

The BOGIE of FEAR by Arthur Somers Roche



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THE STORY.
ALLAYNE GUENNEY has inherited the Gurney millions and an inborn dread of scandal. Her besetting fear of being talked about has led her, at 24, to magnificently a trivial quarrel with SPENSER BOURKE, her fiancé, break the engagement, and rush into a headless 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 Allayne learns of the existence of a woman known as ROSA HALSEY, whom the crook discarded to make his marriage possible, and she promptly tells Halsey she is through with him. The train on which they are passengers is wrecked and Halsey, seeing his scheme a failure and fearing the police, who are always on his trail, conceives the idea of "playing dead" by exchanging papers with one of the wreck victims. Allayne's former romance is renewed, and, supposing Halsey to be dead, she and Bourke are married and find themselves supremely happy. Then Halsey, who has been traveling about again with Rosa, reappears in the role of blackmailer. Allayne has put all her wealth into Bourke's business and is at her wit's end when the crook asks for money. Therefore she complies without question when he demands that she meet him at a roadhouse known as Hillcrest Inn. Meanwhile Halsey 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, he tells Allayne, to kill himself and let her be found in the locked room at the roadhouse with his body. As he is about to carry out his threat, Rosa, who has provided herself with a revolver, enters the room through a window and kills him. Allayne, terror-stricken at the thought of further scandal, makes her escape from the roadhouse with Rosa, hoping that Halsey's death will be thought a case of suicide, and with her mind in a whirl over Rosa's revelation that she had been Halsey's wife, and that therefore the dead man had never really been Allayne's husband at all. Rosa is killed in an automobile accident as she is getting away from the town, and the identification of her body seems, at first, to clear up the mystery of Halsey's death. But the solution does not satisfy RANDOLPH JENKINS, the town's chief of police, who is confronted by several puzzling phases of the case. One of these is the testimony of a waiter that Halsey had given him a letter to mail, addressed to the chief himself. Halsey wrote it to make sure that Allayne would be found at the inn with his body, but Jenkins does not know this. And the letter has disappeared, knocked out of a mail box at the roadside by Allayne as she drove away from the inn in her roadster.

SEVENTH INSTALLMENT.

Allayne Faces the Future.

CLERK entered, with word that a chauffeur wished to see him. Jenkins had him admitted at once.

"I thought I ought to tell you something about a dame usin' my car yesterday," he said.

"Yes?" Jenkins encouraged him.

"She hailed me on Duane street," said the man. "She wanted to go to Hillcrest Inn. I took her out there and a little way from the Inn I got a blow-out. Then, when I changed, I found the new tire didn't have no air. I didn't want to cut it to pieces, so I tells the lady I'm sorry, but she'll hafta walk. She done it—in the rain. And she was dressed like the paper says the dame what was in the room with this 'Carver' guy was dressed. I didn't know it was no importance, still, you can't never tell."

"Indeed you can't," exclaimed Jenkins. "What time was this?"

"What time did she get out of the car? Well, I know that all right," replied the man. "I looked at the clock on the dash just after she left me, because I was figurin' to myself that I'd prob'ly hafta wait a couple hours for some one to come along with a tire pump. It was exactly six minutes after one. And I don't wait but ten minutes before a guy comes along and loans me his pump."

"Your clock correct?" asked Jenkins.

The man nodded emphatically. "Yes, sir. I set it by the railroad clock yesterday morning."

"H'm. What's your name—and address?"

"Peterson, sir. Henry Peterson, 126 Western street," said the taxman.

"Much obliged, Peterson. You'll hear from us later," said Jenkins. Then, as the man started to go, a memory of Kennedy's mocking smile came to him. "Have you told any one else?" he demanded.

Peterson colored. "Well, Chief, the newspapers—"

"Which one?" demanded Jenkins, sharply.

"Evening Bulletin," said the man. "You see, they pay for—"

"It's all right; good morning," said Jenkins.

He understood now why Kennedy had smiled. This afternoon the Bulletin would flay the force, would talk about its incompetency, about its smug self-satisfaction. . . . Mentally he writhed, as he anticipated the tenor of the Bulletin's charges. And they would be true. He had been smug, self-satisfied. But now. . . .

He left his office and once again was driven out to Hillcrest Inn. On either side of the driveway groups of morbid, curiosity-driven people stared at the Inn. But, until the inquest was over, the police were keeping the curious away. Also, under the pretext of keeping traffic clear two uniformed men were preventing cars from parking along the roadside. Fortunately, by this time, the men who sought the missing letter had covered thoroughly all the ground adjacent to the Inn, and were now working in the woods across the street, where they could not be seen by the curious. Or, if they were occasionally glimpsed, they posed as engineers surveying the property. By a policeman Jenkins sent word to them to guard carefully the real reason for their search. For the Hillcrest mystery was not, he had decided, so simple of solution as it had seemed an hour ago. And if the papers should print that a letter written by "Carver" to Jenkins was being sought, some one, reading the statement, might take alarm and disappear.

For suddenly Jenkins had decided that two women had been at the Hillcrest Inn. He would know in a moment.

He entered the office of the manager, now occupied by that perturbed individual, who had been away yesterday, but was now present to bemoan the tragedy that would not enhance the charm of his resort. He willingly surrendered the room to the Chief of Police. And Jenkins sent again for the clerk and the waiter.

Carefully he questioned them. And he learned, beyond a shadow of doubt, that the woman who had been ushered by the waiter into the private dining room had not merely driven up in a car, which she had parked out-

side, but had arrived not later than one o'clock.

"Tell you how I know," said the clerk. "The clock struck one while she was on her way upstairs. And I set that clock every morning by Western Union time. I telephone their office."

Jenkins pursed his lips. The railroad and Western Union time would not vary. The woman of the taxi must have arrived later than the woman of the motor, which had parked outside.

Of course, granting that there were errors in the time of the two clocks upon which he based his theory, his theory fell to pieces. Only—how did it happen, on this lonely road, over which on such a day as yesterday little traffic passed, that the woman of the taxi, the dead woman, had managed to acquire another machine? Could she have had it waiting for her? That was pretty far-fetched reasoning. Jenkins could not accept it.

But only one woman had driven away from the Inn. Even so! There were stairs leading to the balcony outside the dining room windows. He leaped to his feet and almost ran upstairs to the private room. A detective on guard unlocked the door for him, and he entered. The murdered man's body had been removed, but in all other particulars the room was as it had been yesterday, and it would so remain until after the coroner's jury had viewed it.

Jenkins opened the French window and stepped out upon the balcony. The sun was shining brilliantly today. He looked toward the road. How easily, if a person knew that the one he—or she—sought was in this dining room behind him, for that person to leave the driveway, cross the lawn, mount the steps. . . . That would account for the fact that only one woman was mentioned by the clerk, by the waiter, by the other employes. . . .

He descended the flight of steps. There, at the foot of them, were the imprints of heels. Why, in the soft earth, one could trace where a woman—! It must have been a woman by the size of the footprints and the depth of the heel holes—had come across the turf. . . .

He turned back to the Inn, got into his car, and drove to Headquarters. He had made that commonest of all police or detective errors—he had leaped to a conclusion, adopted a theory, and complacently assumed that it must be correct.

But he was not wedded to it. Or, if he had been, he got a speedy divorce. And, because he desired to serve his city more than he desired any personal aggrandizement, he swallowed his pride and telephoned Kennedy of the Bulletin. Had only himself been concerned he would have let Kennedy write any condemnation of the administration of the police force that occurred to that young man's fancy, looking forward to the moment when, laughing last, he might laugh best. But any and every attack upon the force hurt more than the force; it hurt the other city officials, who were endeavoring to give Hilltown a clean and efficient administration.

"Oh, Kennedy," he said, "I have some later stuff on the Hillcrest matter."

"Shoot it," said Kennedy. The Chief thought that he detected chagrin in the reporter's tone.

"You may state," said Jenkins, "that the police have discovered and identified the body of the murdered man's wife, but that from evidence in their possession they have reason to believe that there were two women concerned in the killing."

"Peterson talked, eh?" said Kennedy. He made no effort to hide his chagrin.

"Yes—he talked," laughed Jenkins.

"And we wasted a good twenty dollar bill," said Kennedy. "Oh, well, it doesn't matter. Anything else, Chief?"

"Well, we expect to locate the missing other woman shortly," said Jenkins.

Kennedy guffawed. "Expect is good. Don't mean 'hope,' do you, Chief? All right, much obliged."

The men on the Bulletin played fair, even though they fought the administration. The Bulletin could not now claim to have achieved more than the force, and thus discredit, even though slightly, Jenkins' department. He turned back to his desk and applied himself to the problem of the discovery of the second woman in the case. But he could do nothing more than have the city's garages visited to ascertain, if possible, if any woman had left a car there. He hoped for no result from this, but it was worth trying.

But, while he was willing to try this, his own belief was that the woman who had driven that car away from Hillcrest had not stored it in any public place. She'd be too clever. So, because the case interested him beyond anything else going on at the time and because he must be actively engaged in it, he went out to the Inn again to superintend the search for the missing letter.

He came back to town a couple of hours after the Bulletin had appeared upon the street. He read it, relieved to find that Kennedy had learned nothing not already known to the police.

Allayne read it, too. A night of horror, miserable, fearful, had followed upon her return to her home. At breakfast she had read the morning paper and had breathed easier, even though a suicide theory had not been adopted. But now, at the tea hour, she

received from her Jap butler the Evening Bulletin. She opened it eagerly. And as she glanced at the headline black fear gripped her. She read.

Carver's Wife Killed in Accident. Another Woman Sought.

It was minutes before she could read what followed. For if the police were seeking another woman that woman was herself and Rosa was dead! The only witness who could prove that Allayne had not killed Halsey could not testify in her behalf.

Not scandal now stood at her shoulder; it was something worse. It was Terror!

Her tea grew cold while, at last, she read and re-read the Bulletin's story. The morning paper's account had given her a sense of security. Even though the glaring error of leaving two weapons in the room had been committed, still, the fact that it had been assumed that the woman—! Halsey had been his wife, had made it seem to her that only the capture of Rosa could—! horrify her.

No one could possibly be more unfamiliar with the methods of either police or criminals than Allayne. She did not know that there is absolutely only one kind of crime which does not, by the very act of its commission, create numerous clues. And that is the unpremeditated crime.

Rarely does it happen that a crime of magnitude, whose commission shows forethought and planning, goes forever undetected. The crimes whose perpetrators remain out of custody are suddenly conceived crimes, usually of violence, committed, almost always, by nonprofessional criminals. Every effort made by the professional criminal to hide his presence, his connection with the crime, can be discovered if shrewd enough eyes are engaged on the case.

Only the man who suddenly decides to rob the stranger coming toward him has any chance of perpetrating his action without leaving evidence behind him. He flashes upon the scene and disappears. Later in caution may result in his capture, but his crime itself ordinarily is not productive of

clues. But if he had planned the deed. . . . If he has been rendering himself familiar with his victim's habits, some one will have noticed him, and the fact that he wore a mask at the time of the robbery will not save him from suspicion, if the same one who noticed him learns of the crime, and has quick wit.

Now, Halsey had planned the crime of suicide. That he had not committed it did not affect the fact that in his planning he had created clues. One of them, of course, was the fact that he had arranged that a woman—Allayne—should visit him at Hillcrest. That, alone, had puzzled Jenkins even before later developments had convinced him of the importance of the discovery. Halsey had set a certain time for the arrival of Allayne. That time, when Jenkins studied it out, conflicted with the testimony of the taxman, Peterson. Halsey, unwittingly, had given a clue there.

Allayne had thought that, if she and Rosa escaped without immediate observation and identification, the police would be confronted with an impossible task. She knew better now, and because she knew better her limbs shook and her eyes were glassy.

All her hopes had been predicated on Rosa's escape. Rosa had escaped the law, but death had descended upon her. Forgetful, for a moment, of herself, Allayne's mind dwelt pitifully on Rosa. For whatever Rosa had done, whatever she had planned to do, she had been goaded to it.

A few days ago Allayne would have found little charity in her heart for a woman like Rosa. Today she found it. And yet, she was wrong, perhaps, to pity the woman. She was beyond all fear; life could have held little for her. Perhaps death held more; some brighter world. . . .

The police sought another woman! Back to herself, to her imminent and terrible danger, her mind raced. If the police should discover the identity of that other woman, should charge her with murder, the fact that she had fled would militate against the so-

lution of her story of the killing. More than a nasty notoriety, than a scandal—freedom was in the balance!

Keenly she weighed the facts as they appeared in the Bulletin. The identification of the body of Rosa by the Longridge Hotel employes; the testimony of Peterson and the Hillcrest waiter and clerk; this last was vital. . . . She threw the paper from her. Things that it did not print, but that might be known to the police, flashed through her tortured brain.

Rosa had carried with her a wedding certificate. If she and Halsey had been married under that name, the connection of Allayne with the case would be instantaneous. Not a person in Hilltown, who knew Allayne, but also knew of her previous marriage. . . . She picked up the paper again.

. . . the clothing of the woman was partly destroyed in the flames from the gasoline tank, and a handbag which she carried was entirely consumed, only the charred remains of some bills surviving the blaze. . . .

The wedding certificate, then, that pathetic proof that Rosa was not entirely unmarred, had doubtless been destroyed. Otherwise, surely there would have been mention of it; surely by this time the police would have called upon her, to ask her if she could offer any explanation of the strange resemblance between the name of the dead man and her late husband.

She could afford, then, to dismiss this particular fear. But now that she was doing something that she had never done before—analyzing the evidence, the possible evidence, in a murder case, other matters leaped into the forefront of her thoughts.

Halsey was a criminal. He must have a wide acquaintance among his kind. Suppose that one of them knew of the trip to Hilltown, knew the name under which he was traveling? Still, had there been danger of that, Rosa would not have walked so confidently away from the roadster yesterday. . . . But there were other things that could not be dismissed so easily. Halsey had telephoned her. . . . If the number were traced. . . .

Then she remembered that she had heard, when he had called her up, the voice of "Central" ordering him to drop five cents in the box. He could not, then, have called up from the hotel. Unless the operator had listened in, and heard his call for her to meet him at Hillcrest that call could never be traced.

Slowly hope revived in her. After all, suppose that the police did know that another woman had been at Hillcrest? Was there anything to connect Allayne with that woman? Her natural courage asserted itself. She would not yield to unfounded terrors. She would continue her natural mode of living, of thinking, even.

And in pursuit of her sudden resolve, she rang for the servant. Her tea was cold; she would have fresh tea brought in. She would drink it.

As she rang she heard tinkling faintly the door-bell. All that high courage swept away from her as a wave recedes from a sandy beach. If only Spenser were here! To lean upon him, to tell him, at this late date, the threats of Halsey, and what they had led to. . . .

The Jap entered.

"Man to see the lady," he stated.

Allayne felt the blood leaving her face.

"What—what sort of man?" she asked.

The Jap shrugged slightly. "Taximan," he said.

For a moment Allayne could make no reply. Why should a taximan come to see her? And then she knew why. If one taximan could remember having conveyed Rosa to Hillcrest, why should not another remember having brought Halsey here?

She reached for the cup of lukewarm tea. Nervously she drank it.

"Sh—show him in," she told the servant.

A moment later, his hat twisting embarrassedly in his fingers, the chauffeur was ushered in by a somewhat scornful Jap.

"You the lady of the house?" he asked.

Allayne nodded. She could not trust herself to speak.

"I brought a gent here day before yesterday," said the man. "S'pose you could help me locate him, lady?"

Allayne eyed him. There was nothing threatening in his manner. Nor was there in his embarrassment anything of the furtiveness of the blackmailer.

"Why?" she asked.

The man wiped his forehead with a grimy hand. He grinned sheepishly.

"I'm a good fam'ly man, ma'am, and I pay my bills reg'lar, and there ain't nobody can say my meter ain't correct."

He looked at her as though expecting her to deny his statement; embarrassment made him affect an air of defiance. And, as his was not the attitude of a blackmailer, or one who threatened, Allayne managed a smile.

"I'm sure of that," she said.

"It's true," said the man. "And when any one leaves anything in my car, believe me, lady, they get it back if I can locate them."

"I'm sure of that, too," agreed Allayne. "Did—did the gentleman leave something in your cab?"

"Not exactly that, ma'am. But he wasn't feeling particularly well. Leastwise, he gets out at a drug store downtown and pays me.

He looked like he needed medicine or something. And he slips me a bill and says keep the change. Well, ma'am, just as he gets out another gent jumps in, so I don't look at the bill until that night. Then I find out that your gent—him what I brought here—had slipped me ten dollars, prob'ly thinking it was a two-spot. You see, the meter said a dollar and a half, and he mighta figured on givin' me a fifty-cent tip, but he wasn't dreamin' of giving me no tip of eight-fifty. It ain't natural."

"And you came here to return the money?" asked Allayne.

"Yes'm."

"How do you know that he was the one who gave you that bill?"

"I jammed it, being in a hurry to start off with this other gent, into my outside pocket. That's how I know. That was the only bill there. I'd been round before only I been so busy. Here's the money, ma'am. That is, if you want to hand it to him."

"That would be better," said Allayne. "For—the gentleman isn't in Hilltown—any more. Only—you see—I think he probably meant you to have the money and—anyway—I want you to have it."

The chauffeur stared at her. There was no particular reason why his honesty should make a lady almost cry. Still, women were funny creatures; he was married and knew that.

"Just's you say, ma'am, so long's you don't think he'll think I'm some sort of a short-change artist."

"I'm sure he won't," said Allayne. The ghastly jest unnerved her. She could hardly wait for the man's departure to let loose the flood of tears that welled in her eyes.

But when she had wept, from sheer nervous reaction, she felt better, saner. She had, in the brief interval between the Jap's announcement of the chauffeur's presence and his entrance into the room, suffered a thousand agonies. And the man had come on the simplest, most honest errand in the world.

She rang for fresh tea, drank it thoughtfully, proud of her steady hand as she lifted the cup to her lips. Refreshed, she began to ponder upon the most important matter of all, more important than possible evidence that might be brought against her.

She thought of her husband. Thank God for one thing: he was her husband! The word of Rosa had convinced her of that. Should she tell him?

Not a minute of the past forty-eight hours but had found her wishing for his presence, longing for his strong arms about her. Yet, though she had longed for him, she had been glad, night before last, that he was away. The situation was so preposterous, so dreadful. But now that she knew that she had never been married to Halsey, she wanted Bourke. Yet, if he were here, when he should be here—what could she say?

She must think only on whether or not Spenser, so long as she had a fighting chance to avoid suspicion, should be compelled to bear a share of her burden.

She knew that an accusation against her, a danger threatening her, would weigh infinitely more upon him than any fear for himself. Her own cowardice—her dread of scandal—had brought her troubles upon her; was it fair to shift them to another?

This was not specious reasoning on her part. For, with the departure of the taximan she became convinced that even though the police sought her, they would never find her. Had she been recognized as she sped away from Hillcrest, detectives would have been here before this. Had Halsey's acquaintance with her been known, she would have heard of it by now. When one stopped to analyze the situation carefully, coolly, one came to the conclusion that unless she herself, by some incautious word or deed, gave a clue to her presence at the Hillcrest Inn, that presence would never be discovered.

Had Rosa lived and been captured, common decency would have compelled Allayne to come to her rescue and the world would have known of Allayne's connection with the affair. But now that Rosa was dead, there was no slightest chance of her being compelled to come forward.

Fear entirely left her. She felt that she had analyzed the affair from every possible angle, studied every bit of probable or possible evidence that might be discovered. She was in no danger, save from herself, and that, by being eternally on her guard, she could discount.

But her husband! What right had she to withhold from him her troubles? The best right in the world: the right to save him from worry, from fear on her behalf. So she decided, and as she decided she would act. If, always, she must bear a burden, must eternally be wary, there was no reason why Bourke should also bear that burden. Her own fears had caused the assumption of the burden. Well, she'd be just enough to bear it.

She glanced at the watch upon her wrist. Bourke had not telegraphed, but she knew that he would be here within twenty minutes. She did not wish to meet him at the train. Even had there been no weight upon her soul she would have preferred that that first moment of rapturous greeting be unobserved by indifferent strangers.

And so she washed away the traces of her tears, put on her prettiest tea-gown, and in the living room downstairs, awaited his coming.

She heard the warning signal of a motor horn and leaped to her feet and peered through the window. He was not in a taxi; he was in a limousine, driven by a man who wore the uniform of the police.