

The Black Menace

By ARTHUR B. REEVE

"Who was the fellow? What did he look like?"

"Tall, narrow-chested, one of those fellows that the newspapers call lounge lizards," returned Kennedy.

The policeman walked around, examining all the cars.

"How did you happen to get away so quickly?" asked Speed gratefully of Kennedy, now that he was sure Clara was safe and rapidly recovering.

Not at Her Home.

"When I left the laboratory," replied Craig, "I could not find Miss Claremont at home. I made inquiries elsewhere but no one seemed to know where she was. Finally I went back there again. Her maid told me that she had come in and had gone out, that there had been a telephone call to her. Someone had used your name, Speed, and had said that we were all to dine at the Crystal palace, but in private dining room No. 6. I knew something was wrong, jumped into a cab, and I guess I got there just in time.

"Well," interrupted the traffic policeman, coming with his notebook, "I guess I've got a taxicab on my hands. There doesn't seem to be anybody here to claim it. I guess it's a clue—license No. 987654."

Kennedy noted the number and together we looked over the cab. There did not seem to be anything unusual about it. It was merely like hundreds of others. However, the traffic man was right. There must be some clue in the license number.

"We can't stay here all night," cut in Ravenal. "I think a good plan would be to get back to the Crystal palace as quick as we can. Perhaps we can find out something more there."

Kennedy nodded, and we divided ourselves into two parties and returned to the other two cabs, leaving the deserted cab in the charge of the traffic man for future use.

Back at the Crystal palace Kennedy and Ravenal began a hasty inquiry, commencing with the taxicab starter at the door.

"Who was the fellow who went out with her?" demanded Kennedy.

"I don't know," replied the starter. "I've seen him around here—he says his name is Werner. I guess you've seen a good many of them on Broadway."

Not much advanced by this inquiry, we entered the restaurant, and a few moments later were talking to the manager.

"Who hired private dining room No. 6?" we asked.

"No. 6," repeated the manager. "That's on the third floor. It has been hired by Mademoiselle Celia Breshkaya, the Russian dancer. She is there now."

With him we rode up in the elevator and paused at the door before we knocked. Inside we could hear the voices of several people gaily chatting. The manager tapped on the door and it opened.

Celia Breshkaya was indeed a pretty woman off the stage as well as on it, but it was a style of beauty for which I did not particularly care. Her features had that heavy European look which compare very unfavorably with the delicacy of the American type.

The party inside looked at us in surprise as they saw us standing in the doorway. At first I think they must have thought that a new delegation had arrived to join in their festivities.

"Why, Mr. Speed, how do you do?" came a silvery voice, as Mademoiselle Celia bowed roguishly at Jack.

Speed colored. It was evident that he did not relish the situation. Clara said nothing but there was not an inflection of the voice or an action which she missed.

Kennedy, noticed the embarrassment of the young man out of the corner of his eyes, and did nothing to cover it. In Craig's scheme of things almost anything might be evidence.

"I beg your pardon," apologized the manager, "but a very unfortunate thing has happened. Perhaps you can explain it." Quickly he repeated what we had told him.

A Pretty Shrug.

"I telephoned!" repeated Breshkaya, with her best baby stare, which did not neglect to take Clara's measure. "Why, I

was to entertain a party of friends, but not until 7 o'clock. Yes, the waiter told me some one had been here before early. This is a shame. It took 10 minutes to fix up our tables here again. This fellow whoever he was—must have come here and used my name. Who he is—I do not know him."

She finished with a pretty little shrug of her shoulders, as though she would say, "Who can doubt the word of a lady?"

And indeed, who could? Who was this "Werner?" Was he part of the Black Menace gang? What of Breshkaya herself?

There was only one thing to do. We must accept the explanation for what it was worth. Only time could show whether it was worth anything.

The manager bowed an apology, as Kennedy and the rest of us backed out of the room and we rode down in the elevator considerably at a loss to know what would be the next step.

Down in the lobby again Kennedy paused a moment and glanced at his watch. It had been some time since we left the deserted taxicab in the park and he decided to call up the police station to see whether they had found out anything yet.

For some moments he was in the telephone booth while we waited outside.

"Have you got a car that we can use tonight?" he asked Speed as he rejoined us. "That taxicab was not one from the city. They have looked up the license number 7876054, and they find that it is held by a man named Ransom and the car was kept at a little garage in Heaton Hills, in Nassau County."

Speed glanced up swiftly at the mention of the fashionable North Shore town. It was only another evidence of the wide connections of the Black Menace in the smart set.

"We have only to go a few blocks to my garage," he replied, "I suppose it is the big car that we will want?"

We lost no time in getting into the car and were soon across the city and over the bridge looping along the hilly roads of the North Shore. Ordinarily it might have taken us an hour or more to make the journey, but as Speed shoved his car along, it seemed almost no time before we were approaching the village which was the center of the many millionaire estates at Heaton Hills.

Finding the Garage. We had no trouble in locating the garage, which was on a back street in the village.

"It doesn't look as though anybody was here," remarked Speed as he pulled up before it.

We jumped out and began a hasty examination. The door was locked and the place was apparently empty and dark. Finally Kennedy managed to turn the lock of a back window and we entered. As he flashed a pocket light about the place it was evident that if there had been any other car or cars, they had been removed. A search of the garage seemed to reveal nothing. There was a desk in a little office, but it was empty. A few tools and some worn out tires that were nothing but scrap were the only things of value in the place.

"Double crossed!" concluded Ravenal, as he looked about.

Suddenly there was a jangle from the wall telephone just inside the office, I was standing nearest to it, and I took a step toward it to answer, when I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was Kennedy.

"Don't, Walter," he cautioned in a whisper. "There is a house just across the street. Run over there and get on the wire there. Find out from central the origin of this call before I answer it."

I turned and hurried out of the garage and across the street. The people were very obliging, and I was soon able to find out that the number that was calling was "700 Main." As I thanked them and left the house I inquired about the garage across the street, but the people did not seem to know much about it, except that a couple of strangers had rented it recently and were very quiet, which was all that seemed to interest them.

Back in the garage I found that Kennedy had answered the call, but that it had led to nothing. It seemed that whoever was at the other end of the wire had for some reason become suspi-

cious and, not recognizing the voice which answered, had refused to talk and hung up.

The Number Traced.

"Central told me that the number was '700 Main,'" I whispered to him outside in the darkened garage.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Now the next thing to do will be to go to the telephone office and persuade them to tell us what '700 Main' really is.

A hasty conference with Speed followed, and again we were in his car, picking our way by a short cut to the telephone building.

It was now quite late when we arrived at the telephone building, and after considerable parleying Kennedy persuaded the girl in charge that it was all right to tell us the address.

"It's the big colonial mansion on the Rocky Hill road, she said at length. 'I don't know anything about it and if I did, I don't think that I would dare to say anything.'

There was something, however, in the tone and manner of the girl that confirmed Kennedy in his suspicion that the telephone girl might well prove to be worth tracing. What it might lead us to, he could not say, but I could see by his manner that he much preferred to make this investigation by himself.

Outside Kennedy appeared to be very much concerned about the way in which Miss Claremont might feel after her exciting experience of the evening.

"Speed," he said at length, "I think it would be much better if you took Miss Claremont home and when you do, make arrangements with the police so that there will be somebody near her home, within call all night. There's a little bit of work that Jameson and I must do out here and I think we can do it better by ourselves.

An Order to Wait.

As Speed's car whisked away down the turnpike, Kennedy and I started along the main street of the town, until at last we came to the station, where a lone "fiivver" was waiting for a possible passenger. Kennedy engaged it and we were soon on our way out from the town and along a good, but poorly lighted, country road.

Our chauffeur pulled up after he had gone perhaps a mile and leaned back, speaking through the door. "There's the house down there," he nodded.

"All right," returned Kennedy, brusquely. "There's a light there. You wait here."

The driver ran his car close to the side of the road and Craig and I got out. Without a word he turned up a gravel driveway, which led through a heavy hedge of lilac up to the front door of a long low-lying colonial house. As we approached it in the shadows I fancied that the quietness of the grounds was merely a concealment for something. A coach house lamp shone on at least a half a dozen cars to the side of the house, and we slipped across the driveway for concealment, approaching from the other side.

What was this mansion of mystery?

CHAPTER 5.

The Mansion of Mystery.

Huge trees shaded the house, mostly evergreens, making it a very picturesque building as the moonlight streamed down on it through the branches.

As we made our way up the lawn we, beside the driveway, could see the entrance to the place, a wide door, underneath the four great white colonial pillars. Through the fanlight over the door could be seen streaming the light from the hall, but the rest of the door was dark as were the sidelights.

Suddenly there was the purr of a many-cylindrical motor behind us, on the road, and Kennedy dragged me back on a clump of rhododendrons just as the lights from the car swung in like long fingers up the driveway, pointing almost directly at us. The shelter of the shrubs was, however, sufficient to protect us, and the car swung up swiftly past us, turned and stopped at the door.

The front door was opened and in the shaft of light that shot out from it was revealed the car and the party in it.

Through the door we could catch a glimpse of a splendidly furnished reception hall. There seemed to be a great many people in the house. Although it was late, the gaiety here seemed

increasing rather than diminishing.

A butler in most correct uniform ran out from the hall across the wide porch and opened the doors of the touring car. A couple of men jumped out and began assisting two ladies to alight.

Seen Before.

"Breshkaya!" exclaimed Kennedy.

I looked again more sharply. It was indeed Breshkaya and some of the party whom I had seen at the Crystal palace earlier in the evening. They had motored out here after the gay dinner.

As they disappeared into the mansion of mystery, the car slid around the side of the house and joined the others waiting under the dim coach lamp at the other side.

What did it mean? What manner of establishment was this? It had all the evidence of being a private mansion on a private estate, yet in everything else it seemed to be almost like a social club.

We stole around the side of the house. There was a bay window just off a wide back porch that overlooked the slope of the hill with a beautiful view down across the valley.

Back of this bay window we stood a moment listening. The window was raised for ventilation and through it we could hear sounds. As I listened I could hear a sort of regular, rhythmic click.

Kennedy whispered to me, clapping his hands, downward palms up, to illustrate. "Give me a lift, Walter. I think I can just about make it to look through the window."

I clasped my hands and Kennedy placed his foot in them, raising himself just far enough to be able to look through the window overhead. Craig was heavy, but I held him as long as he looked in. However, I was glad when he let himself down.

"What's that shirr and click?" I asked.

"A roulette wheel," he returned, in a whisper, "Here, you take a look."

As I peered over the window ledge I could see in the bright light a party of handsomely gowned ladies and men in evening clothes gathered about the roulette wheel. There was no need for anyone at the window to be very cautious. Their attention was too soundly riveted on the wheel to be distracted except by a loud noise.

Through the door I could just make out in another room across the wide hall a number of green baize covered tables and at least one party seated about one table deep in what I took to be a game of bridge.

Now and then I could make out servants passing rapidly and silently about, bearing drinks on trays.

There could be no doubt about what the place was. Gaming having been practically closed up in New York, had taken refuge in this de luxe establishment in the suburbs.

"What do you suppose it means?" I asked as I hopped lightly to the ground again beside Kennedy. "Can this be the origin of the blackmailing by the Black Menace?"

At least we had an explanation of the nature of this mansion of mystery.

Kennedy cautioned silence. In an instant I realized why. Some one had passed out through the long French doors to the porch above us.

From where we were crouching we could not see the faces and, indeed, even if we could have seen, I doubt whether we should have been able to make them out in the darkness. But at least we could hear the voices, and very distinctly.

No More Like That.

There were two of them, a man and a woman.

"I don't want any more jobs like that," continued the man, as though he were carrying on a conversation that had started inside.

"What did you have to do?" asked the woman.

Both Kennedy and I strained our ears to recognize the voices. I had hoped that the woman might be Breshkaya, but it did not seem to be, unless she were able to disguise her voice.

"I had to be very careful," returned the man, "smeared the stuff all over the paper—wore gloves and a mask to do it—then I sealed the thing in a letter and directed it. When she opens that—well, it'll be all over."

(To Be Continued Next Week.)

Less than 20 amateur transmitting licenses for radio operators have been issued in Australia.

IRRIGATION AREA FARMS PROSPERING

Crops on Government Projects Good and Farmers Cheered by Prospects of Better Prices, Work Reports.

Universal Service.

Washington, May 28.—Reports from the irrigation projects of the department of the interior indicate that better crops and better prices for farm products are expected by farmers and that a much more optimistic outlook prevails than last year, Secretary of the Interior Work declared Monday. He added:

"On the southwestern projects excellent stands of cotton are being obtained and the first and in some cases the second crop of alfalfa has already been harvested. On the more northern projects orchards have bloomed heavily and little damage to fruit has resulted from frost. A large area is being planted to sugar beets on those projects where this is one of the standard cash crops, and test plots have been planted to this crop on several other projects to determine its practicability."

"The increase in the price of potatoes has resulted in the shipment of large quantities which had been stored during the recent price slump. On a number of the projects the settlers are showing increased interest in dairying, with the result that new creameries and cheese factories are being erected as fast as conditions permit."

"A feature of this development work which should not be overlooked is the fact that these products of western irrigation agriculture seldom if ever enter into competition with the agricultural products of the east and south. The cotton, for example, is in general the long staple variety which competes with the Egyptian but not with the cotton of the south. Alfalfa is very largely consumed locally and will be more and more so as the dairying industry increases."

"With the vast quantities of sugar being imported yearly there is no competition between the sugar beet growers of the west and the cane planters of the south. There is always a local demand for the truck crops."

"On the other hand, the development of these projects is a distinct advantage to the east because of the large quantities of manufactured goods in the shape of furniture, agricultural implements and the like which are purchased by the settlers on the projects and the residents of neighboring towns and cities whose existence is due to the irrigation work of the department of the interior."

HERE'S BOY USED IN BILL HART AFFAIR



Bill Hart's Phantom Baby

This "phantom baby"—phantom not so far as his existence is concerned, but because he was not represented—was used by Miss Elizabeth MacCauley, Brookline, Mass., school teacher in an endeavor to win "Bill" Hart, movie star. She swore the boy was her son and Hart's, but has confessed and exonerated the actor.

ATTEMPT OF ROBBERS AT MITCHELL FAILURE

Mitchell, S. D., May 28 (Special).—Yeggs Sunday night undertook to blow off the safe of the vault door in the Mitchell Abstract company's office. The charge of nitroglycerine was not heavy enough to break the door. Evidently fearing to risk another charge, the robbers fled, and when the police, who had been notified by postoffice employes across the street, arrived the robbers had disappeared.

DIVORCE SUIT ALLEGATIONS RULED FALSE

Miss Larrimore Hints at Criminal Proceedings as Possible Outgrowth of Opera Star's Aspersions on Character.

Universal Service.

New York, May 28.—On the heels of a complete vindication given Miss Stella Larrimore, actress, in the divorce case of Geraldine Farrar against Lou Tellegen, and the assessment against the opera star of all costs in the case, came the announcement Monday night that Miss Larrimore would sue Miss Farrar for \$1,000,000.

Monday Supreme Court Justice Lehman ruled that the charges against Miss Larrimore were unfounded. He based his decision largely on a letter written by Miss Farrar's lawyer to the attorney for Miss Larrimore, acknowledging that the charges were unfounded, and offering to strike them from the record.

Miss Larrimore also intimated that in addition to her damage suit she would institute criminal proceedings through the district attorney's office to trace the aspersions cast on her good name in the Farrar-Tellegen divorce suit.

U. S. TRANSPORT MUTINY STOPPED

Wireless Report Says Dispute Aboard Ship Loaded With Russian Refugees Adjusted.

Universal Service.

Manila, P. I., May 29 (Tuesday).—"All trouble aboard the Merritt has been adjusted and the transport is proceeding at a speed of about 11 knots an hour bound for Nagasaki."

This message was brought here early today by the mine sweeper Henderson, which was rushed to the assistance of the United States transport Merritt Monday, following a report that the Russian crew aboard the transport had gone on a strike 600 miles north of Hongkong.

The Merritt, with 555 Russians aboard, left Olongapo four days ago for the United States, her passengers being the remnants of Admiral Stark's "White fleet" which fled Vladivostok more than a year ago.

SUES TO RECOVER BOND OF FORMER BANK HEAD

Mitchell, S. D., May 28 (Special).—John Hirling, state bank examiner, has instituted suit here, to recover the \$5,000 bond given by Waldemar Wenzlaff, former president of the State Bank at Tripp, S. D.

The state bank examining department holds that Wenzlaff embezzled funds belonging to the Tripp bank and the bank failed because of Wenzlaff's theft. The surety company should be required to pay the bond they say.

Hirling contends the amount of the bond should be turned over to the state banking department to be used in helping pay depositors in the defunct bank. William Wallace, of Aberdeen, S. D., has been appointed referee in the case as the result of the hearing here and will present his findings to the federal court in Sioux Falls.

REDS HALT WORK IN RUHR MINES

Berlin, May 28 (A. P.).—Two million miners and tens of thousands of metal workers are on strike in the Ruhr. Although these figures are probably grossly overestimated, it is believed that undoubtedly every mine center in the Ruhr is idle as a result of the tactics of the communists who are visiting the pits and forcibly ejecting the workers.

A vote taken in the Bochum district showed that a majority of the miners favored resumption of work, but communist pickets are stationed at some of the pits with fixed bayonets to prevent the miners from descending.

No further disorders since yesterday are reported and the casualties for the weekend stand at seven persons killed and 93 wounded. The food shortage is beginning to be felt in the disturbed area, especially at Gelsenkirchen.

MILWAUKEE TO ISSUE.

Washington, May 28 (P.).—The Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul railroad was authorized by the Interstate Commerce Commission to issue \$13,500,000 in equipment trust certificates today.

CLOSE TWO HOSPITALS FOR INVALID SOLDIERS

Washington, May 28.—In order to effect further economies in the operation of the United States veterans' bureau, Director Frank T. Hines has ordered two bureau hospitals in California closed, it was learned here Monday.

Arrowhead Springs and Camp Kearney are the two institutions affected by the director's decision. Refusal of the bureau to continue paying the high rentals now charged, is given as the reason for the order, which will go into effect June 30.