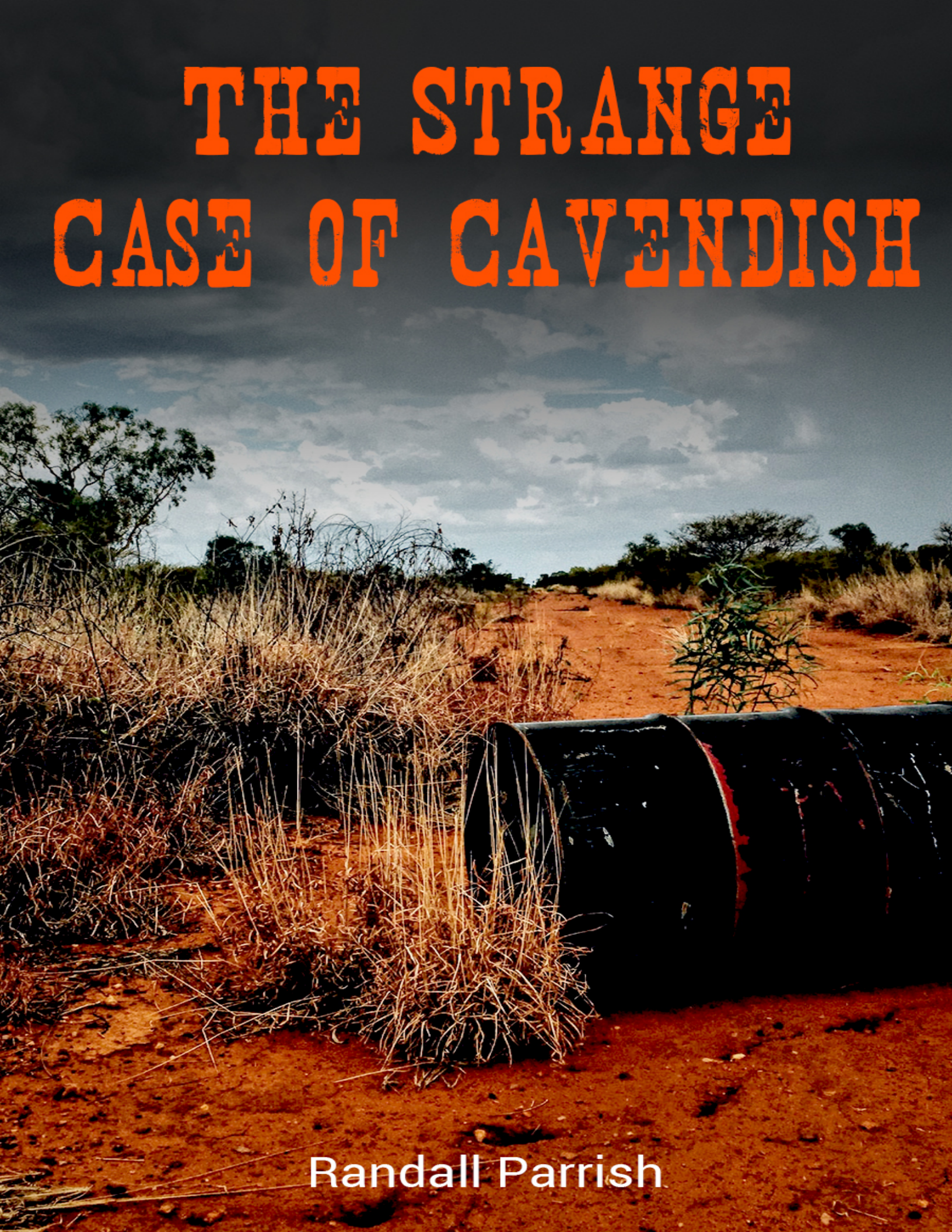
THE STRANGE CASE OF CAVENDISH



Randall Parrish

Randall Parrish

The Strange Case of Cavendish

A Western Murder Mystery

e-artnow, 2022
Contact: info@e-artnow.org

EAN 4066338125194

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I: THE REACHING OF A DECISION

Table of Contents

For the second time that night Frederick Cavendish, sitting at a small table in a busy café where the night life of the city streamed continually in and out, regarded the telegram spread out upon the white napery. It read:

Bear Creek, Colorado, 4/2/15.

FREDERICK CAVENDISH,
College Club,
New York City.

Found big lead; lost it again. Need you badly.

WESTCOTT.

For the second time that night, too, a picture rose before him, a picture of great plains, towering mountains, and open spaces that spoke the freedom and health of outdoor living. He had known that life once before, when he and Jim Westcott had prospected and hit the trail together, and its appeal to him now after three years of shallow sightseeing in the city was deeper than ever.

"Good old Jim," he murmured, "struck pay-dirt at last only to lose it and he needs me. By George, I think I'll go."

And why should he not? Only twenty-nine, he could still afford to spend a few years in search of living. His fortune

left him at the death of his father was safely invested, and he had no close friends in the city and no relatives, except a cousin, John Cavendish, for whom he held no love, and little regard.

He had almost determined upon going to Bear Creek to meet Westcott and was calling for his check when his attention was arrested by a noisy party of four that boisterously took seats at a near-by table. Cavendish recognised the two women as members of the chorus of the prevailing Revue, one of them Celeste La Rue, an aggressive blonde with thin lips and a metallic voice, whose name was synonymous with midnight escapades and flowing wine. His contemptuous smile at the sight of them deepened into a disgusted sneer when he saw that one of the men was John Cavendish, his cousin.

The two men's eyes met, and the younger, a slight, mild-eyed youth with a listless chin, excused himself and presented himself at the elder's table.

"Won't you join us?" he said nervously.

Frederick Cavendish's trim, bearded jaw tightened and he shook his head. "They are not my people," he said shortly, then retreating, begged, "John, when are you going to cut that sort out?"

"You make me weary!" the boy snapped. "It's easy enough for you to talk when you've got all the money—that gives you an excuse to read me moral homilies every time I ask you for a dollar, but Miss La Rue is as good as any of your friends any day."

The other controlled himself. "What is it you want?" he demanded directly: "Money? If so, how much?"

"A hundred will do," the younger man said eagerly. "I lost a little on cards lately, and have to borrow. To-night I met the girl——"

Frederick Cavendish silenced him and tendered him the bills. "Now," he said gravely, "this is the last, unless—unless you cut out such people as Celeste La Rue and others that you train with. I'm tired of paying bills for your inane extravagances and parties. I can curtail your income and what's more, I will unless you change."

"Cut me off?" The younger Cavendish's voice took on an incredulous note.

The other nodded. "Just that," he said. "You've reached the limit."

For a moment the dissipated youth surveyed his cousin, then an angry flush mounted into his pasty face.

"You—you—" he stuttered, "—you go to hell."

Without another word the elderly Cavendish summoned the waiter, paid the bill, and walked toward the door. John stared after him, a smile of derision on his face. He had heard Cavendish threaten before.

"Your cousin seemed peeved," suggested Miss La Rue.

"It's his nature," explained John. "Got sore because I asked him for a mere hundred and threatened to cut off my income unless I quit you two."

"You told him where to go," Miss La Rue said, laughing. "I heard you, but I don't suppose he'll go—he doesn't look like that kind."

"Anyhow, I told him," laughed John; then producing a large bill, cried:

"Drink up, people, they're on me—and goody-goody cousin Fred."

When Frederick Cavendish reached the street and the fresh night air raced through his lungs he came to a sudden realisation and then a resolution. The realisation was that since further pleading would avail nothing with John Cavendish, he needed a lesson. The resolution was to give it to him. Both strengthened his previous half-hearted desire to meet Westcott, into determination.

He turned the matter over in his mind as he walked along until reflection was ended by the doors of the College Club which appeared abruptly and took him in their swinging circle. He went immediately to the writing-room, laid aside his things and sat down. The first thing to do, he decided, was to obtain an attorney and consult him regarding the proper steps. For no other reason than that they had met occasionally in the corridor he thought of Patrick Enright, a heavy-set man with a loud voice and given to wearing expensive clothes.

Calling a page boy, he asked that Enright be located if possible. During the ensuing wait he outlined on a scrap of paper what he proposed doing. Fifteen minutes passed before Enright, suave and apparently young except for growing baldness, appeared.

"I take it you are Mr. Cavendish," he said, advancing, "and that you are in immediate need of an attorney's counsel."

Cavendish nodded, shook hands, and motioned him into a chair. "I have been called suddenly out of town,

Mr. Enright," he explained, "and for certain reasons which need not be disclosed I deem it necessary to execute a will. I am the only son of the late William Huntington Cavendish; also his sole heir, and in the event of my death without a will, the property would descend to my only known relative, a cousin."

"His name?" Mr. Enright asked.

"John Cavendish."

The lawyer nodded. Of young Cavendish he evidently knew.

"Because of his dissolute habits I have decided to dispose of a large portion of my estate elsewhere in case of my early death. I have here a rough draft of what I want done." He showed the paper. "All that I require is that it be transposed into legal form."

Enright took the paper and read it carefully. The bulk of the $1,000,000 Cavendish estate was willed to charitable organisations, and a small allowance, a mere pittance, was provided for John Cavendish. After a few inquiries the attorney said sharply: "You want this transcribed immediately?"

Cavendish nodded.

"Since it can be made brief I may possibly be able to do it on the girl's machine in the office. You do not mind waiting a moment?"

Cavendish shook his head, and rising, the attorney disappeared in the direction of the office. Cavendish heaved a sigh of relief; now he was free, absolutely free, to do as he chose. His disappearance would mean nothing to his small circle of casual friends, and when he was settled elsewhere

he could notify the only two men who were concerned with his whereabouts—his valet, Valois, and the agent handling the estate. He thought of beginning a letter to John, but hesitated, and when Enright returned he found him with pen in hand.

"A trifling task," the attorney smiled easily. "All ready for your signature, too. You sign there, the second line. But wait—we must have witnesses."

Simms, the butler, and the doorman were called in and wrote their names to the document and then withdrew, after which Enright began folding it carefully.

"I presume you leave this in my care?" he asked shortly.

Cavendish shook his head: "I think not. I prefer holding it myself in case it is needed suddenly. I shall keep my rooms, and my man Valois will remain there indefinitely. Now as to your charges."

A nominal sum was named and paid, after which Cavendish rose, picked up his hat and stick and turned to Enright.

"You have obliged me greatly," he smiled, "and, of course, the transaction will be considered as strictly confidential." And then seeing Enright's nod bade him a courteous "Good night."

The attorney watched him disappear. Suddenly he struck the table with one hand.

"By God!" he muttered, "I'll have to see this thing a little further."

Wheeling suddenly, he walked to a telephone booth, called a number and waited impatiently several moments before he said in intense subdued tones: "Is this Carlton's

Café? Give me Jackson, the head-waiter. Jackson, is Mr. Cavendish—John Cavendish—there? Good! Call him to the phone will you, Jackson? It's important."

CHAPTER II: THE BODY ON THE FLOOR

Table of Contents

The early light of dawn stealing in faintly through the spider-web of the fire-escape ladder, found a partially open window on the third floor of the Waldron apartments, and began slowly to brighten the walls of the room within. There were no curtains on this window as upon the others, and the growing radiance streamed in revealing the whole interior. It was a large apartment, furnished soberly and in excellent taste as either lounging-room or library, the carpet a dark green, the walls delicately tinted, bearing a few rare prints rather sombrely framed, and containing a few upholstered chairs; a massive sofa, and a library table bearing upon it a stack of magazines.

Its tenant evidently was of artistic leanings for about the room were several large bronze candle-sticks filled with partially burned tapers. A low bookcase extended along two sides of the room, each shelf filled, and at the end of the cases a heavy imported drapery drawn slightly aside revealed the entrance to a sleeping apartment, the bed's snowy covering unruffled. Wealth, taste and comfort were everywhere manifest.

Yet, as the light lengthened, the surroundings evidenced disorder. One chair lay overturned, a porcelain vase had fallen from off the table-top to the floor and scattered into fragments. A few magazines had fallen also, and there were miscellaneous papers scattered about the carpet, one or two of them torn as though jerked open by an impatient

hand. Still others lying near the table disclosed corners charred by fire, and as an eddy of wind whisked through the window and along the floor it tumbled brown ashes along with it, at the same time diluting the faint odour of smoke that clung to the room. Back of the table a small safe embedded in the wall stood with its door wide open, its inner drawer splintered as with a knife blade and hanging half out, and below it a riffle of papers, many of them apparently legal documents.

But the one object across which the golden beams of light fell as though in soft caress was the motionless figure of a man lying upon his back beside the table near the drapeless window. Across his face and shoulders were the charred remains of what undoubtedly had been curtains on that window. A three-socketed candle-stick filled with partially burned candles which doubtless had been knocked from the table was mute evidence of how the tiny flame had started upon its short march. As to the man's injuries, a blow from behind had evidently crushed his skull and, though the face was seared and burned, though the curtain's partial ashes covered more than a half of it, though the eye-lashes above the sightless eyes were singed and the trim beard burned to black stubs, the face gave mute evidence of being that of Frederick Cavendish.

In this grim scene a tiny clock on the mantel began pealing the hour of eight. As though this were a signal for entrance, the door at the end of the bookcase opened noiselessly and a man, smooth faced, his hair brushed low across his forehead, stepped quietly in. As his eyes surveyed the grewsome object by the table, they dilated

with horror; then his whole body stiffened and he fled back into the hall, crashing the door behind him.

Ten minutes later he returned, not alone, however. This time his companion was John Cavendish but partially dressed, his features white and haggard.

With nervous hands he pushed open the door. At the sight of the body he trembled a moment, then, mastering himself, strode over and touched the dead face, the other meanwhile edging into the room.

"Dead, sir, really *dead*?" the late comer asked.

Cavendish nodded: "For several hours," he answered in an unnatural voice. "He must have been struck from behind. Robbery evidently was the object—cold-blooded robbery."

"The window is open, sir, and last night at twenty minutes after twelve I locked it. Mr. Cavendish came in at twelve and locking the window was the last thing I did before he told me I could go."

"He left no word for a morning call?"

Valois shook his head: "I always bring his breakfast at eight," he explained.

"Did he say anything about suddenly leaving the city for a trip West?
I heard such a rumour."

"No, sir. He was still up when I left and had taken some papers from his pocket. When last I saw him he was looking at them. He seemed irritated."

There was a moment's silence, during which the flush returned to
Cavendish's cheeks, but his hands still trembled.

"You heard nothing during the night?" he demanded.

"Nothing, sir. I swear I knew nothing until I opened the door and saw the body a few moments ago."

"You'd better stick to your story, Valois," the other said sternly,
"The police will be here shortly. I'm going to call them, now."

He was calm, efficient, self-contained now as he got Central Station upon the wire and began talking.

"Hello, lieutenant? Yes. This is John Cavendish of the Waldron apartments speaking. My cousin, Frederick Cavendish, has been found dead in his room and his safe rifled. Nothing has been disturbed. Yes, at the Waldron, Fifty-Seventh Street. Please hurry."

Perhaps half an hour later the police came—two bull-necked plain-clothes men and a flannel-mouthed "cop."

With them came three reporters, one of them a woman. She was a young woman, plainly dressed and, though she could not be called beautiful, there was a certain patrician prettiness in her small, oval, womanly face with its grey kind eyes, its aquiline nose, its firm lips and determined jaw, a certain charm in the manner in which her chestnut hair escaped occasionally from under her trim hat. Young, aggressive, keen of mind and tireless, Stella Donovan was one of the few good woman reporters of the city and the only one the *Star* kept upon its pinched pay-roil. They did so because she could cover a man-size job and get a feminine touch into her story after she did it. And, though her customary assignments were "sob" stories, divorces, society events and the tracking down of succulent bits of general scandal, she nevertheless enjoyed being upon the scene of the murder even though she was not assigned to it. This

casual duty was for Willis, the *Star's* "police" man, who had dragged her along with him for momentary company over her protest that she must get a "yarn" concerning juvenile prisoners for the Sunday edition.

"Now, we'll put 'em on the rack." Willis smiled as he left her side and joined the detectives.

A flood of questions from the officers, interspersed frequently with a number from Willis, and occasionally one from the youthful *Chronicle* man, came down upon Valois and John Cavendish, while Miss Donovan, silent and watchful, stood back, frequently letting her eyes admire the tasteful prints upon the walls and the rich hangings in the room of death.

Valois repeated his experience, which was corroborated in part by the testimony of John Cavendish's valet whom he had met and talked with in the hall. The valet also testified that his employer, John Cavendish, had come home not later than twelve o'clock and immediately retired. Then John Cavendish established the fact that ten minutes before arriving home he had dropped Celeste La Rue at her apartment. There was no flaw in any of the stories to which the inquisitors could attach suspicion. One thing alone seemed to irritate Willis.

"Are you sure," he said to Cavendish, "that the dead man is your cousin? The face and chest are pretty badly burned you know, and I thought perhaps——"

A laugh from the detectives silenced him while Cavendish ended any fleeting doubts with a contemptuous gaze.

"You can't fool a man on his own cousin, youngster," he said flatly.
"The idea is absurd."

The crime unquestionably was an outside job; the window opening on the fire-escape had been jimmied, the marks left being clearly visible. Apparently Frederick Cavendish had previously opened the safe door—since it presented no evidence of being tampered with—and was examining certain papers on the table, when the intruder had stolen up from behind and dealt him a heavy blow probably, from the nature of the wound, using a piece of lead pipe. Perhaps in falling Cavendish's arm had caught in the curtains, pulling them from the supporting rod and dragging them across the table, thus sweeping the candlestick with its lighted tapers down to the floor with it. There the extinguished wicks had ignited the draperies, which had fallen across the stricken man's face and body. The clothes, torso, and legs, had been charred beyond recognition but the face, by some peculiar whim of fate, had been partly preserved.

The marauder, aware that the flames would obliterate a portion, if not all of the evidence against him, had rifled the safe in which, John testified, his cousin always kept considerable money. Scattering broadcast valueless papers, he had safely made his escape through the window, leaving his victim's face to the licking flames. Foot-prints below the window at the base of the fire-escape indicated that the fugitive had returned that way. This was the sum of the evidence, circumstantial and true, that was advanced. Satisfied that nothing else was to be learned, the officers,

detectives, Willis, and Miss Donovan and the pale *Chronicle* youth withdrew, leaving the officer on guard.

The same day, young John, eager to be away from the scene, moved his belongings to the Fairmount Hotel, and, since no will was found in the dead man's papers, the entire estate came to him, as next of kin. A day or two later the body was interred in the family lot beside the father's grave, and the night of the funeral young John Cavendish dined at an out-of-the-way road-house with a blonde with a hard metallic voice. Her name was Miss Celeste La Rue.

And the day following he discharged Francois Valois without apparent cause, in a sudden burst of temper. So, seemingly, the curtain fell on the last act of the play.

CHAPTER III: MR. ENRIGHT DECLARES HIMSELF

Table of Contents

One month after the Cavendish murder and two days after he had despatched a casual, courteous note to John Cavendish requesting that he call, Mr. Patrick Enright, of Enright and Dougherty, sat in his private office on the top floor of the Collander Building in Cortlandt Street waiting for the youth's appearance. Since young Cavendish had consulted him before in minor matters, Mr. Enright had expected that he would call voluntarily soon after the murder, but in this he was disappointed. Realising that Broadway was very dear to the young man, Enright had made allowances, until, weary of waiting, he decided to get into the game himself and to this end had despatched the note, to which Cavendish had replied both by telephone and note.

"He ought to be here now," murmured Mr. Enright sweetly, looking at his watch, and soon the expected visitor was ushered in. Arising to his feet the attorney extended a moist, pudgy hand.

"Quite prompt, John," he greeted. "Take the chair there—and pardon me a moment."

As the youth complied Enright opened the door, glanced into the outer room, and gave orders not to be disturbed for the next half-hour. Then, drawing in his head, closed the door and turned the key.

"John," he resumed smoothly, "I have been somewhat surprised that you failed to consult me earlier regarding the will of your late cousin Frederick."

"His—his will!" John leaned forward amazed, as he stared into the other's expressionless face. "Did—did he leave one?"

"Oh! that's it," the attorney chuckled. "You didn't know about it, did you? How odd. I thought I informed you of the fact over the phone the same night Frederick died."

"You told me he had called upon you to prepare a will—but there was none found in his papers."

"So I inferred from the newspaper accounts," Enright chuckled dryly, his eyes narrowing, "as well as the information that you had applied for letters of administration. In view of that, I thought a little chat advisable—yes, quite advisable, since on the night of his death I did draw up his will. Incidentally, I am the only one living aware that such a will was drawn. You see my position?"

Young Cavendish didn't; this was all strange, confusing.

"The will," resumed Mr. Enright, "was drawn in proper form and duly witnessed."

"There can't be such a will. None was found. You phoned me shortly before midnight, and twenty minutes later Frederick was in his apartments. He had no time to deposit it elsewhere. There is no such will."

Enright smiled, not pleasantly by any means.

"Possibly not," he said with quiet sinister gravity. "It was probably destroyed and it was to gain possession of that will that Frederick Cavendish was killed."

John leaped to his feet, his face bloodless: "My God!" he muttered aghast, "do you mean to say——"

"Sit down, John; this is no cause for quarrel. Now listen. I am not accusing you of crime; not intentional crime, at least. There is no reason why you should not naturally have desired to gain possession of the will. If an accident happened, that was your misfortune. I merely mention these things because I am your friend. Such friendship leads me first to inform you what had happened over the phone. I realised that Frederick's hasty determination to devise his property elsewhere was the result of a quarrel. I believed it my duty to give you opportunity to patch that quarrel up with the least possible delay. Perhaps this was not entirely professional on my part, but the claims of friendship are paramount to mere professional ethics."

He sighed, clasping and unclasping his hands, yet with eyes steadily fixed upon Cavendish, who had sunk back into his chair.

"Now consider the situation, my dear fellow. I have, it is true, performed an unprofessional act which, if known, would expose me to severe criticism. There is, however, no taint of criminal intent about my conduct and, no doubt, my course would be fully vindicated, were I now to go directly before the court and testify to the existence of a will."

"But that could not be proved. You have already stated that Frederick took the will with him; it has never been found."

"Quite true—or rather, it may have been found, and destroyed. It chances, however, that I took the precaution to make a carbon copy."

"Unsigned?"

"Yes, but along with this unsigned copy I also retain the original memoranda furnished me in Frederick Cavendish's own handwriting. I believe, from a legal standpoint, by the aid of my evidence, the court would be very apt to hold such a will proved."

He leaned suddenly forward, facing the shrinking Cavendish and bringing his hand down hard upon the desk.

"Do you perceive now what this will means? Do you realise where such testimony would place you? Under the law, providing he died without a will, you were the sole heir to the property of Frederick Cavendish. It was widely known you were not on friendly terms. The evening of his death you quarrelled openly in a public restaurant. Later, in a spirit of friendship, I called you up and said he had made a will practically disinheriting you. Between that time and the next morning he is murdered in his own apartments, his safe rifled, and yet, the only paper missing is this will, to the existence of which I can testify. If suspicion is once cast upon you, how can you clear yourself? Can you prove that you were in your own apartments, asleep in your own bed from one o'clock until eight? Answer that."

Cavendish tried, but although his lips moved, they gave utterance to no sound. He could but stare into those eyes confronting him. Enright scarcely gave him opportunity.

"So, the words won't come. I thought not. Now listen. I am not that kind of a man and I have kept still. No living person—not even my partner—has been informed of what has occurred. The witnesses, I am sure, do not know the nature of the paper they signed. I am a lawyer; I realise fully

the relations I hold to my client, but in this particular case I contend that my duty as a man is of more importance than any professional ethics. Frederick Cavendish had this will executed in a moment of anger and devised his estate to a number of charities. I personally believe he was not in normal mind and that the will did not really reflect his purpose. He had no thought of immediate death, but merely desired to teach you a lesson. He proposed to disappear—or at least, that is my theory—in order that he might test you on a slender income. I am able to look upon the whole matter from this standpoint, and base my conduct accordingly. No doubt this will enable us to arrive at a perfectly satisfactory understanding."

The lawyer's voice had fallen, all the threat gone, and the younger man straightened in his chair.

"You mean you will maintain silence as to the will?"

"Absolutely; as a client your interests will always be my first concern. Of course I shall expect to represent you in a legal capacity in settling up the estate, and consequently feel it only just that the compensation for such services shall be mutually agreed upon. In this case there are many interests to guard. Knowing, as I do, all the essential facts, I am naturally better prepared to conserve your interests than any stranger. I hope you appreciate this."

"And your fee?"

"Reasonable, very reasonable, when you consider the service I am doing you, and the fact that my professional reputation might so easily be involved and the sums to be distributed, which amount to more than a million dollars. My silence, my permitting the estate to go to settlement, and

my legal services combined, ought to be held as rather valuable—at, let us say, a hundred thousand. Yes, a hundred thousand; I hardly think that is unfair."

Cavendish leaped to his feet, his hand gripping his cane.

"You damned black——"

"Wait!" and Enright arose also. "Not so loud, please; your voice might be heard in the outer office. Besides it might be well for you to be careful of your language. I said my services would cost you a hundred thousand dollars. Take the proposition or leave it, Mr. John Cavendish. Perhaps, with a moment's thought, the sum asked may not seem excessive."

"But—but," the other stammered, all courage leaving him, "I haven't the money."

"Of course not," the threat on Enright's face changing to a smile. "But the prospects that you will have are unusually good. I am quite willing to speculate on your fortunes. A memoranda for legal services due one year from date—such as I have already drawn up—and bearing your signature, will be quite satisfactory. Glance over the items, please; yes, sit here at the table. Now, if you will sign that there will be no further cause for you to feel any uneasiness—this line, please."

Cavendish grasped the penholder in his fingers, and signed. It was the act of a man dazed, half stupefied, unable to control his actions. With trembling hand, and white face, he sat staring at the paper, scarcely comprehending its real meaning. In a way it was a confession of guilt, an acknowledgment of his fear of exposure, yet he felt utterly incapable of resistance. Enright unlocked the door, and

projected his head outside, comprehending clearly that the proper time to strike was while the iron was hot.

Calling Miss Healey, one of his stenographers, he made her an official witness to the document and the signature of John Cavendish.

Not until ten minutes later when he was on the street did it occur to John Cavendish that the carbon copy of the will, together with the rough notes in his cousin's handwriting, still remained in Enright's possession. Vainly he tried to force himself to return and demand them, but his nerve failed, and he shuffled away hopelessly in the hurrying crowds.

CHAPTER IV: A BREATH OF SUSPICION

Table of Contents

As Francois Valois trudged along the night streets toward his rooming house his heart was plunged in sorrow and suspicion. To be discharged from a comfortable position for no apparent reason when one contemplated no sweet alliance was bad enough, but to be discharged when one planned marriage to so charming a creature as Josette La Baum was nothing short of a blow. Josette herself had admitted that and promptly turned Francois's hazards as to young Cavendish's motives into smouldering suspicion, which he dared not voice. Now, as he paused before a delicatessen window realising that unless he soon obtained another position its dainties would be denied him, these same suspicions assailed him again.

Disheartened, he turned from the pane and was about to move away, when he came face to face with a trim young woman in a smart blue serge. "Oh, hello!" she cried pleasantly, bringing up short. Then seeing the puzzled look upon the valet's face, she said: "Don't you remember me? I'm Miss Donovan of the *Star*. I came up to the apartments the morning of the Cavendish murder with one of the boys."

Valois smiled warmly; men usually did for Miss Donovan. "I remember," he said dolorously.

The girl sensed some underlying sorrow in his voice and with professional skill learned the cause within a minute. Then, because she believed that there might be more to be told, and because she was big-hearted and interested in

every one's troubles, she urged him to accompany her to a near-by restaurant and pour out his heart while she supped. Lonely and disheartened, Valois accepted gladly and within half an hour they were seated at a tiny table in an Italian café.

"About your discharge?" she queried after a time.

"I was not even asked to accompany Mr. Frederick's body," he burst out, "even though I had been with him a year. So I stayed in the apartment to straighten things, expecting to be retained in John Cavendish's service. I even did the work in his apartments, but when he returned and saw me there he seemed to lose his temper, wanted to know why I was hanging around, and ordered me out of the place."

"The ingrate!" exclaimed the girl, laying a warm, consoling hand on the other's arm. "You're sure he wasn't drinking?"

"I don't think so, miss. Just the sight of me seemed to drive him mad. Flung money at me, he did, told me to get out, that he never wanted to see me again. Since then I have tried for three weeks to find work, but it has been useless."

While she gave him a word of sympathy, Miss Donovan was busily thinking. She remembered Willis's remark in the apartments, "Are you sure of the dead man's identity? His face is badly mutilated, you know"; and her alert mind sensed a possibility of a newspaper story back of young Cavendish's unwarranted and strange act. How far could she question the man before her? That she had established

herself in his good grace she was sure, and to be direct with him she decided would be the best course to adopt.

"Mr. Valois," she said kindly, "would you mind if I asked you a question or two more?"

"No," the man returned.

"All right. First, what sort of a man was your master?"

Valois answered almost with reverence:

"A nice, quiet gentleman. A man that liked outdoors and outdoor sports. He almost never drank, and then only with quiet men like himself that he met at various clubs. Best of all, he liked to spend his evenings at home reading."

"Not much like his cousin John," she ventured with narrowing eyes.

"No, ma'am, God be praised! There's a young fool for you, miss, crazy for the women and his drinking. Brought up to spend money, but not to earn any."

"I understand that he was dependent upon Frederick Cavendish."

"He was, miss," Valois said disgustedly, "for every cent. He could never get enough of it, either, although Mr. Frederick gave him a liberal allowance."

"Did they ever quarrel?"

"I never heard them. But I do know there was no love lost between them, and I know that young John was always broke."

"Girls cost lots on Broadway," Miss Donovan suggested, "and they keep men up late, too."

Valois laughed lightly. "John only came home to sleep occasionally," he said; "and as for the women—one of them called on him the day after Mr. Frederick was killed. I was in

the hall, and saw her go straight to his door—like she had been there before. A swell dresser, miss, if I ever saw one. One of those tall blondes with a reddish tinge in her hair. He likes that kind."

Miss Donovan started imperceptibly. This was interesting; a woman in John Cavendish's apartment the day after his cousin's murder! But who was she? There were a million carrot-blondes in Manhattan. Still, the woman must have had some distinguishing mark; her hat, perhaps, or her jewels.

"Did the woman wear any diamonds?" she asked.

"No diamonds," Valois returned; "a ruby, though. A ruby set in a big platinum ring. I saw her hand upon the knob."

Miss Donovan's blood raced fast. She knew that woman. It was Celeste La Rue! She remembered her because of a press-agent story that had once been written about the ring, and from what Miss Donovan knew of Miss La Rue, she did not ordinarily seek men; therefore there must have been a grave reason for her presence in John Cavendish's apartments immediately after she learned of Frederick's death.

Had his untimely end disarranged some plan of these two? What was the reason she had come in person instead of telephoning? Had her mysterious visit anything to do with the death of the elder Cavendish?

A thousand speculations entered Miss Donovan's mind.

"How long was she in the apartment?" she demanded sharply.

"Fifteen or twenty minutes, miss—until after the hall-man came back.

I had to help lay out the body, and could not remain there any longer."

"Have you told any one else what you have told me?"

"Only Josette. She's my *fiancée*. Miss La Baum is her last name."

"You told her nothing further that did not come out at the inquest?"

Valois hesitated.

"Maybe I did, miss," he admitted nervously. "She questioned me about losing my job, and her questions brought things into my mind that I might never have thought of otherwise. And at last I came to believe that it wasn't Mr. Frederick who was dead at all."

The valet's last remark was crashing in its effect.

Miss Donovan's eyes dilated with eagerness and amazement.

"Not Frederick Cavendish! Mr. Valois, tell me—why?"

The other's voice fell to a whisper.

"Frederick Cavendish, miss," he said hollowly, "had a scar on his chest—from football, he once told me—and the man we laid out, well, of course his body was a bit burned, but he appeared to have no scar at all!"

"You know that?" demanded the girl, frightened by the import of the revelation.

"Yes, miss. The assistant in the undertaking rooms said so, too. Doubting my own mind, I asked him. The man we laid out had no scar on his chest."

Miss Donovan sprang suddenly to her feet.

"Mr. Valois," she said breathlessly, "you come and tell that story to my city editor, and he'll see that you get a job