

The Mystery of Hartley House

By CLIFFORD S. RAYMOND

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BLACKMAIL.

Synopsis.—Dr. John Michelson, 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 retiring. Jed, the butler, acts like a privileged member of the family. The family has come from Montevideo, South America. 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 Isabel, daughter of the house, and falls in love at first sight. In the night he finds the drunk and holding Mrs. Sidney by the wrist. He interferes. Mrs. Sidney makes light of it. John buys a revolver. John overhears Jed telling Mrs. Sidney he will have his way. In reply she says she will not hesitate to kill him. Mrs. Sidney asks John to consent to the announcement of his engagement to Isabel. The young people consent to the make-believe engagement. Later they find it is to head off Jed, who would marry Isabel. Jed tries to kill John, but the matter is smoothed over. John, though "engaged" to Isabel, conceals his love. Mr. Sidney visits a nearby prison and has Dobson, the murderer, pointed out. Jed tells the story of the Dobson murder. The family go to South America for the winter. John is left at home, but the "engagement" is not broken. John hears the story of a tragedy "that might have happened in Montevideo." The family returns. A mysterious Spaniard appears. Jed recognizes him and wants to kill him. The sailor plays burglar. Mr. Brown, "attorney" for the sailor, calls on John.

CHAPTER VIII—Continued.

"Where was that?" I asked. The little man pulled at his coat cuffs and smiled again.

"My client being Spanish and Mr. Sidney having lived many years in Montevideo, it might be assumed that it was there," he said. "It was there, and my client came into possession of a document—by dishonest means, I suspect—of which he now retains only one page. I wish to leave a copy of this page with you, and later to find out to what extent it interests Mr. Sidney."

"You mean—to find out if he will submit to blackmail," I said.

"I anticipated your remark," he said. "I look at the matter differently. If Mr. Sidney has something to conceal, we shall be glad to help him to conceal it. I will leave a copy of the page from the document with you, and with your permission will see you later."

He handed me a long envelope and with a bow asked to be shown to the door. Jed, not suspecting that the little man had any connection with the sailor, showed him out.

I went to my room to examine the paper which had been left with me. It was accompanied by an explanatory statement by "Attorney Philletus M. Brown." I will give the explanatory statement first.

Memoranda for Dr. Michelson: The accompanying typewritten sheet is a part of a document stolen from Mr. Sidney in Montevideo ten years ago by Alejandro Dravada, then a servant in the capacity of porter. Dravada preserves the original, of which I have had several typewritten copies made. Dravada had the complete document in his hands, but only for a short while. He had discovered, in the course of several years' service under Mr. Sidney in Montevideo, that a strong box in Mr. Sidney's room was particularly guarded. He supposed it contained jewels. He is, I should judge, a person of small moral character and great cupidity. He determined to steal the box, hoping that its contents would enable him to get married and set himself up in a small business.

"He succeeded in getting the box, by entering Mr. Sidney's room, but before he could make his escape he was unfortunately enough to be discovered by another servant, known to you as Jed. Jed leveled a revolver at my client and made him surrender the box."

"I can only conjecture here—frequently this case has caused me to conjecture; but I think that the man Jed, although he knew something valuable was contained in the box, thought, as did my Spanish client, that it was personal property; and, unlike my client, he was not careless of property rights. This conjecture may not mislead you, but I imagine you asking: 'Why did not Jed steal the box?' afterward took from my client? It was, I think, because the man Jed was by nature honest, and it was only when his inhibitions had been broken down by the sight of another man committing a crime which had been easier for him to commit, that he lost control of his morals."

"The man Jed took the box. My client, desperate at finding himself

robbed of his loot, armed himself immediately and broke into Jed's room shortly thereafter. He found Jed desolately looking at a mass of papers, which was all the supposed jewel casket contained.

"In this disappointing occupation Jed was aroused by the stealthy entrance of my client through a window, but there was no conflict. Jed pointed to the papers and laughed. My client was shrewd enough to read Jed's emotions. He knew that the treasure trove had proved a soap bubble. He is a man of violent temper. In his double disappointment he sprang at Jed, stabbed him in the shoulder, seized the papers, scattered them about the room and jumped out of the window.

"If this had been all, I should have no client in this case. But in his rage Dravada, when he was throwing the papers about, had unconsciously retained one sheet in his clenched fist. He found it in his fist when he came out of his senseless and inordinate rage later; and then, his natural cupidity and cunning reasserted, he realized that something was being guarded in the box; that something being only papers, it must follow that the papers were valuable. He reproached himself that his anger had defeated his judgment when it was possible for him to take the entire contents of the box. He did not dare go back; he had stabbed Jed; the house might be alarmed. He had only a single sheet of the guarded manuscript. It is a copy of that sheet which you find here.

"I said I would give you my conjectures. You will ask first why I am so candid in committing to writing a communication of this nature. It is because: first, I prefer to write it, owing to a physical timidity in conversation; and second, but equally important, because I know the last thing Mr. Sidney or any true friend of Mr. Sidney's, desires is to have the story, of which this is a page, made public.

"I do not know what this story is, but I know who does know what it is. That person is the man Jed—now, as before, a servant of Mr. Sidney. I have made sufficient inquiry as to the position of Jed in the household of Mr. Sidney to know that he retains the manuscript found in the box, or if he does not retain it, knows its contents.

"The visit of Mr. Sidney and his family to Montevideo this winter betrayed Jed's whereabouts to Dravada. He came north after they had sailed. His cupidity has determination. I think your man Jed appreciates that. I think from what Dravada has told me, in his simple boasting fashion, that Jed was dismayed to see him again in Montevideo.

"My client's first impulse, having followed Jed to the United States, was to get at this secret by force or theft, but he sees the physical difficulties in the way; and being, except in his violent moments, a reasonable man, he has had recourse to an attorney to obtain such settlement as his knowledge may be worth.

"I do not wish to defend my course in the matter. I suggest merely that Mr. Sidney and all concerned will fare the better for having a man of consideration and discretion, such as I flatter myself I am, intervening between them and a man of the moral complexion indicated by my client. I shall be at your disposal, doctor, within any reasonable time. I leave it to your judgment to handle the matter within Hartley house."

The copy of manuscript which accompanied the letter was as follows:

"... would be fatal to the success of what I have done and intend to do if this confession were to be found. It might be asked, then, why expose myself and my happiness to the chance of discovery of things which I may lock forever by simply forgetting. It is sufficient answer to that question to admit that for me I could not be content unless it were certain that what I have done should be known. I want the record of it known. It increases my satisfaction to know that I shall cause moralists to be indignant. I want to be known as a criminal. I want my crime to be talked about. I want it remembered. That is the savor of my life. It would be impossible for me to obtain a sufficient satisfaction unless I made it possible for the story of a crime to be known some time. So long as I live, I shall need and seek concealment; but I should not be happy unless I could anticipate disclosure. My crime ..."

That was all.

Several persons—two at least; Dravada and Attorney Brown—knew as much as I had read. Three persons, in the house, Mr. Sidney, Mrs. Sidney and Jed, knew the story completely.

It was this knowledge which had given Jed his control in the house, Mrs. Sidney her unhappiness and Mr. Sidney some of his pleasures.

The search for a solvent of the Hartley house mysteries was insistent. Alcott's incidental remark came back to me: "It might have been Montevideo."

I felt uncomfortable to recall this, ashamed and abashed, as if in recalling it I had done something to lower myself in my self-respect. I had to

go to Mrs. Sidney with the information and insinuations Attorney Philletus M. Brown had given me: My desire was to protect her from precisely this kind of trouble; my necessity was to carry the trouble to her. I had to know how to act.

By way of preliminary I told her of the three appearances of the Spaniard and then of the appearances of the lawyer. When I offered her the sheet of paper containing a transcript of a page of Mr. Sidney's diary, her hands trembled, but she took the sheet resolutely. She was greatly alarmed but regained her composure.

She read the page hurriedly and then more carefully and, it seemed, with relief.

"I have to deal with these men," I said, "and I must know how to do it. They can be dealt with by criminal law if there is no reason why protection should not be sought in that fashion."

"There is," said Mrs. Sidney, "and I cannot tell you the reason."

"You know that I do not ask for it," I said.

"You know there is something very strange about this house?"

"That was evident in twenty-four hours," I said, "but it means nothing to me. I am not curious. I merely want to know how to deal with these men."

"It is not a lack of confidence in you that keeps me from telling what is wrong here," said Mrs. Sidney. "It would be a relief to do so. It has been hard to stand it all alone, John."

I was glad, for the first time consciously, that my name was John. It had an honest, straightforward sound, suggesting the plain, honest dealing that might be needed in this house.

"The reason I do not tell you, John," said Mrs. Sidney, "is because I would not have another conscience distressed. You could never again be really happy

was a sailor on a British ship which sailed from Montevideo to Liverpool, and he became tired of sea work. Mr. Sidney had seen him about the wharf and had been attracted to him. They had talked enough for Mr. Sidney to learn of Jed's ambition for a comfortable life on shore. Mr. Sidney gave him the chance to realize it in our house.

"Jed, after he was taken into the house, found that Mr. Sidney used great precautions with something which he locked in a box. When Dravada came, he also saw the box which Mr. Sidney seemed to guard so carefully. Dravada decided to steal whatever was in the box. Jed found him in the act. They fought, but Jed retained the contents—Mr. Sidney's manuscript."

"Then Jed knows the secret?" I asked.

"He does."

"And Dravada does not?"

"He cannot know any more than you know from reading this one sheet from the manuscript."

"Where is the manuscript?"

"Jed has it."

"Does Mr. Sidney know that?"

"Not yet. You have been wondering at Jed's control in the house. He has the manuscript, and he knows the story which for your own sake I would not have you know. He presumes upon his knowledge."

"But doesn't Mr. Sidney ever want to see the manuscript he sets such store by?" I asked.

"No. He wants to know it is in his strong box. If he ever finds that it is not, we shall have to meet the situation somehow. God knows how."

"Then this sailor and this blackmailing lawyer know no more than I know now?"

"No more, so far as I am aware."

Brown, the lawyer, came to Hartley house the next day to see me. I think he regarded his plan of blackmail as irresistible. I wonder that he did not have an express wagon and a large chest with him. He was amiable and expectant.

"You have decided?" he said as Jed, having brought him to me on the porch, went away. He had his cane and his gloves and his nap-worn suit.

"You get nothing," I said, "and may act upon that information."

The disappointment was unpleasant to him. If I wanted to dramatize the effect, I'd say it was catastrophic. He sat down suddenly in the nearest wicker chair, and his face became ugly in appearance.

"You must know, doctor," he said, "that I am nerved to the performance of my duty by the thought of a wife and two daughters for whom I have provided indifferently. I will not say that their situation is desperate, but it may make me desperate. I feel that we have a claim here which might easily be adjusted."

"You use a number of euphemisms for blackmail," I said, "and none of them conceals your meaning. If your wife and daughters are in need, you might approach Mrs. Sidney as the almoner of Mr. Sidney's charities. That, at least, would be an honest statement of your case, and it might be effective."

He brightened at once.

"I thank you for a lesson in procedure," he said. "We shall consider it upon such an understanding."

I saw the mistake I had made.

"I assure you," I said, "you may consider nothing upon the terms you wish to have considered in this house. Your attempt at blackmail is so unconsidered that you may go shriek to the world or to the prosecuting attorney. The family is not interested in you or your client."

The shabby little fellow seemed to get blue-nosed and blue-lipped in disappointment.

"I am sure you cannot have considered your interests," he said. "Mr. and Mrs. Sidney certainly do not want a scandal."

"Certainly not. How are they threatened with one?"

"But the manuscript indicates one."

"Does it? I have read it, and I knew nothing. You have read it. What do you know?"

"I can read English," he said with spirit. "I read in Mr. Sidney's handwriting that he had committed a crime and that he was committing an indiscretion in putting the account on paper."



"The Only Reason I Do Not Tell What the Manuscript Contains is Because I Value Your Peace of Mind."

Jed falls into the hands of his enemies.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Why Clear Nights Are Colder. A clear, bright starlight night in winter is always much colder than a cloudy one. The reason for this is that the heat of the earth is always thrown off more quickly when there is nothing to intercept it. Clouds act as a kind of blanket, and in preventing the earth's heat from escaping, tend to keep the atmosphere warm.

There is no telling where a sinner will land when he begins to monkey with a fishing outfit on Sunday.

WOMAN SLAYS HER AVENGER

Shoots Man Who Had Killed Two Others Who Had Attacked Her Honor.

ARGUES OVER MOTOR

First Husband Ambushed and Killed Six Years Ago—Her Ranch Foreman and His Father Were Shot by Wilson.

Winfield, Kan.—A year and a half after he had shot two men to death on the main street of Tahlequah, Okla., to avenge his wife's honor, Homer S. Wilson, himself, was shot and killed on a lonely country road, near Winfield, Kan., by Mrs. Wilson. He is the fourth man intimately acquainted with his pretty dark-haired wife, who has perished.

Charles West, first husband of Mrs. Wilson, was shot and killed from ambush near Tahlequah six years ago. Then Frank Anthony and his father, William, fell at Wilson's hands because Wilson charged young Anthony, foreman of Mrs. Wilson's ranch, at Tahlequah, had been too friendly with Mrs. Wilson while her husband was in the army.

Were Returning From Cattle Buying Trip.

Mrs. Wilson killed her husband as they were returning from a cattle buying trip to Dexter, 22 miles east of Winfield. With the Wilsons at the time were Charles Ridgeway and Ed Glass, who have ranches near Dexter.

Wilson had been driving his automobile very fast, according to the story told by eye witnesses to the tragedy. When a stop was made for tire trouble and Wilson left the car, Mrs. Wilson slid into the driver's seat, insisting she would drive. An argument followed and Mrs. Wilson suddenly shot twice with an automatic pistol she had taken from the flap of one of the seats.

After Wilson had been inducted into the service he complained to the draft officials that his wife had reported suf-



Mrs. Wilson Suddenly Shot Twice.

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