

Footprints

Jeffery Farnol

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FOOTPRINTS

By Jeffery Farnol

Who killed Sir Gregory Glendale? Jasper Shrig had to find out quickly; but clues were so scarce that he had to help make them himself

Mr. Jasper Shrig of Bow Street, leaning back on the great, cushioned settle, stretched sturdy legs to the cheery fire and, having lighted his pipe, sipped his glass of the famous "One and Only" with a relish that brought a smile to his companion's comely visage.

"Pretty cozy, Jarsper, I think?"

"There ain't," sighed Mr. Shrig, glancing round about the trim, comfortable kitchen, "a cozier place in London, say England, say the universe, than this here old 'Gun'—thanks

to you, Corporal Dick. You've only got an 'ook for an 'and but you're so 'andy wi' that 'ook, so oncommon 'andy that there ain't no word fur it, so Dick—your werry good 'ealth, pal!"

Corporal Richard Roe, late of the Grenadiers, flushed and, being a man somewhat slow of speech, muttered:

"Thankee, comrade," and thereafter sat gazing at the bright fire and caressing his neatly-trimmed right whisker with the gleaming steel hook that did duty for the hand lost at Waterloo.

"On sich con-wiwial occasions as this here," murmured Mr. Shrig, also gazing at the fire, "when I'm as you might say luxooriating in a pipe, a glass and the best o' pals and comrades, my mind nat'rally runs to corpses, Dick."

"Lord!" exclaimed the corporal, somewhat surprised. "Why so, Jarsper?"

"Because, Dick, in spite o' windictiveness in the shape o' bludgeons, knives, bullets, flat-irons and a occasional chimbley-pot, I'm werry far from being a corpse—yet. Fur vitch I'm dooly thankful. Now talkin' o' corpses, Dick."

"But Jarsper—I ain't."

"No, but you will, for I am, d'ye see. Now folks as have been 'took off' by wiolence or as you might say The Act, wictims o' Murder, Dick—with a capital M—said parties don't generally make pretty corpses, not as a rule—no."

"Which," said the corporal, shaking his comely head, "can't 'ardly be expected, Jarsper."

"But," continued Mr. Shrig, sucking at his pipe with very evident enjoyment, "contrairywise I 'ave never seen an 'andsomer, cleaner, nater ca-darver than Sir W. Glendale made—so smiling, so peaceful—and mind ye, Dick, with a knife, a ordinary butcher's knife druv clean into 'is buzzum, up to the werry grip, or as you might say 'andle. Smiling he was, Dick, as if 'e 'ad been 'took off' in the werry middle of a bee-ootiful dream ...

"'Twas the face of a man ... as died ... in his sleep ... fast asleep!" mused Mr. Shrig. "Now why should a man sleep ... so werry sound...? You'll mind the case I think—eh, Dick?"

"For sure, Jarsper, the misfortunate gentleman was murdered about a year ago—"

"A year?" mused Mr. Shrig, pausing with toddy glass at his grim, clean-shaven lips. "Say nine months, say ten—stop a bit till I take a peep at my little reader." Setting down his glass he drew from the bosom of his neat, brass-buttoned coat a small, much-worn notebook whose close-written pages he thumbed slowly over, murmuring hoarsely.

"D. E. F. G.... Griggs ... Goreham, Grant—and 'ere we are—Glendale ... Sir William ... Baronet ... Murdered ... June 1 ... sitting at desk ... Murderer—wanting!"

"Ay," nodded the corporal, leaning forward to touch the cheery fire with caressing poker, "'tis one 'o them crimes as was never found out."

"And, Dick, your memory sarved you true—for the Act was commit—eggsackly a year ago this here werry night!"

"And I suppose it never will be found out now—eh, Jarsper?"

"Why, since you axes me so p'inted, Dick, I answers you, ready and prompt—oo knows? Hows'ever I'm a-vaiting werry patient."

"Ay, but wot for?"

"Another chance p'raps ... dewelopments!"

"Jarsper, I don't quite twig you."

"Dick, I didn't expect as you would. Lookee now—there's murderers vich, if not took and 'topped' or, as you might say, scragged—as gets that owdacious, well, murder grows quite an 'abit wi' 'em and—wot's that?"

"Eh?" said the corporal, starting. "I didn't hear anything."

"Sounded like a dog whining somewheres," murmured Mr. Shrig, glancing vaguely about. "There 'tis again!"

"That's no dog, Jarsper!" muttered the corporal. "Somebody's ill or hurt—that's a child's voice or a woman's."

"No, Dick, that's the voice o' fear ... terror, Dick—lad. Now, stand by, pal." Then soundlessly the corporal unbarred the door, drew it suddenly wide and with a slithering rustle, a vague shape swayed in and lay motionless at his feet.

"A woman, Jarsper!" said he in a hushed voice, stooping above this vague shape.

"Oh, dead, Dick?"

"Looks that way, Jarsper."

"Then in wi' her—so! Now shut the door—quick! Lock it, pal, and likewise bar it and shoot the bolts!"

"Lord love us, Jarsper!" whispered the corporal, ruffling his short curly hair with glittering hook, and staring at the lovely form, outstretched upon the wide settle. "Anyway, she ain't dead, thank God!"

"No, Dick, she's only swooning."

"But what's to do now, Jarsper? What's the correct evolution? How to bring the lady round, comrade?"

"Cold vater applied outwardly is reckoned pretty good, Dick, but sperrits took innardly is better, I fancy. So get the rum, pal, or brandy—vich ever comes 'andiest—stop a bit, this'll do!" And reaching his own glass of the "One and Only" Mr. Shrig knelt beside the swooning girl whose face

showed so pale beneath its heavy braids and coquettish ringlets of glossy, black hair, and tenderly raising this lovely head, he set the toddy to her lips—but, even then, she shuddered violently and, opening great, fearful eyes, recoiled so suddenly that the toddy-glass went flying.

"Dead!" she cried in awful, gasping voice, then checking the outcry upon her lips with visible effort she stared from Mr. Shrig upon his knees, to the towering, soldierly figure of Corporal Richard Roe, and wringing her slim, gloveless hands, spoke in quick breathless fashion:

"I want ... who ... which is Jasper Shrig, the Bow Street officer? I ... I want Mr. Shrig of Bow Street—"

"Ma'm," answered Mr. Shrig gently, "that werry identical same is now a-speaking."

"Yes," she cried, leaning toward him with a strange eagerness. "Yes ... I see you are, now! You ... oh, you surely must remember me?"

"Ay ... by Goles ... I surely ... do!" nodded Mr. Shrig.

"I am Adela Glendale ... a year ago I was suspected of ... of—"

"Not by me, lady, never by me, ma'm."

"No, no, you believed in me then, thank God! You were my good friend—then! But tonight ... Oh, Mr. Shrig—dear Jasper Shrig..." she cried and reaching out she clutched at him with both trembling hands in frantic appeal.

"You believed in me then, you were kind to me then, you stood between me and shameful horror a year ago ... Oh, be kind to me now, believe in me now ... for tonight ... it has happened again ... horrible! Oh, God help me, it has happened again!"

"Eh? ... Murder?" questioned Mr. Shrig in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes—yes ... and the house full of guests! But he's dead ... Uncle Gregory is dead—horrible! See—look at me!" And with swift, wild gesture she threw open the long mantle that shrouded her loveliness and showed her white satin gown—its bosom and shoulder blotched with a hideous stain. "Look! Look!" she gasped, staring down at these dreadful evidences in horror, "His blood ... I'm foul of it ... dear Uncle Gregory!"

Mr. Shrig surveyed these ghastly smears with eyes very bright and keen, his lips pursed as if about to whistle, though no sound came; then he drew the cloak about her.

"And now," said he when their visitor seemed more composed, "now Miss Adele, ma'm, s'pose you tell us all as you know."

"But what—what can I tell you?" she answered with a gesture of helplessness. "I only know that Uncle Gregory ...

dear Uncle Gregory is ... horribly dead. Oh, Mr. Shrig, I shall never forget the awful—"

"There, there, my dear!" said Mr. Shrig, patting the quivering hand that clasped his so eagerly. "But you mentioned summat about guests."

"Yes, there were people to dinner, five or six But—"

"Oo invited them?"

"My half-cousin Roger ... but oh, when I think of how Uncle—"

"Any strangers among 'em—these guests, Miss Adele?"

"No, they were family friends ... But Uncle Gregory had not been very well today and so soon as dinner was over, he excused himself and went to his room."

"Upstairs to bed, ma'm?"

"Not upstairs. He sleeps on the ground floor at the back of the house, looking on to the garden."

"And 'e vas ill today, you tell me? Sick, eh?"

"Oh, no, no, it was only a touch of gout."

"Gout, eh? Now did 'e say anything to you afore 'e went to his room?"

"Yes, he told me he felt very drowsy and could hardly keep his eyes open."

"But gout, ma'm, don't make a man drowsy. Had Sir Gregory drank much wine at dinner?"

"Very little."

"And yet," murmured Mr. Shrig, staring down at the slender hand he was still patting gently, "and yet—so werry sleepy! Did he say anything more as you can call to mind now?"

"He ordered the butler to take his coffee to the bedroom, and told me he would come back later if the drowsiness passed off... And those were his last words, Mr. Shrig, the very last words I shall ever hear him speak—"

"And now, ma'm, tell me o' poor Mr. Roger, your cousin."

"Half cousin, Mr. Shrig!" she corrected hastily. "Roger was poor Uncle William's step-son—"

"Bit of an invalid, ain't 'e?"

"Roger is a paralytic, he can't walk and uses a wheeled chair, but surely you remember this, Mr. Shrig, you seemed to fancy his society very much a year ago ... when—"

"A year ago this werry night, Miss Adele, ma'm!" said Mr. Shrig with ponderous nod. "And a parrylitick ... to ... be ... sure! Instead o' legs—veels, and at his age too, poor, unfort'nate young gentleman!"

"Roger is older than you think, older than he looks ... sometimes I think he never was young, and sometimes—" here she shuddered violently again and clasped the strong hand she held fast between her own. "Oh, Mr. Shrig," she gasped, "what ... what can I do ... Uncle Gregory ... I left him ... sitting there in his great elbow-chair beside the fire ... so still and dreadful! Oh, tell me ... what ... what ... what must I do?"

"First," answered Mr. Shrig gently, "tell me just 'ow you found him?"

"As soon as I could leave the company I stole away ... I knocked softly on his door ... I went in ... the room was dark except for the fire, but I ... could see him ... sitting in his great chair. I thought him dozing so I crept up to settle him more cozily and ... to kiss him. I slipped my arm about him, I ... I kissed his white head ... so lightly and ... Oh God, he slipped ... sideways and ... I saw—!"

"Dick," murmured Mr. Shrig, clasping ready arm about that horror-shaken form, "the brandy!"

"No, no!" she gasped, "I'm not going to ... swoon. Only help me, Mr. Shrig, be my friend for I ... I'm afraid ... terribly afraid! I was the last to speak with him, the last to see him alive—"

"No, Miss Adele, ma'm, the last to see 'im alive was the man as killed him."

"Oh ... friend!" she murmured. "My good, kind Jasper Shrig," and, viewing him through tears of gratitude, bowed her head against the shoulder of the neat, brass-buttoned coat and, with face thus hidden, spoke again, her voice ineffably tender: "But I'm afraid for—another also, Mr. Shrig."

"Ay, to be sure!" nodded Mr. Shrig, "Oo is 'e, Miss Adele, ma'm?"

"John!" she murmured. "Mr. Winton—you remember him? He was Uncle Gregory's secretary. But, oh, Mr. Shrig, three days ago they quarreled! That is, Uncle was very angry with poor John and—discharged him because ... John had dared to fall in love with me."

"Humph! And do you love said Mr. John, ma'm?"

"With all my poor heart. So you see if you're my friend and believe in me, you must be his friend too, for the danger threatening me threatens him also ... there is a dreadful shadow over us—"

"But then, ma'm, a shadder's only a shadder—even if it do go on veels—"

"Oh, Mr. Shrig—"

"And 'ave you seen Mr. John since day of discharge?"

Here she was silent, staring down great-eyed at her fingers that twined and clasped each other so nervously, until at last Mr. Shrig laid his large firm hand upon them and questioned her again:

"Miss Adela, ma'm, if Shrig o' Bow Street, bap-tismal name, Jarsper, is to aid you and said Mr. John you must say eggsackly 'ow and also vereabouts you seen 'im this night."

"I ... I thought I saw him ... in the garden," she whispered.

"Didn't speak to 'im, then?"

"No, I was too distraught ... sick with horror, I could only think of—" the faltering voice stopped suddenly as there came a loud, imperious knocking on the outer door.

"Now oo in the vide universe—"

"That must be John, now!" she cried, looking up with eyes bright and joyous. "I hope, I pray it is—"

"But 'ow should he come to the 'Gun,' if you didn't tell 'im as you—?"

"Oh, I bade Mary, my old nurse, tell him I'd run off to you ... and, oh, please see if it is indeed John." So, at a nod from Mr. Shrig, away strode the corporal, forthwith. Voices in the

passage, a hurry of footsteps and in came a tall young man who, with no eyes and never a thought for anything on earth but the lovely creature who rose in such eager welcome, dropped his hat, was across the kitchen and had her in his arms, all in as many moments.

"My dear," he murmured, "oh, my dear, why did you run away? What new horror is this—?"

"John, tell me, tell me—why were you in the garden tonight?"

"Dear heart, for word with you. Roger wrote me he'd contrive us a meeting, like the good, generous friend I'm sure he is—"

"Oh, John," she wailed, clasping him as if to protect, "how blind, how blind you are!"

"And, Mr. Vinton, sir," murmured Mr. Shrig, pointing sinewy finger, "your fob as was—ain't!" the young gentleman started, turned, clapped hand to fob-pocket and glanced from the speaker to Adele with an expression of sudden dismay.

"Gone!" he exclaimed. "The seal you gave me, dear heart."

"Ay, 'tis gone sure enough, sir," nodded Mr. Shrig. "The question is: how? and likewise where? And now, seeing as none of us ain't likely to tell, vot I says is—Corporal Dick, send out for a coach."

Pallid faces, voices that whispered awfully and became as awfully hushed when Mr. Shrig, opening the door of the fatal room, passed in, beckoning Corporal Dick to follow.

"Dick," said he, softly, "shut the door and lock it."

A stately chamber whose luxurious comfort was rendered cozier by the bright fire that flickered on the hearth with soft, cheery murmur; and before this fire a great, cushioned chair from which was thrust a limp arm that dangled helplessly with a drooping hand whose long, curving fingers seemed to grope at the deep carpet.

"So, there it is, pal!" quoth Mr. Shrig briskly. "Let's see vot it's got to tell us," and crossing to the chair he stooped to peer down at that which sprawled so grotesquely among its cushions.

The big corporal, who had faced unmoved the horrors of Waterloo, blenched at the thing in the chair which death had smitten in such gruesome fashion amid the comfort of this luxurious room.

"Oh—ecod, Jarsper!" he whispered.

"Ay," nodded Mr. Shrig, bending yet closer, "'e's pretty considerable dead, I never see a deader, no! And yet, in spite o' the gore, 'e looks werry surprisin' peaceful ... werry remarkably so! ... Killed by a downward stab above the collar-bone, lookee, in the properest place for it.... A knife or, say a dagger and same wanished ... eh, where are ye, Dick?"

"Comrade," exclaimed the corporal in sudden excitement, "will ye step over here to the winder?"

"Eh ... the vinder?" murmured Mr. Shrig, his keen gaze roving from the figure in the chair to the gleaming moisture beneath it to those helpless fingers and the shining object they seemed to grasp at, to the small table nearby with open book, the box of cigars, the delicate Sevres cup and saucer. "Eh ... the vinder? Why so, Dick?"

"It's ... open, Jarsper!"

"Oh?" murmured Mr. Shrig, his roving gaze fixed at last. "Is it? Look thereabouts and y'may see summat of a dagger, pal, or say, a knife—"

"Why, Jarsper ... Lord love me, here it is!"

"Werry good, bring it over and let's take a peep at it ... Ah, a ordinary butcher's knife, eh, Dick? Vally about a bob—say, eighteen pence. Has it been viped?"

"No, comrade, it's blooded to the grip—"

"That cup and saucer now?" mused Mr. Shrig. "Half full o' coffee ... vot's that got to tell us?" Saying which, he took up the dainty cup, sniffed at it, tasted its contents and stood beaming down at the fire, his rosy face more benevolent than usual. Then from one of his many pockets he drew a small phial into which he decanted a little of the coffee very carefully, whistling softly beneath his breath the while.

"What now, Jarsper?"

"Why, Dick, I'll tell ye, pat and plain. There's coffee in this world of all sorts, this, that and t'other and this is that. And Dick, old pal, the only thing as flummoxes me now is veels."

"Wheels?" repeated the corporal. "Jarsper, I don't twig."

"Vell, no, Dick; no, it aren't to be expected. But you've noticed so worry much already, come and take another peep at our cadaver. Now, vot d'ye see, pal?"

"Very remarkable bloody, Jarsper."

"True! And vot more?"

"The pore old gentleman 'ad begun to smoke a cigar—there it lays now, again' the fender."

"Eh, cigar?" exclaimed Mr. Shrig, starting. "Now dog bite me if I 'adn't missed that. There 'tis sure enough and there ... by Goles ... there's the ash—look. Dicky lad, look—vot d'ye make o' that, now?"

"Why, Jarsper, I makes it no more than—ash."

"Ay, so it is, Dick, and worry good ash, too! Blow my dicky if I don't think it's the best bit of ash as ever I see!" Here indeed Mr. Shrig became so extremely attracted by this small pile of fallen cigar-ash that he plumped down upon his knees before it, much as if in adoration thereof and was still lost in contemplation of it when the corporal uttered a sharp

exclamation and grasping his companion by the shoulder turned him about and pointed with gleaming hook:

"Lord, comrade—oh Jarsper!" said he in groaning voice. "See—yonder! There's evidence to hang any man, look there!" And he pointed to a small, shining object that twinkled just beneath the grasping fingers of that dangling, dead hand. "Mr. John's ... Mr. Winton's seal!" he whispered.

"Oh, ar!" murmured Mr. Shrig, his gaze roving back to the cigar-ash. "I've been a-vonderin' 'ow it got there, ever since I see it, Dick, so eggsackly under corpse's daddle."

"Why, Jarsper, he must ha' snatched it, accidental-like, in his struggle for life and, being dead, dropped it."

"Lord love ye, Dick!" exclaimed Mr. Shrig, beaming up affectionately into the corporal's troubled face. "Now I never thought o' that. You're gettin' as 'andy with your 'ead as your 'ook! Deceased being alive, snatched it and, being dead, naturally drops it. Good! So now s'pose you pick it up and we takes a peep at it."

"It's his'n, Jarsper, and no mistake," sighed the corporal. "See, here's a J. and a W. and here, round the edge: 'To John from Adele.' So, God help the poor sweet creetur, I says!"

"Amen, Dick, with all my heart. So the case is pretty clear, eh?"

"A precious sight too clear, comrade."

"Couldn't be plainer, eh, pal?"

"No how, comrade."

"Then, Dick lad, the vord is—march! No—stop a bit—the window. Open? Yes. And werry easy to climb. But this here bolt now ... this latch ... pretty solid—von't do! But that 'ook o' yourn's solider, I reckon, and you're precious strong, so—wrench it off."

"Eh? Break it, Jarsper?"

"Ar! Off with it, pal! Ha—so, and off she comes! By Goles, you're stronger than I thought."

"Ay, but Jarsper, why break the winder lock?"

"Hist—mum's the vord. Dick—so march it is and lively, pal."

In the hall they were stayed by one who goggled at Mr. Shrig from pale, plump face, bowed, rubbed nervous hands and spoke in quavering voice:

"A dreadful business, sirs, oh, a terrible—"

"Werry true!" nodded Mr. Shrig. "You're the butler, ain't you? Is your master about, I mean your noo master?"

"Mr. Roger is ... is in the library, sir. He desires a word with you. This way, if you please."

For a long moment after the door had closed, Mr. Roger Glendale sat behind his desk utterly still, viewing Mr. Shrig with his dreamy yet watchful eyes.

"So, Shrig, we meet again?" he said at length. "Our last meeting was—"

"A year ago this werry night, sir!"

"A strange coincidence, Shrig, and a very terrible one. By heaven, there seems to be some curse upon this house, some horrible fate that dogs us Glendales!"

"Werry much so indeed, sir!" nodded Mr. Shrig, and his voice sounded so hearty as to be almost jovial.

"And 'ow do you find yourself these days, Mr. Roger, pretty bobbish I 'opes, sir?"

Mr. Roger blenched, throwing up a white, well-cared-for hand:

"An odious, a detestable word, Shrig!" he expostulated.

"Vich, sir?"

"'Bobbish'! A hideous word and most inappropriate as regards myself for—" the sleepy eyes glared suddenly, the pale cheek flushed, the delicate fingers became a knotted fist. "I am the same breathing Impotence! The same useless, helpless Thing, Shrig!"

"I shouldn't eggsackly call ye 'useless,' sir, nor go so fur as to name ye "elpless,' not me—no!"

"Then you'd be a fool, for I'm a log! I'm Death-in-Life, a living corpse, live brain in dead body—look at me!"

"And yet," demurred Mr. Shrig, "you're astonishin' spry with your fambles, sir, your 'ands, Mr. Rogers, or as you might say, your daddles, sir!"

Mr. Rogers glanced at the white, shapely hands in question and flickered their fingers delicately.

"Well, Shrig, my cousin, Miss Adele, forestalled me in summoning you, it seems, but you have seen ... you have looked into this new horror that has smitten us Glendales?"

"Vith both peepers, sir!"

"Well, speak out, man! Have you discovered any trace of the assassin? Formed any conclusions?"

"Oceans, sir!" nodded Mr. Shrig. "The ass-assin is as good as took! Ye see the fax is all too plain, sir! First, the open vinder. Second, by said vinder, the fatal veppin—'ere it is!" and from a capacious pocket he drew an ugly bundle and, unwinding its stained folds, laid the knife before his questioner.

"Very horrid!" said Mr. Roger in hushed accents, viewing the dreadful thing with a very evident disgust. "Anything more, Shrig?"

"Sir, me and my comrade, Corporal Richard Roe, found all as was to be found—this! Number three! A clincher!" And beside that murderous knife he laid the gold seal, beholding which Mr. Roger started in sudden agitation, took it up, stared at it and, dropping it upon the desk, covered his eyes with his two hands.

"Aha, you reckernize it, eh, sir?" asked Mr. Shrig, thrusting it back into his pocket, and wrapping up the knife again. "Yes, I see as you know it, eh, Mr. Roger?"

"Beyond all doubt ... to my sorrow! And you found it ... near ... the body?"

"Beneath its werry fingers, sir, looked as if it had fell out of its dyin' grasp. Pretty con-clusive, I think. And now sir, 'aving dooly noted and brought along everything in the natur' of evidence, I'll be toddling—no, stop a bit—the cup!"

"Cup, Shrig? Pray, what cup?"

"The coffee-cup used by deceased."

"Why trouble to take that?"

"Well," answered Mr. Shrig dubiously, "I don't 'ardly know except for the fact as 'twere used by deceased aforesaid and might come in as evidence."

"How so, Shrig? Evidence of what?"

"Well," answered Mr. Shrig, more dubiously than ever, "I don't 'ardly know that either, but I'd better take it along. Ye see, sir, there's some coffee in it as they might like to examine."

"But my poor uncle was stabbed, not poisoned."

"No more 'e wasn't!" nodded Mr. Shrig. "And I ought to get my report in sharp. And then again if the said cup should be wanted I can fetch it tomorrow."

"You locked the door, Shrig?"

"Seein' as the key was a-missin', I did not, sir, but I've took all as is needful and vot I've left ain't a-goin' to run away, no, 'twill stay nice an' quiet till the undertaker—"

"Good night!" said Mr. Roger, ringing the bell at his elbow.

"Sir, good night!" answered Mr. Shrig, and, turning at the opening of the door, he and Corporal Dick followed the pallid butler, who presently let them out into a pitch-black night, whereupon Mr. Shrig became imbued with a sudden fierce energy:

"Now Dick—at the double!"

"Eh, but Jarsper what ... where—"

"Run!" hissed Mr. Shrig, and seizing his companion's arm, he broke into a heavy, though silent trot ... In among shadowy trees, across smooth, dim lawns along winding

paths to a terrace whence a row of windows glinted down at them; which he counted in breathless whisper:

"Number five should be it ... At Number five she is! After me, pal!" And speaking, he opened this fifth window and clambered through with surprising agility. "Eh—back again?" whispered the corporal, glancing at the great chair before the dying fire. "What now, comrade?"

"The bed, Dick, it's big enough to hide us both, and—sharp's the word!" The heavy curtains of the huge somber four-poster rustled and were still, a cinder fell tinkling to the hearth and then came the corporal's hoarse whisper:

"What are we waiting for, Jarsper?"

"The murderer."

"Lord!" ... A distant clock chimed the hour.

Silence, for the great house was very still; the clock chimed the quarter, the dying fire chinked, this room of death grew slowly darker; the clock chimed the half-hour ... A faint, faint rattle at the door and into the room crept a sound of soft movement with another sound very strange to hear—a crunching rustle that stole across the carpet towards the hearth; a moving, shapeless blot against the feeble fire-glow, a faint tinkle of china and then a voice sudden and harsh and loud:

"In the King's name!" A leap of quick feet, a whirl of sudden movement, a flurry of desperate strife, an inhuman

laugh of chuckling triumph, and then Mr. Shrig's gasping voice:

"Ecod, Dick, he's done us! Catch that arm ... no good! I'm diddled again, by Goles, I am! Get the candles a-goin'—sharp!"

"Lord love us!" gasped Corporal Dick, the lighted candle wavering in his grasp, "Mr. Roger!"

"Ay—but look—look at 'im!"

Roger Glendale lolled in his wheeled chair, his eyes fixed upon the speaker in awful glare, his lips up-curling from white teeth ... and from these writhen lips issued a wheezing chuckle.

"Right, Shrig ... you were right ... I'm not ... not so helpless ... as I seemed. I was Master of Life ... and Death. I'm ... master still! I'm ... away, Shrig, away ... And so ... Good night!" The proud head swayed aslant, drooped forward—the shapely hands fluttered and were still, and Corporal Dick, setting down the candle, wiped moist brow, staring with horrified eyes.

"Love us all!" he whispered, "Dead—eh?"

"As any nail, Dick! Pizen, d'ye see?"

"Comrade, how ... how did ye know him for the killer?"

"'Twas very simple, Dick—in that bit o' cigar-ash as you p'inted out to me, I see the track of a veel, his footprints, so to speak, and—there ye are, pal!"

"Why then ... what now, comrade?"

"Now Dick, get back to them as is a-vaitin' so werry patient in the coach and tell 'em as Jarsper says the shadder, being only a shadder, is vanished out o' their lives and the sun is rose and a-shinin' for 'em and so—let all be revelry and j'y!"

[The end of *Footprints* by Jeffery Farnol]