

THE MARK OF CAIN

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"That's a broad view of it," and Judge Hoyt smiled a little, "but you run along, dear, and after a confab with Mr. Duane, I'll come up and tell you all about it."

The confab wound up by a trip to the office of the district attorney. The situation was too grave to allow of what Avie called "striking out!" If Landon and Mrs. Black were implicated in suspicious collusion, the matter must be sifted to the bottom.

District Attorney Whiting eagerly absorbed the new facts recounted to him, and fitted them into some he had of his own knowledge.

Landon had sent \$50,000 to the mining company of Denver in which he was interested. He had not yet realized on his inheritance, for the estate had not been settled, but he had doubtless borrowed on his prospective legacy. This proved nothing, except that he had been most anxious for the large sum of money, and had utilized his acquisition of it as soon as possible.

"We must get at this thing promptly," counseled Judge Hoyt. "Landon is a peculiar chap, and difficult to bait. If he thinks we suspect him, he's quite capable of bolting, I think. Better try to trip up the housekeeper. She's a vain woman, amenable to flattery. Perhaps if Mr. Groot went to her, ostensibly suspecting—say, Stryker, he could learn something about her relations with Landon. And by the way, how are you going to find Stryker?"

"Through his daughter," Whiting replied. "That butler is no more the murderer than I am—he is hiding, because he's afraid of this handkerchief clue."

"It is certainly an incriminating piece of evidence," observed Hoyt.

"It is. But not against the butler. That handkerchief is a plant. On the fact of it, it is certainly too plain an indication to be the real thing. No, sir, the murderer, whoever he was, stole the butler's handkerchief to throw suspicion on the butler. And who could do this so easily as the housekeeper, or some member of the household, who had access to Stryker's room? Landon wasn't at the house, that we know of, before the murder, therefore, the theory of the housekeeper bringing the handkerchief to him at their library interview, just fits in and makes it all plausible."

"It may be," said Judge Hoyt, looking doubtful; "it may possibly be, Whiting; but go slowly. Don't jump at this, or any other fantastic solution. Track it down pretty closely, before you spring it on the public."

"All of that, Judge Hoyt! I've no idea of spiking my own guns by telling all this too soon. But there's work to be done, and first of all we must find that butler. If he can be made to think we won't accuse him, he'll come round, and we may learn a lot from him. We missed our chances in not questioning him more closely at first."

Meantime Avie had gone home, and on the way, her mood had changed from sorrow to anger. She was angry at herself for having insisted on the employing of Alvin Duane. She remembered how Kane had opposed it, but she was so zealous in her hunt for justice that she ignored all objections. She was angry at Kane for hobnobbing with Eleanor Black, and also for deceiving her about their previous acquaintance. She was angry at Judge Hoyt for not dismissing Duane and obliterating even from his own memory all that stuff the detective had discovered. She was furiously angry at Duane, but that was a helpless, blind sort of rage that reacted upon herself for engaging him.

And so, her tears had dried and her quivering nerves had tautened themselves when she reached the house, and she went in, determined to attack Eleanor Black herself, and learn the truth of her acquaintance with Kane.

But as soon as she entered, she came upon Landon and Mrs. Black in the little reception room, in close confab.

"Come in," said the widow, "come in and talk to us."

"We won't have time for much conversation," said Landon,

looking at his watch, "I want Mrs. Black to go out with me on an errand. May I order the car?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Black, smiling. "I want all my guests to feel at liberty to give any orders they choose." Her smile included Avie and gave the girl that uncomfortable feeling that always manifested itself when the ex-housekeeper asserted herself as mistress of the place.

"Please, Avie, don't look like that," said Eleanor, with an injured air. "I want you to look on this house as home just as long as you choose to do so. And, indeed, you may continue in charge of it, if that is what you want."

"Car's here," sang out Landon. "Come on, Eleanor."

"Eleanor!" thought Avie, as the two went away. She had never heard him call her that before, and it struck her like a chill. And yet she felt sure there was a strong friendship, if not something deeper between them, and she must be prepared for even endearing terms.

But Avie, despite her quick anger, was of a nature born to make sacrifices. She could do anything to help those she loved, and she had suddenly realized that she did love Landon. So without thought of reward, she began to plan how she could help him.

She turned from the window without even wondering where they were going; only conscious of a vague, dull longing, that she felt now, would never be gratified.

And then, Harry Pinckney came, for one of his rather frequent calls. Avie was glad Eleanor was out as she so objected to the sight of a detective, and the young reporter had added that line of work to his own.

"I know where Stryker is," were his first words, after they had exchanged greetings.

"You do! Where?"

"At his daughter's. Been there all the time. That Mrs. Adler is a splendid actress, but she was a little too unconcerned about her father's disappearance to fool me. I pinned her down, and I'm practically sure he's in her house, or she knows where he is. But I've told the police and they'll rout him out. I'm to have the scoop. I hope they find him soon."

"And," Avie held herself together, "who will be the next suspect?"

"Dunno. Old Groot has his eye on Kane Landon, but he's got no evidence to speak of. I don't care two cents for that 'Cain' remark. I mean I don't for a minute think it implicates Kane Landon."

"Bless you for that!" Avie said, but not aloud.

"However," Pinckney went on, "they've got something new up their sleeves. They wouldn't tell me what, I've just come from headquarters, but they're excited over some recent evidence or clue."

"Have you any reason to think it refers to Mr. Landon?"

Pinckney looked at her narrowly. "I hate to reply to that," he said, "for I know it would hurt you if I said yes."

"And you'd have to say yes, if you were truthful?"

"I'm afraid I should, Miss Trowbridge. Honest, now, isn't there a chance that he is the one?"

"Oh, no, no! But, Mr. Pinckney, tell me something. Supposing, just supposing for a minute, that it might be Kane,—you know he's been out west for five years, and out there they don't look on killing as we do here, do they?"

"What have you in mind? A sheriff rounding up a posse of bad men, or a desperado fighting his captor, or just a friendly shooting over a card game—have you been reading dime novels?"

"No. It's just a vague impression. I thought they didn't call killing people murder—"

"Yes, they do, if it's murder in cold blood. Westerners only kill in avenging justice or in righteous indignation."

"Really? I'm glad you told me that. Do you know, Mr. Pinckney, I'm not going to sit quietly down and let Kane be accused of this thing. I don't know whether he did it or not,

but he's going to have his chance. I know him pretty well, and he's so stubborn that he won't take pains to appear innocent even when he is. That sounds queer, I know, but you see, I know Kane. He is queer. If that boy is innocent, and I believe he is, he would be so sure of it himself that he'd make no effort to convince others; and he'd let himself be misjudged, perhaps, even arrested through sheer carelessness."

"It is, indeed, a careless nature that will go as far as that!"

"It isn't only carelessness; it's a kind of pig-headed stubbornness. He's always been like that."

"And if he should be guilty?"

"Then,—" and Avie hesitated, "then, I think he'd act just exactly the same."

"H'm, a difficult nature to understand."

"Yes, it is. But I'm going to see that he is understood, and,—Mr. Pinckney, you're going to help me, aren't you?"

"To the last ditch!" and Harry Pinckney then and there, silently, devoted his time, talent and energies to upholding the opinions of Avie Trowbridge, whatever they might be, and to helping her convince the world of their truth.

CHAPTER XII

Fibsy Fibs.

As the district attorney had surmised, Stryker was in hiding, under the protection of his daughter. Mrs. Adler was a clever young woman, and having undertaken to keep her father safe from the police investigation, she did so remarkably well.

But being assured that there was no reason for apprehension if he had not committed the murder, Stryker decided to face the music. He had feared being railroaded to jail because of his handkerchief having been found in the wood, but a certainty of fair play gave him courage, and he emerged from the house of his daughter's neighbor, with a trembling step, but an expression of face that showed plainly relief at the cessation of strain.

"Yes, I kept father over to Mrs. Gedney's," said Mrs. Adler, "cause I wasn't going to have him all pestered up with an everlasting troop of policemen, when he hadn't done nothin'. I have my sick husband to nurse and wait on, and can't have detectives traipsin' in here all the time. Oh, don't talk to me about the law. I ain't afraid. My father is as innocent as a babe, but he flutters awful easy, and a police man after him makes him thrum about, he don't know where he's at. So, I says, I'll just put him out o' harm's way for a while till I see how the cat jumps."

"But as an intelligent woman, Mrs. Adler," began Mr. Groot, "you must know—"

"I know what I know; and I'm a wife and a daughter long fore I'm an intelligent woman. Don't you come none o' that kind of talk over me. You want my father, there he is. Now talk to him, if you can do so peaceably, but don't give him no third degree, nor don't fuss him all up with a lot o' law terms what he don't understand. Talk nice to him an' he'll tell you a heap more'n if you ballyrag him all to pieces!"

Groot realized the force of this argument, "talked nice" to Stryker, he learned the old man's story.

He had been anxious to take out an insurance policy for his daughter before it became too late for him to do so; but, he affirmed, he did not kill his master for the purpose. The agent had been after him frequently, of late, to urge him to borrow the money for the premium. But this, Mrs. Adler did not want him to do, for, she argued, the interest on the loan and the premiums would counterbalance the value of the policy. They had had many discussions of the subject, for Mr. Adler, a very sick man, had wanted to die knowing that his wife had some provision for her old age. His illness precluded any insurance on his own life.

Not interested in these minute details, Groot questioned Stryker closely about the handkerchief. "I don't know," Stryker said. "I don't know, I'm sure, how my kerchief got into those woods, but I do know I didn't take it there."

"Could it have been taken from your room?"

"I must 'a' been. Leastways, unless it was taken from the clothes line on a wash day,—or mebber it blew off and was picked

up by somebody passin'."

Though not extremely probable these were possibilities, and they had not been thought of before by Stryker or his colleagues.

"There's something in that," he agreed, "now Mr. Stryker, don't get excited, but where were you Tuesday afternoon, the day that Mr. Trowbridge was killed?"

"I know all where I was, but it's sort o' confused in my mind. I was to the insurance agent's; and I was to the doctor's to be sized up for that insurance, if I did decide to take it out; and then I dropped in to see my daughter, and her man was so sick I thought his last hour had come, and I ran over for a neighbor, and somehow I was so upset and bothered with one thing and another that the more I try to straighten out in my mind the order of those things, the more mixed up I get. You see, it was my day out, and that always flusters me anyhow. I'm not so young as I was, and the unusualness of getting into street clothes and going out into the world, as it were, makes me all tremble and I can't remember it afterward, like I can my routine days. And then when I did go home that night, first thing I knew master didn't come to dinner! That never had happened before, unless we knew beforehand. Well, then Miss Black she ate alone, and Miss Avie, she didn't eat at all, and there was whisperin' and goin's on, and next thing I knew they told me master was dead. After that nothing is clear in my mind. No, sir, everything is a blur and a mist from that time on. That there inquest, now, that's just like a dream,—a bad dream."

"Then," and Groot urged him gently on, "then about the night you left the Trowbridge house. Why did you do that?"

Stryker looked around put his finger to his lips. "Ah, that night! Well, if you'll believe me, I heard them whisperin' in the library. You know, sir, I've a right anywhere on the two floors. I ain't like the other servants I've a right,—I'm a passin'. I overheard 'em. Please say as how I was the master! Me, sir, as loved my master more than I can tell you. Sir, I didn't know what I was doin' then, I just got out, I had 'em say they had positive proof, and something about a handkerchief, and I remember the sight of that handkerchief,—oh, well, oh Lord,—oh, Lord!—I didn't do it!" The old man's voice rose to a shriek, and Mrs. Adler exclaimed, "There now, you've set him off! I knew you would! Now, he'll have hysterics and it'll take me all night to get him calmed down, and me with Mr. Adler on my hands and him always worse at night—"

"Wait a minute," commanded Groot. "I'm nearly through, and then I'll go away and he can have his hysterics in peace. Go on, Stryker, finish up this yarn. What did you do when you heard Mr. Duane accuse you?"

Stryker looked at him solemnly and blinked in an effort to concentrate. Then he said, "Why, I pretended I'd had a telephone call from Molly, and I ran around here as fast as I could, and Molly she says, they'll be after you, go over to Mrs. Gedney's and stay there. And I did, till you spied me out."

"All right," and Groot rose to go. "Your father is all right, Mrs. Adler. Don't coddle him too much. It makes him childish. Keep him here with you, and my word for it, no suspicion will rest on him. I had his alibi pretty well fixed up anyway, between the insurance agent and the doctor, and his story just about completes it. There isn't one chance in a thousand that he'll be accused, so keep him here and keep him quiet, and I'll see you again in a day or two. But if your father tries to run away or to hide again, then he will find himself in trouble."

Mrs. Adler proved amenable to these orders and Groot went away to begin his hunt for the purloiner of Stryker's handkerchief.

"You won't have to look far," Whiting said, when he heard the detective's story. "If you wanted one more thread in the strand of the rope for young Landon's neck, that's it. Of course, he got the handkerchief some way, whether from the housekeeper or not. Go to it and find out how."

Indirectly and by bits, Avie learned of Groot's discoveries, and keeping her own counsel, she worked on a side line of her own devising.

(To be continued next week.)

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In the Tornado Belt.
"Taking your piano lesson, are you, dear?" said the farmer's wife to her daughter.
"Yes, mother."
"Where is your father?"
"In the cyclone cellar, mother!"—Yonkers Statesman.

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POOL KNOWN AS MOSES' WELL FOLLOWED EXAMPLE OF HOST

Is Believed to Be That Mentioned in the Bible in Connection With Great Law Giver.

Tactical Visitor Had No Desire to Be "Called," So He Duly "Sarsed" His Coffee.

In the Egyptian desert, about ten miles east of Suez, is situated a picturesque pool known as "Moses' well." This is believed to be the well mentioned in the Bible, where Moses, at the bidding of the Lord, cast a branch into the bitter waters, and they were sweetened. Set in a deep grove of date-palms and pomegranate trees, the well is a dark, calm, mysterious looking pool, faithfully reflecting the palms which fringe its edges. The scene at sunrise, when the first rays strike the still water, is exquisite beyond description.

The oil magnate, Mike Murphy, who passed away not long ago, was fortunate in the fact that his sons inherited their father's consummate ability, says the Philadelphia Ledger. One of them, John, tells this story of a recent visit to a certain section of the country, where he was careful to do as the people did, and to conform with social usages as he found them.

Attempts to identify various natural beauties and locations with mentions or descriptions as given in the Bible have always been difficult, owing to the fact that the records of the rulers of Egypt at the time of the captivity of the Jews were destroyed by rulers that came into power immediately afterward. The motive was jealousy, and a determination to wipe from the minds of the people any regrets for rulers gone.

At the table the venerable host poured coffee into a saucer. But the host's son drank it from a cup. That made the host angry. "Why don't you sarse your coffee?" he bellowed at the son.

Foolish Question No. 3,427.

No, Roger, we should not call it a case of heredity when a hard-headed business man has a bonehead son.—Boston Transcript.

"It's all right this way, father," answered the young man, mildly.
"Son, if your eddication is goin' to make you reflect on your father I want to know it. I tells you, sarse your coffee!"
Whereupon the dutiful son emptied the cup in the saucer, and, says Mr. Murphy, "I sarsed mine, too!"

Shaving, according to one doctor, increases neuralgia and other troubles of the face.

King Solomon made 10,000 golden perfumery censers for the temple of Jerusalem.

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