

# THE COPPER HOUSE

A Detective Story

BY JULIUS REGIS

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The young man colored up like a schoolboy and said huskily: "Was that what your letter was about?"

"Yes, I wrote to request your consent to the sale of the Copper House."

"The Copper House for sale?"

"You may regard it as sold, my lad."

"What the devil do you mean?" cried Leo, springing up from his chair.

"What else can you expect, when a property has been neglected for three generations? Your grandfather spent the whole of his life abroad, and married in California, where he settled. When he died, Karka was mortgaged for half its value, although his sister worked herself to skin and bone in her efforts to reduce expenses. Your father certainly remained at home, but he entertained very lavishly, and his tobacco-growing hobby, which started very hopefully, proved a very costly failure. You inherited your grandfather's love of travel, and your idea of managing an estate apparently consists in telegraphing incessantly for money from the four quarters of the earth. During the last 30 years, I have warned first your father and then you how things were going. Then the war broke out, and now matters have come to a crisis. I can assure you, I have done my utmost to stave off the debts . . ."

Leo had been drumming on the window-pane, and now he turned round and said: "I know you have; I'm not trying to excuse myself."

The lawyer nodded, and continued in a slightly mollified tone: "I had not put up the property for sale, but at the end of March a purchaser appeared unexpectedly, and made a good—an uncommonly good offer, which we have no choice but to accept. I have drawn up the contract already, and was only awaiting your consent to my signature, but since you are back, you can sign it yourself."

"My signature!" repeated the young man. He was filled with a sullen, boyish despair at the thought that by a stroke of the pen, he must sign away the property which had been in his family for eight generations, and lose the old home which was the shrine of his childish memories.

"I can't be true, it's impossible!" he burst out.

The lawyer looked at him as though he were taking a careful inventory of the young man's weakness and lack of resource in this unforeseen emergency.

"Unfortunately it is only too possible," he said gently. The official atmosphere of Mr. Burchardt's private room began to irritate Leo like the touch of a hair shirt on a sensitive skin, and as the lawyer turned suggestively towards his deed-box, the young man said hastily, almost incoherently, as if attempting to stave off inevitable doom: "No, not yet! Give me a little time to get accustomed to the idea. I must have one more look at the Copper House whilst it is still mine . . ."

Burchardt looked thoughtful. Inwardly, he was deeply touched, but his severe expression remained unaltered, and he said to himself: "What a pity the scatter-brained fellow did not make a rich marriage while there was time."

Aloud he remarked: "As you wish. But I have not told you everything yet. As you know, the Copper House, that is, the house itself, was let in the summer of 1915 to a person named Andrei Bernin. He is a Russian author, though I believe he has naturalized him-

self as a Swede, and he is living in the Copper House with his sister and daughter. As regards the rest of the estate, and the woods, Suneson, the bailiff, continued to look after them, at any rate until last year; perhaps you remember him—a decent, trustworthy fellow. But he left the place very suddenly last autumn without giving notice. Andrei Bernin now rents the whole property, but the land is lying fallow. He's a strange sort of man—shuts himself up altogether in the Copper House; he seems to have plenty of money, and not content with paying rent for the place, he has now made a very generous offer to buy it. I have never met him personally, as he is elderly and an invalid, and blind into the bargain; but I carry on negotiations with his friend and solicitor, Marcus Tassler, who is managing the business with the most amazing energy . . ."

"Tassler," said Leo, with a slight grimace, "is he a German?"

"I should say he is of a sort of German-Russian-Jewish extraction, but all the same, he is a Swedish citizen," replied the pedantically accurate Burchardt. "He is one of those financial experts who have come to the front during this war, and he is the manager of the Finno-Russian Import and Export company. Personally, I don't find him particularly congenial, but he certainly looks after his friend Bernin's interests with exemplary zeal. They have not allowed us much time to turn around; I have been obliged to give way a little here and there. A considerable sum of caution money has been paid down already; if the sale does not go through, the lease holds good, and we are bound to undertake expensive repairs, whilst over and above all that, we shall be held legally responsible for allowing the land to go out of cultivation . . ."

Leo turned quickly to the window; the truth seemed to dawn upon him for the first time, and he said: "I suppose the Copper House is filled with these people?"

"Yes, and all the old servants have left. We are absolutely powerless, Leo; the sale must take place!"

"Must it?" murmured Leo; still unconvinced. "Have you anything more to tell me?"

"Yes, Bernin, or, more correctly, Tassler acting for him, has bought up all the mortgages, and the largest outstanding debts on the property, and is bringing pressure to bear on us in that way."

Leo felt as though a net was closing round him; he was furious, and exclaimed: "The cheek of the fellow! So he threatens me, does he? I'll have something to say to him!"

"It is his way, I don't blame him. At any rate, we can't quarrel with the price he offers; it will cover all your family liabilities."

"Will there be any surplus?"

"About 12,000 kroner, I should think."

"That isn't much," remarked Leo thoughtfully. His anger had evaporated, and he was smiling. "After all, I have always been hard-up, so there won't be a great difference. At any rate, the Copper House still belongs to me—nominally."

Burchardt came up to the young man and laid a hand on his shoulder. He had laid aside his official manner, and said kindly: "Take my advice, Leo. Life is hard on those who make no attempt to take it seriously, and we are living in an age when individuals as well as nations are being tested to the

fullest extent of their capabilities. You are young, mentally and physically; that is one asset. You have had a good education; that is another. Face the future boldly, and win yourself a place in the sun; you can do it."

Leo looked at him. "Yes," said he, "that doesn't sound bad. But how am I to do it?"

"By working."

"Painting, do you mean?"

"I mean, by hard work."

"Chopping wood perhaps?"

"By all means, if you are fit for nothing better."

The young man stretched his arms over his head, and laughed softly; then he began to walk up and down the room. "I may be a ne'er-do-well, but I am not an invertebrate," said he. "I expected all this in a way, but I don't know how it is . . . I feel somehow relieved. At any rate, I know now just how I stand. "But," he added, with renewed vehemence, "the loss of the Copper House is an idea that it will take me some time to digest."

"It is too late to prevent it now, Leo."

"That is just what makes it so hard to bear! Besides, I can't get over the fact of such people as these taking such a fancy to the Copper House; I'm sure there's something wrong somewhere."

"There is nothing wrong with their money, at all events," remarked Burchardt patiently.

"Money!" snorted Leo, turning round. His expressive face lighted up, and he added eagerly: "Nobody knows yet that I am in Sweden. Suppose I go straight back to California and try to make a fortune. How's that for an idea?"

The lawyer remained silent; he had not the heart to reply. But the young man's remark reminded him of something, and he bent down and took an envelope from his desk.

"Somebody seems to have expected your arrival," he said, "for this letter has been waiting for you since yesterday."

"A letter!" repeated Leo, taking it with surprise, "so it is, and by the postmark a local one, posted here in Stockholm. Isn't that odd?"

He opened and read it, first to himself, then aloud:

"Mr. Leonard Grath, Care of Burchardt and Company, Stockholm."

Sir,—Should you intend taking any steps with regard to the Copper House, may I beg you to wait for further information from me? The matter is serious. Above all, let nobody know that you are in Stockholm, and on no account go out to the Copper House. Ask Mr. Burchardt to observe similar precautions. He can tell you who I am.

Yours in great haste,

Maurice Wallion.

Leo read these lines once again. The lawyer pricked up his ears, as if at the sound of a bugle. "Maurice Wallion," he repeated.

"Yes, that's the name. What's all this about? Who is the fellow, and what does he mean?"

Burchardt took the letter, and read it in his turn, slowly and attentively. Leo, who was watching him, noticed that the lawyer actually looked disturbed, almost alarmed.

"What is it?" asked the young man, quickly. "Who on earth is Maurice Wallion?"

"Unexpected, perfectly unexpected!" murmured the lawyer. "Serious? Yes, that may well be, if he says so. Leo, this message comes from a man who wishes you well. I happen to know him; few persons have met him, but many have heard of him. They call him 'the problem-hunter,' and his nominal occupation is that of a contributor to the Daily Courier. But he is more than a journalist; he has a way of turning up on the scene of any crime or mystery, if he thinks there is anything abnormal about it."

Leo smiled slightly: "That sounds very mysterious," he said, "but as I am not guilty of any deeds of darkness, I can't

say I feel particularly alarmed . . ."

"I was engaged on young Ravenorone's case, when Wallion recovered his estate for him," replied the lawyer gravely; "that problem was 100 years old; but he solved it in an hour."

"And now I suppose he will offer to recover mine," said Leo. "Why, what business is it of his? How did he know, to begin with that I was coming here?"

"How, indeed," echoed the lawyer significantly.

They looked at one another, and the young man's smile gave way to a frown. "I call it either great cheek or a very poor joke for anyone to meddle unasked in my affairs," he said, taking up the letter to put it in his pocketbook.

Burchardt shook his head, and at the same moment Leo uttered a cry of vexation. "My pocketbook!" he exclaimed. "That scoundrel has stolen it!"

"Who has?" asked the lawyer, jumping up.

"A man who ran into me on the stairs about half an hour ago. It can have been no one else, for I had it in my hand not five minutes before. He was a tall, thin fellow, with black eyes; I thought he was drunk, for he barged right into me, without saying a word; I gave him a good shove, and he lurched out into the street. Of course the beggar was after my pocketbook."

"What had you in it?"

"Not much money, but practically all my papers, passport and everything."

At this minute the door opened, and one of Burchardt's clerks came in.

"A boy has just left this parcel for Mr. Grath," he said, putting down an oblong packet, and departing. Leo tore open the white paper, which bore no address, and looked up, with a mixture of amusement and bewilderment in his face.

"What's the date today?" he inquired.

"July 19, 1927," replied the puzzled lawyer.

"Make a note of it, as being a day of surprises."

"What is it now?"

"I have got back my pocket-book. It is here, in this parcel."

"You don't say so! Empty of course?"

"No," replied Leo, after looking through it, "that is the most surprising thing of all. Nothing is missing. He has not taken a single thing."

"Impossible, it's too absurd. Look again more carefully."

Both men examined the pocketbook again, but it was as Leo had stated: both money and papers were totally undisturbed.

"This is certainly a very striking commentary on our friend the 'problem-hunter's' letter," remarked the young man; "is he given to playing such tricks as these?"

"Nonsense," said Burchardt, curtly. "His letter is a warning, and this incident is a case in point. Some person has had recourse to an uncommonly daring way of finding out everything that concerns you, evidently wishing to identify you by the aid of your own papers."

In spite of himself, Leo began to feel rather uncomfortable, but he pulled himself together, and said: "I begin to think that there is a general conspiracy to make a fool of me: a profiteering baron wants to compel me to sell the Copper House; a thief steals my papers, and sends them back untouched: a problem-hunter sends me unintelligible warnings—my poor brain is getting quite muddled! I wish I was back in California, there are such a queer lot of folk in Sweden, since last I was here."

"Listen to me, Leo," said the lawyer slowly. "There is something wrong about all this. That fellow Tassler must have some motive of which we know nothing. The first thing for you to do is to find out what Maurice Wallion knows."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

## Mail Pick-up Trial Comes to Griet



This giant 20-passenger Burnelli monoplane crashed at Keyport, N. J., in taking off on trial flight before hopping to pick up mail at sea from the Leviathan. P. W. Chapman, owner of the plane, is preparing another to make the flight and will make mail pickup a regular feature if tests prove successful. Mail will be in the post office at Newark airport many hours before the Leviathan docks.

(International Newsweek)

## Once Condemned, in Toils Again



Having once escaped from the shadow of the gallows after being convicted of the murder of Arthur Lindstrom in Chicago several years ago, Mrs. Catherine Cassler, left, of Valparaiso, Ind., is back in jail, where she faces charges of murdering Miss Cameleo Soutar, right, whose body was found in a swamp near Hebron, Ind. Chester Johnson, inset, sweetheart of Miss Soutar, is the woman's chief accuser. Her husband has admitted to having lived with the dead girl during his wife's imprisonment, and she is claimed to have made threats against both.

(International Newsweek)

## \$35,000,000 at Stake She's Queen of May



Hints of huge sums of money being squandered to a personal staff of psycho-analysts are contained in Mrs. Katherine Dexter McCormick's, above, suit, instituted in Los Angeles courts to regain custody of the millions and affections of her husband, Stanley McCormick of Chicago. She claims his affections are being alienated from herself by his physicians' treatments.

Marva Brown, of Staten Island, N. Y., popular senior at Linden Hall Seminary, Lititz, Pa., smiled her way to the throne when she was crowned May Queen at the annual school exercises rounding out the month of May.

(International Newsweek)

(International Newsweek)

## Banished Gypsies

From the New York Evening Post. Many Americans who make it a practice to attend the races at Epsom Downs will regret to learn of the attempt being made to bar gypsies from plying their vocation on notable racing occasions. A vocation they certainly have, and that is telling fortunes. This may strike cold moralists as a reprehensible kind of business, but to many thousands of innocent pleasure seekers the crossing of an old crone's hands with a piece of silver appears to be

a highly romantic part of the proceedings of the English holiday. Fifth, the Royal Academician, immortalized Epsom Downs on one of his broad canvases in which the old fortune teller is posed in front of a barouche containing some beautiful English girls. No one is deceived by the fortune teller and her vaticinations are in exact proportion to the piece of silver placed in her somewhat begrimed palm. For just a shilling—24 cents of American money—the lady will predict a meeting with a tall, dark stranger whose intentions may or may not include matrimony, while for half a crown—60 cents—the illustrious cavalier of

be encountered will offer his hand, heart and fortune.

There are laughter and hilarity, and no more notice is bestowed upon such incidents than upon the persons who are washing down lobsters with champagne or upon those less autocratic patrons of the turf secreting cold mutton with the assistance of warm ale. Acrobats, itinerant organ grinders, Punch and Judy shows and "all the fun of the fair" diversify the glorious downs of the famed Surrey track.

If the gypsies have to go, an interesting and picturesque element of

the Derby will be eliminated, and to the general sorrow. The gypsies are much beloved, whether they are of the real Romany descent or just tanned-up-for-the-day specimens of shrewd performers from the White-chapel and Somers Town districts of London. Who has brought about the prosecution of the gypsies is not exactly clear from the cable dispatches announcing the event, but perhaps chickens have been missed from the domain known as "The Durdams," the racing residence of the late Earl of Rosebery, himself formerly the owner of noted race horses and thrice a winner of the Derby.