

Latest Craig Kennedy Detective Story

BY ARTHUR B. REEVE.

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The Rubber Dagger

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"HYPNOTISM can't begin to accomplish what Karatoff claims. He's a fake, Kennedy," Professor Leslie Gaines, of the department of experimental psychology at the university, paced excitedly up and down Craig's laboratory. "There have been complaints to the County Medical Society," he went on without stopping, "and they have taken the case up and arranged a demonstration for this afternoon. I've been delegated to attend it and report."

"I fancied from his tone and manner that there was just a bit more than professional excitement involved. We did not know Kennedy intimately, though of course Kennedy knew of him and he of Kennedy. Some years before, I recollected, he had married Miss Edith Ashmore, whose family was quite prominent socially, and the marriage attracted a great deal of attention at the time, for she had been a student in one of his courses when he was only an assistant professor."

"Who is Karatoff, anyhow?" asked Kennedy. "What is known about him?" "Dr. Galen Karatoff, a Russian, I believe," returned Gaines. "He claims to be able to treat disease by hypnosis—suggestion, he calls it, though it is really something more than that. As nearly as I can make out it must, almost amount to thought transference, almost something such thing. Oh, he has a large following; in fact, some of the very well known people in the smart set are going to him. Why," he added, "Edith—my wife—has become interested in his hypnotic clinics, she calls them." Gaines paused, and it was evident that he hesitated over asking something.

"When is the demonstration?" inquired Kennedy, with unconcealed interest. "The Professor looks at his watch. 'I'm going over there now; in fact, I'm just a bit late. Only, I happened to think of you, and it occurred to me that perhaps if you could add something to my report it might carry weight. Would you like to come with me?' Really, I should think that it might interest you."

"So far Kennedy had said little besides asking a question or two. I knew the symptoms. Gaines need not have hesitated or urged him. It was just the thing that appealed to him. 'How did Mrs. Gaines become interested in the thing?' queried Craig a moment later, outside, as we climbed into the car with the Professor. 'Through an acquaintance, who introduced her to Karatoff and the rest. Carita Belleville, the dancer, you know?'

Kennedy glanced at me, and I nodded that I had heard of her. It was only a few nights before that I had seen Carita at one of the midnight dances doing a dance which was described as the 'Hypnotic Whirl'—a wild abandon of grace and motion. She had been 'taken up' by society. 'What is Miss Belleville's interest in Karatoff?' pursued Craig, keenly. 'Gaines shrugged his shoulders. 'Notoriety, perhaps,' he replied. 'It is a peculiar group that Karatoff has gathered about him, they tell me.'

There was little time for further questions, for our destination was not far down the drive from the university, and the car pulled up before one of the new, handsome and ornate 'studio apartments' uptown. We followed Gaines into the building, and the hall boy directed us to a suite on the first floor. A moment later we were admitted by Karatoff himself, a tall, dark-haired fellow, bearded, somewhat sallow. Every feature of his remarkable face, however, was subordinate to a pair of wonderful, deep-set, piercing eyes. We could see that he was indeed a fascinating fellow, every inch a mystic. His clinic carried out well the impression of mysticism that one derived from the strange personality who presided over it. There were only two rooms in the apartment, one being the large room down the end of a very short hall, which we entered.

On a quaint stand tea was brewing, and the whole assemblage had an atmosphere of bohemian camaraderie which, with the professions of Karatoff, promised what Kennedy was not wasting time. I watched particularly the exchange of greetings between Professor Gaines and Edith Gaines, who was already there. One could not help noticing that each was watching the other. Edith Gaines was a pretty little woman, petite, light of hair, dainty—the very type of woman who craved for attention. Here at least there seemed to be no lack of it. There was only one other woman in the room who attracted the men equally—Carita Belleville herself. Carita was indeed a stunning woman; tall, slender, dark, with a wonderful pair of magnetic eyes.

As I watched I could see that both women were quite riveted by both Karatoff—perhaps even rivals for his attentions. I saw Gaines watching Carita attentively, never in the mean time falling for long to lose sight of Edith Gaines. Introductions were now coming so fast that neither Kennedy nor I had much opportunity except for the most cursory observation of the women. Among the men, however, I noticed two especially, who proved worth observation. One was Armand Marchant, well known as a broker. Though successful, he was better known as one of those who desert Wall Street promptly at the hour of closing.

to be found late in the afternoon at the tea-dances uptown. Another was Cyril Errol, a man of leisure, well known also in the club world. He had inherited an estate, small perhaps, but ample to allow him to maintain appearances. Errol impressed you as being one to whom the good things of the world appealed mightily, a hedonist, and withal very much attracted to and by the ladies. It was fortunate that the serving of tea enabled us to look about and get our bearings. In spite of the suppressed excitement and obvious restraint of the occasion, we were able to learn to vibrate between the groups about Mrs. Gaines and that about Miss Belleville, welcome wherever he went, for he was what men commonly call a 'good mixer.' Marchant, on the other hand, was almost always to be found not far from Edith Gaines. All of which I saw Gaines duly noting, not for the report he had to make to the Medical Society, but for his own information. In fact, it was difficult to tell the precise degree of disapproval with which he regarded Karatoff, Errol and Marchant, in turn, as he noted the intimacy of Mrs. Gaines with them.

The conversation was at its height when Karatoff detached himself from one of the groups and took a position in a corner of the room, alone. Not a word was said by him, yet as if by magic the buzz of conversation ceased. 'So that there can be no question about what I am able to do,' he began, 'I wish each of you to write on a piece of paper what you would like to have me cause any one to do or say under hypnosis. You will please fold the paper tightly, covering the writing. I will read the paper to myself, still folded up, will hypnotize the subject, and will make the subject do whatever is desired. That will be preliminary to what I have to say later about my powers in hypnotic therapeutics.'

Pieces of paper and little leadpencils were distributed by an attendant. Slowly I wrote: 'Have Mrs. Gaines pick out a record, play it on the phonograph, then let her do as she pleases.' Some moments elapsed while the others wrote. Apparently they were trying to devise methods of testing Dr. Karatoff's mettle. Then the papers were collected and deposited on the table beside him. Apparently at random Karatoff picked out one of the folded papers, then, seemingly without looking at it, and certainly without unfolding it, as far as I could determine, he held it up to his forehead. It was an old trick, I knew. Perhaps he had palmed a sponge wet with alcohol or some other liquid, had brushed it over the paper, making the writing visible through it, and drying out rapidly, so as to leave the paper opaque again, long before any of us saw it a second time. Or was he really exercising some occult power? At any rate, he read it, or pretended to read it, at least. 'I am asked to hypnotize Mrs. Gaines,' he announced. It was something of a shock to realize that it was my paper he had chanced to pick up first, and I leaned forward eagerly, watching.

Mrs. Gaines rose, and every eye was riveted on her as Karatoff placed her in an easy chair before him. There was an expectant silence as Karatoff moved the chair so that she could command her attention only on a bright silver globe at the ceiling. Karatoff moved before her, passing his hands with a peculiar motion before her eyes. It seemed an incredibly short time in which Edith Gaines yielded to the strange force which fascinated all. Slowly Edith Gaines rose from the chair, faced us with unseeing eyes, except as Karatoff directed. Karatoff himself was a study. It seemed as if he had focused every ounce of his faculties on the accomplishment of the task in hand. Slowly still the woman moved, as if in a dream walk, over toward the phonograph, reached into the cabinet beneath it and drew forth a book of records. Her fingers passed over page after page, until finally she stopped, drew forth the record, placed it on the machine, wound it, then placed the record on the revolving disk. My first surprise was quickly changed to gratification. She had picked out the music to the 'Hypnotic Whirl.' I bent forward, more intent. What would she do next? As she turned I could see even in the dim light a heightened color in her cheeks, as though the excitement of the catchy music had infected her. A moment later she was executing, and very creditably, too, an imitation of Carita herself in the 'revue.' What did it mean? Next to Kennedy, I saw Gaines leaning far forward, looking now at his wife, now at the little group. Errol was no less engrossed than Marchant. Quickly I glanced at Carita, wondering if she might be gratified at the performance. I was surprised to see on Carita's face something that looked strangely akin to jealousy. It was as though some other woman had usurped her prerogative. She leaned over to speak to Errol, with the easy familiarity of an old admirer. He glanced at Marchant a moment, as if she had said something about him, then back at Edith Gaines. I had just about decided that the little drama in the audience was of far more importance and interest than even the dance, when the music ceased. Karatoff approached, took Mrs. Gaines

by the hand, led her back to the chair, and at a word she regained her normal consciousness. As she rose, still in a daze it seemed, it was quite evident that she had no waking realization of what had happened, for she walked back and sat down beside her husband quite as though nothing had happened.

Karatoff seemed to realize that he had made a hit. Without giving any one a chance to question him, he reached down quickly and picked up another of the papers, repeating the process through which he had gone before.

"Mr. Errol," he summoned, placing the second folded paper on the table with the first. Errol rose and went forward, and Karatoff placed him in the chair as he had Mrs. Gaines. There seemed to be no hesitation, at least on the part of Karatoff's followers, to being hypnotized. Whatever it was written on the paper, the writer had evidently not trusted to chance, as I had, but had told specifically what to do.

At the mute bidding of Karatoff Errol rose. We watched breathlessly. Deliberately he walked across the room to the table, and, to the astonishment of all save one, picked up a rubber dagger which was lying in the miscellaneous pile on the table.

Quickly Errol turned. A few strides and he had advanced toward our little audience, now keyed up to the highest pitch of excitement by the extraordinary exhibition. "Of course," remarked Karatoff, as at a word Errol paused, still holding the dagger, "you know that under hypnosis in the psychological labora-

tory a patient has often struck at his 'enemy' with a rubber dagger, going through all the motions of real passion. Now!"

No word was said by Karatoff to indicate to Errol what it was that he was to do. But a gasp went up from some as he took another step, and it was evident that it was Marchant he had singled out. For just a moment Errol poised the rubber dagger over his 'victim,' as if glowing. It was a theatrical, realistic. As Errol paused, Marchant smiled at the rest of us—a sickly smile, I thought, as though he would have said that the play was being carried too far.

Then, swiftly, down came the dagger on Marchant's left side, just over the heart, the rubber point bending pliantly as it descended. A sharp cry escaped Marchant. I looked quickly. He had fallen forward, face down, on the floor.

Edith Gaines screamed as we rushed to Marchant and turned him over. For the moment, as Kennedy, Karatoff and Gaines bent over him and endeavored to loosen his collar and apply restoratives, consternation reigned in the little circle.

Marchant was dead! There was not a mark on him, apparently. Only a moment before he had been one of us. "Call an ambulance, quick!" directed Kennedy to me, though I knew that he knew it was of no use except as a matter of form.

"It—it was an accident," muttered Karatoff, eagerly trying to justify himself, though trembling for once in his life. "Arterio sclerosis, perhaps, hardening of the arteries, some weakness of the heart. I never—"

He cut the words short as Edith Gaines reeled and fell into her husband's arms. She seemed completely prostrated by the shock.

At once he drew forth the little tube containing the few drops of tea, and emptied a drop or two into a beaker of freshly distilled water as carefully as if the tea had been some elixir of life. As he was examining the contents of the beaker his face clouded with thought.

"Did you find anything?" I asked. Kennedy shook his head. "There's something wrong," he hazarded. "Perhaps it's only fancy, but I'm sure that there is something with a slight color in the tea, something tea-like, but with a more bitter taste; something that would be nauseous if not concealed in the tea. There's more than tannin and sugar here."

"Then you think that someone present placed something in the tea?" I inquired, shuddering at the thought that we had run some unknown danger. "I can't just say, without further investigation of this and the other samples I took. I began to suspect something the moment I noticed that those notes which we all wrote were gone. When we find out about this tea we may find who took them."

As for the autopsy that was performed on Marchant, it did indeed show that he was suffering from hardening of the arteries, due to his manner of living, as Karatoff had asserted. Indeed, the police succeeded in showing that it was just for that trouble that Marchant was going to Karatoff.

Even to my lay mind the treatment of arterio sclerosis by mental healing seemed, to say the least, incongruous. "Yet the evidence against Karatoff and Errol was so flimsy that they had little trouble in getting released on bail, though it was fixed very high.

got I hadn't told you what I suspected. Why, digitalis-foxglove, you know. I suppose it never occurred to the police that the rubber dagger might have covered up a peculiar poisoning. Well, if they'll take the contents of the stomach, in alcohol, with a little water acidulated, strain off the filtrate and try it on a dog, they will see that its effect is the effect of digitalis. Digitalis is an accumulative poison and a powerful stimulant of arterial walls; by experimental evidence an ideal drug for the purpose of increasing blood pressure. Don't you see it?" he added excitedly. "The rubber dagger was only a means to an end. Someone who knew the weakness of Marchant first placed digitalis in his tea. That was possible because of the taste of the tea. Then, in the excitement of the act pantomimed by Errol, Marchant's disease carried him off, exactly as was to be expected under the circumstances. It was clever, diabolically clever. Whoever did it destroyed the note in which the act was suggested, and counted that no one would ever stop to search for a poison in the 'angle of events.'

"Slowly but clearly I began to realize how certainly Kennedy was reconstructing the strange case. But who was it? What was the motive back of this sinister murder, that had been so carefully planned no one would even suspect a crime?"

I had hardly framed the queries when our telephone rang. It was the Central Office man. The detective had anticipated my own line of inquiry, only had gone much further with it. He had found a clear record of the business relations existing between Errol and Marchant. One episode consisted of a stock deal between them in which Errol had invested in a stock which Marchant was promoting.

For a few moments after the talk with the detective Kennedy seemed to be revolving the case. Then he rose suddenly. "We must find Karatoff," he announced.

We found him easily at his studio apartment, nor did we have any difficulty in gaining admittance. He knew that he was watched and that frankness would be his best weapon of defense. "Of course," opened Kennedy, "you know that investigation has shown that you were right in your diagnosis of the trouble with Marchant. Was it arterio sclerosis for which you were treating him?"

"It would be unprofessional to discuss it," hastily parried Karatoff, "but since Mr. Marchant is now dead, I think I may say that it was, in fact, few persons, outside of those whom I have associated with me, realize to what a wonderful extent hypnosis may be carried in the cure of disease."

"But another patient might have known what Marchant was being treated for?" interrupted Kennedy. "I suppose so," said Karatoff. "No doctor was ever able to control his patients' tongues. Sometimes they boast of their diseases."

"Especially if they are women," hinted Kennedy, watching the effect of the remark keenly. "I have just had the pleasure of a visit from Carita Belleville in my laboratory."

"Indeed?" returned Karatoff, with difficulty restraining his curiosity. "Miss Belleville has been very kind in introducing me to some of her friends and acquaintances, and I flatter myself that I have been able to do them much good."

"Then she was not a patient?" pursued Kennedy, studiously avoiding enlightening Karatoff on the visit. "Rather a friend," he replied quickly. "It was she who introduced Errol."

"Did she introduce Mr. Marchant?" "She introduced Mrs. Gaines, who introduced Mr. Marchant," the hypnotist replied, with apparent frankness. "You were treating Mrs. Gaines?" asked Craig, again shifting the attack. "Yes," admitted Karatoff, stopping. "I imagine her trouble was more mental than physical," remarked Kennedy, as though feeling his way.

Karatoff looked up keenly, but was unable to read Kennedy's face. "I think," he said slowly, "that one trouble was that Mrs. Gaines liked the social life better than the simple life."

"Your clinic, Mr. Marchant, and the rest, better than her husband and the social life at the university," amplified Kennedy. "I think you are right. I should say that Mr. Errol was the kind who would care more for the social life than the simple life, as you put it, too."

"I had noticed something of the sort," Karatoff ventured. "I saw that they were alike in that respect. But, of course, Mr. Marchant was her friend."

Suddenly the implication flashed over me, but before I could say anything Kennedy cut in. "Then Mr. Errol might have been enacting under hypnosis what were really his own feelings and desires?"

"I cannot say that," replied Karatoff, seeking to dodge the issue. "But under the influence of suggestion I suppose it is true that an evil-minded person might suggest to another the commission of a crime, and the other, deprived of free will, might do it."

"Did you know that the Medical Society was interested in you and your clinic, before the demonstration for Professor Gaines was arranged?" "I suspected someone was interested, but I had no idea who it might be," answered Karatoff quickly. "As I think it over, perhaps it was Professor Gaines who instigated the whole inquiry. He would most likely be interested. My work is so far in advance of any that the conservative psychologists do that he would naturally feel hostile, would he not?"

"Especially with the added personal motive of knowing that his wife was

one of your patients, along with Carita Belleville, Marchant, Errol and the rest," added Kennedy.

Karatoff smiled. "I would not have said that myself. But since you have said it, I cannot help admitting the truth. Don't you suppose I could predict the nature of any report he would make?"

Karatoff faced Kennedy squarely. There was an air almost of triumph in his eyes. "I think I had better say no more, except under the advice of my lawyer," he remarked finally. "When the police want me they can find me here."

"The fishing was good," remarked Kennedy tersely, as we went out of the studio. "Now, before I see Errol, I should like to see Gaines again."

I tried to reason it out as we walked along in silence. Marchant had known Edith Gaines intimately. Carita Belleville had known Errol as well. Had it been interest in Errol that had led her to visit the laboratory? Kennedy was weaving a web about someone, I knew. But about whom?

As we passed a corner, he paused, entered a drug store and called up several numbers at a pay station in telephone booth. Then we turned into the campus and proceeded rapidly toward the laboratory of the psychological department. Gaines was there, sitting at his desk, writing, as we entered. "I'm glad to see you," he greeted, laying down his work. "I am just finishing the draft of my report on that Karatoff affair. I have been trying to reach you by telephone to know if you would add anything to it. Is there anything new?"

"Yes," returned Kennedy, "there is something new. I've just come from Karatoff's, and on the way I decided suddenly that it was time we did something. So I have called up, and the police will bring Errol here, as well as Miss Belleville. Karatoff will come—he won't dare stay away; and I also took the liberty of calling Mrs. Gaines."

"To come here?" repeated Gaines, in mild surprise. "All of them?" "Yes. I hope you will pardon me for intruding, but I want to borrow some of your psychological laboratory apparatus, and I thought the easiest way would be to use it here rather than take it all over to my place, and set it up again."

"I'm sure everything it at your service," offered Gaines.

Kennedy was now running his eye over the various instruments which Gaines and his students used in their studies, and was now examining something in a corner on a little table. It was a peculiar affair, quite simple, but conveying to me no idea of its use. "That is my new plethysmograph," remarked Gaines, noting with some satisfaction how Kennedy had singled it out.

"I've heard the students talk of it," returned Kennedy. "It's an improved apparatus, Walter, that records one's blood flow."

"One of my students is preparing an exhaustive table," went on Gaines, as I had hoped, "showing the effects on blood distribution of different stimuli; for instance, cold, heat, chloroform, areolar, desire, disgust, fear, physical conditions, drugs, emotions—all sorts of things can be studied by this plethysmograph, which can be set to record blood flow through the brain, the extremities, any part of the body. When the thing is charted I think we shall have opened up a new field."

"Certainly a very promising one for me," put in Kennedy. "How has this machine been improved. I've seen the old ones, but this is the first time I've seen this. How does it work?"

"Well," explained Gaines, with just a touch of pride. "You see, for stating blood flow in the extremities I slip this cuff over my arm, we'll say. Suppose it is the effect of pain I want to study. Just jab that needle in my other arm. Don't mind. It's in the interest of science. See, when I then winced the plethysmograph recorded it."

"By the way, Walter," Kennedy interrupted, glancing at his watch. "Call up and see if they've started with Errol and the rest yet. Don't stop, Gaines. I must understand this thing before they get here. It's just the thing I want."

"I should be glad to let you have it, then," replied Gaines. "I think I'll need something new with these people," went on Kennedy. "Why, do you know what I've discovered?"

"No, but I hope it's something I can add to my report."

"Perhaps, we'll see. In the first place I found that digitalis had been put in Marchant's tea."

"They'll be here directly," I reported from the telephone. "It couldn't have been an accident, as Karatoff said," went on Kennedy rapidly. "The drug increased the blood pressure of Marchant, who was already suffering from hardening of the arteries. In short, it is my belief that the episode of the rubber dagger was deliberately planned, an elaborate scheme to get Marchant out of the way. No one else seems to have noticed it, but those slips of paper on which we all wrote have disappeared. At the worst, it would look like an accident. Karatoff would be blamed, and— There was a noise outside as the car pulled up. Before even a word of greeting passed Kennedy stepped forward. "It was not an accident," he repeated. "It was deliberately planned as an apparently safe means of revenge on Marchant, the lover of Mrs. Gaines. Without your new plethysmograph, Gaines, you might have thrown it on an innocent person."

The Title of the Next Story is "THE SUBMARINE MINE."



"For just a moment Errol poised the rubber dagger."