

The BOGIE of FEAR by Arthur Somers Roche



THE STORY.
 ALLAYNE GURKINS has inherited the Gurney millions and an inborn streak of scandal. Her brief fear of being talked about has led her, at 24, to marry a man who is a social disgrace.
 SPENSER BOURKE, her snark, breaks the engagement, and rushes into a headlong 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 with Rosa, reappears in the role of blackmailer. Allayne has put all her wealth into Bourke's business and is at her wife's end when the crook asks for money. Therefore she conspires without question when he demands that she meet him at a roadside 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 be found in the locked room at the roadside 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 roadside to 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 the mail box at the roadside by Allayne as she drove away from the inn in her roadster. Other bits of evidence have convinced Jenkins that there was a second woman in the room at the inn. At this juncture Bourke, who has been away on a business trip, returns and gives Allayne a shock by stopping from an automobile driven by a man in police uniform.

EIGHTH INSTALLMENT. Suspicion.

HOW futile had been her boasts! Hardly had they been formulated in her mind before they were made ridiculous. No ground for suspicion, and yet her husband drove up to the house in a police automobile!

And then her hands unclasped. For her husband descended from the closed car, reached through the door and shook hands with a man inside, and turned gaily away to run up the steps. She heard him in the hall; heard him crying her name. But she did not go to him until the machine outside had started down the driveway.

Then she went to him. He caught her up in his arms, murmuring the inarticulate greetings that lovers know. Arm in arm they climbed the stairs.

"Haven't had a chance to shave all day," he said. "Feel as bristly as a porcupine. Miss the aged shaver of your joys and sorrows?"

She managed to equal his lightness of tone. "I have his crutches handy," she said.

He kissed her with boyish enthusiasm. "Had a great trip. Put the business over. Now, where the deuce is my razor?"

He had opened his suitcase and tumbled everything out upon the bed. From the jumbled mass Allayne extricated the razor.

"You didn't come in a taxi," she said.

He was unbending his collar. "No," he said. "Came out of the station, carrying my bag, and saw Rannie Jenkins. He saw me at the same time and offered to give me a lift. Stopped the bus and took me in. Say, that's some murder over at Hillcrest, isn't it?"

"It is," she agreed.

"Jenkins is full of it; can't talk anything else. Says he'll get the second woman all right. Hope he doesn't."

"What? Why?" demanded Allayne.

Her husband, bare-armed now, picked up his shaving materials and darted into the bathroom.

"Why? Hate to see any woman caught in a jam like that," he declared. "Women don't kill without darn' good reason. Sure, I hope she gets away. But I don't think she will."

She inhaled deeply. She was glad that he could not see her face.

"Why not?" she demanded.

"Well, Jenkins doesn't talk to hear his own voice," said Bourke. "He isn't the boasting kind. He says that he'll land this woman within twenty-four hours, and I believe him."

Allayne was silent a moment.

"What's that again?" he called. "I cut my chin—would I want you to tell me? That what you asked?"

"Yes," answered Allayne in a barely audible voice.

"I'll say I wouldn't," he told her. "I've got troubles enough on my young soul without learning that my wife is a fugitive from justice." He appeared suddenly in the doorway and stared at her. "Listen here, Al-



ayne, you mustn't get thinking too much of murders and that sort of thing. I think the newspapers ought to quit printing such stories. They make women hysterical."

"No—be serious," she said. "Should a woman—I'm just wondering, you know—should a woman tell her husband such a thing? If she were quite sure that she'd never be found out—"

"Not tell her own husband that she was a murderess?" Bourke began to laugh. "I don't imagine that she'd tell anyone a thing like that. It's one of those little things that you don't mention, Allayne."

"Be serious," she said again. "I mean—suppose that she hadn't committed murder, but was in a—nasty mess—no one would ever know, but—should she tell her husband?"

"Well, what do I get for answering the puzzle?" he jibed. "How do I know what she ought to do?"

"Well, supposing that a man were the missing person in this murder. And suppose that you were the man. Would you tell me?"

"And have you worry your adorable head right off your lovely shoulders? What sort of a yellow dog do you think I am, Allayne? Any other little soul problems you want answered tonight?"

She smiled at him, and he did not know how effortful was that smile. Now—she could not tell him. She could be no less brave, enduring, than he had said he would be.

"None," she told him.

"Then hustle into your evening clothes. Forgot to tell you—Rannie asked us to dinner and I said we'd come. All right with you?"

To dine with Randolph Jenkins, the man who sought her as a murderess . . .

"Loves to," she answered blithely. Her ancestors, if they could look down upon her, must have been proud of her. She had inherited that grit.

We call ourselves a democracy, and we do our pitiful best to live up to our boast, unrealizing, for the most, that democracy challenges man's most ancient—and who shall say that it is not his most lovable!—instinct: the instinct of superiority. To lift ourselves above the common herd; in some way to isolate ourselves so that, if only for a moment, the crowd will look our way; to hold the center of the stage. . . .

If secret societies did away with all magnificent titles they would not endure beyond the high school and college period; if a legislator were never referred to as "Senator," how many men would covet the office? There are those whose lives are such that they may never hope for glory; they must always be subordinates in the great contest.

Her husband was a night watchman in an office building downtown. His wages were small; they would, Mrs. Purdy had some time ago decided, always be small; life held no excitement for her beyond an occasional pleasure show. Her relaxation from the cares of a brood of small children was found in the daily papers. And the Cresthill mystery was a heaven sent boon to her.

She lived, in a small dilapidated house, not a dozen rods from the scene of the crime. It gave her, among her acquaintances who drove to more remote neighborhoods, a certain prestige. She could discuss, almost with intimacy, the details of the crime.

And when she discovered that her young son, Tommy, had, on his way to school, taken a short cut through the Cresthill Inn grounds, and that he had seen a motor car parked in the space allotted to automobiles, on the day of the crime, Mrs. Purdy's excitement grew intense.

Tommy was nine years old and stupid for his years. Inasmuch, however, as older persons had seen the car in which Allayne rode without being able to recollect—so unimportant had it seemed to them—whether it was a two, five, or seven passenger machine, Tommy cannot be blamed because he had not noticed what sort of a car it was.

But he had noticed the license number of the machine. At least, he thought that it began with the figure "1" and ended with the figure "1." And Tommy's thought, produced after much mental labor on the day after the murder, and induced by incessant questioning on the part of an exasperated mother, was enough to justify Mrs. Purdy in calling upon the chief of police.

It was a proud moment for the matron when, after scornfully refusing to divulge her information to any one other than Jenkins himself, she was ushered into the chief's presence, dragging by the hand a reluctant small boy, to whom the presence of so many uniformed men brought alarm. For Tommy had played "Arab" in his youthful day, and the duty of an Arab is to raid caravans.

Fruit peddlers offered the only opportunity to invest the game with realism, and once a policeman had called at the Purdy home, and stated, flatly, that reform schools were maintained for the sole, exclusive purpose of catering to youths who stole oranges and bananas.

For all that he was no leader in his classes, Tommy had an impressive brain. Thereafter he had shunned "cops" with an assiduity most commendable. And now his mother, with that fatuity which he had come to consider a part of her sex, had not been content with anything less than his introduction to a dozen policemen.

His tears flowed freely as he stood before Jenkins. The chief grinned amiably.

"Tommy," he said, after the proud mother had introduced her offspring, "would you like a nickel?"

Tommy's eyes dried magically. But he was a suspicious soul.

"Where would I get one?" he demanded.

Jenkins grinned again. "Maybe I can find one," he said. He put his hand into a pocket and when it came out it held some small change. He looked at it disparagingly.

"No," he announced, "there isn't a nickel here. But," he added, as Tommy sniffed, "I have a dime. Will that do?"

Graciously Tommy admitted that it would serve the purpose. He accepted it and immediately became more tolerant of his mother.

"Your mother says that you saw an automobile on the Cresthill grounds yesterday," Tommy said Jenkins.

"Sure I did," said Tommy. After all, his mother was all right. This was an event to be related, with much gusto, to envious neighbors.

"And you saw the number plate?"

"Sure I did," said Tommy again.

He could tell no more, but for the purposes of Mrs. Purdy it was enough. Her name would be in the papers. Indeed, on the way out two newspaper photographers took snapshots of herself and Tommy, standing proudly on the steps of headquarters. Mrs. Purdy, on a slim foundation, had bulged for herself a structure of fame. It might be transient, but it would be unforgettable. She was unwisely kind to Tommy for a whole twenty-four hour period.

Jenkins smiled after they left. Tommy's clew amounted to no clew at all. More than one hundred thousand automobiles in the state of New York bore license plates that began with the figure "1." And one in every ten cars bore a plate whose number ended with that figure. To find out how many of them were owned by the residents of Hillstown was possible, of course. But it was absurd to try. . . . Still, was it the slightest clew might lead to unheard-of results.

The Hillstown police department, as a check upon the activities of motor bandits, had compiled a list of all cars owned by residents of the town. Jenkins detailed a couple of men to prepare a list of licenses that began and ended with the primary figure.

Then, because it was getting along toward the dinner hour, he went home. Opposite the station he spied the figure of his good friend, Spenser Bourke. He offered him a ride home, and because Bourke chafed him on the failure, thus far, of the police to apprehend the criminal, Jenkins stated that he was sure of capturing the second woman.

He didn't tell Bourke why; but he meant, of course, that when the missing letter was recovered he expected to have evidence of value.

He had not yet despaired of finding that letter. But a small envelope that may be anywhere in a radius of a quarter of a mile, in heavily wooded territory, is almost as safe from observation as a pebble on the ocean bed. Nevertheless, his men would not give up for a while yet.

He kept bachelor quarters, presided over by an impeccable English butler, used to a master who announced the coming of guests without warning. So, on the impulse, he invited the Bourkes to dinner. When he arrived home he casually told the butler of the invitation, and leisurely bathed and changed his clothing. It was a comfortable life, and he never expected to change it. Good looking, in healthy sort of fashion, with big nose and broad mouth, and eyes that women termed "nice," more than one young girl of Hillstown might have been persuaded to accept a share of his name, place, and patrimony. But he had been too intent upon his profession to pay much attention to girls. Anyway, he preferred married women. One didn't have to flirt with them; if they bored one, it was easy not to call again, without thought of explanation.

He was an extremely popular man with the younger married set of Hillstown. So that when Frank Merriman, cashier and vice president of one of the local banks, telephoned, shortly before dinner, and announced that he and his wife were going to drop over later in the evening, and were going to bring with them a young woman who was a house guest, for a game of bridge, Jenkins responded with cordiality.

"You and your guest, Frank," he said, "can play with the Bourkes. They're dining with me. I'll talk to your wife."

"Fair enough," said Merriman. "Only Allayne might have been persuaded to accept a chance of breaking down your break-up defenses. I warn you—she's a peach."

"So's Mrs. Merriman," rejoined Jenkins, imperturbably. A pleasant smile was on his face as he hung up. It was still there when he greeted the Bourkes.

He knew and liked very much Spenser Bourke. He was as well acquainted with Allayne. Although they saw enough of each other for him to feel free to invite the Bourkes casually, and for them to feel free to accept as casually, he never felt any degree of intimacy with Allayne; even so, for instance, he felt with Mrs. Merriman, or had a dozen of the other young matrons of Hillstown.

But Allayne Bourke was not that sort. Most undeniably she was not that sort. No vulgar intrigue involving deceit of her husband could possibly lead Mrs. Spenser Bourke to falsehood. She loved her husband. The veriest cynic unhung would concede that to her.

But she had not told the truth last night—when she was so probable—Miss Harrington had been mistaken. It was so serious a

certain reserves that Bourke liked in women. She was the sort, he believed, with whom not even a husband becomes acquainted all at once. It was her type—not her physical type, for he had a preference for blondes—but her mental type, that attracted him. He could not, for instance, imagine Spenser Bourke ever being bored in his home life. There were, he imagined, many, many angles to her character; one would discover them singly.

Tonight she seemed more brilliant than ever before. Not that she said anything of particular moment, but her eyes were flashing; her lips tremulous, quick to curl in a smile; her speech was fluent, rapid. As though, he mused, she were under some sort of strain. But, of course, the wife of Spenser Bourke could be under no strain. Her home life was too ideal. He remembered that Bourke had told him that he had been out of town for a couple of days. That accounted for it; she was so happy at seeing him home again. Possibly there was something in this marriage proposition, after all. If one's return could make a lovely girl beam with joy. . . .

The dinner was simple and delicious. Bourke and his host were lighting their second cigarettes in the big living room when the Merrimans and their guest, Miss Harrington, were announced. And after the greetings, and the introduction of the young woman to the three people whom she did not know had been accomplished, Miss Harrington said:

"I saw you yesterday, Mrs. Bourke."

It was a casual remark, a time killing, pause filling statement. But Allayne challenged it. That was how Jenkins phrased it to himself. For her tone, if not her words, held a crispness that was almost defiant.

"I'm quite sure that you're mistaken, Miss Harrington."

"The younger girl smiled. "O, but I'm sure I'm not. You were in a car—a roadster; on Vessey street."

Allayne shook her head. "I have a roadster, but—I wasn't in it yesterday. I was in town all day."

Miss Harrington laughed. "Then I didn't see you," she said pleasantly, and the incident was closed. In a moment the bridge table was brought forward and they were cutting for partners.

But it was several hands before Allayne could concentrate on the game. For she had told the first direct lie of her life. How many more would she be compelled to tell? She wondered if she had stressed her denial so that it was noticeable to any one? But the subject was not brought up again, and she felt that she had deceived every one present.

As a matter of fact, she had. Jenkins, who had thought that her tone held a note that the pleasant statement of Miss Harrington hardly justified, forgot all about it a moment afterward.

But he remembered it the next morning. For the men who he had detailed to make a list of the Hillstown car owners who possessed license plates beginning and ending with the figure "1" had left the lists upon his desk. Running swiftly down them—there happened to be something less than sixty names—he saw listed that of Mrs. Spenser Bourke.

Last night's little contretemps leaped into his mind. It was absurd, ridiculous, but . . . Mrs. Bourke had denied having been in her car with an emphasis quite out of proportion to the importance of Miss Harrington's statement, unless—she didn't wish it to be known that she had been out!

Had Allayne Bourke been anything less than what she was; had she been anything less than a most modest woman, Jenkins might have shrugged his shoulders and dismissed the matter from his mind. There was more than one young matron of Hillstown who kept her husband in the dark as to her goings and comings.

But Allayne Bourke was not that sort. Most undeniably she was not that sort. No vulgar intrigue involving deceit of her husband could possibly lead Mrs. Spenser Bourke to falsehood. She loved her husband. The veriest cynic unhung would concede that to her.

But she had not told the truth last night—when she was so probable—Miss Harrington had been mistaken. It was so serious a

matter, so vital a matter, that Jenkins could not let it remain as it stood. In justice to Mrs. Bourke he must question further Miss Harrington. Unless he did so, he, Jenkins, would always have a doubt. It was his duty to question Miss Harrington. Something much more important than Jenkins' desire to do exact justice, even in his thoughts, to Allayne Bourke was involved. The law was involved.

He sent a thrill through the match-making heart of Alice Merriman by telephoning and asking if she and Miss Harrington would take luncheon with him at the Tremore, Hillstown's only hotel that laid claim to being attractive. Mrs. Merriman would ask Miss Harrington. She did. They would both be delighted.

It was a pleasant little luncheon. Jenkins was a perfect host, and Mrs. Merriman was quite convinced that her dearest chum would soon be a Hillstown neighbor of hers. She didn't know that her chum was already engaged to a New York man. Chums do not always tell each other everything.

The bridge at Jenkins' house was discussed. The Chief of Police deftly led the conversation around to that subject.

"Excellent player, Mrs. Bourke," he said. He felt something of a cad as he mentioned her name. He felt that he was doing something viciously underhanded. But, after all, he was an officer of the law, sworn to uphold it. That his duty led him into strange, incredible places was no reason why it should be forgiven.

There was enthusiastic response from both his guests. Feeling still more caddish, Jenkins asked:

"You hadn't met her before, had you, Miss Harrington?"

The young woman shook her pretty head. "Although I thought that I recognized her as a woman I'd seen driving a car day before yesterday. But I was mistaken."

"Mrs. Bourke is rather a striking-looking woman," insinuated Jenkins.

"Beautiful," agreed Miss Harrington with enthusiasm. "That's why I was so sure that I was right. But, of course, when a woman wears a veil, and is sitting down in a car, one can easily be mistaken. Especially if one doesn't know the person."

"Of course," said Jenkins. He turned the conversation easily to other channels.

But when the luncheon was over and he was back in his office he began to do some serious thinking. The mysterious woman of the Cresthill Inn had been veiled. . . . He tried to put his suspicions from him, but he could not. Of course, on the face of it, nothing was more ridiculous than a suspicion of Mrs. Spenser Bourke. But he knew of many crimes where the first suspicion must have seemed to its holder as absurd as this one of his. If one failed to investigate a circumstance because it didn't seem reasonable one would not get very far.

And it began to seem to him now that he was not going to get very far. The latest reports from the socketer who had addressed to him were not encouraging. They had gone, so they declared, over every inch of the ground near to the dismantled tree-box. They had climbed the trees, scrambled through the underbrush, looked in the shrubbery. Of course, he would not call them off the chase yet. He couldn't afford to do that. But he felt less hopeful; distinctly so.

And the more he thought of Allayne Bourke, of Miss Harrington's statement, of the tone of Allayne's denial, of Tommy Purdy's testimony as to the number of the license plates, of the license number on Allayne's car, the more disturbed he became.

He could not let the matter drop. Yet he could hardly turn over such a matter to a detective. To do that meant to tell his suspicions to another, and that meant to blacken Allayne in the mind of that other. Even though she advanced convincing proof that she had not left her house on the day before yesterday she would be smirched. It was, then, up to him to question Allayne further. It was a most unpleasant task, but it could not be delayed.

He telephoned Allayne and asked if he might come to tea. Her voice gave no indication of her inward terror. She would be delighted, she told him. So, at shortly before five o'clock, he was ushered into the Bourke home.

Allayne poured gracefully. Further, she remembered just how much sugar he liked and that he did not use either cream or lemon. These things are satisfying to a man's sense of his own importance. Jenkins had had tea at Allayne's but once before, and that was some months ago. Yet she had not forgotten. The little incident made him more than ever ashamed of himself.

"We had such a jolly time last night," said Allayne. "And I don't see how you can resist that pretty Miss Harrington. If I were a man I'm sure she's just the girl I'd want."

Jenkins grinned amiably. "A perfect peach," he said. He stirred his tea, looking downward. "Odd, how sure she was that she'd seen you."

Allayne had been expecting this. And because she had wished to get it over with she had invited his remark. Deliberately she had mentioned Miss Harrington's name.

"Wasn't it?" she agreed, with a little laugh. "Only—she was mistaken. I hadn't been out of the house all day."

"You're emphatic," smiled Jenkins. He was watching her now, watching her keenly. "You speak as though you could prove it."

Allayne grimaced. It was a pretty grimace. "Now, that makes it embarrassing, for that's the one thing I can't do. You see, I let the boys—Turo and Hogo—go as soon as they had prepared luncheon. Hogo had missed his day off last week—I gave a dinner party on his regular day off—Wednesday. So, day before yesterday, I let them both go. They are great chums. It was a sort of special extra reward—letting them go together. Of course, Turo came back for dinner—"

"She broke off with a laugh. "I'm giving you a long dissertation on the way I retain my servants and keep them happy."

"You interest me," said Jenkins. She laughed again. She wondered what he knew, how much he suspected. He had taken Miss Harrington's statement last night seriously. Well, she would prove herself a match for him.

"Then—with luncheon on the table, a sudden headache—I have them occasionally—"

Jenkins felt a great wave of relief sweep over him. She was so frank, so unconcerned; her statement was borne out by the Jap. . . . It was insane to think any longer of any connection between Mrs. Spenser Bourke and the woman of the roadside.

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"I saw you yesterday, Mrs. Bourke." It was a casual remark, but Allayne challenged it. "I'm quite sure that you're mistaken, Miss Harrington."

Ed. is admitted her. She seemed to have