

The SABLE

By HORACE HAZELTINE

CHAPTER I.

The Vanishing Portrait.
Evelyn Grayson, meeting me on the old Boston Post Road, between Greenwich and Stamford, gave me a message from her uncle. That is the logical beginning of this story; though to make everything clear from the start it may be better to hark back a few months, to the day on which Evelyn Grayson and I first met.

Then, as now, we were each driving our own car; she, a great sixty-horsepower machine, all glistening pale yellow, and I, a compact six-cylinder racer, of dull dusty gray. But we were not on any such broad, roomy thoroughfare as the Boston Post Road. On the contrary we were short-cutting through a narrow, rough lane, beset by stone walls and interrupted at intervals by a series of sharp and treacherous angles.

I know I shall never forget the momentary impression I received. Out of the golden sunlight, it seemed to me, there had emerged suddenly a tableau of Queen Titania on a topaz throne—the fairest Queen Titania imaged ever conjured—and I, in my mad, panting speed was about to crash into the gauzy fabric of that dream creation and rend it with brutal, torturing onrush of relentless, hard-driven nickel steel. I take no credit to myself for what I did. Volition was absent. My hands acted on an impulse above and beyond all tardy mental guidance. For just a flashing instant the gray nose of my car rose before me, as in strenuous assault it mounted half way to the coping of the rose-tinted wall. I felt my seat dart away from beneath me, was conscious of my body, in swift, unsupported aerial flight, and then—but it is idle to attempt to set down the conglomerate sensations of that small fraction of a second. When I regained consciousness, Queen Titania was kneeling in the dust of the lane beside me—a very distressed and anxious Queen Titania, with wide, startled eyes, and quivering sympathetic lips—and about us were a half dozen or more of the vicinal country folk.

Between that meeting in mid-May and this meeting on the old Boston Post Road in mid-September, there had been others, of course; for Queen Titania, whose every-day name, as I have said, was Evelyn Grayson, was the niece and ward of my nearest neighbor, Mr. Robert Cameron, a gentleman recently come to reside on what for a century and more had been known as the old Townsbury Estate, extending for quite a mile along the Connecticut shore of Long Island Sound in the neighborhood of Greenwich.

The intervening four months had witnessed the gradual growth of an approach to intimacy between Cameron and myself as was possible considering the manner of man that Cameron was. By which statement I mean to imply naught to my neighbor's discredit. He was in all respects admirable—a gentleman of education and culture, widely traveled, of exalted ideals and noble principles to which he gave rigid adherence. But—I was about to qualify this by describing him as reserved and taciturn. I fear, though, to give a wrong impression. He was scarcely that. There were moments, however, when he was unresponsive, and he was never demonstrative. He had more poise than any man I know. He allowed you to see just so much of him, and no more. At times he was almost stubbornly reticent. And yet, in spite of these qualities, which appeared to be cultivated rather than inherent, he gave repeated evidence of a nature at once so simple and kindly and sympathetic as to command both confidence and affection.

To the progress of my intimacy with Evelyn there had been no such temperamental impediment. She was fearlessly outspoken, with a frankness born of unspoiled innocence; barely six weeks having elapsed between her graduation from the tiny French convent of Sainte Barbe near Paris and our perilous encounter in that contracted, treacherous, yet blessed little Connecticut lane. And she possessed, moreover, a multiplicity of additional charms, both of person and disposition—charms too numerous indeed to enumerate, and far too sacred to discuss. From which it may rightly be inferred that we understood each other, Evelyn and I, and that we were already considerably beyond the state or condition of mere formal acquaintanceship.

It was no Queen Titania who now came gliding to a stand beside me on the broad, level, well-ordered highway, under a double row of arching elms. It was no gossamer fairy, but Hebe, the Goddess of Youth, with creamy skin and red lips and a lilting melody of voice:

her that evening. It is true that she sat on my right at table, piquantly, youthfully beautiful in the softly tinted light which filtered through the pink and silver filigree candle-shades, but the atmosphere of the dinner was tinged by a vague, unreasoning constraint as from some ominously brooding yet undefinable influence which overhung the three of us. And when the coffee and liqueurs were served, employing some slender pretext for her going, she bade us good-night, and left us, not to return.

In justice to Cameron, I must add that he appeared least affected by—and certainly in no wise responsible for—the pervading infestivity. He had been, indeed, rather less demure than was often his wont, chatting with almost gayety concerning Evelyn's new role of Lady Bountiful and of her Norton beneficiaries. As for the subject upon which he desired to consult me, it had not been so much as mentioned; so in looking back, it seems impossible that matters of that nature either Evelyn nor I was at the time informed could have exerted an effect, save through Cameron's undetected, subconscious inducement.

Even after his niece had withdrawn, Cameron continued for a time to discuss with me topics of general and public, rather than personal, import. He spoke, I remember, of a series of articles on "The Commercial Resources of the United States," the publication of which had just begun in *The Week*, of which I am owner and editor; and though I fancied at first that it might be in this connection he wished to consult me, I very soon discerned that he was merely using a statement contained therein as a text for certain views of his own on the conservation and development of the country's timber supply.

Meanwhile my curiosity grew keener. It was natural, I suppose, that I should fancy Evelyn involved in some way. In fact I then attributed the depression during dinner to her knowledge of what her uncle and guardian purposed to say to me. Likewise I found in this conception the reason for her sudden and unusual desertion.

Hitherto when I had dined here Evelyn had remained with us while we smoked our cigarettes, leading us at length to the music room, where for a glad half-hour the rich melody of her youthful sweet contralto voice mingled in pleasing harmony with her own piano accompaniment.

And while I vainly made effort to imagine wherein I might have laid myself open to the disapproval of this most punctilious of guardians—for I expected nothing less than a studious and polite reference to some shortcoming of which I had been unwittingly guilty—I momentarily lost track of my host's discourse. Emerging from my abstraction it was with a measure of relief that I heard him saying:

"I think you told me once, Clyde, that you rather prided yourself on your ability to get a line on one's character from his handwriting. That's why I telephoned for you this afternoon. I have received an anonymous letter."

He was leaning forward, a little constrainedly, his left hand gripping the arm of his chair, the fingers of his right hand toying with the stem of his gold-rimmed Bohemian liqueur glass.

"An anonymous letter!" I repeated, with a deprecatory smile. "Anonymous letters should be burned and forgotten. Surely you're not bothering about the writer?"

I wish I could put before you an exact reproduction of Cameron's face as I then saw it; those rugged outlines, the heritage of Scottish ancestry, softened and refined by a brilliant intellectuality; the sturdy chin and square jaw; the heavy underlip meeting the upper in scarcely perceptible curve; the broad, homely nose; the small, but alert, gray eyes, shining through the round lenses of his spectacles; the high, broad, sloping, white brow and the receding border of dark brown, slightly grizzled hair. That, superficially, was the face. But I saw more than that. In the visage of one naturally brave I saw a battle waged behind a mask—a battle waged between courage and fear; and I saw fear win.

make it, indeed, uncommonly perplexing.

I fear my imagination was sluggish. Although, in spite of his dissemblance, I saw that he was strangely moved by these happenings. I could fancy no very terrifying concomitants of the rather commonplace facts he had narrated. For anonymous letters I had never held scant respect. An ambushed enemy, I argued, is admittedly a coward. And so I was in danger of growing impatient.

"When the second letter came," he continued, bringing his left hand forward to join his right on the dazzling white ground of the table's damask, "I searched among the circulars for the first, and found it. I want you to see them both. The writing is very curious—I have never seen anything just like it—and the signature, if I may call it that, is still more singular. On the first letter, I took it for a blot. But on the second letter occurs the same black blur or smudge of identical outline."

Of course I thought of the Black Hand. It was the natural corollary, seeing that the newspapers had been giving us a surfeit of Black Hand threats and Black Hand outrages. But, somehow, I did not dare to voice it. To have suggested anything so ordinary to Cameron in his present mood would have been to offer him offense.

And when, at the next moment, he drew from an inner pocket of his evening coat two thin, wax-like sheets of paper and passed them to me, I was glad that I had kept silence. For the letters were no rough, rude scrawls of an illiterate Mafia or Camorra. In phraseology as well as in penmanship they were impressively unique.

"If you don't mind," Cameron was saying, "you might read them aloud."

He rose and switched on a group of electric wall lights at my back, and I marked for the hundredth time his physique—his towering height, his powerful shoulders, his leanness of hip and sturdy straightness of limb. He did not look the forty years to which he confessed.

One of the long French windows which gave upon the terrace stood ajar, and before resuming his seat Cameron paused to close it, dropping over it the looped curtains of silver gray velvet that matched the walls.

In the succeeding moment the room was ghostly silent; and then, breaking against the stillness, was the sound of my voice, reading:

"That which you have wrought shall in turn be wrought upon you. Take warning therefore of what shall happen on the seventh day hence. As sun follows sun, so follows all that is decreed. The ways of our God are many. On the righteous he showers blessings; on the evil he pours misery."

That was the first letter. The second began with the same sentence:

"That which you have wrought shall in turn be wrought upon you." But there, though the similarity of tenor continued, the verbal identity ceased. It went on:

"Once more, as earnest of what is decreed, there will be shown unto you a symbol of our power. Precaution cannot avail. Fine words and a smiling countenance make not virtue."

And beneath each letter was that strange silhouette which Cameron had mentioned.

It is difficult for me to convey the most meager idea of the emotional influence which these two brief communications exerted. They seemed to breathe a grim spirit of implacable Nemesis far in excess of anything to be found in the euphemism of the written words.

When I had finished the reading of them aloud, Cameron, leaning far back in his chair, sat silently thoughtful, his eyes narrowed behind his glasses, but fixed apparently upon the lights behind me. And so, reluctant to interrupt his reverie, I started to read them through again slowly, this time to myself, fixing each sentence indelibly in mind as I proceeded. But before I had quite come to the end, my companion was speaking.

and nothing you can do will stay it. I thought at first I imagined it, but the oftener I have read, the more I have felt its clutch. The letters of themselves are nothing. What do you suppose I care for veiled threats of that sort? I'm big enough to take care of myself, Clyde. I've met peril in about every possible guise, in every part of the world. But this—this is different. And the worst of it is, I don't know why. I can't for the life of me make out what it is I'm afraid of."

He had gone very pale, and his strong, capable hands, which toyed with the two letters, quivered and twitched in excess of nervous tension.

Then, with a finger pointing to the ink-stain at the bottom of one of the sheets, he asked:

"What does that look like to you?"

I took the letter from him, and scrutinizing the rude figure with concentrated attention for a moment, ventured the suggestion that it somewhat resembled a boat.

"A one-masted vessel, square-rigged," he added, in elucidation. "Exactly." "Now turn it upside down." I did so.

"Now what do you see?" "The head of a man wearing a helmet. The resemblance was very marked."

"A straw helmet, apparently," he amplified, "such as is worn in the Orient. And yet the profile is not that of an Oriental. Now, look at your vessel again." And once more I reversed the sheet of paper.

"Can it be a Chinese junk?" I asked. "It might be a sailing proa or banca," he returned, "such as they use in the South Pacific. But whatever it is, I can't understand what it has to do with me or I with it."

I was still studying the black dab, when he said:

"But you haven't told me about the handwriting. What can you read of the character of the writer?"

"Nothing," I answered, promptly. "It is curious penmanship, as you say—very heavy and regular and upright, with some strangely formed letters; especially the f's and the p's; but it tells me nothing."

"But I thought—" he began. "That I boasted? So I did. When one writes as one habitually writes it is very easy. These letters, however, are not in the writer's ordinary hand. The writing is as artificial as though you, for example, had printed a note in Roman characters. Were they addressed in the same hand?"

"Precisely." "What was the post-mark?" "They bore no post-mark. That is another strange circumstance. Yet they were with my mail. How they came there I have been unable to ascertain. The people at the post office naturally deny that they delivered anything unstamped, as these were; and Barrie, the lad who fetches the letters, has no recollection of these. Nor has Checkbeedy, who sorts the mail here at the house. But each of them lay beside my plate at breakfast—the first on the fourteenth of August; the second, this morning, the fourteenth of September."

"And they were not delivered by messenger?" "So far as I can learn, no." "It is very odd," I commented, with feeble banality.

I took the letters from his hands once more, and held them in turn between my vision and the candle-light, hoping, perchance, to discover a watermark in the paper. But I was not rewarded.

fully, I presume?" was my query as I returned the sheets to the table.

"More than carefully," he answered. "But you shall see them, if you like. I found no trace of any identifying mark."

Thus far he had made no further mention of the "puzzling happening" which followed the receipt of the first letter, and in the interest provoked by the letters themselves I had foreborne to question him; but now as the words "seventh day hence" fell again under my eye, standing out, as it were, from the rest of the script which lay upturned on the table before me, I was conscious of a stimulated concern, and so made inquiry.

"I wish you would tell me, first, whether anything really did occur on the seventh day."

"I was coming to that," he replied; but it seemed to me that prompt though his response was, there was a shade of reluctance in his manner.

"Then he rose, abruptly, and saying: 'Suppose we go into my study, Clyde,' led the way from the dining room, across the great, imposing, grained and fretted hall to that comparatively small mahogany and green symphony wherein he was wont to spend most of his indoor hours. It was always a rather gloomy room at night, with its high dark ceiling, its heavy and voluminous olive tapestry hangings, wholly out of keeping, it seemed to me, with the season—and its shaded lights confined to the vicinity of the massive polished, and gilt-ornamented writing table of the period of the First Empire. And it impressed me now, in conjunction with Cameron's promised revelation, as more than ever grim and awesome.

I remember helping myself to a cigar from the humidor which stood on the antique cabinet in the corner near the door. I was in the act of lighting it when Cameron spoke.

"I want you to sit in this chair," he said, indicating one of sumptuous upholstery which stood beside the writing table, facing the low, long book-cases lining the opposite wall.

I did as he bade me, while he remained standing.

"Do you, by any chance," he asked, "remember a portrait which hung above the book-shelves?"

I remembered it very well. It was a painting of himself, done some years back. But now my gaze sought it in vain.

"Certainly," I answered. "It hung there," pointing.

"Quite right. Now I want you to observe the shelf-top. You see how crowded it is."

It was indeed crowded. Bronze busts and statues; yachting and golf trophies in silver; framed photographs; a score of odds and ends, souvenirs gathered the world over. There was scarcely an inch of space unoccupied. I had frequently observed this plethora of ornament and resented it. It gave to that part of the room the semblance of a curiosity shop. When I had nodded my assent, he went on:

"On the afternoon of Friday, August twenty-first, seven days after the receipt of that first letter, I was sitting where you are sitting now. I was reading, and deeply interested. I had put the letter, as I told you, entirely out of my mind. I had forgotten it, absolutely. That seventh-day business I had regarded—if I regarded it at all—as idle vaporing. That this was the afternoon of the seventh day did not occur to me until afterwards. I recall that I paused in reading to ponder a paragraph that was not quite clear to me, and that while in contemplation I fixed my eyes upon that portrait. I remember that, because it struck me, then, that the flesh tints of the face had grown muddy and that the thing would be better for a cleaning. I recall, too, that at that moment, the little clock, yonder, struck three. I resumed my reading; but presently, another statement demanding cogitation, I lowered my book, and once more my eyes rested on the portrait. But not on the muddy flesh tints, because—I have paused and leaned forward, towards me, speaking with impressive emphasis. "Because," he repeated, "there were no flesh tints there. Because there was no head nor face there!"

I sat up suddenly, open-mouthed, speechless. Only my wide eyes made question.

"Cut from the canvas," he went on, in lowered voice, "clean and sharp from crown to collar. And the hands of the clock pointed to twelve minutes past three."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Parisian Street Costume



(Photo. by Underwood & Underwood, N. Y.)
The photograph shows the latest street costume with a skirt of blue satin, slashed at the side so as to show plaited underskirt and give freedom in walking. The buttons and loops running down the side of the skirt are of a darker shade of blue. The coat is of dark blue taffeta with two smart little tails. The jabot and wrist frills are of mulle and the hat of white beaver. The effect is altogether odd.

FLOWERS FOR THE CORSAGE DESIGNS NOT YET SETTLED

Just Now the Somber Tones Are Most Favored by Those Who Lead the Season's Fashions.

If you'd be quite in the mode this winter you'll have an assortment of the new big velvet flowers that, unlike the real live ones, can be steamed fresh when they seem to wilt.

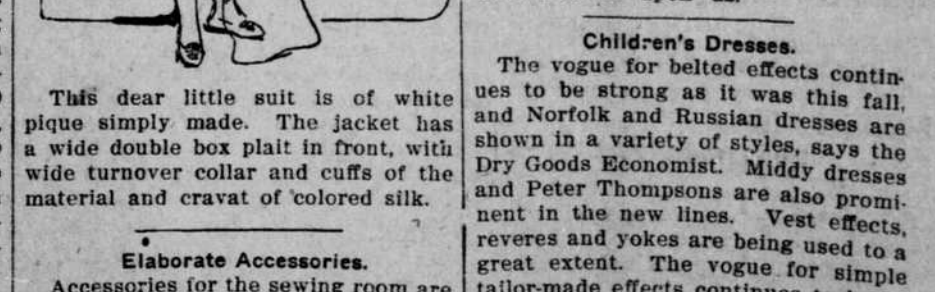
The vogue for somber tones makes a carefully chosen corsage bouquet a touch of particular importance. To be in good taste, the blossom must always be in season.

Just now it's correct to wear a couple of tawny velvet chrysanthemums, or a bouquet of mountain ash berries. Soon violets will form the corsage bouquet, scented so naturally that one who isn't very sharp will take them for the really-true kind.

The idea of matching the flowers used to catch the stole with those introduced on the hat is also used, but in this case the corsage bouquet frankly declares itself artificial. A water lily in black velvet, with white satin lining and a gleam of gold in the heart of the blossom, is one of the favorite devices in this connection, while for evening wear the same flower is well to the fore, being used to catch up the soft glistening folds of the satin or velvet robe, while it usually masquerades in metal tissue trimmed with diamonds, as though a shower of dewdrops had been shaken lightly over the flowers.

A clump of two or three full blown water lilies, with a shower of close-set pendant buds drooping from them, makes a lovely decoration for an evening toilet which relies more or less for its effects upon its lines.

CHILD'S PIQUE SUIT



This dear little suit is of white pique simply made. The jacket has a wide double box plait in front, with wide turnover collar and cuffs of the material and cravat of colored silk.

Inspiration of the Colors

Sentiments That the Soldier Associates With the Flag Have Turned Many Battles.

Instance after instance could be quoted from military history in which the mere sight of the colors has inspired men and carried them to ultimate victory when the tide of battle appeared to have turned against them and all seemed lost. Great generals have themselves taken the colors in their hands and rallied their forces to supreme effort in the hour of trial. Obviously it was not the mere piece of tattered silk that wrought these wonders; it was the sentiment inseparably associated with the colors that acted as the spell.

We know, too, that the capture or the loss of colors has always been assigned a vital importance by the world's greatest commanders, because they knew that these regimental emblems typified all that their possessors held most dear—prestige, honor, victory. Let any man visit Napoleon's tomb at the Invalides, and, taking on the solemn spirit of the hour, gaze down into the circular shrine in which lies the huge porphyry sarcophagus containing the body of the great captain whose legions made all Europe tremble. Apart from the sarcophagus itself, what is it that most impresses nine out of every ten spectators? Surely the stands of colors—the trophies of war—that stand grouped round the tomb. They are the mutely eloquent witnesses to the greatness of the man whose dust rests in their midst.—London Telegraph.

Reindeer in Alaska Increase.

From 1892 to 1902 the United States bureau of education introduced 1,280 European reindeer into Alaska at a time when the natives were threatened with starvation. At the present time these herds have increased to a total of 33,625 head. Their meat is in great demand by both whites and natives, and their skins supply the best winter clothing. It is expected that the exportation of reindeer meat will soon become an important industry.

Above all, the reindeer has proved a most efficient civilizing agency. The success of the Alaskan reindeer enterprise induced Dr. Wilfred Grenfell, in 1903, to import 300 reindeer from Lapland into Labrador, where they have now increased to about 1,200, and are a great boon to the natives. Last year the Canadian government bought 50 of Dr. Grenfell's herd for introduction into northern Canada.

Handing It to Papa.

"Pa, does Mr. Joiner belong to your lodge?" "No, son, why do you ask?" "Well, is he a great friend of yours?" "I'm afraid he isn't." "That's odd. I think he is going to give you some kind of an emblem." "You must be mistaken." "No, only yesterday his little son told me that his father was going to give you the double cross the first time he had a good chance."—Youngstown Telegram.

Fur Used on Hats.

Fur is being used on this season's hats in a great variety of ways, and all sorts of fur are being made use of. Broad bands, large enough to cover the side of the crown completely; the narrowest edgings which are made up, in connection with crepe and plush; facings and brims of fur on hats of satin, brocade and velvet, and tall ornaments of fur taking the place of feathers appear on the hats which will be used in the early part of the season by women who do not care to wear an all fur toque until midwinter is upon us.

Children's Dresses.

The vogue for belted effects continues to be strong as it was this fall, and Norfolk and Russian dresses are shown in a variety of styles, says the Dry Goods Economist. Middy dresses and Peter Thompsons are also prominent in the new lines. Vest effects, reverses and yokes are being used to a great extent. The vogue for simple tailor-made effects continues to be as strong as ever, and elaborate trimmings are seldom used, particularly in the colored frocks.

Tattooing on Doylies.

A most effective luncheon set may be made by using plain linen for centers of doilies and finished the edge of each with a row of double tatting made of not too fine thread. Tatting of very fine thread is an exquisite finish for a dainty handkerchief.