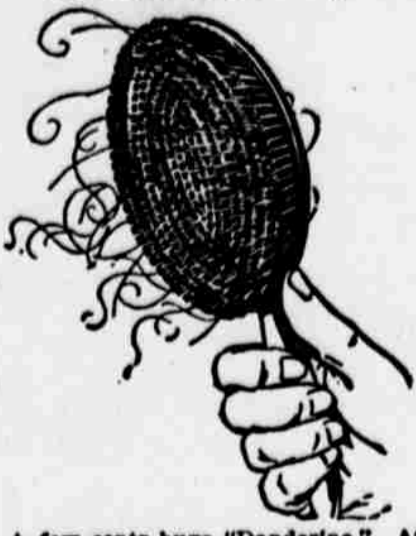


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If neglected, often leads to serious trouble. Safeguard your health, relieve your distress and soothe your irritated throat by taking

PISO'S

The Mystery of Hartley House

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By **CLIFFORD S. RAYMOND**

Illustrated by **IRWIN MYERS**

CHAPTER X—Continued.

"Finally the old boy got up with the case held tight under his arm and went toward the door with the girl and the foreigner following him, and the foreigner talking fast and loud. She ran outside and all got into the car, the girl beside the old boy, who was driving, and the foreigner behind. As the old boy started the car, the foreigner made a grab for the case, but the old boy was too quick for him and dropped it to the floor. The car swerved toward the ditch.

"You can't drive a car that way," I said. "You'd better tell that fellow to lay off."

"I've told him," said the old boy. "If he keeps on bothering me, I'll tell him with a gun. He'll kill all of us." "So they started, but they hadn't gone a quarter of a mile when I heard the girl scream. I got my motorcycle, which was out in front, and went down the road after them. There was sure going to be an accident if the foreigner kept grabbing at the man at the wheel. They must have been going pretty fast. I chased them a mile and a half, and several times I heard the girl cry out ahead in the dark.

"I was within two hundred yards of them when the girl screamed louder than ever, and I heard a crash. I knew they'd get it, and they had. The car had gone into a tree at the side of the road.

"The old boy was dead, and the girl was unconscious—but the foreigner was gone."

"What about the leather case?" asked a man in the group about the constable. It was the question I could have shouted out myself.

"It was gone, too. The old boy did not have a single paper in his pockets, but after I got help and we got attention for the girl, we found a letter in her purse addressed to Miss Agnes Mitchell, Hartley house, Hartley. That was the only identification we had. I telephoned over to Hartley and a man said he would be over. That's all I know about it. I've got to be getting over to the station. It's about time that man from Hartley was looking me up."

As he went out, I followed him, and on the sidewalk I introduced myself.

CHAPTER XI.

The constable looked at me for an instant as if uncertain whether to regard my manner of getting his narrative as altogether friendly.

"You were telling what I wanted to know," I suggested. "I came in because I was directed to inquire for you there. I did not interrupt you, but it was without intent of gaining information that I did not expect to gain otherwise."

"It's all right," said the constable. "You see through me, though. I was just thinking how uncomfortable I ought to have been with you listening, and I was pretty near getting sore. The first thing is the identification of the body. For the time being, it is in the station-house."

There was no possible doubt, even before I looked at the face, from which the constable drew the sheet which covered the body as it lay on a bench. The shabby little villain's rascally schemes, timid but villainous—necessary, probably, in his married and unhappy life—were closed by death.

A deputy of the coroner was present, and he took a deposition by me which gave merely the dead man's name, stated that he had called several times at Hartley house on business, and that I had no personal knowledge of the manner in which he came to his death.

That was all the authorities needed of me. A maid by the name of Agnes Mitchell had been given temporary employment at Hartley house. It was undoubtedly she who was the companion of the man who had been killed.

I asked the constable where I might see the maid and whether she was too badly injured to talk to any one. He said that she had been taken to the nearest hospital, which was ten miles away. He did not know how serious her injuries were. I had my driver take me to the hospital and found that as a representative of the family for which she was employed I might talk to her.

She was in pain and heavily bandaged, but was conscious and willing to talk.

"Agnes," I said, when the nurse had left us, "I am not here to make a great deal of trouble for you, but if I show leniency it will be in exchange for your confidence. We have known that an unscrupulous gang of rascals have had designs on Hartley house. Evidently you have yielded to some temptation they offered you. Deal with me frankly, and I'll be more than lenient."

She told me that the lawyer had tried to corrupt the maid, Anna, who had asked, later, for a month's leave. She found that she did not have the courage for the work. The lawyer evaded the plan of introducing a resolute and reliable woman into the house by the expedient adopted. Her instructions were to find and take away the case she would find concealed.

had made it easy for the maid to search through his belongings. Agnes did not know what value was attached to the manuscript. It was her obligation merely to get it.

The lawyer was to have an automobile waiting on the road beyond the oak grove. He was to be by the small door, through which the maid escaped. She ransacked Jed's room in the fashion of which I saw the result, and found the box cunningly hidden in his bed-springs in a manner so contrived that except to careful investigation it seemed to be a part of the structure of the bed.

Agnes said that she had planned to make her escape after my round of the house, but her excitement at finding the thing so earnestly sought betrayed her into incautiousness.

The lawyer's plan was to take the road we would think less likely to take in case there were pursuit, and for that reason had gone toward Horwich. The Spaniard was not expected to meet them, but he knew they intended to go through Horwich, and he knew approximately the time they would get there if they were successful. The train which stopped at Horwich to let off passengers allowed him to act upon a plan which his suspicions of his lawyer's good faith suggested. He thought that if the lawyer saw a barroom light he would stop for a drink.

He was in Horwich unexpectedly to meet the girl and the lawyer. The scene in the Half Day barroom followed. The Spaniard was determined to have possession of the manuscript. The lawyer was determined he should not have it. They struggled as the lawyer tried to drive the car, having several narrow escapes from the ditch.

Then the Spaniard, in a rage, abandoned all caution and threw himself bodily on the lawyer, who lost control of the car and hit a tree. That was all the girl knew.

I thought a while, trying to make up my mind what further to do with the girl. Finally I said: "Agnes, I am inclined to compromise with the law. I will prefer no charges against you now, and without forecasting the future, I may intimate



"Because I Am a Thief and Know the Business and Have a Record."

that no charges ever will be preferred against you if I may have you removed to Hartley house, where you will have every care, but where you must remain under a sure but unobtrusive surveillance until we give you permission to go."

In spite of her pain the girl smiled. "You would amuse the police," she said.

"Why?" I asked.

"Why do you suppose the lawyer hired me for this job?"

"Because you were available, suitable and easily tempted."

"Because I am a thief and know the business and have a record."

That was a facer, but it did not change the present need.

"You have less reason, then, for wanting to come to the attention of the police again?"

"I have no reason at all."

"Then you will come to Hartley house as I suggested?"

"Sure, if you can get me there without killing me."

I made the necessary arrangements, and Agnes set out on her return, in an ambulance.

The servant who opened the door as we drove up was Jed.

I could not help showing by a start and by the expression on my face that I was astonished by his reappearance. This pleased him. When he acted he liked to produce effects. He looked inquiringly at the ambulance and then inquiringly at me. By that time I was able to accept him as a usual part of the household.

"Get someone to help you with a stretcher, Jed," I said. "Agnes, a maid, has been hurt. Then tell Mrs. Aldrich I should like to see her in the office as soon as it is convenient."

"Yes, sir," said Jed.

Mrs. Aldrich came immediately, and I told her the girl Agnes was to be treated with every consideration and that if it were possible to have the other maids regard her kindly so as not to make her feel obnoxious, it would be only Christian.

Mrs. Aldrich was a very stanch churchwoman and I could see in the tightening of her lips that such soft treatment of a woman caught in crime did not satisfy her ideas of morality.

She went out dissatisfied, but I knew she would do her best. Jed came in, still in his superserviceable mood.

"Would you like some coffee, sir?" he asked. I was tired and did want a stimulant.

"Yes, Jed I would—thank you." I said as heartily as I could, determined to break down his triumph of imperturbability by a commonplace handling of him. He brought the tray.

"Sit down," I said. "Your schemes have come to a bad end in this house. It will do you no good, and it may destroy the family. Things are beyond your control or my control. The Spaniard has the manuscript he was after. Your power is gone. It is transferred to him."

"So you are familiar with this affair?"

"I am not. I only know what has happened since I came here. I do not want to know any more."

"You are wise. There is nothing but unhappiness and danger in knowing. It is not news to me that Dravada has Mr. Sidney's diary. They released me after they learned that the manuscript had been found and that the lawyer and Dravada had it."

Jed then sat down and told what had happened to him. I was very angry, remembering Isobel as she came hunning in that night with her sleeve torn from her waist. I wondered that I could hear the man calmly, but he had extraordinary power, being moved by extraordinary emotions.

"In the first place," he said, "may I say that I have been preposterous? You think I am a lunatic. Sometimes I am, almost. It is easy enough to be a cabbage if you are one. It is sometimes hard to seem one if you are not. I've been a fool—but I've been hunting for something that I have not been able to find. I want happiness and importance. My egotism asks for it, but my common sense is going to have its way. That's preliminary."

Then he told his experiences. He had become violent with Isobel. He wanted it understood that he had been desperate but respectful. He had no idea of taking hold of her or of tearing her sleeve. She had given him a moral shock. He felt like a worm. He had been attacked suddenly by the men who had overpowered him. They had come upon him from the brush. He had recognized Dravada at once. He might have overcome the Spaniard, but the desperate little lawyer, in a frenzy of activity, had been just bold and strong enough to interfere so that Jed had been made helpless. Another man had come breathlessly to help. Jed had been bound and gagged. He had been hustled into the screen of woods and beyond them to a waiting automobile.

His captors, in the automobile, had headed for the city and entered it after midnight. They had taken their prisoner to a tenement on the East side. For several days the lawyer and Dravada had tried to extort the secret from Jed by threats. They had tried to buy it by promise of an equitable division of profits. The lawyer had been quite frantic part of the time. Jed said, bounding about in an ecstasy of rage. At other times he had been friendly and persuasive.

Dravada had been savage and wanted to try torture, but the attorney, enraged as he frequently became in his failure and disappointment, would not permit this and had got a trustworthy rascal of his acquaintance named Sim, with two other men, to keep a constant guard over Jed with a view not only to prevent his escape but to keep Dravada from doing him harm or taking him away.

The lawyer, both dismayed and enraged by Jed's obstinacy, had finally thought of corrupting someone in the house to find and steal the manuscript. The best he had been able to do was to persuade a maid to prove false enough to introduce the real thief.

"Dravada and the lawyer never had any hesitancy at having their quarrels in the room where they held me," Jed said. "Brown was afraid Dravada would corrupt the fellow Sim, torture me and get the story. Dravada was afraid Brown would corrupt someone in Hartley house and get the manuscript. Each one feared that the other would succeed independently and get away without making a division."

"Dravada pretended to be satisfied when Brown told him that he must not appear near Hartley. When they thought they were going to succeed in stealing the manuscript out of my room Brown proved to Dravada that the only one of them that could go to meet the maid was Brown. Dravada appeared to accept that as reasonable, and he must have put Brown off his guard, because Brown told him all the plans.

"Dravada used to be very stupid, but his cupidity has given him a sort of intelligence. He allowed Brown to think he was perfectly satisfied, but he wasn't at all. By seeming to be satisfied he learned all about the details of the plan, and he knew that Brown, to avoid pursuit, intended to take the way to Horwich."

"He knew that if Brown went through Horwich he would stop for several drinks. He would need them if he was disappointed. He would have to have them if he had the manuscript and was excited by it. So Dravada went to Horwich. It all worked out, and when Brown got to the village, he found Dravada. Then he telephoned to the fellow Sim to let me go. I was perfectly harmless. It was an interesting situation."

"I could wish Dravada had tortured you," I said to Jed. "He has the means now, through you, to torture this family."

"I said I knew Dravada had the manuscript," said Jed. "I did that for effect. What I ought to have said was that I knew he thought he had the manuscript. If I had no more than the intelligence you credit me with, doctor, I could not have conducted this affair so long. What Dravada has is not the diary of Mr. Sidney."

Until I felt the relief following Jed's explanation that the blackmailers had stolen only a decoy, I did not fully realize into what dependency our predicament up to that time had thrust me. If Mr. Sidney's diary were being read by unscrupulous men, we might expect anything.

The lawyer, whose shrewdness and lack of morals made him formidable was dead. The Spaniard would soon discover his disappointment and would be furious. I thought the physical danger to Jed was greater than ever and found some pleasure in telling him so.

He was convinced of that himself and was not happy.

"Why don't you end your rascality?" I urged him. "Why don't you give the manuscript to Mrs. Sidney and allow her to make whatever disposition she wants of it? Then your conscience will be easy—your position in this house will for the first time be tolerable to a decent man, and your physical security will be promoted."

He would not. He seemed to hesitate for a moment, but his purpose was too long fixed and too much a part of his life.

He no longer was surly with me, and I seemed to have lost my ability to enrage him. We parted with my telling him that there would be no possible truce or peace between us unless he respected the women of the household. He bowed.

"Anything else, sir?" he asked; and then he departed as the servant.

Mrs. Sidney's relief to find that the robbery had proved only a hoax on the robbers was such as would come from escape from tangible horrors. The lady had been keeping control of herself, as was necessary to protect her husband and daughter from her own agony of mind and to keep the household from finding significance in what could be passed over as a trivial piece of robbery.

When she learned that the alarm was over, she relaxed happily in her chair, and I feared that she might collapse; but in a moment she had struggled back to command of herself. Then she excused herself and went into her bedroom—for prayer, I knew.

Mr. Sidney's joy at the return of Jed was robust, and Jed went to bed very tipsy with two bottles of wine in him. I found him in the hall as I went my rounds of the house. He was singing.

I knew we'd hear again and soon from Dravada, but not in what manner. Naturally I was apprehensive and no doubt Jed was more so, although to save himself from my contempt he tried to conceal his fears.

The Spaniard could not be expected to accept his failure as final. He would try again. That expectation was fulfilled in a disconcerting fashion.

Thus far we had been dealing with chance, with apparitions and threats. We now came to deal with inevitability. Our experiences had been disagreeable, but they had not presented unescapable consequences. We had a choice of ways. Now we entered a way from which there was no escape.

Four days after Jed's return a man came to Hartley house and inquired for me. He was a detective. His name was Morgan; he was the head of the Morgan Metropolitan Detective agency. I thought on first seeing him—while yet wondering what his business with us could be, and yet knowing instinctively that it had to do with Dravada—that this newcomer had more than a suggestion of shrewd malvolence in his face.

Before he was through his interview with me, or rather his inquiries into our case. We were no longer progressing at the mercy of opportunity or chance. Morgan was fate. The whole aspect had been altered. Morgan, a muscular, black-haired, sordid, unscrupulous man of action and oblivious of queer action, was pure Greek tragedy to us.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Extraordinary Coincidence.

The custom has prevailed with a certain Episcopal church in California of presenting each scholar of the Sunday school with an egg at the celebration of Easter. On one occasion, when that point in the service was reached which had been set apart for this interesting ceremony, the clergyman rose and made the announcement: "Hymn No. 419, 'Begin, My Soul, the Exalted Lay,' after which the eggs will be distributed."—Boston Transcript.

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To facilitate the scheme for taking the finger-prints of infants in America, it is proposed to make the impressions in jam.—The Passing Show (London).

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