your statement of the facts."

"Thanks," said Tom, "I can see through the wall now, and it helps me greatly."

"He moved off. As he said to himself, 'What a what frightful Parker. His little scheme would go to grass if my little romance were true.'"

With this Tom dismissed the incident from his mind and got about finding the Shadow. This was quickly done, and Tom dismissed him for the day.

Tom thought seriously about calling on Mrs. Templeton, and in the end he decided to ask him with Tom, to do as much to act, and forthwith he sought the place where he thought the gentleman was most likely to be found.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOLBROOK TAKES UP THE CASE WITH REVERENT INTEREST.

HE visited to Flora Ashgrove, and in the end he brought forth a fact which was of importance, though in Holbrook's mind it was not.

He did not receive the consideration it was entitled to. His lines connecting Fountain and the dead Templeton, and the relation they bore to the dead Preston.

These lines established, he thought the way to the determination of the mystery would be straightforward and rapid. Hence he gave a little thought to the fact that an owner of the diamond button had probably been found.

He did not blame Flora for refusing to tell him the name of the man, and in fact respected her reserve. He did wish, however, that Tom had not gone to Fountain before the result of his visit to Flora had been known, and his first impulse was to set out in search of his journalistic friend and communicate the facts in his possession. Indeed, it would be so much easier to meet and talk with Fountain after the interview with Flora.

A little reflection told him how useless was the effort, for he had no knowledge of Tom's plans in the afternoon, and he could do nothing if he returned to his office, so he determined to call upon the Templetons and see if he could not elicit something from them that would point to their connection with Preston.

He found both ladies in and both unaffably glad to see him. He plunged at once into his subject by asking if they had any relatives of the name of Preston.

Mrs. Templeton was quite sure she had none, and an equally sure Mr. Templeton had none.

On Mr. Templeton's side it was easy of settlement. Her husband, after his uncle's death, whose name was the same, had no relatives in the country, however remote. He maintained a correspondence with relatives of the same name in England and also with those upon his mother's side, of the name of Colchester.

He had visited England a few times during his life, and on two occasions relatives had called on him in the country, but they had returned to their own home.

On the occasion of his death she had received many kind letters of condolence from his family abroad, many from those of whom she had never even heard before, but among them all there was none of the name of Preston. These letters she had preserved, and if of any use to Mr. Holbrook she would give them to him.

Holbrook pursued his inquiries as to her father's relatives. Did she know any relatives in the country, however remote?

"Very little," was the reply. He had run away to sea before she was born, and all she had heard of him was long after he had been lost of him, and after he was supposed to be dead. Evidently he had done something wrong for the elder to hold little respect in speaking of him, and that when they were in the land, that he was dead. He had died in her childhood.

Holbrook then said that though they had made little progress in the unfolding of the mystery surrounding the death of her son, yet they were steadfastly at work at it. That while he had thought it best to say little to them about it, with the hope of helping in the work, they had in their investigation thought,

perhaps, a man of the name of Pearson, who had died recently, had been connected with the events.

It was strange, but none the less true, that Tom had failed to tell Holbrook of the scene between the drunkard Preston and Parker. Had he done so Holbrook undoubtedly would have elicited something from Mrs. Templeton which would have put an end to the matter upon a matter of fact, it is the impression of the Shadow had made but little report on Tom at the time, for his mind then was concentrated upon the task of fastening the crime of murder upon Fountain. Such thought as he did give to it was that, perhaps, a discreet inquiry in that direction might lead up to a discovery of some of Preston's surroundings, which might help them to an understanding of how Templeton, Fountain and Pearson were connected. And so it was that Holbrook was treading close upon facts of great value without being conscious of it.

Having ascertained that Mrs. Templeton could tell him nothing that could be of value, he dropped the subject, and turned the conversation in another channel.

But Annie, who was sitting at the window engaged in embroidery work, and using a very pretty picture as she sat there, remarked that who was glad the search was being continued, for though they had heard little about it recently, they were greatly interested in it.

Holbrook, who thought there was something of genius approach in the words, said:

"The truth is, Miss Templeton, nothing has been accomplished. For ten days we have been under the impression that we could lay our hands upon the man, but this morning we discovered that the man in question could not have possibly done the deed. We hardly dared to admit to ourselves our suspicions, and I should have been greatly to blame had I raised false hopes in your breast or had I permitted a suspicion that could not be justified. Rest assured that everything is being done that can be done to uncover the mystery."

"Oh," said Annie, covered with confusion and blushing very prettily, "I had no intention of complaining. Indeed we are really too much obliged to you for the trouble you have taken in our affairs to criticize or to complain."

"During this exchange Holbrook had moved from his chair in the middle of the room, where he had been conversing with Mrs. Templeton, and taken a walk, say one near the window where Annie sat."

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