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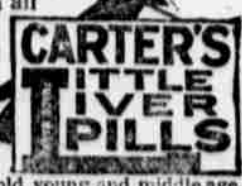
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W. N. U., LINCOLN NO. 43-1920.

The MYSTERY of HARTLEY HOUSE by Clifford S. Raymond Illustrated by Irwin Myer Copyright by George H. Doran Co

CHAPTER XI—Continued.

He was a curious instrument of such abstract justice. He served fate as if it had sworn out a police court warrant. As a nemesis he was slow, or at least a beadle or a bailiff. The manner in which he served inevitability will appear. Mr. Sidney's crime, I soon saw, whatever manner or kind of crime it had been, was one of unescapable consequence.

"A man named Dravada," said Morgan, after we had looked at each other in interrogative hostility for an instant, "has come to our agency with a very strange tale. From what I learn of the things he and his disreputable attorney have done, I can see that they are heading directly into the penitentiary. I understand that the lawyer is dead and that all their schemes are closed. Dravada has come to our agency, and I have come directly to you. I want you to understand our methods of doing business. They are honest. The paper Dravada carries about him says that crime has been committed. Are you familiar with that paper?"

"I have seen what a blackmailing lawyer said was a copy of a sheet in the possession of Dravada."

"I am not much of a literary man," said Morgan, taking from a black leather case a manuscript which he handed to me, "but I've read 'The Moonstone,' and this looks to me like a couple of chapters copied out of it. Probably you are familiar with 'The Moonstone.'"

"I have read it several times."

"Then what do you make of that manuscript?"

I looked at several of the pages. The manuscript was a copy of part of 'The Moonstone.'

"I am right, then," said Morgan. "Moonshine" it had better be called. That's the manuscript the maid stole out of your man Jed's room and that Dravada took after the lawyer had been killed. Here's my reasoning—maybe you will be interested: This man Jed and this fellow Dravada worked for Mr. Sidney in Montevideo. Oravada is a thief; Jed isn't much better. Dravada got one sheet of a manuscript that had something to do with a concealed crime. Jed got the rest of the manuscript, so Dravada says. Dravada has been trying to make Jed go 50-50. He has been trying to get the rest of the manuscript. He'll murder Jed yet.

"Now here's the way I look at it: A man like Jed does not go to the trouble of copying a couple of chapters of 'The Moonshine' and planting the copy in his room just to devil a desperate fellow like Dravada. He does

blatantly and trustworthiness had been established, but if they had been, and if the question were merely one of fidelity and stanchness, I hoped I could be regarded loyal.

"If only those qualities were involved, John," said Mrs. Sidney, "you could have the inmost secrets of my soul. I would trust you with anything anywhere, but for your own salvation I would not have this terrible thing in your consciousness. Knowledge of it would curse you. It will be unless there is expiation in a great love, and exculpation in self-sacrifice. Jed's soul is gone beyond redemption. I dare not think of Mr. Sidney nor of myself. But Jed is a gross sinner."

She was by nature and wish an unemotional, untheatrical lady, but she was dramatic in her seriousness. Then she said:

"I should like to have you for a son."

I was much embarrassed—the more so when she kissed me. To conceal some disconcerting emotions I laughed awkwardly and went on about my business. I was to go blindfolded into the intricacies of the strangest situations I ever encountered.

With early October beautiful days came and brought tranquillity. Life is full of zest in October, the rich, rare month of the year; physical senses are made more sensitive. Hartley house blazed out in autumn splendor. What had been beautiful before was now glorified.

I could have hours, but not complete days of happiness. I could use my common sense part of the time, but Isobel broke it down at other times. Occasionally I thought her willful and tried to believe that she amused herself by playing the devil with the only man available, but when I came to my senses, I knew I was a fool.

All she did was to associate frankly and friendly with the only available man, and if she liked to be with me, it was a compliment I did not see that I deserved.

With the return to normality, with Jed back and immediate alarm quieted, our family routine was re-established. Dinner, which had been less the sociable occasion that it might have been, because of Jed's malevolent superservicability, became a pleasant event.

Heretofore Jed had made it a point to restrict and embarrass our attempts at easy conversation. Now he withdrew and left us to ourselves.

It was owing to this extraordinarily favorable disposition that I, coming to dinner one evening in a sullen mood, had opportunity to take up a subject which concerned me.

ability entered the house. We were no longer dodging chance. Morgan surely and certainly represented fate. It had become only a matter of time when in one fashion or another the security of this home, so carefully studied, would be invaded successfully. That was apparent. It might be that Morgan would be able to expose us to nothing more than the publicity he mentioned. But that was sufficient; it would be destructive.

I had telephoned McGuire, telling him of Morgan's part in the new turn of events, and he later informed me that two of the Morgan agency operatives had sailed for South America, taking Dravada with them. The hunt had begun—but a long way off.

The hunters knew as much of the quarry as I did, and I had no way of knowing whether it was likely that they could find a trail back to Hartley house. It was impossible not to feel uneasy. Dravada had been to me, whatever he had been to Jed, merely an incident grotesque and extravagant, a preposterous dash of color in old conditions. The lawyer had been resourceful and cunning enough, but his actions had to be those of a slinking feral animal. He was not to be greatly feared, but Morgan was. He had the machinery for the work. His cupidty was aroused. Everyascal who smelled the mystery of Hartley house became eager to follow the scent into the strong box of the house.

I thought I was not assuming enough responsibility. I asked Mrs. Sidney again if it would be of service to give me the secret of the house. I told her I was far from certain that my reli-

CHAPTER XII.

Mr. Morgan was pacing forth and back in the office much enraged. "Look here," he said. "This does not get us anywhere. My time is valuable. I am wasting a lot of it. I'll tell you now I've got enough information to know this is the sort of case we like, a tough case. I haven't been fooled a bit. You may not be interested. Maybe no one here is interested, but I'm interested. Do you get that, Mr. Doctor, Mr. Representative, Mr. Fiance? I'm interested. This case is going to be gone into. There's a crime concealed somewhere which will do our agency good to discover. We shan't do it for money. We shall do it for publicity. The advertising will be worth thousands of dollars to us. Do you understand me?"

"I know you can make life very miserable for us for a couple of days. You will have to use your own judgment."

"I can pack that lawn out there with reporters and photographers from the city. They'll see and talk to Mr. Sidney. Take my word for that. They'll see and talk to Mrs. Sidney and to Miss Sidney. I can bring that down to you by midnight."

"The house has some protections," I said. "You might suggest that to the newspaper people for their own good."

"The slyster and that common thief Ann Forth got in, didn't they?"

"I don't know Ann Forth."

"No, but you know Agnes Mitchell. Well, you know Ann Forth, man. Say, you simpleton, you don't know what you're up against. This story just as it stands—copy of sheet from manuscript—Spaniard—running off with Jed—thief of manuscript—death of slyster—Ann Forth back in house—hidden crime—millionaire reclusive—beautiful daughter—haunted house—its copy for every paper in the country."

I knew it and was appalled by the certain prospects.

"It would be a very cruel and useless thing to do," I said, "but as I told you, you must use your own judgment. We are not interested in this child's nursery story you are following, and I do not intend to have people who are not well disturbed by the questioning of a detective."

I knew how to deal safely with Morgan, but the method was out of the question. I should indeed have been a simpleton if I had not known. All I had to ask was "How much?"

We were wholly resolved against paying blackmail, knowing that it was only a gradual descent to ruin. It was better to go in one direct plunge if it were fated.

Morgan looked at me steadily for a few moments as if giving me a chance to listen to the voice of reason. His method had been perfect. He was beyond a legal suspicion, and I knew he was dangerous.

"Well, young man," he said at last, "we are both wasting time—at least I am. But it's only fair to you to tell you that this is not the end of the case. It's the kind of a case we like, something tough and difficult. We may not make any money out of it, but when we are ready, we at least shall be paid in publicity. You needn't be afraid of the reporters and photographers just now. It's too good a case to waste that way. There's always that, no matter what we turn up."

"This case is just good enough to spend some money on. It's just good enough to send a couple of men down to Montevideo. I'll tell you in advance that is what we're going to do."

"We'll go into the life of Mr. Sidney with a fine-tooth comb, and we'll do it well. We are accustomed to doing such things well. And we'll do this well. We'll get something here or in South America. We'll follow that something until we know why Jed copied two chapters of 'The Moonstone' and hid them in a box built in the springs of his bed."

"Then we'll come back here and ask for a little more co-operation in serving the purposes of the law, and if we don't get some help, the reporters and photographers will be swarming on the lawn. That's all, Mr. Doctor."

I knew at first glance that Morgan's face was malevolent. Now I saw it extraordinarily so.

"I'll have Jed show you the door," I said. "And tell him we do not know whether we take Dravada to South America or not. It will make him happy."

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The olive branch is the emblem of peace and the orange blossom is the emblem of war.

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