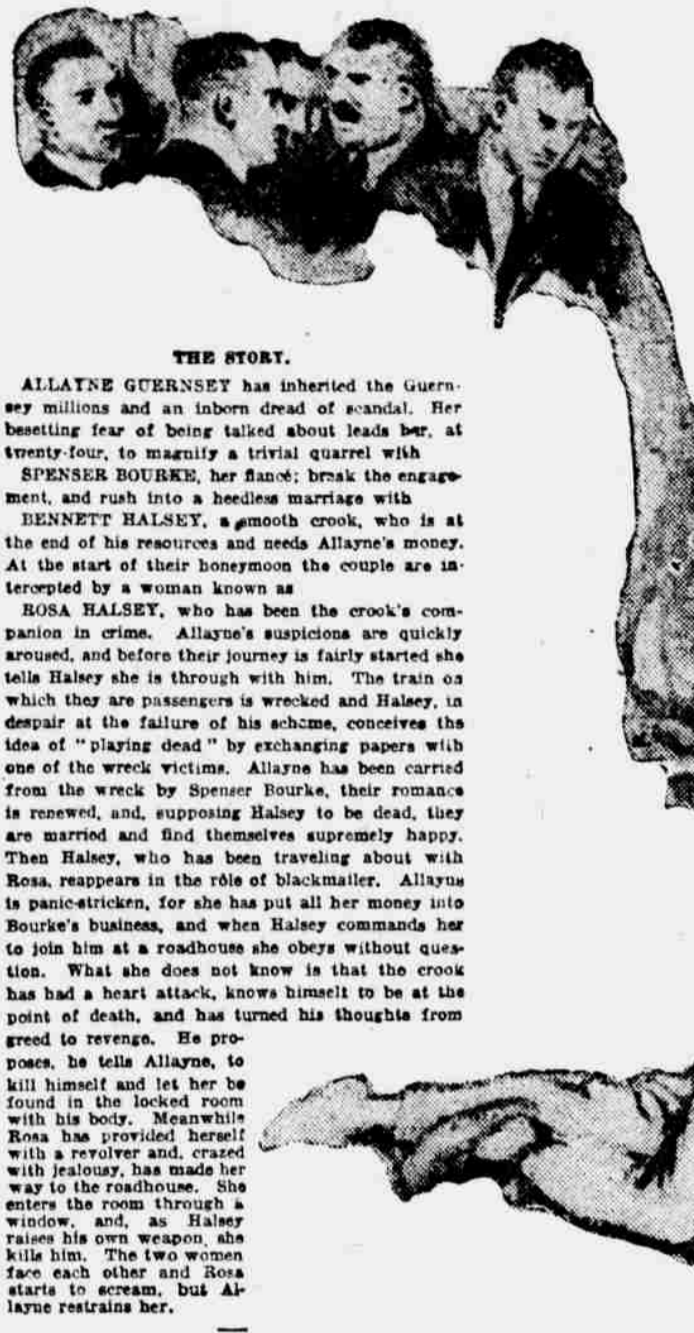


The BOGIE of FEAR by Arthur Somers Roche



Blue Ribbon Fiction

Two Weapons! No burn upon the dead man's forehead! Murder beyond question.

THE STORY.

ALLAYNE GUENNEY has inherited the guernsey millions and an unborn dread of scandal. Her besetting fear of being talked about leads her, at twenty-four, to marrying a trivial quarrel with SPENSER BOURKE, her fiancé; break the engagement, and rush into a heedless marriage with BENNETT HALSEY, a smooth crook, who is at the end of his resources and needs Allayne's money. At the start of their honeymoon the couple are interrupted by a woman known as ROSA HALSEY, who has been the crook's companion in crime. Allayne's suspicions are quickly aroused, and before their journey is fairly started she tells Halsey she is through with him. The train on which they are passengers is wrecked and Halsey, in despair at the failure of his scheme, conceives the idea of "playing dead" by exchanging papers with one of the wreck victims. Allayne has been carried from the wreck by Spenser Bourke, her romance is renewed, and, supposing Halsey to be dead, they are married and find themselves supremely happy. Then Halsey, who has been traveling about with Rosa, reappears in the role of blackmailer. Allayne is panic-stricken, for she has put all her money into Bourke's business, and when Halsey comes to join him at a roadhouse she obeys without question. What she does not know is that the crook has had a heart attack, knows himself to be at the point of death, and has turned his thoughts from greed to revenge. He proposes to Allayne, to kill himself and let her be found in the locked room with his body. Meanwhile Rosa has provided herself with a revolver and, crazed with jealousy, has made her way to the roadhouse. She enters the room through a window, as Halsey raises his own weapon, she kills him. The two women face each other and Rosa starts to scream, but Allayne restrains her.

FIFTH INSTALLMENT.

The Getaway.

Allayne's breath exhaled in a sigh of relief. Rosa's voice was petulant, almost whimpering, held also a hint of fear. Hysteria, for the while at any rate, had been banished.

"Be quiet," she ordered. She rose, releasing the woman. Her eye lighted upon Rosa's pistol; swiftly she bent over and picked it up, with the same movement of her other hand she retrieved Halsey's weapon. Then again she turned to Rosa.

Always Rosa had played a subordinate part. She was the one who took orders, who obeyed. It had been Halsey who made the decisions, formulated the plans. If Halsey said "Paris," Rosa packed their things without protest.

And now the fire that had burned within her had worn itself out. She was ready to be led once again. She had killed Halsey and would not feel remorse. Her love for him had been slain as definitely as she had slain him. But the passion of hate was only embers now; it could never blaze furiously again. Already fear of the consequences crept into her soul.

"The police?" she whispered. She looked up at Allayne pleadingly; the petulance had gone. She recognized that Allayne was of some superior clay; to the behests of that superior person she would defer.

Allayne shook her head. "No one knows—yet." She sat down and eyed Rosa curiously. This woman had killed a man. She had committed murder. Had some one told Allayne yesterday morning that she could have gazed, with an impersonal curiosity, at a murdered whose victim was as yet not cold, she would have been scornful of the speaker's absurdity. Time and events change us.

"Why did you kill him?" she asked.

"To save you," said Rosa. Her voice was dull. She had climbed heavily to her feet, all her catlike grace gone, and then sunk into a chair. Her hands were folded upon her lap. She was as meek as some servant, long out of work, applying for a position. All that of Allayne had gone from her heart. Indeed, she could not have told whether she had any hate of the woman who with Halsey. Whether or not, having slain Halsey, she would have turned her gun upon Allayne had not emotion overwhelmed her consciousness, neither she nor any one else could have told.

"To save me?" asked Allayne. She asked the question with no purpose. She was trying to think, trying to conceive of some way out of an impossible situation.

Faintly Rosa colored. Her eyes avoided Allayne, rested upon the dead man. Into her eyes came a faint gleam of wrath.

"But I intended," she said, "to kill him anyway."

"Why?" asked Allayne.

The woman looked at her.

"He had a way to live. He knew it. Yet he went to meet another woman. O, he had done that often before. And I had forgiven him. But this time—I gave up everything for him. I was decent, honest, until I married him."

Allayne stared at her. "Married him?"

Once again a faint flush stole over Rosa's cheeks.

"I am bad," she said simply, "but not that way. He was my husband."

Allayne sank back into her chair. "Then—then—he was not my husband," she cried. Rosa stared at her.

"Of course not! I carry always with me our wedding certificate." From her bodice

she brought forth an envelope. She held it out toward Allayne.

"I am not bad—not that way," she cried. Allayne waved the envelope away. Her hand went over her eyes. She did not wish even to see the dead remains of this man who had tried to shame her. So she had never been Halsey's wife! Therefore, she was Bourke's wife. If only she had defied the man, telephoned Spenser. . . . Now, because she had feared a lie, she was face to face with a situation more dreadful than anything that her fears could have imagined.

"You thought he was your husband?" Rosa asked.

"Why else would I have met him here?" countered Allayne. "He demanded money—money which I could not raise. I came here when he telephoned me, to tell him that my—my husband would kill him if he knew that I had been blackmailed, and that I intended to tell him. Then that man—told me that he was going to kill himself, that my—prudence—had robbed him of fortune and life itself. He said that I would be found here, with his dead body beside me, unable to explain. . . ."

Rosa stared at the body of Halsey.

"He was worse than I thought," she said. "I did not dream—you thought yourself a widow when you married again? Of course! And when Benny came to see you—I understand. But he—to wish to shame you—he must have loved you," she said.

Allayne glanced quickly at her. But there was no jealousy in Rosa's heart. Her love had been lost in her hate. No shadow of regret, no tinge of remorse did she feel. She had endured the ultimate of emotion, and her endurance had culminated in Halsey's death. She had come here intending to murder him. She had fired to save Allayne, she thought, but had Allayne been in no apparent danger the bullet would have struck Halsey just the same. She was born of two emotional races; for love she could murder, for hate she could kill. But when emotion had reached its climax little but indifference remained. Halsey had wronged her, deceived her a score of times; he had paid the price; that he might have loved Allayne, in his own peculiar fashion, did not antagonize Rosa now. Halsey was dead! She was finished. She made the statement perfunctorily almost.

"I will testify," she said, "why I killed him. I will not mention you." She rose suddenly to her feet. "No one has come," she cried. "Go—quietly. I will remain. No one will ever know. Hurry."

Allayne shook her head. She was swept by the desire to obey. It was a way out. But, no matter what Rosa's intentions had been, the fact remained that she had fired the shot that killed Halsey in order, as she believed, to save Allayne's life. So Allayne could testify upon the stand, all in honesty. Any one looking at Halsey would have thought as Rosa had thought. Allayne could not desert the woman.

But Rosa's words opened up a pathway of escape. What Rosa said was true. She could leave the room. And so could Rosa! She, Allayne, was heavily veiled. She had never been in this Inn before. It was certain that she had not been recognized. Her car, the little roadster, was a common model. Its number may have been noticed, but—that was a chance that she must take.

For she had not learned that what we fear will always overwhelm us until we cease to fear. Had she defied Halsey at the outset, yesterday morning, she would not be in this dreadful predicament now. Halsey had cowed her with threats that had no foundation. She had yielded to them enough to

come here. . . . And now, instead of facing the facts, trusting to truth to illumine darkness, she thought of fleeing the facts.

"Why," she asked, "should either of us stay? Listen! You came through the window. Did any one see you?"

Rosa shook her head. Allayne walked swiftly to the window. A feeling of faintness swept over her as she passed Halsey's body. But she mastered herself, or, rather, the strong spirit that her ancestors had transmitted to her helped her to mastery.

It was still dark, still blowing, still raining heavily. On the windswept road not a car, much less a pedestrian, could be seen. She turned back to Rosa.

"If we go down together, the waiters—some one—might think it odd. You are not known to be here. But if you go down the steps outside and slip across the lawn—I'll get my car. I'll pick you up—"

Rosa shrugged her shoulders. "It means nothing to me," she said. "Why should I run away? Where shall I run to? I have no money—nothing. I do not fear death. That is the worst that can happen to me."

"Why should you die? Why should you go to prison?" demanded Allayne. She was not thinking of herself now. She was thinking of this poor thing whose soul, by vicious treatment, had been misshapen. She had killed—yes. But, no matter what her intentions might have been a second before the killing, the fact remained that she had

killed justifiably, to save, she thought, another's life.

Rosa shrugged. "It does not matter."

"It does matter," cried Allayne. "If you stay here—then I must stay, too. You cannot run the risk—here!" Upon the woman she pressed the money that she had brought for Halsey. "Have you no bag?" she asked.

Apathetically Rosa replied: "It is on the steps—outside. I throw it there. I never expected—I meant to kill myself." Her voice suddenly rose. "I shall do that now."

Allayne seized her by the shoulders. Once again, by the sheer force of her own personality, she conquered the hysteria imminent in Rosa. "You will do as I say," she said, harshly.

Meekly Rosa nodded. For years she had yielded to a stronger will; she could not resist one now.

The eye for detail that had been one of her father's great assets came to Allayne now. She forced herself to look upon the body of Halsey. He was lying upon his right side, his left hand curled beneath him and his right hand reaching forward. From the table Allayne took the pistol that Rosa had fired; she placed it on the floor a few inches from the dead man's fingers. Then she rose to her feet and confronted Rosa.

"You are a young woman," she said. "You have years of life before you. You have a right to live them, to be happy. If you stay—" Her own future rose blackly, awesomely before her. She, Allayne, had done no wrong. Should this man be permitted from the grave to reach forth and defile her? Should his malign spirit be allowed to wreck the happiness of Bourke? Must he, who had done nothing, bear the shame of a murder trial in which his wife must testify, from which her own personality must emerge always vaguely smirched?

Hadn't a person a right to fight for security, of mind as well as of body? There was the law—yes. The law was uncompromising. A jury should decide whether or not Rosa had justly slain. So the law maintained, would maintain. But were there not higher things than the man-made law? If it was inevitable that Rosa should be set free—and common-sense told Allayne that it was—then the law would exact no recompense from Rosa for her deed. Rosa, then, in the eyes of the law, was an innocent person.

Why, then, should an innocent person be harassed, tortured? Why should another innocent person—herself—be stained, humiliated, shamed? What good would it do for her to summon the employes of the Inn, await the arrival of the police? No good whatsoever. Then why do it?

There were things that superseded the law. The law was a generality; justice was a specific thing. The law, after all, was an instrument made by man for the creation and preservation of justice. Like all man-made instruments, it worked imperfectly. To admit the law into this room now meant to admit injustice. Injustice to Rosa, injustice to herself.

She would not admit.

"Go down those steps. Get to the road—wait for me," she commanded.

Meekly Rosa arose. She adjusted her hat, and Allayne opened the window. Silently Rosa passed through.

Now that action had been taken, Allayne found herself strung to a pitch that she had never known before. She could visualize the life of a criminal, ever alert, fearful lest around the corner be a waiting officer of the law. . . . She felt that if Rosa faltered, even for a moment, the tension to her nerves would kill her. In the moment that Rosa disappeared on the steps Allayne suffered a thousand tortures. But then—and now carrying in her hand her bag—Rosa reappeared. Allayne saw her cross the turf, reach the driveway, turn down it, turn to the right along the main road—and then the hedge hid her.

She breathed freely again. Her own part, infinitely more dangerous, did not alarm her so greatly. Still, there was need for infinite caution. If the waiter should come. . . . Well, she must risk it.

Tightly across her face she adjusted her veil. She forced herself to look again upon the dead man. Yes; it would deceive—she thought—any one. Suicide! Incidentally the thought possessed her that it was fitting ironic justice that Halsey, who had intended to kill himself, should seem to have done so.

Then she was through the door, carrying the key in her hand. No one was in the corridor outside. She locked the door with the key that had been on the inside. That would gain for her at least a moment. Nor was there any one on the stairway; she descended rapidly.

Behind a counter, before his desk, sat the clerk who had told her the location of the room where Mr. "Carver" had been awaiting her. He did not look up as she approached, but after she had passed by him and had reached the door Allayne heard him stir. In another moment a waiter would be knocking on the door upstairs.

Yet, because it was vital, she mastered panic. She managed to impart to her stride, as she walked through the rain to where her car was parked, that exact appearance of haste which the rain justified, yet which would not look like the panic of guilt.

She was sufficiently mistress of herself to spend a half minute draping a handkerchief over the front mirror panel. She had not another one, so she scooped up in still-gloved hands, mud from the driveway and spattered the rear plate. It would have to do!

Then she stepped into her car. The engine turned over immediately; she let in the clutch and started down the driveway. As she did so she heard a cry from the main door of the Inn. She slipped into high and pressed down on the accelerator. The little car bounded ahead; she was going a bit too fast around the corner into the main road and her rear wheels skidded. She dashed, before she could straighten out the wheel, into a post, a top of which was a letter box. She saw the post go over, saw a flurry of white articles blown in the breeze, and then she was speeding, reckless of the slippery surface, down the road.

A hundred yards from the driveway she reached Rosa. She stopped the car, leaped out, and took off the handkerchief from the front plate. It was dangerous, but not so dangerous as to leave it there, exciting instant suspicion in the mind of any motorist. If such a one was abroad this terrible afternoon. Then, urging Rosa into the car before her, she drove swiftly toward town.

On the outskirts of the town Rosa insisted on being put down. Apathetic at first, willing even to die, Rosa had become transformed. Now she wanted to live. Halsey, though she didn't know it, had been a spiritual weight upon her soul. That weight was gone now. The fact that she had killed him was no longer a weight. She was elemental, a thing of terrific primordial passions. Superstitious, mystical though she undoubtedly was, Halsey's end would not haunt her. In her blood was the impulse to slay that which had wronged her; it was righteous, just. So she was made.

Suddenly she was callous.

"No get-away we made," she said. "All I got to do now is grab a train and—forget it."

"Can you?" demanded Allayne. For she was sustained by no callousness; she was sustained only by the primitive impulse of self-preservation, and that impulse covers name and fame as well as body.

"Can I?" Rosa almost laughed. "I'll say I can."

Allayne shrank from her. The woman sensed it and touched Allayne's arm.

"You and I are different," she said. "You get what Benny and I have done. You're a lady. Well, I'm a woman. I'll swallow all the pride in the world; till I can't swallow any more. Then—well, you know what I'll do. You saw me do it. And I won't worry about it. Benny Halsey got a lot less than was coming to him. I stood it for years—I loved the man. Then he died. Now I don't even do that. He's nothing. Not even a memory."

And Allayne, though she could not understand, believed her.

"But what are you going to do?" she demanded, as she stopped the car.

"Do?" echoed Rosa. "Well, I'm going to do what Benny and I have done. I'll take a hundred times—beat it. By the time the police have tied me up with Benny I'll be so far away that it'll take a telegram four years to catch up with me. Thanks for the money. Good-by."

Allayne stared at her. There were a hundred pieces of advice that she wanted to give, but Rosa scorned them. Halsey was only half an hour—or slightly more—dead. Yet

to Rosa, apparently, the deed was something already dim in antiquity. It was baffling, bewildering. Allayne did not know, could not know, that the criminal mind—and Rosa possessed it—is the mind of a child. And nothing is of more than passing importance to a child. Students of criminality know that what we call callousness is merely lack of understanding; for only a mental cripple is a professional criminal.

Rosa's walk had resumed its springy, catlike quality as she moved away. Her troubles were over. But Allayne's troubles—and vaguely, although she felt that she was secure, she seemed to sense this—were only just beginning.

Hillstown was a thriving little city. It had two daily papers, one morning and one evening, five banks, a country club, and a reform administration. It was this last that proved that it had definitely emerged from the village chrysalis and had spread its wings as a city butterfly.

Much has been written on the difference between the rural and the urban community. Growing towns shriek blatantly about the number of moving picture theaters, the quantity of business done each fiscal year, and the demand for building lots east—or south or west or north—of what was the town hall, but is now the municipal building.

And the dweller in the community that has been acknowledged for some years as a city smiles patronizingly. To him these things prove nothing. But when a community has progressed so far away from rural and toward cosmopolitanism that it boasts a city administration that has been elected on a promise of municipal reform, then it is admitted, unquestioningly, into the brotherhood of the cities. It belongs.

The present administration of Hillstown had been swept into office on a platform that differed in no wise from a thousand other reform administrations. It promised that the city affairs would be administered roomily, honestly, and that a moral purification would begin when the new administration took office. It had kept the latter pledge as well as such pledges can be kept. Hillstown, due to the sudden industrial expansion brought on by the war activities, had within its borders, during the present industrial slump, an element—largely foreign—to whom the law meant something inimical, something to be frustrated and challenged. Now that work was less easily obtainable, this element had inaugurated a régime of crime that was not always petty.

That régime, three months after the installation of the new administration, still endured, but its rule was not so bold as it had been. Little by little the professional crooks had been rounded up and the amateurs had become frightened by the determination of the authorities to enforce the law.

And it was due almost entirely to the abilities of the new chief of police that the moral pledge was being so well observed. His name was Jenkins; he had inherited wealth, consisting of a half interest in a leather goods factory not very far from the Hillstown Chemical company.

His bent, however, had not been toward business. He had adopted the law, and to the amusement of his legal and social friends, had chosen the criminal branch of the law as his specialty. It interested him. There was eternal drama in the conflict between the forces of righteousness and those of evil.

He made no money from his practice. As a matter of fact, he refused to take any case in which he was not convinced of the innocence of his prospective client. Little by little his reputation grew. Those friends of his who had been wont to sneer at his career began to discover that Randolph Jenkins—"Rannie"—to his intimates—was a force for civic decency.

For, from beginning by aiding the unfortunate, he ended by attacking conditions that created misery. The saloon, the brothel, the gaming house; without being a bit of a prig, Rannie Jenkins fought them. And the result was that the reform mayor offered him the command of the police force.

A lawyer politically ambitious or legally ambitious would have preferred the district attorneyship, but Jenkins had no personal ambition. He knew how easily a police force can become an instrument for evil; how crooked politicians, once they get a police department in their clutches, can bend it to uses diametrically opposed to the enforcement of the law.

Rannie Jenkins did away with all that sort of thing. Hillstown's force consisted of only forty men, but he organized it on big city lines. He even had a detective bureau. And this was his special pride and joy. His criminal law experience had given him a certain knowledge of the principles of detection, and several vicious assaults of society were learning that Hillstown's plain clothes men were as efficient as any in the country.

Needless to say, Jenkins, along with the

rest of the reform administration, encountered opposition. The evening paper was financed by a group of politicians who had thriven on lax law enforcement. So that anything that could possibly be termed inefficiency was spread in huge type before the public each day.

So it was that when a mysterious killing occurred at Hillcrest Inn Jenkins, realizing that failure to apprehend the criminal might have far reaching political effects, himself took charge of the case.

The killing had been discovered within a moment after Allayne had left the private dining room. The waiter had knocked again upon the door. Finding it locked and receiving no response to his knock, he called the clerk. On the arrival of the latter the two men had forced the door. They might have entered the room from the outside stairs and would have done so but for the inexplicable effect that death has.

For they sensed the tragedy beyond the locked door. Man is not yet entirely removed from the animal stage; his instincts are still strong. The two men, moved by a common impulse, pressed against the door. Something seemed to tell them that they must not delay.

So it was that the clerk a moment later shrieked from the inn door to Allayne, leading down the driveway. The man watched her skid into the letter box and then turn down the main road. He saw that pursuit on foot was useless. And while the owner of the inn owned a motor car, he was not present. There were no other patrons this stormy day whose cars might be pressed into pursuit.

He ran to the telephone and called up police headquarters. But the sight upstairs had unnerved him. He could give no coherent description either of Allayne or of her motor car; he couldn't even tell whether the woman who had been with Halsey had driven away in a limousine or an open car. So that the policemen on their beats, to whom the news was flashed, had nothing on which to work. They couldn't hold up every automobile that contained a woman. Moreover, by the time that the news had been relayed to them Allayne had sped up her own driveway and into her own garage.

It was the first murder that was not an ordinary killing following a drunken brawl that had occurred in Jenkins' tenure of office. His secretary told him of the crime as soon as the news had reached headquarters. And Jenkins, jamming a soft hat on his head and wriggling into an overcoat, ran downstairs from his private office to the street, where a car was always in readiness for him.

"Hillcrest Inn, Sam," he said to his chauffeur. Behind him came a sergeant of the detective bureau, followed by two plain clothes men and a police surgeon, but Jenkins did not wait for them. They followed in another machine, but their chief was on the scene several minutes before they arrived.

Allayne had never studied criminal law; no books on evidence had been included in the curricula of the schools that she had attended. Otherwise she would have known how hopeless it is for the most astute criminal to endeavor to deceive the trained mind of the criminal investigator. She had thought that if she left a revolver close to Halsey's fingers the natural assumption would be that he had killed himself. She realized, of course, that the presence of a companion in the room with the dead man would arouse police suspicion, but that the fashion of Halsey's death should be doubted never occurred to her.

She did not know that when a man kills himself with a revolver the wound is burned by the powder's flash. And, of course, one glance told Jenkins that the dead man had not fired the shot. There were no marks of powder, no burn upon the flesh.

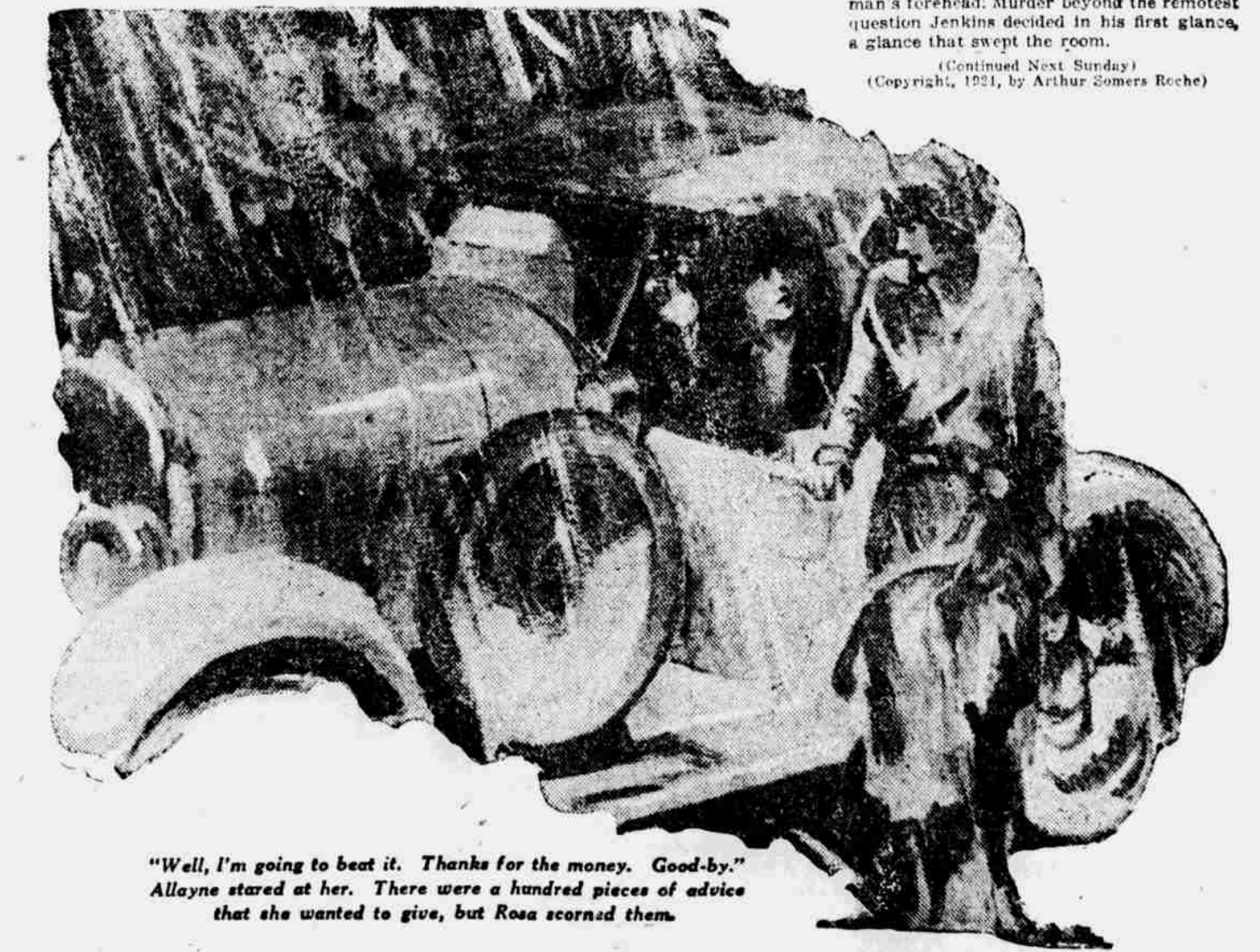
But the gravest error that Allayne had made was the fact that two weapons were in the room. She had left Halsey's own revolver upon the table!

This does not argue that Allayne possessed a mentality below the average. On the contrary, her brain was far superior to the average one. But the greatest criminals of history have made faux pas equal to this of hers. Crime is abnormal; all natural processes of thought are swept away in the emotions aroused by crime. Allayne was defying the law for purposes that seemed justifiable to her. And the moment that she embarked upon that abnormal course of defiance her usual reasoning powers were swept away. She had an eye for detail, inherited from her father. But there never has been a skilled criminal whose eye for details was so all observing that it saw them all. Her mistake, glaring though it was, was one that might have been made by the most crafty law-breaker in the world.

Two weapons! No burn upon the dead man's forehead! Murder beyond the remotest question Jenkins decided in his first glance, a glance that swept the room.

(Continued Next Sunday)
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