



"By the Way, Mrs. Conway Dropped in the Office Yesterday, While you Were Away."



SYNOPSIS.

Lawrence Blakeley, lawyer, goes to Pittsburgh with the forged notes in the Bronson case to get the deposition of John Gilmore, millionaire. A lady requests Blakeley to buy her a Pullman ticket. He gives her lower 11 and retails lower 10. He finds a drunken man in lower 11 and retires in lower 9. He awakens in lower 7 and finds his clothes and bag missing. The man in lower 10 is found murdered. Circumstantial evidence points to both Blakeley and the man who stole his clothes. The train is wrecked and Blakeley is rescued from a burning car by a girl in blue. His arm is broken. The girl proves to be Alison West, his partner's sweetheart. Blakeley returns home and finds he is under surveillance. Moving pictures of the train taken just before the wreck reveal to Blakeley a man leaping from the train with his stolen grip. Investigation proves that the man's name is Sullivan. Mrs. Conway, the woman for whom Blakeley bought a Pullman ticket, tries to make a bargain with him for the forged notes, not knowing that they are missing. Blakeley and an amateur detective investigate the home of Sullivan's sister. From a servant Blakeley learns that Alison West had been there on a visit and Sullivan had been attentive to her. Sullivan is the husband of a daughter of the murdered man.

CHAPTER XXV.—Continued.

Against both of these theories, I accuse a purely chimerical person named Sullivan, who was not seen by any of the survivors—save one, Alison, whom I could not bring into the case. I could find a motive for his murdering his father-in-law, whom he hated, but again—I would have to drag in the girl.

And not one of the theories explained the telegram and the broken neck.

Outside the office force was arriving. They were comfortably ignorant of my presence, and over the transom floated scraps of dialogue and the stenographer's gurgling laugh. McKnight had a relative, who was reading law with him, in the intervals between calling up the young women of his acquaintance. He came in singing, and the office boy joined in with the uncertainty of voice of 15. I smiled grimly. I was too busy with my own troubles to find any joy in opening the door and startling them into silence. I even heard, without resentment, Robbs of the uncertain voice inquire when "Blake" would be back.

I hoped McKnight would arrive before the arrest occurred. There were many things to arrange. But when at last, impatient of his delay, I telephoned, I found he had been gone for more than an hour. Clearly he was not coming directly to the office, and with such resignation as I could muster I paced the floor and waited.

I felt more alone than I have ever felt in my life. "Born an orphan," as Richey said, I had made my own way, carved out myself such success as had been mine. I had built up my house of life on the props of law and order, and now some unknown hand had withdrawn the supports, and I stood among ruins.

that, under the cloud that hung over me, I did not dare to say. But I wanted to see her, to touch her hand—and only a lonely man can crave it, I wanted the comfort of her, the peace that lay in her presence. And so, with every step outside the door a threat, I telephoned to her.

She was gone! The disappointment was great, for my need was great. In a fury of revolt against the scheme of things, I heard that she had started home to Richmond—but that she might still be caught at the station.

To see her had by that time become an obsession. I picked up my hat, threw open the door, and, obvious of the shock to the office force of my presence, followed so immediately by my exit, I dashed out to the elevator. As I went down in one cage I caught a glimpse of Johnson and two other men going up in the next. I hardly gave them a thought. There was no hansom in sight, and I jumped on a passing car. Let come what might, arrest, prison, disgrace. I was going to see Alison.

I saw her. I flung into the station, saw that it was empty—empty, for she was not there. Then I hurried back to the gates. She was there, a familiar figure in blue, the very gown in which I always thought of her, the one she had worn when, Heaven help me—I had kissed her, at the Carter farm. And she was not alone. Bending over her, talking earnestly, with all his boyish heart in his face, was Richey.

They did not see me, and I was glad of it. After all, it had been McKnight's game first. I turned on my heel and made my way blindly out of the station. Before I lost them I turned once and looked toward them, standing apart from the crowd, absorbed in each other. They were the only two people on earth that I cared about, and I left them together. Then I went back miserably to the office and awaited arrest.

CHAPTER XXVI.

On to Richmond. Strangely enough, I was not disturbed that day. McKnight did not appear at all. I sat at my desk and transacted routine business all afternoon, working with feverish energy. Like a man on the verge of a critical illness or a hazardous journey, I cleared up my correspondence, paid bills until I had writer's cramp from signing checks, read over my will, and paid up my life insurance, made to the benefit of an elderly sister of my mother's.

I no longer dreaded arrest. After that morning in the station, I felt that anything would be a relief from the tension. I went home with perfect openness, courting the warrant that I knew was waiting, but I was not molested. The delay puzzled me. The early part of the evening was uneventful. I read until late, with occasional lapses, when my book lay at my elbow, and I smoked and thought. Mrs. Klopston closed the house with ostentatious caution, about eleven, and hung around waiting to enlarge on the outrageousness of the police search. I did not encourage her. "One would think," she concluded

pompously, one foot in the hall, "that you were something you oughtn't to be, Mr. Lawrence. They acted as though you had committed a crime."

"I'm not sure that I didn't, Mrs. Klopston," I said wearily. "Somebody did, and the general verdict seems to point my way."

She stared at me in speechless indignation. Then she founced out. She came back once to say that the paper predicted cooler weather, and that she had put a blanket on my bed, but, to her disappointment, I refused to reopen the subject.

At half-past eleven McKnight and Hotchkiss came in. Richey has a habit of stopping his car in front of the house and honking until some one comes out. He has a code of signals with the horn, which I never remember. Two long and a short blast mean, I believe, "Send out a box of cigarettes," and six short blasts, which sound like a police call, mean "Can you lend me some money?" Tonight I knew something was up, for he got out and rang the door-bell like a Christian.

They came into the library, and Hotchkiss wiped his collar until it gleamed. McKnight was aggressively cheerful.

"Not pinched yet!" he exclaimed. "What do you think of that for luck! You always were a fortunate devil, Lawrence."

"Yes," I assented with some bitterness, "I hardly know how to contain myself for joy sometimes. I suppose you know"—to Hotchkiss—"that the police were here while we were at Cresson, and that they found the bag that I brought from the wreck?"

"Things are coming to a head," he said thoughtfully, "unless a little plan that I have in mind—" he hesitated.

"I hope so, I am pretty nearly desperate," I said, doggedly. "I've got a mental toothache, and the sooner it's pulled the better."

"Tut, tut," said McKnight, "think of the disgrace to the firm if its senior member goes up for life, or—" he twisted his handkerchief into a noose, and went through an elaborate pantomime.

"Although jail isn't so bad, anyhow," he finished, "there are fellows that get the habit and keep going back and going back." He looked at his watch, and I fancied his cheerfulness was strained. Hotchkiss was nervously fumbling his book.

"Did you ever read the Purlined Letter, Mr. Blakeley?" he inquired.

"Probably, years ago," I said. "Poo, isn't it?"

He was choked at my indifference. "It is a masterpiece," he said, with enthusiasm. "I re-read it to-day."

"And what happened?"

"Then I inspected the rooms in the house of Washington Circle. I—I made some discoveries, Mr. Blakeley. For one thing, our man there is left-handed." He looked around for our approval. "There was a small cushion on the dresser, and the scarfpins in it had been stuck in with the left hand."

"Somebody may have twisted the cushion," I objected, but he looked hurt, and I desisted.

"There is only one discrepancy," he admitted, "but it troubles me. According to Mrs. Carter, at the farmhouse, our man wore gaudy pajamas, while I found here only the most severely plain night-shirts."

"Any buttons off?" McKnight inquired, looking again at his watch.

"The buttons were there," the amateur detective answered gravely, "but the buttonhole next the top one was torn through."

McKnight winked at me furtively. "I am convinced of one thing," Hotchkiss went on, clearing his throat, "the papers are not in that room. Either he carries them with him, or he has sold them."

A sound on the street made both my visitors listen sharply. Whatever it was it passed on, however. I was growing curious and the restraint was telling on McKnight. He has no talent for secrecy. In the interval we discussed the strange occurrence at Cresson, which lost nothing by Hotchkiss' dry narration.

"And so," he concluded, "the woman in the Baltimore hospital is the wife of Henry Sullivan and the daughter of the man he murdered. No wonder he collapsed when he heard of the wreck."

"Joy, probably," McKnight put in. "Is that clock right, Lawrence? Never mind, it doesn't matter. By the way, Mrs. Conway dropped in the office yesterday, while you were away."

"What!" I sprang from my chair. "Sure thing. Said she had heard great things of us, and wanted us to handle her case against the railroad."

"I would like to know what she is driving at," I reflected. "Is she trying to reach me through you?"

Richey's flippancy is often a cloak for deeper feeling. He dropped it now. "Yes," he said, "she's after the notes, of course. And I'll tell you I felt like a poltroon—whatever that may be—when I turned her down. She stood by the door with her face white, and told me contemptuously that I could save you from a murder charge and wouldn't do it. She made me feel like a cur. I was just as guilty as if I could have obliged her. She hinted that there were reasons and she laid my attitude to beastly motives."

"Nonsense," I said, as easily as I could. Hotchkiss had gone to the window. "She was excited. There are no reasons," whatever, she means."

Richey put his hand on my shoulder. "We've been together too long to let any reasons or unreasons come between us, old man," he said, not very steadily.

Hotchkiss, who had been silent, here came forward in his most im-

pressive manner. He put his hands under his coat-tails and coughed.

"Mr. Blakeley," he began, "by Mr. McKnight's advice we have arranged a little interview here to-night. If all has gone as I planned, Mr. Henry Pinckney Sullivan is by this time under arrest. Within a very few minutes—he will be here."

"I wanted to talk to him before he was locked up," Richey explained. "He's clever enough to be worth knowing, and, besides, I'm not so cocksure of his guilt as our friend the patch on the seat of government. No murderer worthy of the name needs six different motives for the same crime, beginning with robbery, and ending with an unpleasant father-in-law."

We were all silent for awhile. McKnight stationed himself at a window, and Hotchkiss paced the floor expectantly. "It's a great day for modern detective methods," he chirruped. "While the police have been guarding houses and standing with their mouths open waiting for clues to fall in and choke them, we have pieced together, bit by bit, a fabric—"

The door-bell rang, followed immediately by sounds of footsteps in the hall. McKnight threw the door open, and Hotchkiss, raised on his toes, flung out his arm in a gesture of superb eloquence.

"Behold—your man!" he declaimed.

Through the open doorway came a tall, blond fellow, clad in light gray, wearing tan shoes, and followed closely by an officer.

"I brought him here as you suggested, Mr. McKnight," said the constable.

But McKnight was doubled over the library table in silent convulsions of mirth, and I was almost as bad. Little Hotchkiss stood up, his important attitude finally changing to one of chagrin, while the blond man ceased to look angry, and became sheepish.

It was Stuart, our confidential clerk for the last half dozen years!

McKnight sat up and wiped his eyes.

"Stuart," he said sternly, "there are two very serious things we have learned about you. First, you jab your scarf-pins into your cushion with your left hand, which is most reprehensible; second, you wear—er—night-shirts, instead of pajamas. Worse than that, perhaps, we find that one of them has a buttonhole torn out at the neck."

Stuart was bewildered. He looked from McKnight to me, and then at the crestfallen Hotchkiss.

"I haven't any idea what it's all about," he said. "I was arrested as I reached my boarding-house to-night, after the theater, and brought directly here. I told the officer it was a mistake."

Poor Hotchkiss tried bravely to justify the fiasco.

"You can not deny," he contended, "that Mr. Andrew Bronson followed you to your rooms last Monday evening."

Stuart looked at us and flushed.

"No, I don't deny it," he said, "but there was nothing criminal about it, on my part, at least. Mr. Bronson has been trying to induce me to secure the forged notes for him. But I did not even know where they were."

"And you were not on the wrecked Washington Flier?" persisted Hotchkiss. But McKnight interfered.

"There is no use trying to put the other man's identity on Stuart, Mr. Hotchkiss," he protested. "He has been our confidential clerk for six years, and has not been away from the office a day for a year. I am afraid that the beautiful fabric we have pieced out of all these scraps is going to be a crazy quilt." His tone was facetious, but I could detect the undercurrent of real disappointment.

I paid the constable for his trouble, and he departed. Stuart, still indignant, left to go back to Washington Circle. He shook hands with McKnight and myself magnanimously, but he hurled a look of utter hatred at Hotchkiss, sunk crestfallen in his chair.

"As far as I can see," said McKnight dryly, "we're exactly as far along as we were the day we met at the Carter place. We're not a step nearer to finding our man."

"We have one thing that may be of value," I suggested. "He is the husband of a bronze-haired woman at Van Kirk's hospital, and it is just possible we may trace him through her. I hope we are not going to lose your valuable co-operation, Mr. Hotchkiss?" I asked.

He roused at that to feeble interest. "I—oh, of course not, if you still care to have me, I—I was wondering about—the man who just went out. Stuart, you say? I—told his landlady to-night that he wouldn't need the room again. I hope she hasn't rented it to somebody else."

We cheered him as best we could, and I suggested that we go to Baltimore the next day and try to find the real Sullivan through his wife. He left sometime after midnight, and Richey and I were alone.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

As George Sees the Peers. "David Lloyd George," said the miner from Wales, as he emptied his glass of cwrw. "David is a very witty speaker. I've heard him many a time in Carnarvon."

"Speaking in Welsh, he once ridiculed in Carnarvon the house of lords. He said the average peer thought so much of himself that at family prayers he always made one well-known passage run:

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"Its climax," he said, "is false and unsatisfactory—as false and unsatisfactory as Rowndar's excuse."

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