

Old Sleuth

Two Wonderful Detectives: or, Jack and Gil's Marvelous Skill



Sleuth Old

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Old Sleuth

Two Wonderful Detectives; Or, Jack and Gil's Marvelous Skill

BY OLD SLEUTH,

Author of All the Famous Old Sleuth Stories.

CHAPTER I

THE DETECTIVE AND THE BANKER – A REMARKABLE NARRATIVE – A PECULIAR TRAIL – MILLIONS WITH NO OWNER – A GREAT TASK LOOMING UP FOR JACK – A MOMENT OF EXPECTANCY

"Your name is John Alvarez?"

"That is my name, sir."

An elderly man was seated at a table and a young man stood opposite to him. The elderly person was a well-known banker who had retired from business, and he had sent for the detective who had just entered his presence.

"You are a detective?"

"I claim to be, sir."

The elderly man meditated a moment and then said:

"A gentleman learning that I desired the services of a detective mentioned your name to me, and gave you a character for qualities which I think are specially needed in the service I may have for you."

"I am glad, sir, that some good friend has spoken well of me."

John Alvarez was a twin brother of Gil Alvarez. They were known among their few friends as Jack and Gil. They were trained athletes; their father had been a circus performer, and under peculiar circumstances the two brothers had been trained for the profession, but owing to reasons satisfactory to themselves, and as recorded in previous records of their exploits, they had decided become detectives, and had so acted upon three occasions as recorded in Nos. 104, 106 and 108 of "Old Sleuth's Own." These brothers had a history and were two very remarkable young men, as proved in their previous exploits as recorded, and as will be proved again in the present narrative.

"The matter I have on hand is a singular one. I do not know that I can give you a single clue to work upon – indeed, it is a very strange story."

"If you have sufficient confidence in me, sir, you may tell me the story and I will be able to judge whether or not there is a clue to work upon."

"I will tell you the story and tell it in perfect confidence, trusting that in case we fail you will never mention the circumstances to a living soul; let the subject pass from your mind forever. And again, you must call in no confidential assistant in the matter. Your failure or success must remain a secret between ourselves – yes, a secret forever."

"Is there a crime involved?"

"I do not think there is unless I am the criminal."

Jack Alvarez gave a start as the old banker by implication accused himself of being a criminal.

"I cannot agree, sir, to hold as a secret a crime which in justice should be exposed."

The banker laughed, and said:

"That is a straight remark and in full accord with the character that was given you as a straightforward, honorable young man. I can say that my crime is not a punishable one, and yet I feel that I am deserving of censure. You may think so also, but I will say this much: I will pay a large sum of money to rectify. What I say as concerns myself is a case of inexcusable negligence."

"That is your only crime?"

"I feel so."

"Then, sir, you can state the case to me and rely upon my maintaining your secret."

The banker meditated a few moments and then said:

"Forty years ago I was a comparatively poor man; I had just started in the banking business and I was having a hard time to make both ends meet, as I had been a clerk and was starting out on my own hook with a very small capital. The business in which I was engaged at that time under the old emigration laws is not possible now – I mean the transactions in which I made the best profits. It was a legitimate business, and I know several bankers who from the same beginning afterward became large financial concerns. Yes, I was successful myself, but, as stated, I was doing a small business and thankful to make fifteen or twenty dollars on a deal; and one rainy day – a dark, dismal day – I was seated in my office alone, when a man entered – a singular appearing man – and demanded if my name was Richard Townsend. I replied that my name was Richard Townsend; he then asked me if I was born and raised in a certain town in Massachusetts. I told him that I had been born in Massachusetts in the town named. He asked me about my father and mother, named them by their given names, and named them correctly. I made an affirmative answer to all his questions, and then he said:

"You are the right man, I have made no mistake,' and then added:

"Here is a certified draft on London for sixty thousand dollars; here are securities to the amount of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars; here are other securities of a cash value of sixty-five thousand dollars; here is a draft accepted by a London firm of solicitors for fifty thousand pounds, which is to be held in trust until collected. Now, sir, my instructions are to deposit these with you. The drafts are made payable to your order; the bonds are made over to you, and of course the Bank of England notes are collectable at any time."

The banker rested a moment, and then resuming said:

"You may judge of my surprise and astonishment. I would have thought the man crazy, but as he named the different amounts he laid the vouchers before me, and at a glance I could see that they were all genuine. The singular statements of the man and his final proposition almost took my breath away, and it was fully a minute – and under the circumstances a minute is a long time – before I could propound the question:

"Why is this wealth consigned to me?"

"I will explain."

"Do so."

"I am to give you a letter. These securities and the letter you are to put away in your safe and forget that you have this trust for twenty years. At the expiration of twenty years you are to open the letter and you will receive full instructions."

"But in case of my death?" I said.

"You are to leave a letter addressed to some one whom you can trust, who will open the letter and carry out the trust. Here is the letter."

"I was thoughtful for a long time. I did not understand it all. I was appalled, for there was a convertible fortune committed to my care, and I was to be its custodian for twenty years without knowing for whom I held it in trust, and there were many contingencies that might occur. The securities might fall in value, the institutions might go out of existence, and there were dividends to be collected or they would accumulate. I spoke of this, and the stranger said:

"The individual who consigns this wealth to you has taken all these possibilities into consideration. He desires the dividends to accumulate, and will take the chances also of the winding up of the institutions. You will accept the trust, and I am to pay you in advance ten thousand dollars for so doing. I have the money here in good current bills, and here is the letter of instructions to be opened in twenty years. Now, sir, will you accept the trust?"

"Is this honest money, and am I assured that I am not becoming the custodian of stolen funds?"

"I will swear that it is honest money, and I will also sign a letter to you that if you discover at the end of twenty years when you have opened the letter that all is not fair and square you can make such disposal of the money as you may see fit."

Again the banker meditated a few moments, and Jack sat silent, wondering what the denouement to the strange story would prove. At length Mr. Richard Townsend after an interval resumed, and said:

"I thought the matter over and concluded that stolen money would not be hidden away for twenty years, and after due reflection, having decided to have him give me the letter, I consented to accept the trust. Ten thousand dollars paid in hand was a great temptation, but not even for ten thousand dollars would I have accepted a criminal trust.

"The man gave me the letter signed by a name I had never heard before. I proposed that he make it in the form of an affidavit, but he said:

"'You will have the money; it will be a matter of conscience with you anyway; in fact, I have no witnesses. You can steal the money, no one can call you to account; it is an even thing between us.'

"I so concluded, and the man went away after some further talk. Now, Mr. Alvarez, that is one part of this mysterious affair."

"Did the man give you no intimation of his purpose in making such a strange contract?"

"He did not, but he did say I could change the securities and cash the draft in London and make investments in the United States, but he imposed the conditions that I should do so at once and then place the securities in some safe place and let them lay collecting interest and dividends according to my judgment; 'but the letter,' said he, 'you must not open until twenty years from to-day.'

"The man went away and I was in possession of the securities. I let a week or two pass, thinking he might be crazy or that some development might come, but he came not nor did any development. I waited one year before I did anything with the securities, then I changed all the foreign investments into American securities. I collected the draft on the London solicitors; I decided to invest the money all in real estate. I did so in my own name, but provided for its going to the proper person at the end of the twenty years."

"Did the man never turn up?"

"He never did; and it is just forty years ago that I received the trust. My investments have increased so that at this moment the estate which I hold in trust amounts to over two and a half millions, and I know not who the real owner of this vast property is."

"Didn't you learn when you opened the letter?"

"Aha! Mr. Alvarez, here comes in my criminality."

Jack expected to hear a confession; on the contrary, the explanation was strange, weird, and extraordinary, and yet the incident could readily occur. It was, however, a remarkable incident.

CHAPTER II

NOT A TERRIBLE CRIME – A SERIES OF SHARP QUESTIONS – A DETECTIVE AT HIS BEST – STARTLING DEVELOPMENTS OF A LOGICAL MYSTERY SOLVER – REPRODUCING AN IMAGE AFTER FORTY YEARS – A GREAT DIALOGUE

When Mr. Townsend said "Here comes in my criminality," as intimated, Jack expected a weird confession and he remained silent, determined to permit the banker to declare his crime in his own way, and after a little the latter said:

"The money and securities I held intact; the letter I put away in my safe, and as instructed I tried to forget all about it. The years passed; I became very successful in business – indeed, a rich man, and still there came no word from the party who placed the fortune in my hands under such strange conditions, and one morning, ten years later, I came down to my office and there had been a great fire. The building in which my office was located was totally destroyed, and the letter was in a safe. I was very much disturbed; the safe was fireproof and I hoped to find the letters, but, alas! the safe and all its contents were destroyed – " The banker stopped short; he had made the last statement with startling distinctness.

"The letter was lost?" suggested Jack.

"Yes."

"But where does your criminality come in? You could not help the fire, and you had taken all due precautions."

"Yes, I had, but there I was with this vast fortune, and as it appeared, no way of finding out the owner of it. The ten years passed following the fire, completing the twenty. I never heard from the individual who had deposited the money with me, nor did any one else make a claim; and so twenty years more have passed and no claimant has appeared, and I am in possession of the fortune."

"It is certainly all very strange," said Jack, "but I cannot see where you are in any way to blame."

"I am, though."

"How?"

"I feel that I am to blame, however."

"How?"

"I knew of the possibility of fire and *I should not have left the letter in my safe down at the office.*"

"There was the same chance of fire in your residence."

"No, you see, my house is well guarded against fire. I am a bachelor, and the ordinary chances of a fire in a private residence do not equal those in a public building where there are thousands of tenants. Yes, I feel that at the end of twenty years I should have made an effort to find the real owners without the aid of a letter."

"And did you not do so?"

"No; I was engaged in large transactions, and the fact that the twenty years had expired escaped my memory, and five years or more elapsed before I recalled the fact of the letter; then I placed the matter in the hands of a detective. He advertised and made search. He questioned as concerned the appearance of the man who deposited the fortune with me, but I could give him no more information than I have given you."

"I think, sir, you have been faithful to your trust."

"It is very kind of you to say so, but I cannot agree with you. I blame myself, and if the owner of the fortune is not found, I always shall blame myself."

"What more could you have done?"

"Had I started in immediately after the expiration of the twenty years I might have been successful. The real owners of the fortune might have known something about the affair and have been on the lookout for information, but after five years they may have given up in despair."

"And you want me to find the owner of the fortune?"

"Yes."

"I certainly will perform a great detective feat if I succeed."

"Yes, you will."

"Accident may aid me; I owe a great deal to accident in my past investigations."

"I will tell you one thing: it is worth your while to succeed."

"I do not doubt that."

"You will earn more money for this one success than you could possibly earn in many years – indeed, I can promise you twenty-five thousand dollars in case you discover the real heir and furnish absolute proofs as to identity."

"But remember, I have not a single clue. Forty years have elapsed since the fortune was placed in your hands. The chances are that all the heirs are dead."

"That is true," said Mr. Townsend.

"True practically, and yet there is a possibility that an heir lives, and is ignorant of a fortune which would be his or hers in case of identification."

"Again, that is true."

"How long since any one was engaged on the case?"

"It is fourteen or fifteen years. After the failure of the detective I employed, at the end of twenty-five years I made no further efforts; that man devoted a whole year to the case."

"Where is he now? He must have secured some data."

"He is dead."

"And did he never give you any data?"

"He never did; on the contrary, he informed me that it was a hopeless case unless accident should open up the mystery."

Jack, as our readers know who have read of his previous exploits, possessed a wonderful faculty of discernment and a very clear and penetrating astuteness. He was a born detective, and this natural gift in the direction of solving mysteries had led him to become one. As stated, he became very thoughtful – indeed, he said to the banker:

"Excuse me, sir, but let me think a few moments – yes, think while the incidents of your remarkable narrative are fresh in my mind."

"Certainly," said the banker; "and let me tell you I have hopes that you will succeed."

"You have?"

"Yes."

"What leads you to hope?"

"The gentleman who referred me to you said, 'If any man on earth can solve the mystery, Jack Alvarez is the man.'"

"He was very kind to speak so highly of me."

Jack fell into silence, and his active mind was performing wonders of detective investigation, and after a season he asked:

"How long was the man in your presence who confided this fortune to you?"

"He was with me over an hour."

"Do you recall his appearance?"

"As well as though it were yesterday that he stood in my presence – yes, I possess a wonderful memory."

"How old are you, sir?"

"I am seventy."

"How old was the man who called on you?"

"He was a man between fifty and sixty, I should say."

"He had gray hair?"

"Yes, gray hair."

"The color of his eyes was black."

"No, sir."

"Oh, yes."

"No, sir, they were clear blue eyes; I remember that well. Why did you say they were black?"

Jack laughed and answered:

"I was only aiding you to remember – working on the plan of a detective I've read about, who always worked on the negative track, when trying to develop positive facts from witnesses."

"By ginger! I never should have recalled the color of his eyes if you had not positively stated that they were black."

"Then we have verified the theory?"

"Yes, indeed."

"He wore a high beaver hat, I am sure?"

"No, he did not; he wore a wide-brimmed slouch hat, what they used to call a Kossuth hat."

"Oh, I see; but he wore low shoes?"

"No, he didn't; he wore boots. I remember that; he sat opposite me and his pants were drawn up, exposing the leg of his boots."

"I see; and those boots were covered with black mud?"

"No, they were not," laughingly exclaimed Mr. Townsend. "They were covered with the *red mud of New Jersey*."

"Nonsense, sir."

"I'll swear to that," cried Mr. Townsend, and there came a look of wonderment to his face as he added:

"Young man, you'll win, you'll solve the mystery."

"I will?"

"Yes."

"Why do you say so?"

"I can see that you will."

"You can?"

"Yes."

Jack laughed and said:

"What encourages you to think so?"

"You are going to work the right way. By ginger! you already have a clue; hang me, if you are not a mind reader! You have a clue – yes, you've established the fact that the man who deposited the fortune with me *came from New Jersey*."

"New Jersey must be red," said Jack, as a smile overspread his handsome face.

"Yes, and I'll swear that man came from Jersey."

"The man, you mean, with heavy plow boots on."

"Hang me! now I recall that is a fact."

"He wore very plain clothes?"

"Yes."

"He had a sort of twang in his pronunciation," said Jack, leaning forward in an eager manner.

"Young man," cried Mr. Townsend, "you have raised up the figure of forty years ago. You have described the man exactly – yes, I have been blind; you are inspired. Now I recall the man must have come to me off a farm."

Jack was delighted, and we will here state that subsequent incidents suggested the idea that he was almost inspired, for like lightning a theory had formed in his mind, and stranger still, his theory led him to ask a remarkable question which drew forth an answer astoundingly suggestive.

Jack had been thoughtful awhile, but at length he asked:

"Did it not enter your mind that there might be a claimant for that fortune before the expiration of the twenty years?"

"Great Scott! young man, are you a mind reader?"

"No, I am merely a logical student of possibilities. Answer my question."

"Your question has recalled a part of my conversation with that strange man which had really escaped my memory."

"Oh, yes, I may lead you to recall considerable."

"How fortunate it would have been had I met and employed you fifteen years ago."

"Yes, it might have been better for us both, but I may work up a clue yet, and as you will admit I start out on a very slight basis."

"You do; I called you into this case as a last resort without any idea even that you would attempt to solve the mystery."

"I shall attempt to solve it; but you have not answered my question."

"I did speak of a possibility of there appearing a claimant. His answer was that 'If there did arise a claimant who founded his claim on a basis that appeared reasonable to me, to *open the letter at once*.'"

"Aha! you recall that now?"

"I do."

"And you are not mistaken?"

"I am not."

"Then he did admit the possibility that there might arise a claimant ere the expiration of the twenty years?"

"He did practically, when he answered my question as I have stated."

CHAPTER III

AN EXTRAORDINARY CROSS-EXAMINATION – A THEORY AT LAST – WHITE SAND AND JERSEY MUD – WORKING ON A SLIGHT CLUE – AN INSPIRATION – THE MAN WITH THE DIARY – A PROSPECT

Again Jack became thoughtful. He appreciated that his questions were developing strange and directing admissions. After some little time he resumed his questions. Our readers will remember that our hero had adopted a line of interrogations in line with a theory that had been suggested in his mind. He asked:

"Did you observe in the securities that they had been wet?"

"No."

"Now mark well this next question, sir: Did you notice any white soil?"

"Great Moses!" ejaculated Mr. Townsend, "young man, who are you – what are you?"

"I am a detective; you have my card; but please answer my question."

"Yes, sir, when I opened the package of securities I observed that some white sand fell on my lap. I remember brushing it off – yes, it's marvelous that you should know this. Are you the heir, or did you meet the man, or do you know him, or did some one tell you, or am I dreaming?"

"None of your propositions, sir, are correct; I am merely shadowing down to facts, going logically to work to find a clue."

"But you must have some basis for these questions?"

"Only such as come to me."

"No facts?"

"None whatever; I never heard of the affair until you related the circumstances to me within the hour, but I am reasoning on certain lines. I may project several theories and consider them all. We have made a little advance; we have learned that the strange man who deposited the fortune with you came from New Jersey; we have reason to believe that his *farm* was somewhere near the seashore."

"Yes, yes, I see, this is wonderful. Why, the detective business is easy enough if you only know how to go about it."

Jack laughed and said:

"Yes, it is easy, but there is another mystery to solve. How did you cash those drafts on the London solicitors? Did you not receive some intimation from them?"

"They were drafts drawn by themselves on bankers; in fact, they were indorsed by them to no particular individual. I sent them through the regular channel for collection; they were paid and I never received any word from them."

"Didn't your first detective mention them?"

"He did, but I could not remember the names of the drawers of the drafts. Remember, twenty-five years had elapsed."

"Did you make no record of the names?"

"If I did the record was lost."

"And there you lost a clue."

"That is true, I can see now."

"But the securities – did they not contain a name?"

"Certainly, but I have forgotten those names also. Strangely enough, they were indorsed or assigned blank by the London solicitors, and all I had to do was fill in our name and get new certificates; I did so."

"And you claim a great memory?"

"Yes."

"And you do not remember any of the names on those papers?"

"No, you see, I was excited; I may have observed the names at the time, but they passed from my memory. I disposed of them immediately and the matter rested for twenty-five years. It was evident that they had been indorsed in blank on purpose for some one to fill in the name and dispose of them at will. I admit it was a strange oversight for me not to have made a record of the names – indeed, it is possible I did, and that I filed them away with the letter, and if I did so they were destroyed with the letter."

"It does appear," said Jack, "that the fates all combined to hide the identity of the real heirs to that property."

"Yes, but now I recall through your aid that the strange man who deposited this fortune with me did several times speak of possible claimants, and I remember that in the letter he gave me he bade me use my own judgment should any such claimants present themselves."

"And that letter of instructions?"

"It was destroyed along with the other memoranda."

"Now give me a general description of the appearance of the man who deposited the fortune with you."

Mr. Townsend did so, and his description was minute, and as afterward appeared very accurate, and Jack made a mental note of the description, and after some further talk, distinguished by the same singular brightness which had enabled him to ascertain as much as he did in order to establish some slight indices whereon to base a "shadow," he bade Mr. Townsend adieu, promising to call upon him as soon as he had anything definite to report.

Once alone as he walked through the streets going to his lodgings, Jack meditated deeply over the strange narrative he had listened to, and he muttered:

"It is all straight enough save the fact that the old man who has such a good memory in one direction should forget so important a fact as those names, which it appears must have been written on the securities and the drafts; and yet," added Jack, "he appears perfectly frank and honest."

Our hero saw his brother Gil, and the two discussed for a long time the strange incidents, and Jack said:

"It is possible that Mr. Townsend is crazy. He is over seventy years of age and may be laboring under a hallucination. His story does appear incredible; there are elements of romance stranger than any I ever read about. Had the money been deposited with him for a few months, or even years, it would have been different, but a deposit to cover twenty years seems to me almost incredible; and then again, he appeared to be all right."

"You know," said Gil, "some people laboring under a hallucination will tell a straighter narrative than those who are relating facts."

"Yes, I've thought of that, but there is one thing I particularly observed: the old man answered my questions. I revived his memory, and every time he answered me clearly and naturally, and it is this fact which makes me believe that there may be some truth in his extraordinary narrative. At any rate, I shall investigate the story."

"Have you formed a plan?"

"I have."

Jack revealed his plan to his brother and laid out a course of work for the latter, for which he was particularly fitted. He said:

"I shall proceed in this matter for awhile as though I had not a single doubt as to the authenticity of the old man's tale. I have a theory, and if I am correct I believe I will be able to delve until I strike a clue, and if I do and prove the story correct and solve the mystery, we shall have performed one of the most extraordinary detective feats ever accomplished."

"I will tell you frankly, Jack, I believe you are being played by a crazy man."

"All right, we shall see."

Jack was not a man to be played very easily. He did not accept the story as a whole, nor did he absolutely reject it, as intimated. He determined to make a test, satisfied that he would be able to strike a clue, a sufficient one to at least confirm the story. And such being the case he could then go ahead and investigate further.

Our readers will remember that our hero was working for a clue on an event which had occurred forty years previously, and the difficulty is apparent. He could not trace by the memories of people who could aid him, and on the following day when he crossed to Jersey he became more and more impressed as to the difficulties of the "shadow," and he remarked:

"Accident has favored me several times, but I cannot see how accident can favor me now."

It is strange, but the very word accident suggested a most extraordinary and novel plan. He went to the railroad office, and gaining admission to the presence of the superintendent made several inquiries as to a record of accidents that had occurred on the road. At first the superintendent showed little interest, but when Jack disclosed the fact that he was a detective, the superintendent became communicative and inquisitive, and Jack was compelled to practice great adroitness in evading questions. Finally the superintendent said:

"There is an old man employed in the freight office who has been on the road fifty years. He is a queer old fellow, and has kept a diary of every incident of importance as connected with the road for fifty years. His name is Douglas; he lives in Newark, I think. See him and you will get all the information you require."

Jack left the office and there was a smile of satisfaction on his face, as he remarked:

"By ginger! it does appear as though my thoughts were an inspiration. Why, probably I wouldn't have run across anything like this diary business anywhere else in all the world."

We ask our readers to observe the extraordinary foresight of the detective in developing his theory, in view of the extraordinary denouement that was to follow.

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