

The MYSTERY of HARTLEY HOUSE

by Clifford S. Raymond
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"ENGAGED!"

Synopsis.—Dr. John Nicholson, just beginning his career, becomes resident physician and companion of Homer Sidney at Hartley House. Mr. Sidney is an American, a semi-invalid, old and rich and very desirous to live. Mrs. Sidney is a Spanish woman, dignified and reticent. Jed, the butler, acts like a privileged member of the family. Hartley house is a fine old isolated country place, with a murder story, a "haunted pool," and many watch-dogs, and an atmosphere of mystery. The "haunted pool" is where Richard Dobson, son of a former owner of Hartley House, had killed his brother, Arthur Dobson. Jed begins operations by locking the doctor in his room the very first night. Doctor John fixes his door so he can't be locked in. He meets Isobel, daughter of the house and falls in love at first sight. In the night he finds the butler drunk and holding Mrs. Sidney by the wrist. He interferes. Mrs. Sidney explains. John buys a revolver.

CHAPTER II—Continued.

The gardener's name was Williamson. He had been on the place almost from the time of Mr. Sidney's purchase of it. He was attached to it, proud of his work and fond of it and its results. He had a neat little cottage beyond the gardens. His wife was very pleasant and thought too much of my services. Williamson himself was a fine man, and I am interested in gardening. Consequently, having to visit the family every day or every other day, I formed a habit of talking with him.

When, by chance, I spoke of the ghost story to Williamson, with no more purpose than I ever had had in these inquiries, I noticed that he was a bit embarrassed.

"I take no stock in the stories about the pool," he said. "I'd just as lief pass it at midnight as midday—almost."

"Be honest, Williamson," I suggested laughingly.

"Almost, I said," he replied. "But I did see something at the pool."

He was a straightforward, unimaginative sort of man. I was sure he was not about to indulge in romance.

"I know something of these stories," he said. "I have not gossiped since about—was coming from town late—after midnight. It was the second year of our being here. It was in the fall or late summer—I do not remember. As I came along the road by the pool, I saw the figure of a man standing by the edge of the river. It was light enough for me to see that the figure was leaning on a stick or cane. I stopped and was going to call out, but for some reason—I don't know just why—I didn't. The figure did not move. I began to feel creepy and went on as gently as I could. Fifty feet farther, I heard a rustling in the brush and I thought I saw a face. I couldn't be sure, but I thought I did. I know I heard a rustling. When I got out in the open, I ran the rest of the way home on the turf."

"There was nothing very alarming about that," I suggested. My romance needed more substance. "You saw a man and heard a noise," said Williamson. "It was the effect."

"That was due to the hour and the place."

"No, I'm not superstitious. I was not thinking of the place. The man on the bank was different from a man. I could not see why. I didn't think he was a man. It was not because I was scared—at first, I became scared as I looked at him. He did not move. He did not seem to be alive. When I felt shivers starting up and down my back, I knew I was scared. Then when I heard the rustling, I went home as quickly and quietly as I could."

CHAPTER III.

Jed certainly was the most significant disagreeable fact in the house, and his influence the most significant malignancy. He had been sobered by the discovery of his attack upon Mrs. Sidney, but as he began to recover from his discomfiture, and as the sense of caution began to lessen, he again asserted, or suggested, control, particularly when he was drunk. He never allowed Mr. Sidney to know this. In their strange association at Horatian wine feasts, Jed was tactful, respectful, considerate and jovial.

To Mrs. Sidney he was at times courteous and thoughtful, at other times disrespectful or even brutal. Sometimes he seemed to frighten himself. When I saw that he was again beginning to show disrespect for her, I was for putting an end to it. Mrs. Sidney was horrified when I said that Jed could be brought to terms. She held up her hands.

"No, no," she said. "Not in any event! Never, please, speak to Mr. Sidney. Please never think of it. Jed is invaluable to Mr. Sidney. He is not so discourteous to me as you might think. He is gruff, and drinking does not make him better, but it is Mr. Sidney's whim that he should drink. It

would be unjust—don't you see it would be unjust—to make a point against him of behavior that Mr. Sidney causes. Please never mention it."

She was very much in earnest and was not satisfied until she had my promise that I never would speak to Mr. Sidney of Jed until I had her consent. She then showed relief, and I felt more distressed. Jed had some hold on this resolute lady that I should have liked to break.

Jed's attitude toward me was a thing to drive distracted a person who cared what it was. I did not. He could be interesting, and then I was interested in him. He could be stupid, and I avoided him. He could be surly, and I ignored him. He could be quarrelsome, and I fought him back.

It seldom was a matter of sobriety or insobriety with him. He was best natured to me at times when he was most intoxicated. He was surliest at times when he was perfectly sober. At other times he quite reversed this. One never knew from his physical condition what his disposition might be at the time.

He served at dinner when Mrs. Sidney, Isobel and I, more ceremoniously than we cared to, dined. Certain domestic ceremonies pleased Mr. Sidney and he liked to know that in some respects the baronial character of his place was being maintained as he would have maintained it if he had been active.

When Jed was in good nature, he frequently sought me out for talks, and when he was in bad nature, I encouraged him. I did not want to open up any secrets the house might have, merely to learn what they were, but I knew Mrs. Sidney needed help, and I thought I might give it if I knew how. I also thought that Jed some evening when pleasantly and good naturedly drunk and garrulous might say more than he intended. There were many opportunities, but he never did.

One night—this was in September—I was walking about the place with the mastiffs at my side. I stood a while at the edge of the woods looking at the house. In its shadowy bulk it seemed fit container of mystery. Only a few windows were illuminated. It was the river side of the house that was bright at night.

I walked slowly across the lawn toward the side where Mrs. Sidney's rooms were. A small balcony opened off her sitting room. I could hear her talking to some one on this balcony. The person she was talking to, as I heard in another moment, was Jed. I was then almost under the balcony.

"I am a resolute man," Jed was saying. "I'll have my own way. I'll have what I want. I'll make you glad to come to terms. I'm a reasonable man, too. Now, admit that I've been considerate."

I started to get out of hearing as quietly and rapidly as I could, but I heard Mrs. Sidney, her voice vibrant with indignation, say:

"I ought to have you whipped."

"That is silly, unreasonable passion," said Jed.

"I shall not hesitate to kill you," said Mrs. Sidney.

Then I went out of earshot. The fact that Jed could threaten Mrs. Sidney in this fashion was inexplicable. It could not be explained by his servility to Mr. Sidney, great as that

was. I walked about for a while, distressed and depressed; then I passed the heads of the mastiffs, went indoors and to my room.

An hour later I opened my door in response to a light rap. Mrs. Sidney was there.

"May I come in a moment?" she asked. "Thank you. I have a request to make which you cannot help but think is extraordinary—preposterous."

I placed a chair for her. She thanked me but remained standing. I thought she must be in an agony of mind, but she smiled.

"I hope it is to ask me to take Jed in hand," I said.

"No; it is to ask you to permit me to announce the engagement of my daughter Isobel to you. Don't be alarmed. It shall not make any difference in your life. It is a desperate expedient I am using out of a difficulty."

I felt as if I were in a spiritual fog. "Is that the only way I can help you out?" I asked.

"The only one," she said. "I have thought of everything."

"Has it to do with Jed again?" I asked.

"With things I cannot possibly explain. Is there any one who would be distressed by such an announcement?"

"Not a soul," I said, "except Miss Sidney."

"I would not cause pain," said Mrs. Sidney. "Are you sure there is no one?"

"Mrs. Sidney," I said, "you are the only lady who ever has given me a thought since I knew my mother. I am merely wondering what Miss Sidney will think of me in such a role. Will she understand why I take it? I am not hesitating. I hope I do not seem to be, but I know—I suspect—that your decision is sudden."

"Isobel's affection for us is greater than her demand for independence," said Mrs. Sidney. "If she knows that I asked you to consent to this announcement, she will think of you as a proved friend."

I had suggested all the precautions that were reasonable. "You certainly may make any use of me you want to," I said. She thanked me and said good night.

Isobel's view of our engagement was purely comic. She may have had a second of spiritual revolt, but comedy and consideration for her mother assuaged themselves. Mrs. Sidney, when she told Isobel of the engagement, had me present. The mother was really embarrassed, almost flustered, but she was determined. Isobel was greatly amused.

It may be imagined that I was not heroic. I might better have been a wax figure taken from a display window. I felt like one, a thing with a wax smile and no animation.

"It is merely precautionary," said Mrs. Sidney unasily. "It is quite impossible to explain. You will have to accept my judgment, Isobel, Dr. John"—an odd halfway house toward intimacy she reached and stopped at—"Dr. John has been kind enough to do as I asked him. I need and want the support of my children in what I am doing."

I felt a touch of emotion at that. Unconsciously, intent upon her main point, she had included me at the bedside and had spoken of her "children."

"Anything you do or have done is all right, mother," said Isobel, recovering from her sense of humor. "Dr. John—will not be unhappy—I am sure—will you, doctor? And I—mother—I'll get an advantage of you in this—see if I don't."

"You mustn't try to, Isobel," said Mrs. Sidney anxiously. "I am doing the best I can."

Later in the evening I saw Isobel, finding her alone in the library, where she was reading. I went in to get a book before going to bed. She was by a lamp near the fireplace, and she looked very beautiful.

"I want to talk to you," she said when she saw me. "Do you know the explanation of this?"

"No," I said.

"You are not quite honest," she said. "A man engaged to a girl he never asked to marry him might suspect that something was out of the ordinary."

"Of course, something is extraordinary," I said. "Do you know what it is?"

"No, I don't," she said. "Why don't you sit down?"

With a soft witchery of femininity she pervaded and glorified the room, but she was peremptory. I was not wailing, but I felt dejected.

"Because I don't want to sit down," I said.

Isobel smiled indulgently at me.

"Oh, sit down, Dr. John," she said. "I want to talk to you. We are engaged, you know, and engaged people ought to have a talk after the event, if not before."

"You understand how this happened," I suggested.

"I do," she said. "My mother is frightened. Jed has been trying to marry me."

"What can give him the privilege of such insolence?" I exclaimed.

"I imagine he is enamored," she said serenely. "It may seem impossible to you."

"Has this man approached you directly?" I asked.

"He has been gallant, amorous, suggestive, tender, soulful, aggressive, pleading, threatening, subservient and—I think that is all—but only in manner."

"I don't understand it," I said helplessly.

"Neither do I," she said. "And I know just enough to know that I shall not understand it. I do not like to find a Romeo among the servants, but I have learned to accept some strange conditions here—among them you."

"Don't disturb yourself about me," I said.

A good deal of my hurt pride must have found expression in that remark. "I am unjust," she said. "I know that you are doing what my mother wants done and that you are not considering yourself. I shall be reasonable. I want to make my mother's life as pleasant as it can be made. I cannot understand everything that she needs of me, but I know that you have done everything that you could do for her. I do not want to seem inconsiderate."

"I'd like to protect you and your mother," I said.

"We are indebted," said Isobel, with a chill and unkind restraint. Then she smiled and said:

"Good night, doctor. If I am inconsiderate at any time, put it down to a naturally bad temper."

Jed had taken a small shotgun and said that he was going after rabbits, which were unusually numerous and threatened to be damaging to the young brush about the place. It was an October afternoon with a warm sun. An hour or two after Jed had gone, I went out for a walk, going down by the pool.

I was in the brush for fifteen minutes, and it happened that while I was there I saw from a little prominence the figure of Jed on ahead with his shotgun. He was some distance away, but I could see that he was going stealthily from tree to tree in an odd fashion for one hunting for rabbits. It was as if he were stalking something rather than trying to kick rabbits up out of the brush.

I went on toward the pool. Once again I saw Jed ahead of me. I came out on the path and went on to the river bank, where I sat down.

Whenever I saw a piece of drift in the pool and watched its movements, I thought of the body of the slain brother. It had been whirled out into the current and had been carried down stream. On the bank had been found a few torn bits of clothing—the sleeve



"I Do Not Like to Find a Romeo Among the Servants."

of a coat, a collar spotted with blood, a necktie and a piece of a white shirt. There also had been found a heavy walking stick, bloodied and with hair in the blood.

I had not been sitting on the bank five minutes when I was startled by a shot from the nearby thickets, and a bullet hit within two feet of where I was sitting, knocking off the bark of a tree. The report was not that of a small shotgun such as Jed had carried. It was the report of a rifle or pistol.

The chipped bark showed that a bullet, not shot, had hit the tree, and I was unpleasantly conscious of what had happened. Jed had shot at me, probably with a large caliber revolver. He could not have had a rifle, unless he had one hidden in the brush. I had seen what he carried, not only as he left the house but as he was dodging through the thickets.

It likely was a pistol or a revolver, and that was why he had missed me. I was stupefied for an instant, and I did not jump or start. I was motionless, not even looking around, but I was thinking rapidly. A subconscious protective idea formed almost instantly, and when the next moment another shot came from behind me, I fell forward on my face, rolled a couple of feet to a bush, turned my face in the direction from which the shot came, got out my pistol and lay still.

After a minute or two which seemed a very long time, Jed's face came in view in the brush. He looked malevolent but seemed undecided and cautious. I think he was uncertain whether to leave my body where it lay and have it discovered, or throw it into the river and have my disappearance unexplained. His decision was given him by the noise of a farm wagon approaching on the road, and he disappeared. I was ready to shoot him if he came near me.

I was young and had youth's confidence, but nevertheless this event would have sent me away from Hartley if it had not been for Isobel and Mrs. Sidney. They needed even my small help and I had to remain. I had to remain, but I had also to protect myself. Another time Jed might not miss. On the way back to the house I thought out a plan which I believed would work. I inquired for Jed and was told that he was with Mr. Sidney. I found him there drinking, and my entrance gave him a shock which he plainly indicated. His fright made him so ugly that he was comical.

"After all, we are engaged."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

World's Highest Village.

The little village of Karzok in Kashmir is said by a writer in L'Astronomie to be the highest in the world. Its altitude is 14,936 feet. The buildings consist of a few wretched stone houses and a small Buddhist monastery. Kashmir is the most northerly state of India and lies wholly in the Himalaya mountains. Not far from its eastern border is Mt. Everest, the loftiest peak so far as known, in the world.

CUTTING DOWN HARBOR THEFTS

Vigilance of New York Harbor Motor Police Makes Stealing Extra Hazardous.

HEAVY TOLL TAKEN

Motorboat Crews Work Hand in Hand With Barge Captains—Harbor Police Pursue Pirates With Speedy Launches.

New York.—Thousands of dollars worth of loot which used to be almost the nightly toll of New York city harbor motor thieves have now dwindled to a minimum of losses, due to the efficiency of the New York harbor police. The police have jurisdiction over the navigable waters of New York city and their aquatic beat, measured in shore lines, covers a distance of 445 miles.

Speedy motorboats, equipped with automatic rapid fire guns, grappling irons and searchlights, patrol every inch of the distance, day and night. Each member of the harbor police must be able to swim, and swim well. Many of them are former sailors with a technical knowledge of nautical matters which helps them in their present work.

Work During Relieving Hour. Police and launches work in eight-hour shifts. Immediately following roll call, the launches start off for their post, nearly always close to the pier-head line, and always there at nighttime. The police launches steal along at night without sidelights and now and then flash an inquiring searchlight into the darkest depths of some deserted pier.

For this is the time and place when the motorboat pirate plies his art. He knows the relieving hour, too, and does business very fast during the 30 minutes it takes to change reliefs. In fact, so cognizant is he of the very time and place, that both are changed every fortnight to keep him guessing.

"Bleeding the Cargo." "Bleeding the cargo," they call it—the favorite form of river robbery. Defined, the phrase means stealing a little here and there, the total making a snug haul. The game is more safe if the barge captain stands in with the pirates, as he often does. He receives cash for the privilege of letting the pirates make away with a certain portion of his cargo, a small supply of



Police Chase Pirates.

sugar, a few bags of coffee or a few yards of rope. Combined, it makes a launch cargo worth considerable money.

If it is coffee the thieves are after (already weighed and passed on to the rightful owners) the captain looks the other way while the pirates pilfer a few 100-pound sacks. In 15 minutes it's in the motorboat and off to some "fence" ashore.

The river pirate's vocation is the safest one in the underworld. Nearly all the men have been sailors themselves. They operate under cover of darkness, in speedy motorboats built especially for the work.

CASE TOO MUCH FOR SOLOMON

Efforts to Follow the Example of Solomon in Judicial Decisions Sometimes Go Wrong.

Charleston, W. Va.—Efforts to follow the example of Solomon in judicial decisions sometimes go wrong. Five witnesses testified that a hen and her brood belonged to Mrs. John Frazier, who had been arrested on a charge of stealing them. Mrs. E. S. Cookham said the hen belonged to her, and six witnesses backed up her claims. Judge Henry Wertz decided to turn the chickens loose at a point half way between the two homes and see if they wouldn't go home to roost. They went to Mrs. Frazier's home. Now Mrs. Cookham's witnesses say chickens recognize as home the last place in which they were fed, and that, of course, they would go to Mrs. Frazier, who was charged with harboring them. "It's a case which even Solomon couldn't handle," says the judge.

Back Lame and Achy?

Housework is too hard for a woman who is half sick, nervous and always tired. But it keeps piling up, and gives weak kidneys no time to recover. If your back is lame and achy and your kidneys irregular; if you have "blue spells," sick headaches, nervousness, dizziness and rheumatic pains, use Doan's Kidney Pills. They have done wonders for thousands of worn out women.

A Nebraska Case

Mrs. W. B. Gardner, Friend, Neb., says: "I had the grip last fall and it left my kidneys in a weak condition. My kidneys acted too often and there was a heavy, dull ache across the small of my back. I suffered with dizzy, sick headaches. I heard of Doan's Kidney Pills and got a box and they relieved my condition in a week. My back is strong and my kidneys work good now."

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FREEKLES

Or an Outside Nail. He had bought a house. It had been such a bargain that he couldn't risk writing till his fiancee saw it. But she was delighted to hear the news and questioned him eagerly about it.

"How many clothes closets are there, Henry," she demanded.

"There are six," replied the man, proudly.

"But that's hardly enough, Henry."

"What do you want with more than six closets? That's enough to hang your clothes in, is it not?"

"Yes, dear," replied the maiden.

"My, but you'll want part of one for your clothes, won't you, Henry?"

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He Didn't Have to Lie. Dick had been spending the day with a little playmate, and when his mother called for him he hopped in the machine and settled himself comfortably, saying: "Thank heavens, that's once I didn't have to tell a lie."

His mother asked what he meant, and he said: "Well, you see Mike's mother wasn't home, so I didn't have to say I had a good time, cause I didn't."

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