

Lighted Windows

By EMILIE LORING
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CHAPTER XIII

The Commissioner's eyes were sharp but reassuringly friendly as he took command of the situation.

"Mrs. Hale, did you quarrel with your husband before you went to the dance last evening; did he object to your leaving him?"

"Was it only last evening?" She shivered. "He didn't want me to go."

"But you went?"

"Yes. For a short time."

"Did he threaten you?"

"Not more than usual."

"Mm. I see. Had he quarreled with anyone at headquarters?"

"With Mr. Harcourt. You can't suspect him, you can't! Bruce never quarreled with him. He was at the Waffle Shop every moment till he walked home with me and then he didn't come in."

"But the shooting was done with his revolver."

"How do you know?" The question was a strained whisper.

"It was found on the shore."

She looked up with agonized eyes at Harcourt standing by the mantel.

"Bruce! Bruce!"

"You and your brother were in the H house helping decorate it. Did you notice whether the gun was there?"

"I—I didn't notice."

"Anyone there besides you and your brother?"

"Kadyama brought in the greens. Miss Mary was unpacking some things in one of the bedrooms."

Mrs. Hale, describe what you found when you entered the cabin."

"Joe was lying face down on the rug. Wheel-chair overturned. I don't know how long I stood staring at him. I felt something tugging at my skirt. It was my little dog begging to be taken up. That broke the spell of horror. I raised Joe's head and shoulders, realized what had happened and rushed for Mr. Harcourt."

The Commissioner fitted spatula finger-tips together with nice precision. "Any theory as to the motive for the attack on your husband, Mrs. Hale?"

Her thin fingers tightened. "No. Unless—unless it was robbery. Joe always carried a lot of cash."

"Why did you go for Mr. Harcourt instead of your brother?"

"Go for Jimmy? Why he hated Joe and—" she stifled a cry with one hand. "You're not trying to make out that Jimmy did it, are you? Bruce! Bruce! You know Jimmy. You know that he's incapable of a thing like that."

"Did he tell you then that he was going away?"

"Away! Where?" She was on her feet, swaying as she stood. Harcourt pressed her back into the chair.

"Take it easy, Millicent. Jimmy went off in a plane."

"Where, Bruce, where?"

"In just one hour he will be on his way to find out. We won't trouble you any more now, Mrs. Hale. Good afternoon. See you in the morning. Come on, Harcourt."

Out of earshot of the Samp cabin, the Commissioner stopped.

"That woman knows more than she's telling, a whole lot more. We'll let her think we're as dumb as she thinks we are, while we go after Chester."

The Commissioner said Bruce knew every field where a plane could land. Harcourt admitted it.

"I do. We have three large camps stocked with provisions for two years. They have good fields. Unless Chester had an accident, he must have come down in one of those. He wouldn't go to a city or town of any size. If he is running away, he would know that you would have his description broadcast."

"We'll start in an hour. Leave someone in charge with instructions to let Mrs. Hale have her head. Get 'em all feeling secure, that's the idea. Going to eat at the Waffle Shop?"

"No. At my cabin. I want to talk with Pasca, my horse-boy, and leave Grant in charge."

Tubby Grant was strumming a mournful ditty on his ukulele as Harcourt entered his cabin and left instructions.

"Keep your eye on Janice, will you?"

"What a heck of a honeymoon!"

"By the way, Millicent suggested robbery as the motive of the attack on Joe. No money was found on him or in the cabin, you remember. Kadyama will bear watching."

Smoke rose from the chimney, drifted lazily into the pink afterglow, as Harcourt entered his cabin. He stopped on the threshold.

Was that really an embroidered cloth and shining silver on the small table laid for two, or was he seeing things? The plates and tumblers of the warranted-to-withstand-wear-and-tear variety were his—he would

swear to that. Who was humming to the accompaniment of an egg-beater? He flung open the kitchen door.

"Janice!"

The girl in her gay smock, furiously beating eggs in a bowl, bobbed a dancing-school curtsy.

"What are you doing here?"

"Here! Didn't milord send word by Miss Martha that if I did not return to the H house pronto he would come for me?"

"I didn't send for you because I wanted a cook."

"Don't bite. Miss Martha intimated that as a chef Pasca left something to be desired. I seen my duty an' I done it. Look at that asparagus with sauce vinaigrette. I found a basket of gulls' eggs. I'm making an omelette, a plump, yellow omelette, not one of those thin things with a soap-sudsy filling. Something tells me that I have mortally offended your house-boy. He cares so awfully for himself as a cook."

Harcourt looked gravely at Janice seated across the small table.

"For the first time in my life I understand why my father always said grace at his own table. Mother was something for which to give daily thanks if he had nothing else."

He cleared his voice. "Where did all this elegance come from?" He touched the beautiful cloth with a shining silver spoon.

"I told you that I had not realized quite into what I was adven-

ture. Thought I might have an occasional afternoon tea."

"And you drew this. It is all wrong, Jan, but we won't go back to that now." He looked at the clock. "I am taking off in just thirty minutes."

"Where?"

"After Jimmy Chester."

"Oh, no! Not nice Jimmy Chester! Does the Commissioner think he did it?"

He told her of the interview with Millicent Hale, while Pasca served the simple supper. As the Eskimo set cups of coffee on the table, Harcourt smiled at the girl.

"This has the restaurant at which we dined beaten a mile. Feed Tong, Pasca. Fuel the Tanager. I will be at the field in ten minutes."

As the door closed behind the man and dog, Janice asked:

"Why are you taking that particular plane?"

"Because I can take off after a run of less than three hundred feet, and come to a complete stop one hundred feet from the spot where the plane first touches the ground. As I don't know where I may have to come down, it's the best bet."

He looked at her steadily. "Do I need to tell you that Millicent's intimation that it would matter to me if she were free is a figment of her crazed imagination?"

Janice was intent on the pattern she was etching on the cloth with the tip of a silver spoon.

"Imagination! It sounded like the real thing to me."

He caught her shoulders. "You know better. You know that I—Good Lord, is that the Commissioner knocking? Can't he allow me a minute with—with my family?"

He opened the door. The smiling, impeccably dressed man facing him said suavely:

"I was told that I would find—"

"Ned!"

The choked exclamation came from Janice. Harcourt glanced at the clock. Five minutes before he

was due at the flying field. Only five minutes. He looked straight at Paxton, whose eyes were on the girl.

"Come in. Jan, here is a friend from the outside world." As she took a step forward he glanced unseeingly at his wrist-watch. "Sorry that I have to leave headquarters just as you arrive, Paxton, but Janice and Grant will show you the wonders of this north country."

He caught the girl in his arms. "It's like tearing my heart out to leave you, Beautiful!" He kissed her eyes, her throat, her mouth. She struggled for an instant before she relaxed against him. He pressed his lips to her hair. "Dearest!"

"Ha-ar-court!"

The Commissioner's shout outside crashed into his husky voice. Janice caught the back of the chair as he released her. Her long lashes were a dark fringe against her colorless skin. Paxton was staring out of the window, a fighting set to his shoulders.

Harcourt picked up jumpers, helmet, rifle. His blood raced. He had intended to kiss Janice lightly, a mere gesture to impress the late fiancée with the reality of their relationship. The feel of her in his arms had set him aflame. He had kissed her as though he were starved for her—as he was. Would she forgive him?

She followed him to the door in true wifely solicitude. Said in a voice disconcertingly steady:

"Good luck to you, Bruce."

As he stepped to the board walk she leaned forward to whisper furiously:

"Your technique is superb. You must have had heaps of practice. But why martyr yourself to impress Ned?"

He caught her hand. She twisted it free. Stepped back.

The door closed.

Harcourt was still stubbornly clinging to the conviction of Jimmy Chester's innocence when on the third day of the search he left the northernmost camp. Not one of the three he had visited had yielded a clue. The Commissioner was irritated and air-worn. He had ordered a return to headquarters, had radioed Grant to expect them that afternoon. As Harcourt climbed to cruising altitude the first uneasiness as to Chester's safety seized him.

Once he thought he heard the vibration of an engine ahead. It couldn't be the Commissioner, must be a sound mirage. He sent the plane up again and came out into the sun. The altimeter registered a mile.

He kept above the clouds till he came into clear sky. Descended to get his bearings. Was that a camp below? Men, looking no bigger than beetles, moving. Digging? Probably archaeologists in search of the first Americans. He looked at the compass. His heart stood still. It had gone dead. Some electric current in that prickling rain storm had done the trick. Where was he?

A buzz in his ear warned him that he must have more forward speed instantly or the plane would stall and spin out of control. As he climbed swiftly he looked round the horizon to get his bearings. Toward the south the sky was black with smoke. Old Katmal tuning up. Now he knew the direction in which to fly.

He mounted into the clouds. They were moving south. They would serve as compass. The drone of an engine? Was he really hearing it? The effect was weird. Suddenly fog caught him.

To his astonishment he came out into brilliant sunlight. What an infernally queer world! The berg-dotted sea was over his right wing. In his relief he laughed. The plane had flopped on its side. He righted it and took his bearings.

How long had he been flying aimlessly in the storm? He glanced at his wrist-watch. Noon. He frowned at the gas gauge. Couldn't do much more experimenting with that supply. He peered over the side of the ship. An ice-floe. Big as an able-bodied island with acres of plateau. He wing-slipped nearer, wires humming. Dots! Three of them! Two moving. One inert. A plane on its side! The phantom of the clouds cracked-up? Could one of the dots be Chester? No. Jimmy went alone.

Engine shut off, he side-slipped down. Landed, bumped and skidded over the rough surface to a stop. The floe stretched away illimitably, not a collection of cakes but acres of grinding, heaving ice-fields, their smoothness broken by an occasional crevice choked with loose fragments, by swiftly running rills. He pushed back his helmet. The crippled plane! Good Lord, what a wreck! Propeller smashed, one wing gashed into fringe by the ice. Where was the pilot?

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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The Questions

1. Why is a small pocket knife called a pen-knife?
2. The solid part of the earth is known as what?
3. What result is obtained by multiplying 5 x 6 x 0 x 10?
4. Is the science of fingerprinting practiced in China?
5. What is the only walled city in North America?
6. What sainted woman is said to have given her kerchief to Christ as he carried his cross to Golgotha?

7. The Philippines are named for the king of what country?

The Answers

1. Because it was formerly used to make and sharpen quills for pens.
2. The lithosphere.
3. Zero.
4. Yes. It originated there in the Fourth century.
5. Quebec is the only walled city in North America.
6. Veronica.
7. Spain (Philip II).

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