

THE MARK OF CAIN

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"There!" shouted Fibly, triumphantly; "now wait a minute, Mr. Berg," and by the force of his own insistence Fibly held the audience, while he pursued his own course. He drew a silver quarter from his pocket and handed it to Sandstrom. "Look at that," he cried, "look at it good!" He snatched it back. "Did you look at it good?" and he shook his fist in the other's face.

"Yes, Ay look at it good."
"All right; now tell me where the plugged hole in it was? Was it under the date, or was it over the eagle?"

The Swede thought deeply..
"Be careful now! Where was it, old top? Over the eagle?"

"Yes, Ay tank it been over the eagle."
"You tank so! Don't you know?"

The heavy face brightened.
"Yes, Ay know! Ay know it been over the eagle."
"You're sure?"

"Yes, Ay bane sure."
"All right, pard. You see, Mr. Coroner," and Fibly handed the quarter over to Berg, "they ain't no hole in it anywhere!"

Nor was there. Berg looked mystified. "What's it all about?" he said, helplessly.

"Why," said Fibly, eagerly, "don't you see, if that fool Swede don't know enough to see whether there's a hole in a piece o' chink or not, he ain't no reliable witness in a murder case!"

The boy had scored. So far as the Swede's alleged recognition of Landon was evidence, it was discarded at once. Coroner Berg looked at the boy in perplexity, not realizing just how the incident of the silver quarter had come about. It was by no means his intention to allow freckle-faced office boys to interfere with his legal proceedings. He had read in a book about mal-observation and the rarity of truly remembered evidence, but he had not understood it clearly and it was only a vague idea to him. So it nettled him to have the principle put to a practical use by an impertinent urchin, who talked objectionable slang.

Judge Hoyt looked at Fibly with growing interest. That boy had brains, he concluded, and might be more worth-while than his appearance indicated. Avie, too, took note of the bright-eyed chap, and Kane Landon, himself, smiled in open approval.

But Fibly was in no way elated, or even conscious that he had attracted attention. He had acted on impulse; he had disbelieved the Swede's evidence, and he had sought to disprove it by a simple experiment, which worked successfully. His assertion that the Swede had been told to say that he recognized Landon, was somewhat a chance shot.

Fibly reasoned it out, that if Sandstrom had seen Landon in the woods, he would have recognized him sooner at the inquest, or might even have told of him before his appearance. And he knew that the police now suspected Landon, and as they were eager to make an arrest, they had persuaded the Swede that he had seen the man. Sandstrom's brain was slow and he had little comprehension. Whether guilty or innocent, he had come to the scene at his wife's orders, and might he not equally well have satisfied at the orders or hints of the police? At any rate, he had admitted that he had been told to say what he had said, and so he had been disqualified as a witness.

And yet, it all proved nothing, rather it left them with no definite proof of any sort. Fibly ignored the stupid-looking Swede, and stared at the coroner, until that dignitary became a little embarrassed. Realizing that he had lessened his own importance to a degree, Berg strove to regain lost ground.

"Good work, my boy," he said, condescendingly, and with an air of dismissing the subject. "But the credibility of a witness's story must rest with the gentlemen of the jury. I understand all about those theories of psy—psychology, as they call them, but I think they are of little, if any, use in practice."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," said Judge Hoyt. "I find them very interesting. Do you always see things clearly, Terence?"

"I ain't seeing clearly," said

Fibly, with an earnest face, "it's seein' true. Now, f'r instance, Mr. Coroner, is the number for 6 o'clock, on your watch, a figger or a VI?"

"I cannot allow this child's play," and Mr. Berg looked decidedly angry.

"But that's rather a good one," said Judge Hoyt. "Come, now, Berg, do you know which it is?"

"Certainly I do," Berg snapped out. "It's the Roman letters, VI."

"Yessir?" said Fibly, eagerly. "An' are they right side up, or upside down, as you hold 12 at the top?"

Berg thought a moment. "As I hold 12 at the top, they're upside down, of course. All the numbers have their base toward the center of the dial."

"The the six on your watch is VI, with the tops of the letters next the rim of the watch?"

"It is," said Berg, adding sneeringly, "would you like to see it?"

"Yessir," and Fibly darted forward.

The coroner snapped his watch open, and after a brief glance, the boy gave a quick little wag of his head, and went back to his seat without a word.

But the man flushed a fiery red, and his pompous air deserted him.

"Were you right, Berg?" asked Judge Hoyt. "Come now, own up?"

"A very natural error," mumbled the coroner, and then Detective Groot pounced on him, demanding to see his watch.

"Why, there's no six on it at all!" he cried and then gave an uncontrollable guffaw. "There's only a round place with the second hand into it!"

"This tomfoolery must be stopped," began the coroner, but he had to pause in his speech until the ripple of merriment had subsided and the jury had realized afresh the seriousness of their purpose.

"Hold on Berg, that's a fairly good one on a coroner," said Judge Hoyt, a little severely. "Have you looked at that watch for years and didn't know there was no six on it?"

"I s'pose I have. I never thought about it."

"It does show the unreliability of testimony intended to be truthful," and Hoyt spoke thoughtfully. "Terence, how did you know Mr. Berg's watch had a second hand instead of the six numeral?"

"I didn't know a thing about it. But I wanted to see if he did. It might of been a six upside down for all o' me, but most watches has second hands there and most people don't know it. I got it out of a book. People don't see true. They think a watch has gotter say six o'clock, they don't remember it might mean it, but not say it."

Again Hoyt gave the boy a look of appreciation. "Keen-witted," he said to himself. "Ought to make his mark." And then he glanced back to the discomfited coroner.

CHAPTER VII.

Stephanotis.

Now Mr. Berg's disposition was of the sort that when offended, desires to take it out of some one else rather than to retaliate on the offender. So, after a little further questioning of the still bewildered Swede he turned again to Landon.

"Let us dismiss the matter of the Swede and his evidence," he said, lightly, "and resume the trend of our investigations. Do I understand, Mr. Landon, that you expect to inherit a legacy from your late uncle?"

Landon's eyes flashed. "I don't know what you understand, Mr. Coroner. As a matter of fact, I haven't much opinion of your understanding. But I know nothing of the legacy you speak of, save that my uncle said to me yesterday, that he would leave me \$50,000 in his will. Whether he did or not, I do not know."

The statement was made carelessly, as most of Kane Landon's statements were, and he seemed all unaware of the conclusions immediately drawn from his words.

"Judge Hoyt," said the coroner, turning to the lawyer, "are you acquainted with the person

of Mr. Trowbridge's will?"
"Most certainly, as I drew up the document," was the answer. "Is Kane Landon a beneficiary?"

"Yes; to the extent of \$50,000."
It was impossible not to note the gleam of satisfaction that came into Landon's eyes at this news. Hoyt gave him a stare of utter scorn and Avie looked amazed and grieved.

"You seem pleased at the information, Mr. Landon," the coroner grieved.

Landon favored him with a calm, indifferent glance and made no response.

Berg turned again to Miss Wilkinson, the blonde stenographer.

"Will you tell me," he said, "if you know, what caused Mr. Trowbridge to leave his office early, yesterday?"

The girl hesitated. She shot a quick glance at Landon, and then looked down again. She fidgeted with her handkerchief, and twice essayed to speak, but did not finish.

"Come," said Berg, sharply, "I am waiting."

"I don't know," said Miss Wilkinson at last.

Fibly gave a quick whistle. "She does know," he declared; "she takes all the telephone calls, and she knows the G'v'nor went out 'cause somebody telephoned for him."

"Is this true?" asked Berg of the girl.

"How can I tell!" she retorted, pertly. "Mr. Trowbridge had a lot of telephone calls yesterday, and I don't know whether he went out because of one of them or not. I don't listen to a telephone conversation after Mr. Trowbridge takes the wire."

"You do so!" said Fibly, in a conversational tone. "Mr. Berg, Yellowtop told me just after the G'v'nor went out, that he'd gone 'cause somebody asked him over the wire to go to Van Cortlandt Park."

"Tell the truth," said Berg to the girl, curtly.

"Well, I just as lief," she returned; "but it ain't my way to tell of private office matters in public."

"Make it your way, now, then. It's time you understand the seriousness of this occasion!"

"All right. Somebody, then, some man,—did call Mr. Trowbridge about 2 o'clock, and asked him to go to Van Cortlandt Park?"

"What for? Did he say?"

"Yes, he said somebody had set a trap for him."

"Set a trap for him! What did he mean?"

"How do I know what he meant? I ain't a mind-reader! I tell you what he said—I can't make up a meanin' for it too. And I ain't got a right to tell this much. I don't want to get nobody in trouble."

The girl was almost in tears now, but whether the sympathy was for herself or another was an open question.

"You have heard, Miss Wilkinson, of testimony that means to be true, but is—er—inexact?"

The coroner smiled a trifle, as if thus atoning for his own late slip. "Therefore, I beg that you will do your utmost to remember exactly what that message was."

"I do, 'cause I thought it was such a funny one. The man said, 'you'd better come, he's set a trap for you.' And Mr. Trowbridge says 'I can't go today, I've got an engagement.' And the other man said, 'Oh, c'mon. It's a lovely day, and I'll give you some stephanotis.'"

"Stephanotis!"

"Yes, sir, I remembered that, 'cause it's my fav'r'te puffume."
"Was Mr. Trowbridge in the habit of using perfumery?" asked Berg of Avie.

"Never," she replied, looking at the blonde witness with scorn. "I don't care," Miss Wilkinson persisted, doggedly; "I know he said that, for I had a bottle of stephanotis one Christmas, and I never smelled anything so good. And then he said something about the Caribbean Sea—"

"Now, Miss Wilkinson, I'm afraid you're romancing a little," and the coroner looked at her in reproof.

"I'm telling you what I heard. If you don't want to hear it, 'I'll stop."

"We want to hear it, if it's true, not otherwise. Are you sure this man said these absurd things?"

"They weren't absurd, least-ways, Mr. Trowbridge didn't think so. I know that, 'cause he was pleasant and polite, and when the man said he'd give him some stephanotis, Mr. Trowbridge

said, right off, he'd go."
"Go to the Caribbean Sea with him?"

"I don't know whether he meant that or not. I didn't catch on to what he said about that, but I heard Caribbean Sea all right."

"Do you know where that sea is?"

"No, sir. But I studied it in my geography at school, I forget where it is, but I remember the name."

"Well it's between—er—that is, somewhere near South America, and the—well, it's down that way. Did this man speaking sound like a foreigner?"

"N—no, not exactly."
"Like an American?"

"Yes—I think so."
"Explain your hesitation."

"Well," said the girl desperately, "he sounded like he was trying to sort of disguise his voice—if you know what I mean."

"I know exactly what you mean. How did you know it was a disguised voice?"

"It was sort of high and then sort of low as if making believe somebody else."

"You're a very observing young woman. I thought you didn't listen to telephone conversations of your employer."

"Well, I just happened to hear this one. And it was so—so queer, I kind of kept on listenin' for a few minutes."

"It may be fortunate that you did, as your report is interesting. Now, can you remember any more, any other words or sentences?"

"No, sir. There was a little more but I didn't catch it. They seemed to know what they was talkin' about, but most anybody else wouldn't. But I'm dead sure of the puffumery and the sea."

"Those are certainly queer words to connect with this case. But maybe the message you tell of was not the one that called Mr. Trowbridge to the park."

"Maybe not, sir."
"It might have been a friend warning him of the trap set for him, and urging him to go south to escape it."

"Maybe sir."
"These things must be clearly looked into. We must get the number of the telephone call and trace it."

"Can't be done," said Detective Groot, who being a taciturn man listened carefully and said little. "I've tried too many times to trace a call to hold out any hopes of this. If it came from a big exchange it might be barely possible to trace it; but if from a private wire or a public booth, or from lots of such places you'll never find it. Never in the world."

"Is it then so difficult to trace a telephone call?" asked one of the jury. "I didn't know it."

"Yes, sir," repeated Groot. "Why there was a big case in New York years ago, where they made the telephone company trace a call and it cost the company thousands of dollars. After that they tore up their slips. But then again, you might happen to find out what you want. But not at all likely, no, not a bit likely."

Avie looked at the speaker thoughtfully. The night before she had asked the number of a call and received it at once. But, she remembered, she asked a few moments after the call was made, and of the same operator. Her thoughts wandered back to that call made by Eleanor Black, and again she felt that impression of something sly about the woman. And to think, she had the number of that call, and could easily find out who it summoned. But all such things must wait till this investigation of the present was over. She looked at Mrs. Black.

The handsome widow wore her usual spix-like expression and she was gazing steadily at Kane Landon. Avie thought she detected a look in the dark eyes as of a special, even intimate interest in the young man. She had no reason to think they were acquaintances, yet she couldn't help thinking they appeared so. At any rate, Eleanor Black was paying little or no attention to the proceedings of the inquest. But Avie remembered she had expressed a distaste and aversion to detectives and all their works. Surely, the girl thought, she could not have cared very much for Uncle Rowly, if she doesn't feel most intense in running the murderer to ground.

She turned again toward the coroner to hear him saying:

(To be continued next week.)

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"To my sorrow," said the harassed editor.
"Didn't you work for a woman's suffrage?"
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TAKEN FROM EXCHANGES
Theory raises a man's hopes. Practice raises his wages.
Be cheerful and don't argue; and you will multiply friends.

Wise men may fool others, but the fool fools only himself.
Don't wait for the dead past to bury itself—cremate it.

Paint is like news—of no value unless well spread.
Our best opportunities are of the home-made variety.

He who laughs last sometimes laughs impudently.
Broad hints are wasted on narrow-minded people.

Facts—and fancies—are stubborn things.
The successful man doesn't believe in luck.

Bachelors are men who have illusions about women.
The high cost of living makes us dig down.

Kissing is dangerous, but every girl considers herself immune.
Many a man is continually in hot water without ever acquiring a clean record.

Nor can you tell from the size of a man how far he can jump from the frying pan into the fire.
Everyone wants to be entertained; and he will pay as much for it as for food.

On the Job.
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"Sick?" I'll gladly prescribe."
The Cuticura Toilet Trio.
Having cleared your skin keep it clear by making Cuticura your every-day toilet preparations. The soap to cleanse and purify, the Ointment to soothe and heal, the Talcum to powder and perfume. No toilet table is complete without them. 25c everywhere.—Adv.

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"That was an exhibition which might be called one of mite and mane."

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At the Musicals.
Enthusiast—Don't you think the charrn oscuro was fine?
Non-Musical Guest—To tell the truth, I liked the chicken salad better.

Not the Same.
"Mrs. Gaddy has no conversation."
"Why, she talks incessantly."
"Who said she didn't?"

Practice and Theory.
"Jubbs was a crank about the simple life."
"Naturally; he is now in a home for the feeble-minded."

Easiest means of spreading happiness is by paying compliments. Sow 'em thick.
Speaking of styles someone remarks that the snake is the longest-waisted animal.

In your effort to make both ends meet you must be mighty careful they don't snap in the middle.
Banns of marriage are so-called because ban originally meant proclamation.

Nothing looks so unhappy as a man waiting for his change in a dry goods store.

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