
Chronicles of Martin Hewitt

Arthur Morrison



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No. 191

CHRONICLES OF MARTIN HEWITT

**BY
ARTHUR MORRISON**

AUTHOR OF **TALES OF MEAN STREETS, ETC.**



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THE HOLFORD WILL CASE

At one time, in common, perhaps, with most people, I took a sort of languid, amateur interest in questions of psychology, and was impelled there-by to plunge into the pages of the many curious and rather abstruse books which attempt to deal with phenomena of mind, soul and sense. Three things of the real nature of which, I am convinced, no man will ever learn more than we know at present—which is nothing.

From these I strayed into the many volumes of *Transactions of the Psychical Research Society*, with an occasional by-excursion into mental telepathy and theosophy; the last, a thing whereof my Philistine intelligence obstinately refused to make head or tail.

It was while these things were occupying part of my attention that I chanced to ask Hewitt whether, in the course of his divers odd and out-of-the-way experiences, he had met with any such weird adventures as were detailed in such profusion in the books of "authenticated" spooks, doppelgangers, poltergeists, clairvoyance, and so forth.

"Well," Hewitt answered, with reflection, "I haven't been such a wallower in the uncanny as some of the worthy people who talk at large in those books of yours, and, as a matter of fact, my little adventures, curious as some of them may seem, have been on the whole of the most solid and matter-of-fact description. One or two things have happened that perhaps your 'psychical' people might be interested in, but they've mostly been found to be capable of a disappointingly simple explanation. One case of some genuine psychological interest, however, I have had; although there's nothing even in that which isn't a matter of well-known scientific possibility." And he proceeded to tell me the story that I have set down here, as well as I can, from recollection.

I think I have already said, in another place, that Hewitt's professional start as a private investigator dated from his connection with the famous will case of *Bartley v. Bartley* and others, in which his then principals, Messrs. Crellan, Hunt & Crellan, chiefly through his exertions established their extremely high reputation as solicitors. It was ten years or so after this case that Mr. Crellan senior—the head of the firm—retired into private life, and by an odd chance Hewitt's first meeting with him after that event was occasioned by another will difficulty.

These were the terms of the telegram that brought Hewitt again into personal relations with his old principal:—

"Can you run down at once on a matter of private business? I will be at Guildford to meet eleven thirty-five from Waterloo. If later or prevented please wire. Crellan."

The day and the state of Hewitt's engagements suited, and there was full half an hour to catch the train. Taking, therefore, the small travelling-bag that always stood ready packed in case of any sudden excursion that presented the possibility of a night from home, he got early to Waterloo, and by half-past twelve was alighting at Guildford Station. Mr. Crellan, a hale, white-haired old gentleman, wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, was waiting with a covered carriage.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Hewitt, how d'ye do?" the old gentleman exclaimed as soon as they met, grasping Hewitt's hand, and hurrying him toward the carriage. "I'm glad you've come, very glad. It isn't raining, and you might have preferred something more open, but I brought the brougham because I want to talk privately. I've been vegetating to such an extent for the last few years down here that any little occurrence out of the ordinary excites me, and I'm sure I couldn't have kept quiet till we had got indoors. It's been bad enough, keeping the thing to myself, already."

The door shut, and the brougham started. Mr. Crellan laid his hand on Hewitt's knee, "I hope," he said, "I haven't dragged you away from any important business?"

"No," Hewitt replied, "you have chosen a most excellent time. Indeed, I did think of making a small holiday to-day, but your telegram—"

"Yes, yes. Do you know, I was almost ashamed of having sent it after it had gone. Because, after all, the matter is, probably, really a very simple sort of affair that you can't possibly help me in. A few years

ago I should have thought nothing of it, nothing at all. But as I have told you, I've got into such a dull, vegetable state of mind since I retired and have nothing to do that a little thing upsets me, and I haven't mental energy enough to make up my mind to go to dinner sometimes. But you're an old friend, and I'm sure you'll forgive my dragging you all down here on a matter that will, perhaps, seem ridiculously simple to you, a man in the thick of active business. If I hadn't known you so well I wouldn't have had the impudence to bother you. But never mind all that. I'll tell you.

"Do you ever remember my speaking of an intimate friend, a Mr. Holford? No. Well, it's a long time ago, and perhaps I never happened to mention him. He was a most excellent man—old fellow, like me, you know; two or three years older, as a matter of fact. We were chums many years ago; in fact, we lodged in the same house when I was an articled clerk and he was a student at Guy's. He retired from the medical profession early, having come into a fortune, and came down here to live at the house we're going to; as a matter of fact, Wedbury Hall.

"When I retired I came down and took up my quarters not far off, and we were a very excellent pair of old chums till last Monday—the day before yesterday—when my poor old friend died. He was pretty well in years—seventy-three—and a man can't live for ever. But I assure you it has upset me terribly, made a greater fool of me than ever, in fact, just when I ought to have my wits about me.

"The reason I particularly want my wits just now, and the reason I have requisitioned yours, is this: that I can't find poor old Holford's will. I drew it up for him years ago, and by it I was appointed his sole executor. I am perfectly convinced that he cannot have destroyed it, because he told me everything concerning his affairs. I have always been his only adviser, in fact, and I'm sure he would have consulted me as to any change in his testamentary intentions before he made it. Moreover, there are reasons why I know he could not have wished to die intestate."

"Which are—?" queried Hewitt as Mr. Crellan paused in his statement.

"Which are these: Holford was a widower, with no children of his own. His wife, who has been dead nearly fifteen years now, was a most excellent woman, a model wife, and would have been a model mother if she had been one at all. As it was she adopted a little girl, a poor little soul who was left an orphan at two years of age. The child's father, an unsuccessful man of business of the name of Garth, maddened by a sudden and ruinous loss, committed suicide, and his wife died of the shock occasioned by the calamity.

"The child, as I have said, was taken by Mrs. Holford and made a daughter of, and my old friend's daughter she has been ever since, practically speaking. The poor old fellow couldn't possibly have been more attached to a daughter of his own, and on her part she couldn't possibly have been a better daughter than she was. She stuck by him night and day during his last illness, until she became rather ill herself, although of course there was a regular nurse always in attendance.

"Now, in his will, Mr. Holford bequeathed rather more than half of his very large property to this Miss Garth; that is to say, as residuary legatee, her interest in the will came to about that. The rest was distributed in various ways. Holford had largely spent the leisure of his retirement in scientific pursuits. So there were a few legacies to learned societies; all his servants were remembered; he left me a certain number of his books; and there was a very fair sum of money for his nephew, Mr. Cranley Mellis, the only near relation of Mr. Holford's still living. So that you see what the loss of this will may mean. Miss Garth, who was to have taken the greater part of her adoptive father's property, will not have one shilling's worth of claim on the estate and will be turned out into the world without a cent. One or two very old servants will be very awkwardly placed, too, with nothing to live on, and very little prospect of doing more work."

"Everything will go to this nephew," said Hewitt, "of course?"

"Of course. That is unless I attempt to prove a rough copy of the will which I may possibly have by me. But even if I have such a thing and find it, long and costly litigation would be called for, and the result would probably be all against us."

"You say you feel sure Mr. Holford did not destroy the will himself?"

"I am quite sure he would never have done so without telling me of it; indeed, I am sure he would have consulted me first. Moreover, it can never have been his intention to leave Miss Garth utterly unprovided for; it would be the same thing as disinheriting his only daughter."

"Did you see him frequently?"

"There's scarcely been a day when I haven't seen him since I have lived down here. During his illness—it lasted a month—I saw him every day."

"And he said nothing of destroying his will?"

"Nothing at all. On the contrary, soon after his first seizure—indeed, on the first visit at which I found him in bed—he said, after telling me how he felt, 'Everything's as I want it, you know, in case I go under.' That seemed to me to mean his will was still as he desired it to be."

"Well, yes, it would seem so. But counsel on the other side (supposing there were another side) might quite as plausibly argue that he meant to die intestate, and had destroyed his will so that everything should be as he wanted it, in that sense. But what do you want me to do—find the will?"

"Certainly, if you can. It seemed to me that you, with your clever head, might be able to form a better judgment than I as to what has happened and who is responsible for it. Because if the will has been taken away, some one has taken it."

"It seems probable. Have you told any one of your difficulty?"

"Not a soul. I came over as soon as I could after Mr. Holford's death, and Miss Garth gave me all the keys, because, as executor, the case being a peculiar one, I wished to see that all was in order, and, as you know, the estate is legally vested in the executor from the death of the testator, so that I was responsible for everything; although, of course, if there is no will I'm not executor. But I thought it best to keep the difficulty to myself till I saw you."

"Quite right. Is this Wedbury Hall?"

The brougham had passed a lodge gate, and approached, by a wide drive, a fine old red brick mansion carrying the heavy stone dressings and copings distinctive of early eighteenth century domestic architecture.

"Yes," said Mr. Crellan, "this is the place. We will go straight to the study, I think, and then I can explain details."

The study told the tale of the late Mr. Holford's habits and interests. It was half a library, half a scientific laboratory—pathological curiosities in spirits, a retort or two, test tubes on the writing-table, and a fossilized lizard mounted in a case, balanced the many shelves and cases of books disposed about the walls. In a recess between two book-cases stood a heavy, old-fashioned mahogany bureau.

"Now it was in that bureau," Mr. Crellan explained, indicating it with his finger, "that Mr. Holford kept every document that was in the smallest degree important or valuable. I have seen him at it a hundred times, and he always maintained it was as secure as any iron safe. That may not have been altogether the fact, but the bureau is certainly a tremendously heavy and strong one. Feel it."

Hewitt took down the front and pulled out a drawer that Mr. Crellan unlocked for the purpose.

"Solid Spanish mahogany an inch thick," was his verdict, "heavy, hard, and seasoned; not the sort of thing you can buy nowadays. Locks, Chubb's patent, early pattern, but not easily to be picked by anything short of a blast of gunpowder. If there are no marks on this bureau it hasn't been tampered with."

"Well," Mr. Crellan pursued, "as I say, *that* was where Mr. Holford kept his will. I have often seen it when we have been here together, and this was the drawer, the top on the right, that he kept it in. The will was a mere single sheet of foolscap, and was kept, folded of course, in a blue envelope."

"When did you yourself last actually see the will?"

"I saw it in my friend's hand two days before he took to his bed. He merely lifted it in his hand to get at something else in the drawer, replaced it, and locked the drawer again."

"Of course there are other drawers, bureaux, and so on, about the place. You have examined them carefully, I take it?"

"I've turned out ever possible receptacle for that will in the house, I positively assure you, and there isn't a trace of it."

"You've thought of secret drawers, I suppose?"

"Yes. There are two in the bureau which I always knew of. Here they are." Mr. Crellan pressed his thumb against a partition of the pigeon-holes at the back of the bureau and a strip of mahogany flew out from below, revealing two shallow drawers with small ivory catches in lieu of knobs. "Nothing there at all. And this other, as I have said, was the drawer where the will was kept. The other papers kept in the same drawer are here as usual."

"Did anybody else know where Mr. Holford kept his will?"

"Everybody in the house, I should think. He was a frank, above-board sort of man. His adopted daughter knew, and the butler knew, and there was absolutely no reason why all the other servants shouldn't know; probably they did."

"First," said Hewitt, "we will make quite sure there are no more secret drawers about this bureau. Lock the door in case anybody comes."

Hewitt took out every drawer of the bureau, and examined every part of each before he laid it aside. Then he produced a small pair of silver callipers and an ivory pocket-rule and went over every inch of the heavy framework, measuring, comparing, tapping, adding, and subtracting dimensions. In the end he rose to his feet satisfied. "There is most certainly nothing concealed there," he said.

The drawers were put back, and Mr. Crellan suggested lunch. At Hewitt's suggestion it was brought to the study.

"So far," Hewitt said, "we arrive at this: either Mr. Holford has destroyed his will, or he has most effectually concealed it, or somebody has stolen it. The first of these possibilities you don't favour."

"I don't believe it is a possibility for a moment. I have told you why; and I knew Holford so well, you know. For the same reasons I am sure he never concealed it."

"Very well, then. Somebody has stolen it. The question is, who?"

"That is so."

"It seems to me that every one in this house had a direct and personal interest in preserving that will. The servants have all something left them, you say, and without the will that goes, of course. Miss Garth has the greatest possible interest in the will. The only person I have heard of as yet who would benefit by its loss or destruction would be the nephew, Mr. Mellis. There are no other relatives, you say, who would benefit by intestacy?"

"Not one."

"Well, what do you think yourself, now? Have you any suspicions?"

Mr. Crellan shrugged his shoulders. "I've no more right to suspicions than you have, I suppose," he said. "Of course, if there are to be suspicions they can only point one way. Mr. Mellis is the only person who can gain by the disappearance of this will."

"Just so, Now, what do you know of him?"

"I don't know much of the young man," Mr. Crellan said slowly. "I must say I never particularly took to him. He is rather a clever fellow, I believe. He was called to the bar some time ago, and afterwards studied medicine, I believe, with the idea of priming himself for a practice in medical jurisprudence. He took a good deal of interest in my old friend's researches, I am told—at any rate he *said* he did; he may have been thinking of his uncle's fortune. But they had a small tiff on some medical question. I don't know exactly what it was, but Mr. Holford objected to something—a method of research or something of that kind—as being dangerous and unprofessional. There was no actual rupture between them, you understand, but Mellis's visits slacked off, and there was a coolness."

"Where is Mr. Mellis now?"

"In London, I believe."

"Has he been in this house between the day you last saw the will in that drawer and yesterday, when you failed to find it?"

"Only once. He came to see his uncle two days before his death—last Saturday, in fact. He didn't stay long."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes."

"What did he do?"

"Merely came into the room for a few minutes—visitors weren't allowed to stay long—spoke a little to his uncle, and went back to town."

"Did he do nothing else, or see anybody else?"

"Miss Garth went out of the room with him as he left, and I should think they talked for a little before he went away, to judge by the time she was gone; but I don't know."

"You are sure he went then?"

"I saw him in the drive as I looked from the window."

"Miss Garth, you say, has kept all the keys since the beginning of Mr. Holford's illness?"

"Yes, until she gave them up to me yesterday. Indeed, the nurse, who is rather a peppery customer, and was jealous of Miss Garth's presence in the sick room all along, made several difficulties about having to go to her for everything."

"And there is no doubt of the bureau having been kept locked all the time?"

"None at all. I have asked Miss Garth that—and, indeed, a good many other things—without saying why I wanted the information."

"How are Mr. Mellis and Miss Garth affected toward one another—are they friendly?"

"Oh, yes. Indeed, some while ago I rather fancied that Mellis was disposed to pay serious addresses in that quarter. He may have had a fancy that way, or he may have been attracted by the young lady's expectations. At any rate, nothing definite seems to have come of it as yet. But I must say—between ourselves, of course—I have more than once noticed a decided air of agitation, shyness perhaps, in Miss Garth when Mr. Mellis has been present. But, at any rate, that scarcely matters. She is twenty-four years of age now, and can do as she likes. Although, if I had anything to say in the matter—well, never mind."

"You, I take it, have known Miss Garth a long time?"

"Bless you, yes. Danced her on my knee twenty years ago. I've been her 'Uncle Leonard' all her life."

"Well, I think we must at least let Miss Garth know of the loss of the will. Perhaps, when they have cleared away these plates, she will come here for a few minutes."

"I'll go and ask her," Mr. Crellan answered, and having rung the bell, proceeded to find Miss Garth.

Presently he returned with the lady. She was a slight, very pale young woman; no doubt rather pretty in ordinary, but now not looking her best. She was evidently worn and nervous from anxiety and want of sleep, and her eyes were sadly inflamed. As the wind slammed a loose casement behind her she started nervously, and placed her hand to her head.

"Sit down at once, my dear," Mr. Crellan said; "sit down. This is Mr. Martin Hewitt, whom I have taken the liberty of inviting down here to help me in a very important matter. The fact is, my dear," Mr. Crellan added gravely, "I can't find your poor father's will."

Miss Garth was not surprised. "I thought so," she said mildly, "when you asked me about the bureau yesterday."

"Of course I need not say, my dear, what a serious thing it may be for you if that will cannot be found. So I hope you'll try and tell Mr. Hewitt here anything he wants to know as well as you can, without forgetting a single thing. I'm pretty sure that he will find it for us if it is to be found."

"I understand, Miss Garth," Hewitt asked, "that the keys of that bureau never left your possession during the whole time of Mr. Holford's last illness, and that the bureau was kept locked?"

"Yes, that is so."

"Did you ever have occasion to go to the bureau yourself?"

"No, I have not touched it."

"Then you can answer for it, I presume, that the bureau was never unlocked by *any one* from the time Mr. Holford placed the keys in your hands till you gave them to Mr. Crellan?"

"Yes, I am sure of that."

"Very good. Now is there any place on the whole premises that you can suggest where this will may possibly be hidden?"

"There is no place that Mr. Crellan doesn't know of, I'm sure."

"It is an old house, I observe," Hewitt pursued. "Do you know of any place of concealment in the structure—any secret doors, I mean, you know, or sliding panels, or hollow door frames, and so forth?"

Miss Garth shook her head. "There is not a single place of the sort you speak of in the whole building, so far as I know," she said, "and I have lived here almost all my life."

"You knew the purport of Mr. Holford's will, I take it, and understand what its loss may mean to yourself?"

"Perfectly."

"Now I must ask you to consider carefully. Take your mind back to two or three days before Mr. Holford's illness began, and tell me if you can remember any single fact, occurrence, word, or hint from that day to this in any way bearing on the will or anything connected with it?"

Miss Garth shook her head thoughtfully. "I can't remember the thing being mentioned by anybody, except perhaps by the nurse, who is rather a touchy sort of woman, and once or twice took it upon herself to hint that my recent anxiety was chiefly about my poor father's money. And that once, when I had done some small thing for him, my father—I have always called him father, you know—said that he wouldn't forget it, or that I should be rewarded, or something of that sort. Nothing else that I can remember in the remotest degree concerned the will."

"Mr. Mellis said nothing about it, then?"

Miss Garth changed colour slightly, but answered, "No, I only saw him to the door."

"Thank you, Miss Garth, I won't trouble you any further just now. But if you can remember anything more in the course of the next few hours it may turn out to be of great service."

Miss Garth bowed and withdrew. Mr. Crellan shut the door behind her and returned to Hewitt. "*That* doesn't carry us much further," he said. "The more certain it seems that the will cannot have been got at, the more difficult our position is from a legal point of view. What shall we do now?"

"Is the nurse still about the place?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Then I'll speak to her."

The nurse came in response to Mr. Crellan's summons: a sharp-featured, pragmatical woman of forty-five. She took the seat offered her, and waited for Hewitt's questions.

"You were in attendance on Mr. Holford, I believe, Mrs. Turton, since the beginning of his last illness?"

"Since October 24th."

"Were you present when Mr. Mellis came to see his uncle last Saturday?"

"Yes."

"Can you tell me what took place?"

"As to what the gentleman said to Mr. Holford," the nurse replied, bridling slightly, "of course I don't know anything, it not being my business and not intended for my ears. Mr. Crellan was there, and knows as much as I do, and so does Miss Garth. I only know that Mr. Mellis stayed for a few minutes and then went out of the room with Miss Garth."

"How long was Miss Garth gone?"

"I don't know, ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, perhaps."

"Now Mrs. Turton, I want you to tell me in confidence—it is very important—whether you, at any time, heard Mr. Holford during his illness say anything of his wishes as to how his property was to be left in case of his death?"

The nurse started and looked keenly from Hewitt to Mr. Crellan and back again.

"Is it the will you mean?" she asked sharply.

"Yes. Did he mention it?"

"You mean you can't find the will, isn't that it?"

"Well, suppose it is, what then?"

"Suppose won't do," the nurse answered shortly; "I *do* know something about the will, and I believe you can't find it."

"I'm sure, Mrs. Turton, that if you know anything about the will you will tell Mr. Crellan in the interests of right and justice."

"And who's to protect me against the spite of those I shall offend if I tell you?"

Mr. Crellan interposed.

"Whatever you tell us, Mrs. Turton," he said, "will be held in the strictest confidence, and the source of our information shall not be divulged. For that I give you my word of honour. And, I need scarcely add, I will see that you come to no harm by anything you may say."

"Then the will *is* lost. I may understand that?"

Hewitt's features were impassive and impenetrable. But in Mr. Crellan's disturbed face the nurse saw a plain answer in the affirmative.

"Yes," she said, "I see that's the trouble. Well, I know who took it."

"Then who was it?"

"*Miss Garth!*"

"Miss Garth! Nonsense!" cried Mr. Crellan, starting upright. "Nonsense!"

"It may be nonsense," the nurse replied slowly, with a monotonous emphasis on each word. "It may be nonsense, but it's a fact. I saw her take it."

Mr. Crellan simply gasped. Hewitt drew his chair a little nearer.

"If you saw her take it," he said gently, closely watching the woman's face the while, "then, of course, there's no doubt."

"I tell you I saw her take it," the nurse repeated. "What was in it, and what her game was in taking it, I don't know. But it was in that bureau, wasn't it?"

"Yes—probably."

"In the right hand top drawer?"

"Yes."

"A white paper in a blue envelope?"

"Yes."

"Then I saw her take it, as I said before. She unlocked that drawer before my eyes, took it out, and locked the drawer again."

Mr. Crellan turned blankly to Hewitt, but Hewitt kept his eyes on the nurse's face.

"When did this occur?" he asked, "and how?"

"It was on Saturday night, rather late. Everybody was in bed but Miss Garth and myself, and she had been down to the dining-room for something. Mr. Holford was asleep, so as I wanted to re-fill the water-bottle, I took it up and went. As I was passing the door of this room that we are in now, I heard a noise, and looked in at the door, which was open. There was a candle on the table which had been left there earlier in the evening. Miss Garth was opening the top right hand drawer of *that* bureau"—Mrs. Turton stabbed her finger spitefully toward the piece of furniture, as though she owed it a personal grudge—"and I saw her take out a blue foolscap envelope, and as the flap was open, I could see the enclosed paper was white. She shut the drawer, locked it, and came out of the room with the envelope in her hand."

"And what did you do?"

"I hurried on, and she came away without seeing me, and went in the opposite direction—toward the small staircase."

"Perhaps," Mr. Crellan ventured at a blurt, "perhaps she was walking in her sleep?"

"That she wasn't!" the nurse replied, "for she came back to Mr. Holford's room almost as soon as I returned there, and asked some questions about the medicine—which was nothing new, for I must say she was very fond of interfering in things that were part of my business."

"That is quite certain, I suppose," Hewitt remarked—"that she could not have been asleep?"

"Quite certain. She talked for about a quarter of an hour, and wanted to kiss Mr. Holford, which might have wakened him, before she went to bed. In fact, I may say we had a disagreement."

Hewitt did not take his steady gaze from the nurse's face for some seconds after she had finished speaking. Then he only said, "Thank you, Mrs. Turton. I need scarcely assure you, after what Mr. Crellan has said, that your confidence shall not be betrayed. I think that is all, unless you have more to tell us."

Mrs. Turton bowed and rose. "There is nothing more," she said, and left the room.

As soon as she had gone, "Is Mrs. Turton at all interested in the will," Hewitt asked.

"No, there is nothing for her. She is a new-comer, you see. Perhaps," Mr. Crellan went on, struck by an idea, "she may be jealous, or something. She seems a spiteful woman—and really, I can't believe her story for a moment."

"Why?"

"Well, you see, it's absurd. Why should Miss Garth go to all this secret trouble to do herself an injury—to make a beggar of herself? And besides, she's not in the habit of telling barefaced lies. She distinctly assured us, you remember, that she had never been to the bureau for any purpose whatever."

"But the nurse has an honest character, hasn't she?"

"Yes, her character is excellent. Indeed, from all accounts, she is a very excellent woman, except for a desire to govern everybody, and a habit of spite if she is thwarted. But, of course, that sort of thing sometimes leads people rather far."

"So it does," Hewitt replied. "But consider now. Is it not possible that Miss Garth, completely infatuated with Mr. Mellis, thinks she is doing a noble thing for him by destroying the will and giving up her whole claim to his uncle's property? Devoted women do just such things, you know."

Mr. Crellan stared, bent his head to his hand, and considered. "So they do, so they do," he said. "Insane foolery. Really, it's the sort of thing I can imagine her doing—she's honour and generosity itself. But then those lies," he resumed, sitting up and slapping his leg; "I can't believe she'd tell such tremendous lies as that for anybody. And with such a calm face, too—I'm sure she couldn't."

"Well, that's as it may be. You can scarcely set a limit to the lengths a woman will go on behalf of a man she loves. I suppose, by the bye, Miss Garth is not exactly what you would call a 'strong-minded' woman?"

"No, she's not that. She'd never get on in the world by herself. She's a good little soul, but nervous—very; and her month of anxiety, grief, and want of sleep seems to have broken her up."

"Mr. Mellis knows of the death, I suppose?"

"I telegraphed to him at his chambers in London the first thing yesterday—Tuesday—morning, as soon as the telegraph office was open. He came here (as I've forgotten to tell you as yet) the first thing this morning—before I was over here myself, in fact. He had been staying not far off—at Ockham, I think—and the telegram had been sent on. He saw Miss Garth, but couldn't stay, having to get back to London. I met him going away as I came, about eleven o'clock. Of course I said nothing about the fact that I couldn't find the will, but he will probably be down again soon, and may ask questions."

"Yes," Hewitt replied. "And speaking of that matter, you can no doubt talk with Miss Garth on very intimate and familiar terms?"

"Oh yes—yes; I've told you what old friends we are."

"I wish you could manage, at some favourable opportunity to-day, to speak to her alone, and without referring to the will in any way, get to know, as circumspectly and delicately as you can, how she stands in regard to Mr. Mellis. Whether he is an accepted lover, or likely to be one, you know. Whatever answer you may get, you may judge, I expect, by her manner how things really are."

"Very good—I'll seize the first chance. Meanwhile what to do?"

"Nothing, I'm afraid, except perhaps to examine other pieces of furniture as closely as we have examined this bureau."

Other bureaux, desks, tables, and chests were examined fruitlessly. It was not until after dinner that Mr. Crellan saw a favourable opportunity of sounding Miss Garth as he had promised. Half an hour later he came to Hewitt in the study, more puzzled than ever.

"There's no engagement between them," he reported, "secret or open, nor ever has been. It seems, from what I can make out, going to work as diplomatically as possible, that Mellis *did* propose to her, or something very near it, a time ago, and was point-blank refused. Altogether, Miss Garth's sentiment for him appears to be rather dislike than otherwise."

"That rather knocks a hole in the theory of self-sacrifice, doesn't it?" Hewitt remarked. "I shall have to think over this, and sleep on it. It's possible that it may be necessary to-morrow for you to tax Miss Garth, point-blank, with having taken away the will. Still, I hope not."

"I hope not, too," Mr. Crellan said, rather dubious as to the result of such an experiment. "She has been quite upset enough already. And, by the bye, she didn't seem any the better or more composed after Mellis' visit this morning."

"Still, then the will was gone."

"Yes."

And so Hewitt and Mr. Crellan talked on late into the evening, turning over every apparent possibility and finding reason in none. The household went to bed at ten, and, soon after, Miss Garth came to bid Mr. Crellan good-night. It had been settled that both Martin Hewitt and Mr. Crellan should stay the night at Wedbury Hall.

Soon all was still, and the ticking of the tall clock in the hall below could be heard as distinctly as though it were in the study, while the rain without dropped from eaves and sills in regular splashes. Twelve o'clock struck, and Mr. Crellan was about to suggest retirement, when the sound of a light footstep startled Hewitt's alert ear. He raised his hand to enjoin silence, and stepped to the door of the room, Mr. Crellan following him.

There was a light over the staircase, seven or eight yards away, and down the stairs came Miss Garth in dressing gown and slippers; she turned at the landing and vanished in a passage leading to the right.

"Where does that lead to?" Hewitt whispered hurriedly.

"Toward the small staircase—other end of house," Mr. Crellan replied in the same tones.

"Come quietly," said Hewitt, and stepped lightly after Miss Garth, Mr. Crellan at his heels.

She was nearing the opposite end of the passage, walking at a fair pace and looking neither to right nor left. There was another light over the smaller staircase at the end. Without hesitation Miss Garth turned down the stairs till about half down the flight, and then stopped and pressed her hand against the oak wainscot.

Immediately the vertical piece of framing against which she had placed her hand turned on central pivots top and bottom, revealing a small recess, three feet high and little more than six inches wide. Miss Garth stooped and felt about at the bottom of this recess for several seconds. Then with every sign of extreme agitation and horror she withdrew her hand empty, and sank on the stairs. Her head rolled from side to side on her shoulders, and beads of perspiration stood on her forehead. Hewitt with difficulty restrained Mr. Crellan from going to her assistance.

Presently, with a sort of shuddering sigh, Miss Garth rose, and after standing irresolute for a moment, descended the flight of stairs to the bottom. There she stopped again, and pressing her hand to her forehead, turned and began to re-ascend the stairs.

Hewitt touched his companion's arm, and the two hastily but noiselessly made their way back along the passage to the study. Miss Garth left the open framing as it was, reached the top of the landing, and without stopping proceeded along the passage and turned up the main staircase, while Hewitt and Mr. Crellan still watched her from the study door.

At the top of the flight she turned to the right, and up three or four more steps toward her own room. There she stopped, and leaned thoughtfully on the handrail.

"Go up," whispered Hewitt to Mr. Crellan, "as though you were going to bed. Appear surprised to see her; ask if she isn't well, and, if you can, manage to repeat that question of mine about secret hiding-places in the house."

Mr. Crellan nodded and started quickly up the stairs. Half-way up he turned his head, and, as he went on, "Why, Nelly, my dear," he said, "what's the matter? Aren't you well?"

Mr. Crellan acted his part well, and waiting below, Hewitt heard this dialogue:

"No, uncle, I don't feel very well, but it's nothing. I think my room seems close. I can scarcely breathe."

"Oh, it isn't close to-night. You'll be catching cold, my dear. Go and have a good sleep; you mustn't worry that wise little head of yours, you know. Mr. Hewitt and I have been making quite a night of it, but I'm off to bed now."

"I hope they've made you both quite comfortable, uncle?"

"Oh, yes; capital, capital. We've been talking over business, and, no doubt, we shall put that matter all in order soon. By the bye, I suppose since you saw Mr. Hewitt you haven't happened to remember anything more to tell him?"

"No."

"You still can't remember any hiding-places or panels, or that sort of thing in the wainscot or anywhere?"

"No, I'm sure I don't know of any, and I don't believe for a moment that any exist."

"Quite sure of that, I suppose?"

"Oh yes."

"All right. Now go to bed. You'll catch *such* a cold in these draughty landings. Come, I won't move a step till I see your door shut behind you. Good-night."

"Good-night, uncle."

Mr. Crellan came downstairs again with a face of blank puzzlement.

"I wouldn't have believed it," he assured Martin Hewitt; "positively I wouldn't have believed she'd have told such a lie, and with such confidence, too. There's something deep and horrible here, I'm afraid. What does it mean?"

"We'll talk of that afterwards," Hewitt replied. "Come now and take a look at that recess."

They went, quietly still, to the small staircase, and there, with a candle, closely examined the recess. It was a mere box, three feet high, a foot or a little more deep, and six or seven inches wide. The piece of oak framing, pivoted to the stair at the bottom and to a horizontal piece of framing at the top, stood edge forward, dividing the opening down the centre. There was nothing whatever in the recess.

Hewitt ascertained that there was no catch, the plank simply remaining shut by virtue of fitting tightly, so that nothing but pressure on the proper part was requisite to open it. He had closed the plank and turned to speak to Mr. Crellan, when another interruption occurred.

On each floor the two staircases were joined by passages, and the ground-floor passage, from the foot of the flight they were on, led to the entrance hall. Distinct amid the loud clicking of the hall clock, Hewitt now heard a sound, as of a person's foot shifting on a stone step.

Mr. Crellan heard it too, and each glanced at the other. Then Hewitt, shading the candle with his hand, led the way to the hall. There they listened for several seconds—almost an hour—it seemed—and then the noise was repeated. There was no doubt of it. It was at the other side of the front door.

In answer to Hewitt's hurried whispers, Mr. Crellan assured him that there was no window from which, in the dark, a view could be got of a person standing outside the door. Also that any other way out would be equally noisy, and would entail the circuit of the house. The front door was fastened by three heavy bolts, an immense old-fashioned lock, and a bar. It would take nearly a minute to open at least, even if everything went easily. But, as there was no other way, Hewitt determined to try it. Handing the candle to his companion, he first lifted the bar, conceiving that it might be done with the least noise. It went easily, and, handling it carefully, Hewitt let it hang from its rivet without a sound. Just then, glancing at Mr. Crellan, he saw that he was forgetting to shade the candle, whose rays extended through the fanlight above the door, and probably through the wide crack under it. But it was too late. At the same moment the light was evidently perceived from outside; there was a hurried jump from the steps, and for an instant a sound of running on gravel. Hewitt tore back the bolts, flung the door open, and dashed out into the darkness, leaving Mr. Crellan on the doorstep with the candle.

Hewitt was gone, perhaps, five or ten minutes, although to Mr. Crellan—standing there at the open door in a state of high nervous tension, and with no notion of what was happening or what it all meant—the time seemed an eternity. When at last Hewitt reached the door again, "What was it?" asked Mr. Crellan, much agitated. "Did you see? Have you caught them?"

Hewitt shook his head.

"I hadn't a chance," he said. "The wall is low over there, and there's a plantation of trees at the other side. But I think—yes, I begin to think—that I may possibly be able to see my way through this business in a little while. See this?"

On the top step in the sheltered porch there remained the wet prints of two feet. Hewitt took a letter from his pocket, opened it out, spread it carefully over the more perfect of the two marks, pressed it lightly and lifted it. Then, when the door was shut, he produced his pocket scissors, and with great care cut away the paper round the wet part, leaving a piece, of course, the shape of a boot sole.

"Come," said Hewitt, "we may get at something after all. Don't ask me to tell you anything now; I don't know anything, as a matter of fact. I hope this is the end of the night's entertainment, but I'm afraid the case is rather an unpleasant business. There is nothing for us to do now but to go to bed, I think. I suppose there's a handy man kept about the place?"

"Yes, he's gardener and carpenter and carpet-beater, and so on."

"Good! Where's his sanctum? Where does he keep his shovels and carpet sticks?"

"In the shed by the coach house, I believe. I think it's generally unlocked."

"Very good. We've earned a night's rest, and now we'll have it."

The next morning, after breakfast, Hewitt took Mr. Crellan into the study.

"Can you manage," he said, "to send Miss Garth out for a walk this morning—with somebody?"

"I can send her out for a ride with the groom—unless she thinks it wouldn't be the thing to go riding so soon after her bereavement."

"Never mind, that will do. Send her at once, and see that she goes. Call it doctor's orders; say she must go for her health's sake—anything."

Mr. Crellan departed, used his influence, and in half an hour Miss Garth had gone.

"I was up pretty early this morning," Hewitt remarked on Mr. Crellan's return to the study, "and, among other things, I sent a telegram to London. Unless my eyes deceive me, a boy with a peaked cap—a telegraph boy, in fact—is coming up the drive this moment. Yes, he is. It is probably my answer."

In a few minutes a telegram was brought in. Hewitt read it and then asked,—

"Your friend Mr. Mellis, I understand, was going straight to town yesterday morning?"

"Yes."

"Read that, then."

Mr. Crellan took the telegram and read:

*"Mellis did not sleep at chambers last night. Been out of town for some days past.
Kerrett."*

Mr. Crellan looked up.

"Who's Kerrett?" he asked.

"Lad in my office; sharp fellow. You see, Mellis didn't go to town after all. As a matter of fact, I believe he was nearer this place than we thought. You said he had a disagreement with his uncle because of scientific practices which the old gentleman considered 'dangerous and unprofessional,' I think?"

"Yes, that was the case."

"Ah, then the key to all the mystery of the will is in this room."

"Where?"

"There." Hewitt pointed to the book-cases. "Read Bernheim's *Suggestive Therapeutics*, and one or two books of Heidenhain's and Björnström's and you'll see the thing more clearly than you can without them; but that would be rather a long sort of job, so—but why, who's this? Somebody coming up the drive in a fly, isn't it?"

"Yes," Mr. Crellan replied, looking out of the window. Presently he added, "It's Cranley Mellis."

"Ah," said Hewitt, "he won't trouble us for a little. I'll bet you a penny cake he goes first by himself to the small staircase and tries that secret recess. If you get a little way along the passage you will be able to see him; but that will scarcely matter—I can see you don't guess now what I am driving at."

"I don't in the least."

"I told you the names of the books in which you could read the matter up; but that would be too long for the present purpose. The thing is fairly well summarised, I see, in that encyclopædia there in the corner. I have put a marker in volume seven. Do you mind opening it at that place and seeing for yourself?"

Mr. Crellan, doubtful and bewildered, reached the volume. It opened readily, and in the place where it opened lay a blue foolscap envelope. The old gentleman took the envelope, drew from it a white paper, stared first at the paper, then at Hewitt, then at the paper again, let the volume slide from his lap, and gasped,—

"Why—why—it's the will!"

"Ah, so I thought," said Hewitt, catching the book as it fell. "But don't lose this place in the encyclopædia. Read the name of the article. What is it?"

Mr. Crellan looked absent-mindedly at the title, holding the will before him all the time. Then, mechanically, he read aloud the word, "*Hypnotism*."

"Hypnotism it is," Hewitt answered. "A dangerous and terrible power in the hands of an unscrupulous man."

"But—but how? I don't understand it. This—this is the real will, I suppose?"

"Look at it; you know best."

Mr. Crellan looked.

"Yes," he said, "this certainly is the will. But where did it come from? It hasn't been in this book all the time, has it?"

"No. Didn't I tell you I put it there myself as a marker? But come, you'll understand my explanation better if I first read you a few lines from this article. See here now:—

'Although hypnotism has power for good when properly used by medical men, it is an exceedingly dangerous weapon in the hands of the unskilful or unscrupulous. Crimes have been committed by persons who have been hypnotised. Just as a person when hypnotised is rendered extremely impressionable, and therefore capable of receiving beneficial suggestions, so he is nearly as liable to receive suggestions for evil; and it is quite possible for an hypnotic subject, while under hypnotic influence, to be impressed with the belief that he is to commit some act after the influence is removed, and that act he is safe to commit, acting at the time as an automaton. Suggestions may be thus made of which the subject, in his subsequent uninfluenced moments, has no idea, but which he will proceed to carry out automatically at the time appointed. In the case of a complete state of hypnotism the subject has subsequently no recollection whatever of what has happened. Persons whose will or nerve power has been weakened by fear or other similar causes can be hypnotised without consent on their part.'

"There now, what do you make of that?"

"Why, do you mean that Miss Garth has been hypnotised by—by—Cranley Mellis?"

"I think that is the case; indeed, I am pretty sure of it. Notice, on the occasion of each of his last two visits, he was alone with Miss Garth for some little time. On the evening following each of those visits she does something which she afterwards knows nothing about—something connected with the disappearance of this will, the only thing standing between Mr. Mellis and the whole of his uncle's property. Who could have been in a weaker nervous state than Miss Garth has been lately? Remember, too, on the visit of last Saturday, while Miss Garth says she only showed Mellis to the door, both you and the nurse speak of their being gone some little time. Miss Garth must have forgotten what took place then, when Mellis hypnotised her, and impressed on her the suggestion that she should take Mr. Holford's will that night, long after he—Mellis—had gone, and when he could not be suspected of knowing anything of it. Further, that she should, at that time when her movements would be less likely to be observed, secrete that will in a place of hiding known only to himself."

"Dear, dear, what a rascal! Do you really think he did that?"

"Not only that, but I believe he came here yesterday morning while you were out to get the will from the recess. The recess, by the bye, I expect he discovered by accident on one of his visits (he has been here pretty often, I suppose, altogether), and kept the secret in case it might be useful. Yesterday, not finding the will there, he hypnotised Miss Garth once again, and conveyed the suggestion that, at midnight last night, she should take the will from wherever she had put it and pass it to him under the front door."

"What, do you mean it was he you chased across the grounds last night?"

"That is a thing I am pretty certain of. If we had Mr. Mellis's boot here we could make sure by comparing it with the piece of paper I cut out, as you will remember, in the entrance hall. As we have the will, though, that will scarcely be necessary. What he will do now, I expect, will be to go to the recess again on the vague chance of the will being there now, after all, assuming that his second dose of mesmerism has somehow miscarried. If Miss Garth were here he might try his tricks again, and that is why I got you to send her out."

"And where did you find the will?"

"Now you come to practical details. You will remember that I asked about the handyman's tool-house? Well, I paid it a visit at six o'clock this morning, and found therein some very excellent carpenter's tools in a chest. I took a selection of them to the small staircase, and took out the tread of a stair—the one that the pivoted framing-plank rested on."

"And you found the will there?"

"The will, as I rather expected when I examined the recess last night, had slipped down a rather wide crack at the end of the stair timber, which, you know, formed, so to speak, the floor of the recess. The fact was, the stair-tread didn't quite reach as far as the back of the recess. The opening wasn't very distinct to see, but I soon felt it with my fingers. When Miss Garth, in her hypnotic condition on Saturday night, dropped the will into the recess, it shot straight to the back corner and fell down the slit. That was why Mellis found it empty, and why Miss Garth also found it empty on returning there last night under hypnotic influence. You observed her terrible state of nervous agitation when she failed to carry out the command that haunted her. It was frightful. Something like what happens to a suddenly awakened

somnambulist, perhaps. Anyway, that is all over. I found the will under the end of the stair-tread, and here it is. If you will come to the small staircase now you shall see where the paper slipped out of sight. Perhaps we shall meet Mr. Mellis."

"He's a scoundrel," said Mr. Crellan. "It's a pity we can't punish him."

"That's impossible, of course. Where's your proof? And if you had any I'm not sure that a hypnotist is responsible at law for what his subject does. Even if he were, moving a will from one part of the house to another is scarcely a legal crime. The explanation I have given you accounts entirely for the disturbed manner of Miss Garth in the presence of Mellis. She merely felt an indefinite sense of his power over her. Indeed, there is all the possibility that, finding her an easy subject, he had already practised his influence by way of experiment. A hypnotist, as you will see in the books, has always an easier task with a person he has hypnotised before."

As Hewitt had guessed, in the corridor they met Mr. Mellis. He was a thin, dark man of about thirty-five, with large, bony features, and a slight stoop. Mr. Crellan glared at him ferociously.

"Well, sir, and what do you want?" he asked.

Mr. Mellis looked surprised. "Really, that's a very extraordinary remark, Mr. Crellan," he said. "This is my late uncle's house. I might, with at least as much reason, ask you what you want."

"I'm here, sir, as Mr. Holford's executor."

"Appointed by will?"

"Yes."

"And is the will in existence?"

"Well—the fact is—we couldn't find it—"

"Then, what do you mean, sir, by calling yourself an executor with no will to warrant you?" interrupted Mellis. "Get out of this house. If there's no will, I administrate."

"But there is a will," roared Mr. Crellan, shaking it in his face. "There is a will. I didn't say we hadn't found it yet, did I? There is a will, and here it is in spite of all your diabolical tricks, with your scoundrelly hypnotism and secret holes, and the rest of it! Get out of this place, sir, or I'll have you thrown out of the window!"

Mr. Mellis shrugged his shoulders with an appearance of perfect indifference. "If you've a will appointing you executor it's all right, I suppose, although I shall take care to hold you responsible for any irregularities. As I don't in the least understand your conduct, unless it is due to drink, I'll leave you." And with that he went.

Mr. Crellan boiled with indignation for a minute, and then turning to Hewitt, "I say, I hope it's all right," he said, "connecting him with all this queer business?"

"We shall soon see," replied Hewitt, "if you'll come and look at the pivoted plank."

They went to the small staircase, and Hewitt once again opened the recess. Within lay a blue foolscap envelope, which Hewitt picked up. "See," he said, "it is torn at the corner. He has been here and opened it. It's a fresh envelope, and I left it for him this morning, with the corner gummed down a little so that he would have to tear it in opening. This is what was inside," Hewitt added, and laughed aloud as he drew forth a rather crumpled piece of white paper. "It was only a childish trick after all," he concluded, "but I always liked a small practical joke on occasion." He held out the crumpled paper, on which was inscribed in large capital letters the single word—"SOLD."