

THE CURVED BLADES

By CAROLYN WELLS

Author of "A Chain of Evidence," "The Gold Bag," "The Clue," "The White Alley," Etc.

CHAPTER XVIII—Continued.

"Yes, for the simple reason that she would not have invented all that talk. Even if she were in the room herself, and the remarks were addressed to her, she might be trying to lay the blame elsewhere; to create that conversation out of her own brain is too preposterous. You see, Hardy, these things must be weighed in the balance of probability. If Miss Frayne had set out to invent a lot of stuff which she merely pretended to overhear, she would have had two sides to the conversation. It is that unusual effect of one voice only that gives her story the stamp of truth."

"But there must have been another voice, even though inaudible to her."

"That's just the point. There may have been—probably was. But if the story was her own invention, she never would have thought of representing that second voice as inaudible. Now, either she did hear Miss Carrington say those things, or she didn't. I believe she did, because if she hadn't she must have invented the tale, and if she had invented it, it would have been different. Likewise, Miss Stuart's snake story. If it were not true that her aunt asked her to buy that snake, Miss Stuart must have made up that yarn. And if she had made it up, it would have been different. That's always my test for the truth of an amazing statement. If the teller were falsifying, would he tell it that way? If so, then it is probably a lie; if not, then probably it is a true bill. Now they say Miss Carrington had a high, shrill voice. Did you ever hear it, Hardy?"

"No. I never knew the lady. But I've heard a record of it on the phonograph, and it is high, and rather thin."

"On the phonograph? How does that happen?"

"Gray Haviland is a dabster at that sort of thing, and he has people sing for him and make records frequently. And once I heard that they had a record of the dead woman's singing, and I asked to hear it, merely out of curiosity or a general interest. And it contained some spoken words, too, and her speaking voice is high and shrill, just such as would carry through a closed door. You can, of course, hear the record, if you care to."

"I do care to. I'll make a note of that. Now, here's another thing. Miss Stuart has declared that she obliterated a footprint which was noticeable in that powder scattered by the dressing table."

"Yes, I know it. And Haviland states that it was he who wiped out that print! What do you make of that?"

"That Haviland did do it, and Miss Stuart fibbed about it to shield Haviland."

"Oh, so it's Haviland you think Miss Pauline is shielding?"

"I think it may be; at any rate, she suspects some one dear to her and—"

"You're way off, Mr. Stone! If you'll excuse my saying so, Miss Stuart has pulled the wool over your eyes until you don't know where you're at."

Fleming Stone gasped. Pulled wool over his eyes! Over the eyes, the gimlet eyes, the all-seeing eyes of Fleming Stone! What could the man mean? And this so called wool pulled by a woman! What unheard-of absurdity!

"Mr. Hardy—" he began.

"Yes, yes, I know. Nothing of the sort, and all that. But it's true, Mr. Stone. Miss Stuart is a siren from Sirenville. She can make any man think black is white if she so chooses. And she has been bullied and cowed by that old aunt of hers for years, and for my part, I don't blame her for getting to the end of her rope. If she—"

"Stop! Mr. Hardy, I know you think you're right, but you are not! Do you hear, you are not! And I'll prove it to you, and that soon! I'll ferret out this thing, and I'll do it on this new theory of mine whether you believe it or not!"

Hardy looked at the man in amazement. He had expected a different mode of procedure from

this talented sleuth. He had looked for a quiet, even icy, demeanor, and magical and instantaneous solution of all mystery. And here was the great man, clearly baffled at the queerly tangled web of evidence, and, moreover, caught in the toils of a woman whom Hardy fully believed to be the criminal herself.

But he only said quietly, "What way does your theory point, Mr. Stone? I may be able to help you."

"You can't, Hardy, because you're so determined to find Miss Stuart guilty that you couldn't see it as I do. You consider the strange features of this case—and Lord knows they are strange!—separately, whereas they must be looked at as a whole. The gown, the quantity of jewelry, the smiling face, the glove, the overheard conversation—all these points are to be considered as one of import—as leading to one conclusion. And you think of them as implicating separately, mind you—Miss Stuart, Miss Frayne and the noble count. Now, all those queer points are not only connected, but identical in their significance. But never mind that. Here's the place to begin. Miss Carrington was poisoned. She didn't poison herself. Who did?"

"Mr. Stone, you have put it tersely. I entirely agree that all we are seeking is the answer to that last question of yours."

"I will yet give it to you," and Fleming Stone spoke solemnly rather than boastfully. "The poison, the aconitine, was taken by Miss Carrington as she sat there at her own dressing table. She took it willingly, smilingly—"

"Yes, because she didn't know she was taking it. When she ate the sandwich—"

"The poison wasn't in the sandwich. She took that poison in water. The tumbler and spoon that were used are even now on the glass shelf in her bath room."

"You know this?"

"I know that in the glass that now stands there a chemist has found a slight trace of aconite. I took the glass myself to be tested, with that result. This is not a great discovery, it merely proves that the poison was administered in water, not in a sandwich."

"But it also means that it was given to her by someone who could persuade her to take the solution, unquestioningly—not under compulsion."

"It would seem so."

"And that points to Miss Stuart."

"Not necessarily. Hardy, I refuse to discuss these things with you if you avow everything to condemn her. Why does what I have just told you point to Miss Stuart any more than anyone else in the house? Why not Miss Frayne? Or Haviland?"

"Pshaw! Nobody suspects Gray Haviland."

"But why not? If you're merely suspecting here and there without definite reason, why not include him on your list? And here's another thing. Whoever mixed that poison in the glass of water, afterward rinsed the glass and returned it to its place in the bath room. This was either done at the time, that is, before the lady died, or later on, after death had ensued. In either case, it opens up a field of conjecture."

"It doesn't with me," said Hardy, bluntly. "There's no room for conjecture. It simply piles up the proof against Miss Stuart, and all your skill and even your will can't get her off."

A low moan was heard and a sound as of a falling body. Stone sprang to the door, and flinging it open, disclosed Pauline lying on the floor where she had just fallen. With a low exclamation, Stone picked her up and carried her to a couch. In a moment she sat up and cried, "What do you mean, Mr. Hardy? Do you think I killed Aunt Lucy?"

"There, there, Miss Stuart, don't ask foolish questions," and Hardy, deeply embarrassed, stood at bay. It was one thing to assert his suspicions to Fleming Stone, and quite another to have them overheard by this beautiful and indignant girl.

"How dare you!" Pauline went on. "I was at the door and I heard all you said. No, I am not ashamed of listening, I'm glad I did. Now I know what I have to fight against! And you, Mr. Stone, do you think me a murderer?"

Pauline cringed not at all. She looked more like an avenging goddess, as she confronted the two men, and her blazing eyes and frowning face challenged their replies.

"I do not, Miss Stuart," said Stone, quietly, but Pauline responded, "How do I know? If you did, you'd say you didn't! I have no friend, no one to stand up for. I shall send for Carr. He will defend me."

With a disdainful glance round she left the room. The two men looked at one another.

"Guilty," said Hardy.

"Never!" said Stone, and then the two went their different ways. Hardy's way led to police headquarters, and his report there, which included Stone's story of the tested glass, was heard with interest.

He demanded Miss Stuart's immediate arrest, claiming that only she could have persuaded her aunt to swallow the poisoned draught.

Inspector Brunt was not quite willing to order arrest, but he set machinery at work which he hoped would bring decisive results of some sort.

It did. That same evening, Pauline went to Fleming Stone. The two were alone. Standing before him in all her somewhat tragic beauty, Pauline asked, "You don't think me guilty, Mr. Stone?"

He looked deep in the great dark eyes that seemed to challenge his very soul, and after a moment's steady glance, he replied, "I know you are not, Miss Stuart."

"Can you prove it?"

"I hope so."

"That means nothing. Are you sure you can?"

Fleming Stone looked troubled. Never before in his career had he been unable to declare his surety of success; but with those compelling eyes upon him he couldn't deny a present doubt.

Shaking himself, as if to be freed from a spell, he said, at last, "Miss Stuart, I am not sure. I am convinced of your innocence, but the only theory of guilt that I can conceive of is so difficult, so almost impossible of proof, and so lacking in plausibility, that it seems hopeless. If determination and desperate effort can do it, you shall be exonerated. But there are many circumstances not in your favor. These I shall overcome, eventually. But, to be honest, until I can get a clue or a link of some sort to join my purely imaginative theory to some tangible fact, I can do little. I am working day and night in my efforts to find this connection I seek, but it may take a long time. Meanwhile—"

"Meanwhile, I may be arrested?" Pauline's voice was a mere whisper; her face was drawn and white with fear. To Stone she did not look like a guilty woman, but like an innocent girl, frightened at thought of unjust suspicion and terrorized by imagination of the unknown horrors that might come to her.

"Oh, help me!" she moaned.

"Mr. Stone, can't you help me?"

"Pauline!" he exclaimed, taking her hands in his; "Pauline, go!" he cried tensely; "I will save you, but until I do, keep away from me! You unnerve me. I cannot think!"

"I understand!" and Pauline slowly drew her hands from his. "I will keep away from you."

Stone let her go. He closed the door after her, locked it, and threw himself into a chair. What had he done? Full well he knew what he had done. Hardy was right. He had fallen in love with Pauline Stuart! He realized it quietly, honestly, as he would have realized any incontrovertible fact. His subconsciousness was that of a deep, still gladness; but, strangely enough, his surface thought was that since he had fallen in love with her, so undeniably, so irrevocably, she must be innocent.

Then on the heels of this thought, came another, equally logical: if he deemed her innocent, was it not only because he loved her?

It was only after an hour of deep thought that Fleming Stone pulled himself together and realized with a conquering assurance, that he could go on with the case, and do his duty. If, as he was confident, he could prove his vague theory to be fact, then his love for Pauline would help him to good work and triumphant conclusions. If, instead, his further investigations showed his theory to be false, then he must push on and if—it couldn't be, but if—well—he could always drop the case. But—and of this he was certain—his heart should not only be kept from interfering with the work of his head but it should help and encourage such desperately clever work that success must come.

Pauline did not appear at dinner that night, and on inquiry Stone was told she had gone over to New York for a day or two.

This, then, was what she had meant when she said, "I will keep away from you."

The next day came District Attorney Matthews to interview Miss Stuart. Her absence from home annoyed him and he asked for her New York address. This no one knew, as she had not informed any of them where she was staying in the city, and Mr. Matthews went off in a state of angry excitement. But the household at Garden Steps was even more excited.

For this was the first sign of a definite action against Pauline. What it meant or how far it would go, no one could say.

And then, that afternoon, came a letter from Pauline herself. It had been mailed in New York that morning and contained a surprising news that Pauline had sailed at noon that day for Alexandria.

"Get her back!" roared Haviland, as he read the letter.

"Wireless the steamer and make her get picked up by some incoming ship! Don't think of expense! She mustn't run off like that! It's equivalent to confession of the crime!"

"Hush!" demanded Fleming Stone. "How dare you say that?"

"It's true!" cried Anita.

"Why else would Pauline run away? She knew she was on the verge of arrest and she fled to Carr Loria. He will hide her from her pursuers."

"He can," said Haviland, thoughtfully; "maybe it's as well she's gone there. Of course, she did it."

"Of course, she didn't!" and Fleming Stone's voice trembled in its very intensity. "And I shall prove to a lot of dunder-headed police that she didn't, but it will make my work much harder if you two insist on Miss Stuart's guilt. Why do you want to railroad her into conviction of a crime she never dreamed of?"

"Then who did it?" demanded Anita.

"To whom was Miss Lucy speaking when she said those things I heard?"

"If you harp on that string much longer," said Stone, looking at her, "one might almost be justified in thinking she said them to you."

"No," said Anita, in a low, awed voice, and looking straight at Fleming Stone, "no, she did not say them to me."

And Stone knew she spoke the solemn truth.

But she had not spoken the truth when she said she saw Pauline Stuart coming from the boudoir of her aunt.

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LETTERS FROM THE FUGITIVE.

Pauline's flight was deemed by many a confession of guilt. The district attorney declared his intention of cabling a command to hold her for examination at Alexandria. Or, he said, perhaps it would be better to intercept her course at Gibraltar or Naples. The people at Garden Steps paid little attention to these suggestions, so absorbed were they in planning for themselves.

"Poor child," said Haviland, "she ran away in sheer panic. You don't know Pauline as we do, Mr. Stone; she is brave in the face of a present or material danger. When a gardener's cottage burned, she was a real heroine, and saved a tiny baby at risk of her own life. But always a vague fear or an intangible dread throws her into a wild, irresponsible state, and she loses her head utterly. Now, I may as well own up that I do think Polly committed this deed. I think that she had stood Aunt Lucy as long as she possibly could, and you've no idea what the poor child had to put up with. I think that when Lady Lucy threatened to send Pauline away, homeless and penniless, this panic of fear overcame her and she gave that poison, on an impulse."

"But," interrupted Stone, "that would imply her having the poison in readiness. She couldn't procure it at a moment's notice."

(Continued Next Week.)

Asserting that Col. Raymond Robins, former head of the American Red Cross mission in Russia, employed a bolshevist interpreter and a bolshevist secretary, from whom he secured "all his information on Russian affairs," Gen. A. N. Dobranjan, former general of technical aid to the Russian minister of war, declares that Colonel Robins "knows nothing at all about the true state of Russian affairs under Lenin and Trotsky."

HAD TO SAVE THOSE PANTS

Paul Musser in Much the Same Predicament as Is the German Nation Today.

"Germany will do anything to prevent a commercial boycott," declared Secretary Lansing the other day. "Regardless of the outcome of the peace conference, she stands or falls by her future trade. Germany's position reminds me of Paul Musser of my home town."

"Paul, one wintry day, started to repair a water pipe on the outside of his house. He sat on the concrete steps while he worked. Half an hour later, when he tried to rise, he found he couldn't. His trousers were frozen to the steps. So he called to his wife and explained his predicament.

"Mrs. Musser got a kettle of hot water and proceeded to thaw him out."

"The water was pretty good darn hot," admitted Musser, but I determined to save them there pants at all hazards."

FRECKLES

Now Is the Time to Get Rid of These Ugly Spots

There's no longer the slightest need of feeling ashamed of your freckles, as Othine—double strength—is guaranteed to remove these homely spots.

Simply get an ounce of Othine—double strength—from your druggist, and apply a little of it night and morning and you should soon see that even the worst freckles have begun to disappear, while the lighter ones have vanished entirely. It is seldom that more than one ounce is needed to completely clear the skin and gain a beautiful clear complexion.

Be sure to ask for the double strength Othine, as this is sold under guarantee of money back if it fails to remove freckles.—A.D.R.

Real Chinese Puzzle.

On the mantelpiece of his dressing room at Drury Lane theater Alfred Lester has an array of quaint little wooden figures of Chinese workmanship. They were sent to him by a friend from Shanghai. I saw them the other day.

"This one is supposed to be me," said Lester, gloomily pointing to a little man in a cart. "It is either a hoodoo or a mandarin going to church—I forget which."—Exchange.

Just say to your grocer Red Cross Ball Blue when buying bluing. You will be more than repaid by the results. Once tried always used. 5c.

The wisdom of a woman who is vain of her beauty is equal to that of a man who is vain of his brains.

Don't worry yourself and others with what can't be remedied.

In the Spring-time



It's just at this time of the year that we need something taken from Nature to restore the vital forces.

People get sick because they go away from Nature, and the only way to get well is to go back. Something grows out of the ground in the form of vegetation to cure almost every ill.

Dr. Pierce, of Buffalo, N. Y., long since found herbs and roots provided by Nature to overcome constipation, and of these he selected Mayapple, leaves of Aloe, root of Jalap, and from them made little white sugar-coated pills, that he called Dr. Pierce's Pleasant Pellets. When your intestines are stopped up, poisons and decayed matter are imprisoned in your system and these are carried by the blood through your body. Thus does your head ache, you get dizzy, you can't sleep, your skin may break out, your appetite declines you get tired and despondent. As a matter of fact, you may get sick all over. Don't you see how useless all this suffering is? All that is often needed is a dose of castor oil, or something which is more pleasant, a few of Dr. Pierce's Pleasant Pellets, which he has placed in almost every drug store in this country for your convenience and health. Try them by all means. They are probably the very thing you need.—right now.

Calf Enemies

WHITE SCOURS BLACKLEG

Your Veterinarian can stamp them out with Cutter's Anti-Calf Scour Serum and Cutter's Germ Free Blackleg Filtrate and Aggrassin, or Cutter's Blackleg Pills.

Ask him about them. If he hasn't our literature, write to us for information on these products.

The Cutter Laboratory
Berkeley, Cal., or Chicago, Ill.
"The Laboratory That Knows How"

"ASPIRIN" WAS TALCUM POWDER

Heavy Sentence Imposed on Manufacturer of Tablets.

(ASSOCIATED PRESS DISPATCH)

NEW YORK, December 31.—Accused of having manufactured and sold to influenza sufferers thousands of boxes of aspirin tablets, principally composed of talcum powder, Joseph M. Turkey, head of the Verandah Chemical Company, of Brooklyn, was found guilty yesterday of violation of the sanitary code and sentenced to three years in prison with a fine of \$500. The sentence was the most severe ever imposed in the country for such an offense.

Hereafter say, "Give me genuine 'Bayer Tablets of Aspirin.'"

Insist you want only the Bayer package with the "Bayer Cross" on the package and on the tablets.

Don't buy Aspirin in a pill box! Get Bayer package!

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The genuine American owned "Bayer Tablets of Aspirin" have been proved safe by millions for Pain, Headache, Neuralgia, Toothache, Earache, Rheumatism, Lumbago, Colds, Gripe, Influenzal Colds, Joint Pains, Neuritis. Proper dosage on every "Bayer" package.

Boxes of 12 tablets—Bottles of 24—Bottles of 100—Also Capsules.

Aspirin is the trade mark of Bayer Manufacture of Monaceteicacidester of Salicylicacid.

Resolution. "Your husband boasts of his indomitable will."

"Yes," said the woman with the patient expression. "When he gets his mind set on anything he's absolutely indifferent to worldly things. I have known John to set his teeth and spend two or three weeks solving a puzzle in the back of a magazine."

It takes a barrel of dough to make a homely poor girl a pretty rich one.

The less honor a man has the more sensitive he is on the subject.

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