

The BOGIE of FEAR by Arthur Somers Roche

NINTH INSTALLMENT
The Letter.

ALLAYNE could read his thoughts. His sigh of relief was audible. She felt triumphant, victorious. For no one else would have seen her; the streets through which she had passed that tragic Wednesday had been almost deserted. Even when she had taken Rosa almost into town the storm had swept the streets of pedestrians. It was sheer accident that Miss Harrington had observed. There would not be two such accidents. And the road on which she lived was on the outskirts of the town. She could swear to it that none of her distant neighbors or their servants had been abroad to see her motor car go in or out.

She was safe! And then Ifuku entered the room. Her two Jap boys were a source of constant amusement to her and her friends. Equally capable, they changed positions without consulting their mistress. Today Tsuro was acting as butler and Ifuku was chef and footman both.

"Lady call," he announced.
"Who is it?" asked Allayne.
"Mrs. Guterman." The Jap pronounced the name with difficulty. "She say—call Wednesday—you out. Want see you."
Allayne saw the gleam in the eye of Jenkins. But not by a quiver of a muscle did she show her tension.

"Bother!" she declared. She smiled quizzically at Jenkins. "You know, she's dear, but she is a bore. I'm out again today, Ifuku."

The Jap bowed and left the room. The gleam died out of Jenkins' eyes. Of course! "Out" was a polite phrase indicating that one did not wish to receive a person.

"She rang and rang and rang," said Allayne carelessly. "But—when one has a headache—"

"Of course," said Jenkins. His whole manner seemed to change. Allayne felt it. She knew that if he had in any way suspected her, her manner and her story had banished his suspicions. He suddenly smiled at her, that warm, friendly grin of his that helped his popularity.

It even broadened as he heard her husband enter the hall outside and cry:
"Allayne!"

They were a damned nice couple, and he ought to be kicked around the block for entertaining for the fractional part of a second the insane idea that Mrs. Bourke knew anything about the Cresthill mystery.

A sudden thought assailed Allayne even as she responded to her husband's kiss. It had rained only one day in the last week—Wednesday. She had not had the car cleaned. Last night, when she and Spenser had dined with Jenkins, it had been dark; the mud on the car had not been observable. But, lest by accident Jenkins see it, and dead suspicion be revived, that mud should be removed.

"Mr. Jenkins is having tea with me," she told her husband.

"Fine!" exclaimed Bourke. He walked into the living room. Allayne, lingering behind, gave an order to Ifuku.

"We're not expecting any one else—There can answer the bell if any one should come. Will you wash the car?"

Ifuku bowed. They were very fond, these two Jap boys, of the household which they served. Ifuku was ambitious to learn how to drive a car. Allayne had promised that she would pay for lessons and that when he was competent she would permit him to call for her husband occasionally at the office. Ifuku had no objection to cleaning a car which he expected some day to drive. And, if he had, his liking for Allayne would have made him swallow his objection.

Allayne entered the room where her husband and Jenkins sat. The two men were chatting pleasantly, and she took her seat again at the tea table.

"How's the search for the mysterious woman coming along?" asked Bourke. "I've read the papers, but it doesn't seem to me that you're any nearer to her than you were yesterday."

Allayne's smile, though neither of the men knew it, held a trace of bitterness.

"O, we're coming along," rejoined Jenkins. Bourke jeered at him amicably. "Huh! That's what the police always say. They're coming along. They have reason to believe—something or other. Tell the truth, Rannie, old top. You're in the house of your friends. Have you one single, solitary, lonesome ray of hope that you'll ever locate her? Aren't you just waiting for the hue and cry to die away to forget all about her and turn your attention to other matters? On-the-level stuff, now!"

Beneath his quizzical, incredulous glance

Jenkins colored slightly. His round chin took on an expression of stubbornness.

"O, it's not as bad as that," he declared.
"Well—why isn't it?" challenged Bourke.
"Confidentially, aren't you stalling? Have you got any idea at all that you'll locate her?"

These were his friends. Spenser Bourke had done a bit of campaigning for Jenkins' party in the last election. And he, Randolph Jenkins, had done Mrs. Bourke the grave wrong of suspecting her of a hideous crime. Of course no one else in the world knew of his suspicions. Nevertheless he had held them. In a measure he owed her something. So he felt, at any rate.

Also, Bourke had a keen mind—an excep-



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tionally keen one, Jenkins believed. If he had been theorizing absurdly, Bourke would point out the absurdity. If he had been correct, Bourke would probably recognize that fact. A sudden impulse to confidence opened his usually guarded lips.

"Well, I'll tell you, Spense," he said. "So nearly as I can figure it, I've one chance in the world to land the woman. Yesterday the chance looked brighter—in fact, I was certain. Today—well, I'm doubtful."

Allayne's face was a mask of polite interest as she asked:

"Only one chance? What do you mean, Mr. Jenkins?"

He stared at her; then he looked at her husband. He lighted, accepting Allayne's nod as permission, a cigar.

"Well, Spense, suppose that you knew that this dead man, Carver, had, just before the woman came to see him in the private dining room, written a letter? What would you think of it?"

Bourke was puzzled. "Well," he replied slowly, "I'm not sure that I'd think anything of it. It would depend, I take it, on whom the letter was written to."

"Exactly!" exclaimed Jenkins. "And if that letter had been addressed to the Chief of Police of Hillstown—what would you think were its contents?"

Bourke whistled incredulously. Allayne felt her heart sinking down into depths where no well regulated heart should go. So then, all her quick wit, her caution—these went for nothing! She felt an almost mastering impulse to scream, but fought it down. The figures of the two men, sitting so close to her, seemed to recede, then to come close; they were blurred; then every feature was sharply defined. . . . Clearly, incisively, seeming to spell her doom, she heard her husband speak.

"Why, there's nothing to it at all, Rannie. There were two guns found there in the room, weren't there? A fair assumption would be that the man carried one of them. Certainly the woman didn't carry them both. Of course, if there were two women they might have carried one apiece. But still, assuming—fairly enough, I think—that the man Carver owned one of the weapons. . . . Men don't carry revolvers to luncheons with women unless they expect trouble. Why," he went on more slowly, more carefully, "I'd say that this man expected trouble, thought that he was going into danger, perhaps might be killed. . . . I'd say," he finished confidently, "that he told in that letter whom he expected to lunch with him and what he feared from that person. And, most probably, why he feared whatever he did fear."

"Well, that's exactly what I think," said Jenkins.
"Think!" ejaculated Allayne. "Don't you know?" And desperately as she strived to keep her voice calm, normal, she heard it rise thinly as she emphasized the last word.
"That's the trouble; I haven't received the letter." Then, as they both stared at him in bewilderment, he explained.
"And the men are still looking for it in the woods?" asked Allayne.
"Hardly at this minute," said Jenkins. "It's dark. I've found that flashlights aren't much use; but they'll be at it again in the morning. You see," he addressed his words to Bourke, "how certain I was yesterday afternoon. But now that today has gone without discovery of the note—it might, you know, be years before it was found. But some day, sometime, unless the rain has rotted it out of all existence, that letter will be found. Nothing is ever lost, although it may be destroyed."

Nothing is ever lost! As a felon might feel upon hearing the judge's sentence, so Allayne felt at Jenkins' words. All through life, though she might live to be ninety, would be with her the ever-present fear that some one would stumble upon that letter.
What was it that Halsey had said to her in that room of tragedy? As if she could ever forget it!
". . . you'll not convince them that I killed myself. I've taken care of that."
She had not known then what he meant. Since then she had supposed it to be based upon his expectation that she would be found beside his dead body. But now she understood the devilish cunning of the man. He had guarded against her possible escape from the room. He had written to the Chief of Police!

She could imagine what he had written, the half-truths, the downright lies. No wonder that Jenkins had felt confident of her apprehension.
Nothing is ever lost, although it may be destroyed! Her only reliance could be that the elements would destroy this letter. But the elements would treat her no more kindly than Fate had done. Sooner or later, tomorrow or the next day. . . .
To tamely yield, to surrender while there was a fighting chance. . . . But she could not go to the woods near by the Cresthill Inn and herself search for the missing letter. To do so would be to arouse instant suspicion. And how could she hope to find what half a dozen men had thus far failed to discover?

And now, suddenly for the first time since Halsey had called upon her on last Tuesday, she felt calm, reconciled. This was the end; she had tried to avoid it, and it was unavoidable. It was too late for regret.

"I'd be delighted," he told her.
"Then I'll get them," said Allayne. She rose and left the room. She went to her own room and waited there five minutes. Then from the head of the stairs, she called to her husband.

"I can't find the key, Spense," she said.
"Will you come up and help me?"
Bourke murmured a word of apology to Jenkins and went upstairs. In the middle of her room he found Allayne.

"I'll say you're not looking very hard," he smiled.
Then something in her face drove the smile from his lips. He advanced toward her, his arms outstretched.

"Allayne—what's wrong?"
She gave him her hands and faced him.
"Spense," she said slowly, "I'm the woman that the police are looking for."
"You're the—what's the joke, Allayne?" he blurted.

But, incredible as her statement was, somehow he knew that it was true. And, because he was the sort of man who can meet a great emergency in a great way, he did not stammer incoherent things.

"Tell me, Allayne," he said.
Slowly, yet with her voice controlled, she told him all that had happened since the arrival at the house of Halsey. Then, having finished, she waited, now trembling with fear, for some word of condemnation from him. The law—she no longer feared that. Fate had been too much for her. But Spense—what he would say. . . . Yet she might have known.

His arms went around her, and he drew her to him; the mere pressure of his strong muscles buoyed her, gave her strength.
"You listen to me, Allayne," he said.
"There's nothing to this thing. Any jury in the world will take your word."
"But the scandal, Spense!"

If his smile was wry the tears in her eyes prevented her from analysis.
"I guess we can outlive any scandal that's based on untruth," he told her.

"Then we'll go down and—tell him?" she breathed.

"Don't you be afraid," he said.
"I'm not," she told him.

And, amazingly, it was true. Now that the crisis was at hand, now that nothing in the world could prevent the world from knowing that she had been in the Cresthill Inn, had witnessed the murder, she was unafraid. Because she had done no wrong. True, she had helped Rosa escape, but there was no moral wrong, she felt, in that.
Oh, if she had had courage before! Courage to face a scandal that, in the light of what confronted her now, had been nothing at all; courage that would have made her receive and believe Bourke's explanation of that long-ago party at "Summertime." She would never have married Halsey. . . . But, no! She had been so afraid of being smirched, ever so slightly, that she had sent the man that she loved from her.

Once, she had had courage; when she sent Halsey from her. But it had been the courage of desperation, and she had been, oh, so glad, that scandal had been spared her. Courage! It was all that was necessary to have sent Halsey whining away from her house last Tuesday.

Courage! It was all that she needed now. And she had it! Thank God she had learned, even at the great price that she must pay, the price of notoriety, of scandal, of a trial, perhaps, that only that which we fear can hurt us. Unafraid, conscious of our own honesty, nothing can harm us.

At last she knew this. She smiled as she took her husband's arm.

"Spense," she said softly, "can you ever forgive me—for dragging you into this—dreadful affair?"

He laughed at her. Though he himself was sick at heart, it was for her, not even in any faint measure for himself.
"Forgive you? Why bless your sweet heart, there's nothing to forgive. You were trying to keep me out of something unpleasant—you know," he went on, and his voice was suddenly grim, as she had guessed that it might be, "if you had told me before I went to Chicago, the result would have been the same. Halsey would have been killed."

She shuddered. For another moment she lay in his arms; then, gently, she released herself. She needed no support from her husband's arm now. She was strong, confident, fearless.

Together they entered the living room.
"Where are the statuettes?" demanded Jenkins. He looked from one to the other. Mrs. Bourke was a beautiful woman, one of the most beautiful, with her black hair, olive skin, and gray eyes, that Jenkins had ever seen. There was only one flaw in an otherwise almost perfect specimen of femininity; she was cold. Her eyes always seemed a bit

too appraising, as though she were forming judgments that would not be expressed, as though she might have reservations which one would never know.

But now, beside her husband, there was warmth in her eyes; her color came and went. He knew how natural it was, now. She had been a statue before, to the eyes of Jenkins; a rarely lovely statue, it was true, but not more than that. But now she was a woman, alive, warm. . . . He felt envy for Bourke. If a girl like that would look his way. . . . Well, some day. . . .

"Where are the statuettes?" he demanded again.

And now he seemed to sense something tense, something strange, in the atmosphere. He felt suddenly embarrassed. Had he, in some way, offended either or both of them? Why did they stare at him so oddly?

"Allayne has something to say to you," said Bourke. His voice was strained. Jenkins felt the color burning his cheeks, even his throat. If Mrs. Bourke had something to say to him, why make such an event of it? Had he—racked his memory. Had he said something incautious about some friend? Had he been offensive in one of those unwitting ways against which we cannot guard? He tried to make his voice as light as it should be, as he replied.

"I shall be delighted to have Mrs. Bourke say anything to me."

And then Ifuku, that Jap of all trades, who could bottle, or cook, or answer the bell, or wash automobiles, and who would, doubtless, in the course of time command the navy or army of Nippon, entered the room.

Motor car engines fascinated the young Jap. He was studying, in spare moments, hampered by an amazing lack of knowledge of the English language, a book on the gasoline engine. As a matter of fact, about all that he could comprehend were the drawings that illustrated the text. But whenever he had opportunity to compare the drawings with an engine itself, he did so.

So, this afternoon, having washed the car, with that rapidity of which only the Jap seems capable, he lifted the hood on one side to look at the mysterious source of power underneath. And there, lying against the cylinder, in exactly the place where, driven by the wind, it had slipped through a long ventilating slit in the engine cover, was an envelope.

Ifuku picked it up and looked at it. He knew the printed alphabet, and a few words. But long-hand writing was as yet incomprehensible to him. So he put the envelope, somewhat stained by oil, into his pocket. Then, closing the hood, after a long affectionate stare at the engine, he went into the house.

Long after Allayne would wonder whether or not chance directed Ifuku's eyes to the engine, whether blind luck was responsible for his entrance into the living room just as confession trembled on her lips. And she decided that neither chance, nor fate, nor luck—call it what you will—had anything to do with it. She decided that the spirit is ruled by laws as absolute, as inevitable, as the laws that govern the changing seasons, the movements of the tides, the growth of the grass. Courage and fear: the two great qualities of humankind. Who fears, suffers; who does not, cannot suffer.
No longer did she fear; courage had come to her; and so, because she no longer feared, the danger that she had dreaded vanished. For Ifuku bowed, said:
"Letter for lady. In car."

She glanced swiftly down at it. Her brain seemed to swirl until she thought that her skull could no longer confine it. Then, with a smile, she handed the letter to Spenser.

He looked at it. Their eyes met; from one to the other, as clearly as though they had spoken the words, flashed the message, "The only proof!" For the envelope was addressed to the Chief of Police of Hillstown!

Each glanced at Jenkins; he was still staring at them, puzzled. They could tell that he had not heard the Jap's words.
"Another damned catalogue," said Bourke. Allayne's eyes dropped to his fingers. With apparent impatience he tore the envelope in half. Then he walked to the open fire, burning merrily, and dropped the pieces of paper into the blaze. Almost instantly they were consumed.

"Well, what has Mrs. Bourke to say to me?" demanded Jenkins.

Over Allayne's face swept a smile such as Jenkins had never seen before. It was, though he did not know it, the smile of a soul released from torment.

"To say to you—why—why—Mr. Jenkins—Spense and I—upstairs—we decided—we forgot all about the statuettes."

She blushed divinely. And Rannie Jenkins there and then decided that he wouldn't wait to run across a girl like Mrs. Spenser Bourke. He'd go looking for one. Marriage was a damned nice thing!
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