

THE GREAT BEASLEY MYSTERY

A MYSTERY THAT WILKES-BARRE HAS GONE WILD ABOUT.

There is a Runaway in the Story, Also a White Ram and a Woman Who Wore Blouses. But Nobody Seems Able to Explain Exactly What It Is About.

"I have been up in Wilkes-Barre," said a man in an uptown hotel the other night, "and I have been trying ever since to figure out where I am at. Either I've got 'em or Wilkes-Barre's got 'em. I don't know which."

"What is it? Coal strike?"

"No, Beasley."

"Beasley?"

"Yes, Beasley. My head is buzzing with Beasley."

"It began in the Westmoreland Club, where I went with a friend one day. We found three gentlemen seated at a table and engaged in a very animated discussion. One of them was J. Ridgeway Wright and the others were Col. C. B. Dougherty and Arthur Hillman—all men of solid standing in the community."

"My friend introduced me and we joined them at the table."

"We were speaking about Mr. Beasley," said Mr. Wright, "and trying to get straight a rather peculiar chain of circumstances. Maybe you can help us out. Of course you have heard of Mr. Beasley? Hiram Gordon Beasley was his full name."

"Payson," interrupted Mr. Hillman, "Hiram Payson Beasley was the name, Ridgeway."

"Pardon me, Arthur," replied Mr. Wright, "but you are mistaken. Hiram Payson Beasley was quite another man."

"Not that there was anything wrong with Hiram Payson. Quite the contrary, but"

"Married a Munson," interrupted Col. Dougherty.

"Not Hiram Payson, Colonel," said Mr. Wright. "It was Hiram Gordon Beasley who married a Munson—Atanidia Munson was her name."

"The Munsons were a Connecticut family. You know, sir," said Mr. Wright, "turning to me, 'that the early settlers in the Wyoming Valley came from Connecticut. Miss Munson was born I think in 1820 or 1822. She was a very estimable woman."

"Her mother also was much esteemed. Alvina was the mother's name. Her maiden name was Doolittle. She was a good Christian woman and quite stout. The Doolittles were all of rather full habit—broad and full."

"I never heard that before," said Mr. Hillman a little tartly. "I thought, 'Nathaniel' was the only Doolittle I ever heard of being full and you know how that happened, Ridgeway, just as well as I do, so I don't think it's fair to say an entire respectable family were in the habit of getting full."

"I don't know, Arthur," said Mr. Wright kindly, "whether you are trying to be flippant or whether it's just your ordinary confused state of mind. I said the Doolittles were of full, stout habit, not in the habit of getting full."

"Well, what I want to get clear in my mind," said Col. Dougherty, "is how Beasley's run had anything to do with the runaway."

"You are impetuous, Colonel," said Mr. Wright, "I was coming around in that in due time as you will see."

"Mr. Beasley did have a run. It was a white ram. Now there was something very peculiar about that ram. You know how it is with bulls—how they will dash anything red. Well, as red is to a bull, as white was to Mr. Beasley's ram."

"Mr. Beasley's fence and the trunk of a tree were whitewashed when he got that ram and he had to paint them all a different color because the ram batted them right and left. He was an elderly man at that. Yet he nearly caved in his head bawling 'like trees and fences. Ruggles was the ram's name."

"Nathaniel Doolittle never drank a drop in his life," interrupted Mr. Hillman, "until he had that trouble, and you know it, Ridgeway. And even then when he did get drunk he went around singing hymns. He thought he was the Salvation Army."

"But it all came from his family trouble. Mrs. Doolittle took to wearing blouses and she was a changed woman from that day. Nathaniel sang in the choir."

"In either the fall of 1918 or the spring of 1920," continued Mr. Wright, "severely ignoring Mr. Hillman's interruption, 'Hiram Gordon Beasley—'"

"Payson," interrupted Mr. Hillman, "Hiram Payson Beasley."

"Hiram Gordon Beasley, I say," continued Mr. Wright, "not heeding Mr. Hillman's interruption."

"Married a Munson," interjected Col. Dougherty.

"Came into this valley from Cattaraugus county, New York. I think it was Cattaraugus county. It may have been Wayne, but no matter—"

"Well," continued the man back from Wilkes-Barre, "that's the way the thing began. Mr. Wright went on and on and I kept getting into it thicker and thicker."

"There was something about a runaway in it and then it involved some kind of mines up in New Hampshire, the discovery of coal in the Wyoming valley, samples over the pedigree of the Beasleys, the Munsons and the Doolittles and the Lord knows what."

"At first I was all in a fog—bewildered. Then I thought it was just a pleasant way of stringing a stranger. But the string was all over town."

"It was in the newspapers. You heard Beasley on the street cars and in the streets. When you saw men talking excitedly on the streets you knew it was about the Beasleys."

"I got out of the town at last and thought I was clear of the Beasleys. But on the train I'm blessed if I didn't hear two men at it hammer and tongs, with the old white ram, and Hiram Payson and Hiram Gordon and the Doolittles and the Munsons and the whole tribe."

"I had to go over to Shenandoah and as I walked up from the station I heard two of the National Guard officers, members of Gen. Cullen's staff, I think, talking Beasley and wondering about Hiram Payson and Hiram Gordon."

"Then there came to Wilkes-Barre a pretty letter from Nathaniel saying that a holy cat up by the sea there was supposed to be that of Hiram Gordon Beasley. It was a lie, of course, but that set the Hiram Beasley die off afresh."

"Now suppose that that Hiram Payson, or Gordon, or Munson, or whatever his name was, Beasley did come from Cattaraugus county in 1840, and did have a runaway and did have a white ram and did marry a Munson, and suppose Nathaniel Doolittle, who did wear blouses, and Nathaniel did take to drink, and suppose the whole business, in a word—why, then, what about it? What were all the people up there getting so worked up over it for?"

"So far as I know there isn't a Beasley in all Wilkes-Barre. If there are any they are the only persons in my knowledge who are not mixed up in the Beasley case."

That's what befogged me. So I went to Tom Cassidy up there one day and asked him to untangle the Beasley snarl for me. In essence, I knew if there was a man in town who could be comparatively sane on the Beasleys, he was the man. So I asked Tom as an act of charity to help me out.

"Why, it's this way," said Tom. "Hiram Gordon Beasley, some call him Hiram Payson Beasley, but they're away off there. Payson Beasley was the name. Hiram Gordon Beasley was another man entirely. Possibly he may have been of the same family as Hiram Gordon, a distant relative, I know. But I am not even sure of that."

"But no matter. At any rate, in the fall of 1918 Hiram Gordon Beasley—"

"Yes, I know all that—married a Munson," I said. "I've heard that until my head's whirling with it—the Munsons and the white ram and the rustic tribe of Doolittles—"

"Not Doolittle," Tom broke in. "Helfelder. That's where they all go wrong and get mixed up."

"Helfelder was the name—an old Pennsylvania Dutch family. The Doolittles came from Connecticut. This valley was settled by people from Connecticut, you know. The massacre—"

"Here was where I quit. He followed me a block up the street talking Beasley six or seven to the dozen all the way."

"Well, it was clear that with me it was a case of a padded cell or get out of that Beasley territory. My head is humming with Beasleys yet. What's the matter with you, up there, anyway? Go up there and find out, if you want to. I'm through. And if anybody says Beasley to me again there'll be a fight."

Not that there was anything wrong with Hiram Payson. Quite the contrary, but—

"Married a Munson," interrupted Col. Dougherty.

"Not Hiram Payson, Colonel," said Mr. Wright. "It was Hiram Gordon Beasley who married a Munson—Araminta Munson was her name."

"The Munsons were a Connecticut family. You know, sir," said Mr. Wright, turning to me, "that the early settlers in the Wyoming Valley came from Connecticut. Miss Munson was born, I think, in 1820 or 1822. She was a very estimable woman."

"Her mother also was much esteemed. Alvina was the mother's name. Her maiden name was Doolittle. She was a good Christian woman and quite stout. The Doolittles were all of rather full habit—broad and full."

"I never heard that before," said Mr. Hillman a little tartly. I thought, "Nathaniel was the only Doolittle I ever heard of being full and you know how that happened, Ridgway, just as well as I do, so I don't think it's fair to say an entire respectable family were in the habit of getting full."

"I don't know, Arthur," said Mr. Wright kindly, "whether you are trying to be facetious or whether it's just your ordinary confused state of mind. I said the Doolittles were of full, stout habit, not in the habit of getting full."

"Well, what I want to get clear in my mind," said Col. Dougherty, "is how Beasley's ram had anything to do with the runaway."

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"Mr. Beasley did have a ram. It was a white ram. Now there was something very peculiar about that ram. You know how it is with bulls—how they will dash at anything red—well, as red as a bull, a white was to Mr. Beasley's ram."

"Mr. Beasley's fences and the trunks of his trees were white-washed when he got that ram and he had to paint them all a different color because the ram butted them right and left. He was an elderly ram at that. Yet he nearly carved in his head budding white trees and fences. Ruggles was the ram's name."

"Nathaniel Doolittle never drank a drop in his life," interrupted Mr. Hillman, "until he had that trouble, and you know it, Ridgway. And even then, when he did get drunk he went around singing hymns. He thought he was the Salvation Army."

"But it all came from his family troubles. Mrs. Doolittle took to wearing bloomers and she was a changed woman from that day. Nathaniel sang in the choir."

"In either the fall of 1849 or the spring of 1850," continued Mr. Wright, severely ignoring Mr. Hillman's interruption, "Hiram Gordon Beasley—"

"Payson," interrupted Mr. Hillman.

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"I had to go over to Shenandoah and as I walked up from the station I heard two of the National Guard officers, members of Gen. Gobin's staff, I think, talking Beasley and wrangling about Hiram Payson and Hiram Gordon."

"Then there came to Wilkes-Barre a private letter from Nantucket saying that a body cast up by the sea there was supposed to be that of Hiram Gordon Beasley. It was a lie, of course, but that set the infernal Beasley din off afresh."

"Now suppose that that Hiram Payson, or Gordon, or Munson, or whatever his name was, Beasley did come from Cattaraugus county in 1849, and did have a runaway and did have a white ram and did marry a Munson; and suppose Nathaniel Doolittle's wife did wear bloomers; and Nathaniel did take to drink; and suppose the whole business, in a word—why, then, what about it? What were all the people up there getting so worked up over it for?"

"So far as I know there isn't a Beasley in all Wilkes-Barre. If there are any they are the only persons to my knowledge who are not mixed up in the Beasley controversy."

"But what were they all trying to get at?"

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"Payson," interrupted Mr. Hillman, "Hiram Payson Beasley was the name, Judge."

"Pardon me, Arthur," replied Mr. Wright firmly, "but you are mistaken. Hiram Beasley was quite another man."

That's what befogged me. So I went to Tom Cassidy up there one day and asked him to straighten the Beasley matter for me. Tom is a level-headed chap with lots of experience. I knew if there was a man in town who could be comparatively sure on the Beasley, he was the man. So I asked Tom as an act of charity to help me out.

"Why, it's this way," said Tom. "Hiram Gordon Beasley—some call him Hiram Payson Beasley, but they're away off there. Hiram Gordon was the name. Hiram Payson Beasley was another man entirely. Possibly he may have been of the same family as Hiram Gordon, a distant relative, you know. But I am not even sure of that."

"But no matter. At any rate, in the fall of 1866 Hiram Gordon Beasley—"

"Yes, I know all that—married a Munson," I said. "I've heard that until my head's whirling with it—the Munson and the white rain and the lunatic tribe of Doonville—"

"Not Doolittle," Tom broke in. "Bell-chaser. That's where they all go wrong and get mixed up."

"Helfandler was the name—an old Pennsylvania Dutch family. The Doolittles came from Connecticut. The valley was settled by people from Connecticut, you know. The massacre—"

"Here was where I quit. He followed me a block up the street talking Beasley sixteen to the dozen all the way."

"Well, it was clear that with me it was a case of a palmed cell or get out of the Beasley territory. My head is humming with Beasley yet. What's the matter with 'em up there, anyway? Go up there and find out, if you want in. I'm through, and if anybody says Beasley to me again, here'll be a fight."