

The Mystery of Hartley House

By CLIFFORD S. RAYMOND

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"JOHN!"

Synopsis.—Dr. John Michelson, just beginning his career, becomes resident physician at Hartley house. Mr. Sidney is an American, a semi-invalid, old and rich and very desirous to live. Mrs. Sidney is a Spanish woman, dignified and reticent. Jed, the butler, acts like a privileged member of the family. Hartley house is a fine old isolated country place, with a murder story, a "haunted pool," and many wack-dogs, and an atmosphere of mystery. The "haunted pool" is where Richard Dobson, son of a former owner of Hartley house, had killed his brother, Arthur Dobson. Jed begins operations by locking the doctor in his room the very first night. Doctor John fixes his door so he can't be locked in. He meets Isobel, daughter of the house and falls in love at first sight. In the night he finds the butler drunk and holding Mrs. Sidney by the wrist. He interferes. Mrs. Sidney explains. John buys a revolver. John overhears Jed telling Mrs. Sidney he will have his way. In reply she says she will not hesitate to kill him. Mrs. Sidney asks John to consent to the announcement of his engagement to Isobel. The young people consent to the make-believe announcement. Jed tries to kill John.

CHAPTER III—Continued.

Mr. Sidney never liked to have his vicarious drinking interrupted, but he always was good natured.

"Well, doctor," he said, "what now? Is Jed drinking too much for my health?"

At that moment no possible amount of liquor would have been too much for Jed. The wretch must have thought I was a ghost.

"Jed may drink himself to death, for all me," I said. "That probably is the best end he can come to. I think he is gallows meat, but I want to talk to him when you can spare him."

"We can't spare Jed to have him hanged," said Mr. Sidney. "He's too useful. Who else could drink my wine of an evening? Go along with the doctor, Jed, and see what he wants. It's probably a matter of pills or powders for me."

Jed was recovering from his shock, but he still showed the effects of it.

"No hurry," I said. "I'd rather wait a half hour. I'll be in my room."

I went there and wrote two letters. Both were to one point. They related circumstantially what had happened that afternoon. One I addressed to a lawyer I knew, and the other to Dr. Brownell. Jed knocked at the door as I finished them. He was still un-nerved.

"I have something I want you to read," I said, and gave him the letters. He read them and moistened his lips.

"You don't need to talk, Jed," I said. "I'll do all the talking that's necessary. I am not going away. I am going to stay right here, and you'd better be very careful of my health. These letters go out tonight. The men who get them will keep their mouths shut so long as I am alive. If anything should happen to me, whether you had anything to do with it or not, you'd have a difficult time with a jury."

"It was a mistake," he said. "I would not do you any harm. I shot at a rabbit."

"Twice with a pistol, when you had a shotgun?" I said. "You did! I was the rabbit."

CHAPTER IV.

Jed came to me the next day in one of his candid moods.

"I did shoot at you yesterday," he said.

"I know you did," I replied.

"And you're wondering why and you're wondering if I intend to do it again."

"I don't wonder at anything you do," I said. "And you know that if you do it again, the evidence is prepared against you. I think I am perfectly safe. I know you are a coward."

"No, I'm not a coward," he said, as if he were stating a fact and not making a boast. "I never do anything without a purpose, and when I have a purpose, I do it no matter what the consequences may be. The reason I wanted to shoot you was because you were engaged to Isobel. I intend to marry Isobel. Now I know that you are not going to marry Isobel. You are just the foolish fence that her mother thought she could build up around Isobel and keep me from trying to marry her. Isobel doesn't want you. She is laughing at you. So we might as well be friends again."

"You preposterous old fool!" I said. "You scallie alcoholic! You are a violation of decency. You enfeebled, exasperating old goat! You would sicken the moral conscience of a mummy. If you ever associate your aspirations with the name of Miss Sidney again, I'll cut your throat with a paper knife."

Jed smiled and made me feel ridiculous.

"I am a more intelligent man than you," he said. "You are too simple for the complexities of life. You could not possibly be sufficient for a girl of Miss Sidney's character. She would die of

boredom in six months. There is nothing preposterous about my candidacy for Miss Sidney. I am older than I'd like to be, but that is all."

"You are a hideous old fool," I said. "but I think I can handle you, and I give you warning."

"I am going to be quite friendly," said Jed.

"You flatter yourself," I said.

"Well, anyway," he said, "I'm friendly."

He proved to be so. The life of the house went placidly from day to day. Isobel, with a sense of our posturing toward each other, made mocking gestures of affection which shocked her mother. She particularly delighted to demonstrate, when Jed was serving dinner. I thought she would end by getting me shot in the back, but Jed had rated me finally as unimportant, which did my egotism no good. For such a rascal to discard me, formally betrothed as I was to Isobel, in his scandalous pursuits of that beautiful girl, was preposterous.

If Mrs. Sidney had known that I was idiotically in love with Isobel, she would not have sought relief from her distress by the arrangement which made me her daughter's protective fiancé. The only thing I could take credit for in this absurd situation was that Mrs. Sidney was not allowed to know the state of my feelings.

I was as sensible as a corrupting romanticism would permit me to be. I knew that any affection I might place in this fashion was a real and serious emotional vice, which if not controlled might lead to unhappiness. That consciousness had steadied me, but it had not delivered me.

Isobel walked brightly through the old house of tragedy—as surely it was, however hidden the tragedy. She was the glint of sunshine in the aisles of the dark woods, the odor of roses against the wall. She had the charm of the hollyhocks, the freshness of the hepatica in the spring, the beauty of the wild rose in June.

If I showed my feeling more than a liver sausage shows a soul, I hope I may be punished. What I thought of Isobel was my own affair, so long as I kept it strictly my own affair.

I took myself in hand with as much energy and promptness as I could, following the announcement of our engagement. I did not want to confess myself a fool. I did not intend to do so if I could help it.

I overdid it. I became disagreeable. I kept as much out of Isobel's presence as possible. I never willingly was alone with her. I did my best to avoid meeting her or speaking to her. Isobel met the situation with her natural frankness after I had been giving this demonstration of myself for some time.

"Doctor," she said, "this household necessarily imposes friendships upon the people in it. I wonder if we could not be a little more agreeable to each other."

I did not know what to say. I hoped not to be a hypocrite, and I did not want to be absurd.

"I shall be glad to be as agreeable as I can," I said after some mental stuttering. "I want to be, but I am so awkward."

"I want to be, too," said Isobel; "and if we both want to be, we shall not have to glower at each other every time we meet. Even mother does not require it and father would detest it."

Without saying anything more, she made me see that I had used a cheap device to escape the consequences of a foolish affection. The girl in a very friendly fashion had shown me that my avoidance of her was marked, cool and unreasonable. It was wholly reasonable from my poor standpoint, but from no other.

I saw that I was meeting my difficulty by running away from it, and I not only did not like the timidity of escape in this fashion, but furthermore, I did not like the opinion Isobel formed of me because of it. I had to face the music, and after that I did. It ought not to have astonished me that I felt better instantly. I knew that a coward only increased his troubles.

I imagine if I had not seemed such a professional stick, such a thing aloof from human emotions, Isobel would have been merely friendly and kind. As it was, she was tantalizing. She liked me well enough, but that meant very little. If she did not drive, ride, walk or play tennis with me, she had a choice of the servants. It was I or nothing.

I was with Mr. Sidney a number of hours every day. They varied, sometimes seven or eight a day in different periods, sometimes three or four. Very little of this time was occupied in professional duty. Life at Hartley house would have been intolerably lonesome if I had been there merely as a practitioner. And therefore I welcomed a routine that was outside my profession. Mr. Sidney had a delicacy of perception which told him when attention upon even so amiable an invalid might be drawing upon the physical reserve of the people waiting upon him or being with him. He always managed that they never should feel the fatigue of it.

We saw no company at Hartley house. We made no calls and received none. We extended no invitations and received none. The estate was baron-

ial, and it had baronial habits, but it brought no friends to the doors.

It was nearly always with regard to Isobel that the condition seemed unnatural. For an invalid like Mr. Sidney it was natural enough. Mrs. Sidney was wholly devoted to him; I was engaged in professional duties; and for Jed and the servants in the house it was natural to be content with what they had of life or with the performance of duties for which they were paid and which they might abandon at will. But this was Isobel's life. She was young, vibrant, beautiful, but vistas opening into human prospects were closed to her. And she was engaged to a piece of professional dead wood who happened to be the only masculine thing available when her mother was in great distress.

Later Isobel said that as a woman she knew of course that I loved her, but this is evident fiction. She did no such thing, and it would be an unkindness to her to think so. What was only comedy if I were, as she thought I was, an indifferent, unfeeling man, would have been cruelty if it had been known that the position was mockery of denied hopes.

Isobel used me to gain her liberty. She affected familiarities and called me "John" derisively, or worse "dear" or "old dear." I protested, in more pain than she could guess.

"We are engaged," she said. "What should I call you?"

"You might consider the fact that we are not engaged," I suggested.

"But we are. If we don't act as if we were, you'll not be any protection against Jed. Don't you want me to call you John?"

"Of course I do," I said. "It's perfectly straightforward, natural and proper."

"Then it's the 'dear' and 'old dear' you object to, and I perfectly delight in calling you 'old dear.' It fits so



Isobel Used Me to Gain Her Liberty.

well—it is really wonderful. It is almost a complete description as well as a charming appellation. I adore it."

"I object to unnecessary freedom," I said.

"But it helps to deceive Jed," "Nothing deceives Jed. He was deceived only for a short while. Then he tried to kill me. He apologized afterward for his mistake. He knows the character of our engagement."

"Just the same, he has not bothered mother since then as he did before."

"That is because he is a coward and I have him where I can control him."

Mrs. Sidney did not understand her daughter. That was not astonishing; Isobel was a young American woman; Mrs. Sidney had Spanish traditions, Isobel came naturally, through her father, to a candor which never ceased to amaze and—occasionally—to distress her mother. Isobel said what she thought. Her frankness came from honesty of character. Her lovely mother regarded life as something to be managed by reticence and denial. Mrs. Sidney was esthetic, and if a fact were unesthetic, she denied it and put it out of her consideration. It was, to her, the only proper thing to do.

Isobel was a clever tennis-player and I a poor one. She beat me three or four sets every fine afternoon. She liked to drive a car and ride a horse. I drove and rode with her.

When Isobel said for the first time that she wanted to take me for a drive in the car, her mother made a gesture of dismay. Isobel stood before her and smiled.

"You know we are engaged, mother," she said.

I thought of the hen at the pond's edge seeing her brood of ducklings in the water. Mrs. Sidney was not in a panic and she did not flutter, but her distress was acute. She knew the girl had to develop and she knew that she had to live in North, not South America. But knowledge is not a complete anodyne to pain.

Isobel took her mother's hand and kissed it, and then her lips. She smiled in such an honest, frank, perceptive fashion—I know that a smile can contain all the human understanding in

the world, because I saw Isobel's—and then, holding her mother's hand, she allowed Mrs. Sidney to have the moment of distress with the intimate support of her own presence.

It may seem a small struggle that mother and daughter went through, but it did not seem small to me who witnessed it, and it had no rhetorical and little emotional expression.

Isobel knew her mother suffered, but she was wise. Mrs. Sidney dreaded her daughter's adopted mode of life, but knew her daughter.

"Good-bye, mother," said Isobel. "We shan't be gone long. Come on, John."

That was the first time she had called me John honestly and without comedy. I knew her finesse. She did it to give her mother the comfortable sense that she was not going upon a wild adventure of an automobile ride with an unrelated man but was within the strict intimacy of the family.

We went driving, Isobel at the wheel. She liked to drive fast and I do not. I am timid. I do not think that locomotion is a genuine human pleasure. Possibly it is, behind either a fast or a plodding horse. I prefer the plodding horse. Locomotion then merely reveals gradually changing facets of the scene; one likes to see the manifold aspects of a landscape unfold. But an automobile driven as Isobel wanted to drive it revealed no facets. It merely blurred the vision and gave the idea that the satisfaction sought was a certain amount of wind blown in the face. For such as love it, not for me!

"That was a difficult scene, doctor," she said.

I knew that was what she would call me next—"doctor." I came directly down out of the clouds.

"I know it was," I said, "and I admired the honest way in which you managed it."

"I think I shall continue to call you John just that way," she said. "It seems more honest and decent. After all, we are engaged."

Sometimes Mr. Sidney could be taken out in an automobile, of a warm, fair afternoon. It was not often that his strength permitted this, but whenever it did, I was glad not only to allow but to suggest that he make use of all opportunities.

The most beautiful of our river drives brought us, within the limitation of Mr. Sidney's strength, to the penitentiary at Alwick. It was a hideous structure of barracks, work-rooms and walls, of cells and armed guards; but it was in lovely surroundings, and if we took the best roads, we came naturally to the prison walls.

Mr. Sidney would look at the enclosure and the guards in the turrets as if interpreting his own life in the terms of prison existence. We may have taken this drive by the prison road ten times when, approaching it on another of our outings, Mr. Sidney had the driver stop at the entrance.

"I feel very strong and well today, doctor," he said, "and if you do not object, I think I should like to go inside. I have seen the outside so many times, I have a curiosity to see the inside."

I consented, thinking that with Jed and me helping him—we acted as his legs, guiding and sustaining his feeble motions—he was strong enough to make the effort. I did not know whether it was good or bad psychology to give him a sight of so many imprisoned men, but my instinct suggested that it would, in his case, be good. He was a logical, reasoning man—a rare phenomenon in the human race. If he had been emotional and sentimental, I should have had more doubt.

Mr. Sidney was important enough to be known in the neighborhood. The warden of the prison came to meet him in the office as soon as we had entered. He was very cordial to Mr. Sidney, who himself never showed more his aristocracy of democracy. I am a democrat. I am most fond of an aristocratic democrat. Such was Mr. Sidney.

Mr. Sidney visits the penitentiary.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Flat Feet.

Symptoms of flat foot are pain along the instep or even in the calves of the legs, knees, thighs, hips or back, often mistaken for rheumatism or other troubles. The person stands with feet well apart and toes turned outward. The ankle bends inward and the weight falls on the inner line of the foot so that the entire sole rests flat on the ground.

Fox Squirrel's Nests.

In the South, instead of being in the hollow trees, the fox squirrels build big nests in the tops of the pine and other trees, usually of Spanish moss, says the American Forestry Magazine. In these they sleep, also carrying to them the pine cones. In the hardwood forests of the North, dry leaves take the place of the Spanish moss, and a conspicuous nest is built with an entrance hole at the side.

Every boy knows several men whom he intends to whip when he grows up.

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WAS TO BE MORE YELLING

Safe to Say That Father's Prediction Turned Out to Be Absolutely Correct.

The sweetly peaceful scene in the little sitting room was suddenly disturbed by a loud yell, and the honored guest sprang wildly from the chair into which he had just sunk, while the daughter of the house felt her face grow pale.

She had had hopes from this visit. Alas, poor girl, were they to be blighted?

But father took the matter—and his small son—firmly in hand. With a graceful apology he removed the bent pin from the chair and the aforesaid small boy from the room.

"Now, look here, Charles," he said sternly, in the back yard, "why did you do it?"

"It—it was an experiment, father!" faltered the lad.

"An experiment!" snorted father. "The only man who has visited your poor sister for years, and you go and drive him away!"

"Well, dad," explained the boy, "he advertised that he is a painless dentist, and I wanted to find out if it was true, and it wasn't. You should have heard him yell!"

"Yes," was the father's grim comment. "And some one else is going to hear you yell now!"

A Clue.
"You said the suspected moonshiners gave you a clue by singing. What was the song?"

"'Oft in the Stillly Night.'"

A Clean Sweep.
Vacationist—You say the city takes everything you raise. Farmer—Yes! And that includes the help we raise.

Unprofitable Combination.
Howell—Is your new hired man satisfactory?
Powell—I should say not. He is one of the heavy eaters and light workers.

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POET'S WORD GOOD ENOUGH

Student Was Absolutely Satisfied Without the Necessity of Seeing Any Proofs.

A good story is going the rounds of Princeton about Prof. Alfred Noyes, the English poet.

Professor Noyes, it is well known, likes very much to read his works aloud to his friends, and at Princeton, with so many young men under him, he is usually able to gratify this liking to the full.

The other day Professor Noyes said to a junior, who had called about an examination:

"Wait a moment. Don't go yet. I want to show you the proofs of my new book of poems."

But the junior made for the door frantically.

"No, no," he said. "I don't need proofs. Your word is enough for me, professor."

English Women in Wit.

One of the best-known women in London's newspaper world, returning from Birmingham by train and endeavoring to make shorthand notes en route, was hopelessly interrupted by a man on the opposite seat who persisted in shouting his political opinions to an acquaintance in the farthest corner, says a writer in the London Evening News. At last he used a phrase containing the word "damn" and turned to apologize to the lady for using such a word.

"Don't mention it," she replied, sweetly. "I have been mentally using the word for the last hour."

And the newspapers of the other passengers rustled through the laughter of their owners.

Height of Something or Other.

Our idea of the height of something or other is a 200-pound corned pig jammed into a tin bathtub that is attached to a motorcycle.—Arkansas Thomas Cat.

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