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Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Molière
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
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Baum Henry Flaubert Nietzsche Willis
Leslie Dumas Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whitman Twain
Darwin Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato
Potter Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte
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Poe Aristotle Wells Bunner Shakespeare Chambers Irving
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The Stowmarket Mystery Or, A Legacy of Hate

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A LEGACY OF HATE

Chapter I

"The Stowmarket Mystery"

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"Mr. David Hume."

Reginald Brett, barrister-detective, twisted round in his easy-chair to permit the light to fall clearly on the card handed to him by his man-servant.

"What does Mr. David Hume look like, Smith?" he asked.

"A gentleman, sir."

Well-trained servants never make a mistake when they give such a description of a visitor. Brett was satisfied.

"Produce him."

Then he examined the card.

"It is odd," he thought. "Mr. David Hume gives no address, and writes his own cards. I like his signature, too. Now, I wonder—"

The door was thrown open. A tall, well-proportioned young man entered. He was soberly attired in blue serge. His face and hands bore the impress of travel and exposure. His expression was pleasing and attractive. In repose his features were regular, and marked with lines of thought. A short, well-trimmed beard, of the type affected by some naval men, gave him a somewhat unusual appearance. Otherwise he carried himself like a British cavalry officer in mufti.

He advanced into the room and bowed easily. Brett, who had risen, instantly felt that his visitor was one of those people who erect invisible barriers between themselves and strangers.

"My errand will occupy some time, perhaps half an hour, to permit of full explanation," said Mr. Hume. "May I ask—"

"I am completely at your service. Take that chair. You will find it comfortable. Do you smoke? Yes. Well, try those cigarettes. They are better than they look."

Mr. Hume seemed to be gratified by this cordial reception. He seated himself as requested, in the best light obtainable in a north-side Victoria Street flat, and picked up the box of cigarettes.

"Turkish," he announced.

"Yes."

"Grown on a slope near Salonica."

"Indeed? You interest me."

"Oh, I know them well. I was there two months ago. I suppose you got these as a present from Yildiz Kiosk?"

"Mr. Hume, you asked for half an hour, Make it an hour. You have touched upon a subject dear to my heart."

"They are the best cigarettes in the world. No one can buy them. They are made for the exclusive use of the Sultan's household. To attempt to export them means the bastinado and banishment, at the least. I do not credit you with employing agents on such terms, so I assume an Imperial gift."

The barrister had been looking intently at the other man during this short colloquy. Suddenly his eyes sparkled. He struck a match and held it to his visitor, with the words:

"You are quite right, Mr. David Hume-Frazer."

The person thus addressed neither started, nor sprang to his feet, nor gasped in amazement. He took the match, lit a cigarette, and said:

"So you know me?"

"Yes."

"It is strange. I have never previously met you to my knowledge. Am I still a celebrity?"

"To me — yes."

"A sort of distinguished criminal, eh?"

"No man could be such a judge of tobacco and remain commonplace."

"Pon my honour, Mr. Brett, I think you deserve your reputation. For the first time during eighteen months I feel hopeful. Do you know, I passed dozens of acquaintances in the streets yesterday and none of them knew me. Yet you pick me out at the first glance, so to speak."

"They might do the same if you spoke to them, Mr. —"

"Hume, if you please."

"Certainly. Why have you dropped part of your surname?"

"It is a long story. My lawyers, Flint & Sharp, of Gray's Inn, heard of your achievements in the cases of Lady Lyle and the Imperial Diamonds. They persuaded me to come to you."

"Though, personally, you have little faith in me?"

"Heaven knows, Mr. Brett, I have had good cause to lose faith. My case defies analysis. It savours of the supernatural."

The barrister shoved his chair sideways until he was able to reach a bookcase, from which he took a bulky interleaved volume.

"Supernatural," he repeated. "That is new to me. As I remember the affair, it was highly sensational, perplexing — a blend of romance and Japanese knives — but I do not remember any abnormal element save one, utter absence of motive."

"Do you mean to say that you possess a record of the facts?" inquired Hume, exhibiting some tokens of excite-

ment in face and voice as he watched Brett turning over the leaves of the scrap-book, in which newspaper cuttings were neatly pasted, some being freely annotated.

"Yes. The daily press supplies my demands in the way of fiction—a word, by the way, often misapplied. Where do you find stranger tales than in the records of every-day life? Ah, here we are!"

He searched through a large number of printed extracts. There were comments, long reports, and not a few notes, all under the heading: "The Stowmarket Mystery."

Hume was now deeply agitated; he evidently restrained his feelings by sheer force of will.

"Mr. Brett," he said, and his voice trembled a little, "surely you could not have expected my presence here this morning?"

"I no more expected you than the man in the moon," was the reply; "but I recognised you at once. I watched your face for many hours whilst you stood in the dock. Professional business took me to the Assizes during your second trial. At one time I thought of offering my services."

"To me?"

"No, not to you."

"To whom, then?"

"To the police. Winter, the Scotland Yard man who had charge of the business, is an old friend of mine."

"What restrained you?"

"Pity, and perhaps doubt. I could see no reason why you should kill your cousin."

"But you believed me guilty?"

The barrister looked his questioner straight in the eyes. He saw there the glistening terror of a tortured soul. Somehow he expected to find a different expression. He was puzzled.

"Why have you come here, Mr. Hume?" he abruptly demanded.

"To implore your assistance. They tell me you are the one man in the world able to clear my name from the stain of crime. Will you do it?"

Again their eyes met. Hume was fighting now, fighting for all that a man holds dear. He did not plead. He only demanded his rights. Born a few centuries earlier, he would have enforced them with cold steel.

"Come, Mr. Brett," he almost shouted. "If you are as good a judge of men as you say I am of tobacco, you will not think that the cowardly murderer who struck down my cousin would come to you, of all others, and reopen the story of a crime closed unwillingly by the law."

Brett could, on occasion, exhibit an obstinate determination not to be drawn into expressing an opinion. His visitor's masterful manner annoyed him. Hume, metaphorically speaking, took him by the throat and compelled his services. He rebelled against this species of compulsion, but mere politeness required some display of courteous tolerance.

"It seems to me," he said, "that we are beginning at the end. I may not be able to help you. What are the facts?"

The stranger was so agitated that he could not reply. Self-restrained men are not ready with language. Their thoughts may be fiery as bottled vitriol, but they keep the cork in. The barrister allowed for this drawback. His sympathies were aroused, and they overcame his slight resentment.

"Try another cigarette," he said, "I have here a summary of the evidence. I will read it to you. Do not interrupt. Follow the details closely, and correct anything that is wrong when I have ended."

Hume was still volcanic, but he took the proffered box.

"Ah," cried Brett, "though you are angry, your judgment is sound. Now listen!"

Then he read the following statement, prepared by himself in an idle moment:—

“The Stowmarket Mystery is a strange mixture of the real and the unreal. Sir Alan Hume-Frazer, fourth baronet, met his death on the hunting-field. His horse blundered at a brook and the rider was impaled on a hidden stake, placed in the stream by his own orders to prevent poachers from netting trout. His wife, nie Somers, a Bristol family, had pre-deceased him.

“There were two children, a daughter, Margaret, aged twenty-five, and a son, Alan, aged twenty-three. By his will, Sir Alan left all his real and personal estate to his son, with a life charge of #1,000 per annum for the daughter. As he was a very wealthy man, almost a millionaire, the provision for his daughter was niggardly, which might be accounted for by the fact that the girl, several years before her father’s death, quarrelled with him and left home, residing in London and in Florence. Both children, by the way, were born in Italy, where Sir Alan met and married Miss Somers.

“The old gentleman, it appeared, allowed Miss Hume-Frazer #5,000 per annum during his life. His son voluntarily continued this allowance, but the brother and sister continued to live apart, he devoted to travel and sport, she to music and art, with a leaning towards the occult—a woman divorced from conventionality and filled with a hatred of restraint.

“Beechcroft, the family residence, is situated four miles from Stowmarket, close to the small village of Sleagill. After his father’s death, the young Sir Alan went for a protracted tour round the world. Meanwhile his first cousin, Mr. David Hume-Frazer, lived at Beechcroft during the shooting season, and incidentally fell in love with Miss Helen Layton, daughter of the rector of Sleagill, the Rev. Wilberforce Layton.”

Hume stirred uneasily in his chair, and the barrister paused, expecting him to say something. But the other only gasped brokenly: “Go on; go on!”

"Love lasts longer than death or crime," mused Brett.

He continued:

"In eighteen months Sir Alan the fifth—all heirs had same name—returned to Beechcroft, about Christmas. His cousin had been called away on family business, but returned for a New Year's Eve ball, given by Mrs. Eastham, a lady of some local importance. Sir Alan and Helen Layton had followed the hounds together three times during Christmas week. They were, of course, old friends.

"David sent from Scotland—his father's estate was situated close to Inverness—some presents to his future wife, his cousin, and others. The gift to Sir Alan was noteworthy and fatalistic—a handsomely inlaid Japanese sword, with a small dagger inserted in a sheath near the top of the scabbard. David reached Beechcroft on the day of the ball. Relations between the cousins seemed to the servants to be cool, though the coolness lay rather with the baronet, and David, a year older, it may be here stated, was evidently taken by surprise by Sir Alan's attitude.

"The three young people went to the ball, and shortly after midnight there was something in the nature of a scene. Sir Alan had been dancing with Miss Layton. They were in the conservatory when the young lady burst into tears, hurried to find David, and asked him to take her at once to her carriage. Mrs. Eastham was acting as chaperon to the girl, and some heated words passed between her and the two young men.

"Evidence showed that Sir Alan had bitterly upbraided Miss Layton on account of her engagement, and hinted that David had taken an unfair advantage of his (Alan's) absence to win her affections. This was absolutely untrue. It was denied by the two most concerned, and by Mrs. Eastham, who, as a privileged friend, knew all the facts. The young men were in a state of white heat, but David sensibly withdrew, and walked to the Hall.

"Mrs. Eastham's house was close to the lodge gates, and from the lodge a straight yew-shaded drive led to the library windows, the main entrance being at the side of the house.

"In the library a footman, on duty in the room, maintained a good fire, and the French windows were left unfastened, as the young gentlemen would probably enter the house that way. David did, in fact, do so. The footman quitted the room, and a few minutes later the butler appeared. He was an old favourite of David's. He asked if he should send some whisky and soda.

"The young man agreed, adding:

"'Sir Alan and I have commenced the year badly, Ferguson. We quarrelled over a silly mistake. I have made up my mind not to sleep on it, so I will await his arrival. Let me know if he comes in the other way.'

"The butler hoped that the matter was not a serious one.

"'Under other circumstances it might be,' was the answer, 'but as things are, it is simply a wretched mistake, which a little reasonable discussion will put right.'

"The footman brought the whisky and soda.

"Twenty minutes later he re-entered the room to attend to the fire. Mr. David Hume-Frazer was curled up in an arm-chair asleep, or rather dozing, for he stirred a little when the man put some coal in the grate. This was at 1 a.m. exactly.

"At 1.10 a.m. the butler thought he heard his master's voice coming from the front of the house, and angrily protesting something. Unfortunately he could not catch a single word. He imagined that the 'quarrel' spoken of by David had been renewed.

"He waited two minutes, not more, but hearing no further sounds, he walked round to the library windows, thinking that perhaps he would see Sir Alan in the room.

“To his dismay he found his young master stretched on the turf at the side of the drive, thirty feet from the house. He rushed into the library, where David was still asleep and moving uneasily – muttering, the man thought:

“‘Come quickly, sir,’ he cried, ‘I fear something has happened to Sir Alan. He is lying on the ground outside the house, and I cannot arouse him.’

“Then David Hume-Frazer sprang to his feet and shouted:

“‘My God! It was not a dream. He is murdered!’

“Unquestionably –”

But the barrister’s cold-blooded synopsis of a thrilling crime proved to be too much for his hearer’s nerves. Hume stood up. The man was a born fighter. He could take, his punishment, but only on his feet.

Again he cried in anguish:

“No! It was no dream, but a foul murder. And they blame me!”

Chapter II

David Hume's Story

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Brett closed the book with a snap.

"What good purpose can it serve at this time to reopen the miserable story?" he asked.

Curiously enough, Hume paid no heed to the question. His lips quivered, his nostrils twitched, and his eyes shot strange gleams. He caught the back of his chair with both hands in a grasp that tried to squeeze the tough oak.

"What else have you written there?" he said, and Brett could not help but admire his forced composure.

"Nothing of any material importance. You were arrested, after an interval of some days, as the result of a coroner's warrant. You explained that you had a vivid dream, in which you saw your cousin stabbed by a stranger whom you did not know, whose face even you never saw. Sir Alan was undoubtedly murdered. The dagger-like attachment to your Japanese sword had been driven into his breast up to the hilt, actually splitting his heart. To deliver such a blow, with such a weapon, required uncommon strength and skill. I think I describe it here as 'un-English.'"

Brett referred to his scrap-book. In spite of himself, he felt all his old interest reawakening in this remarkable crime.

"Yes?" queried Hume.

The barrister, his lips pursed up and critical, surveyed his concluding notes.

"You were tried at the ensuing Assizes, and the jury disagreed. Your second trial resulted in an acquittal, though the public attitude towards you was dubious. The judge, in summing up, said that the evidence against you 'might be deemed insufficient.' In these words he conveyed the

popular opinion. I see I have noted here that Miss Margaret Hume-Frazer was at a Covent Garden Fancy Dress Ball on the night of the murder. But the tragic deaths of her father and brother had a marked influence on the young lady. She, of course, succeeded to the estates, and decided at once to live at Beechcroft. Does she still live there?"

"Yes. I am told she is distinguished for her charity and good works. She is married."

"Ah! To whom?"

"To an Italian, named Giovanni Capella."

"His stage name?"

"No; he is really an Italian."

Brett's pleasantry was successful in its object. David Hume regained his equanimity and sat down again. After a pause he went on:

"May I ask, Mr. Brett, before I tell you my part of the story, if you formed any theories as to the occurrence at the time?"

The barrister consulted his memoranda. Something that met his eyes caused him to smile.

"I see," he said, "that Mr. Winter, of Scotland Yard, was convinced of your guilt. That is greatly in your favour."

"Why?"

Hume disdained the police, but Brett's remark evoked curiosity.

"Because Mr. Winter is a most excellent officer, whose intellect is shackled by handcuffs. 'De l'audace!' says the Frenchman, as a specific for human conduct. 'Lock 'em up,' says Mr. Winter, when he is inquiring into a crime. Of course, he is right nine times out of ten; but if, in the tenth case, intellect conflicts with handcuffs, the handcuffs win, being stronger in his instance."

Hume was in no mood to appreciate the humours of Scotland Yard, so the other continued:

"The most telling point against you was the fact that not only the butler, footman, and two housemaids, but you yourself, at the coroner's inquest, swore that the small Japanese knife was in its sheath during the afternoon; indeed, the footman said it was there, to the best of his belief, at midnight. Then, again, a small drawer in Sir Alan's writing-table had been wrenched open whilst you were alone in the room. On this point the footman was positive. Near the drawer rested the sword from which its viperish companion had been abstracted. Had not the butler found Sir Alan's body, still palpitating, and testified beyond any manner of doubt that you were apparently sleeping in the library, you would have been hanged, Mr. Hume."

"Probably."

"The air of probability attending your execution would have been most convincing."

"Is my case, then, so desperate?"

"You cannot be tried again, you know."

"I do not mean that. I want to establish my innocence; to compel society to reinstate me as a man profoundly wronged; above all, to marry the woman I love."

Brett amused himself by rapidly projecting several rings of smoke through a large one.

"So you really are innocent?" he said, after a pause.

David Hume rose from his chair, and reached for his hat, gloves, and stick.

"You have crushed my remaining hope of emancipation," he exclaimed bitterly. "You have the repute of being able to pluck the heart out of a mystery, Mr. Brett, so when you assume that I am guilty —"

"I have assumed nothing of the kind. You seem to possess the faculty of self-control. Kindly exercise it, and answer my questions, Did you kill your cousin?"

"No."

"Who did kill him?"

"I do not know."

"Do you suspect anybody?"

"Not in the remotest degree."

"Did he kill himself?"

"That theory was discussed privately, but not brought forward at the trial. Three doctors said it was not worthy of a moment's consideration."

"Well, you need not shout your replies, and I would prefer to see you comfortably seated, unless, of course, you feel more at ease near the door."

A trifle shamefacedly, Hume returned to his former position near the fireplace—that shrine to which all the household gods do reverence, even in the height of summer. It is impossible to conceive the occupants of a room deliberately grouping themselves without reference to the grate.

Brett placed the open scrap-book on his knees, and ran an index finger along underlined passages in the manner of counsel consulting a brief.

"Why did you give your cousin this sword?"

"Because he told me he was making a collection of Japanese arms, and I remarked that my grandfather on my mother's side, Admiral Cunningham, had brought this weapon, with others, from the Far East. It lay for fifty years in our gun-room at Glen Tochan."

"So you met Sir Alan soon after his return home?"

"Yes, in London, the day he arrived. Came to town on purpose, in fact. Afterwards I travelled North, and he went to Beechcroft."