

# The Yellow Letter



by William Johnston

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## SYNOPSIS.

Harding Kent calls on Louise Farrish to propose marriage and finds the house in great excitement over the attempted suicide of her sister Katharine. Kent starts an investigation and finds that Hugh Crandall, suitor for Katharine, who had been forbidden the house by General Farrish, had talked with Katharine over the telephone and finds that she had just been stricken with paralysis. Kent discovers that Crandall has left town hurriedly. Andrew Elser, an aged banker, commits suicide about the same time as Katharine attempted her life. A yellow envelope is found in Elser's room. Post Office Inspector Davis, Kent's friend, takes up the case. Kent is convinced that Crandall is at the bottom of the mystery. Katharine's strange outcry puzzles the detectives. Kent and Davis search Crandall's room and find an address—Look Box 17, Ardway, N. J. Kent goes to Ardway to investigate and becomes suspicious of a "Henry Cook." A woman commits suicide at the Ardway Hotel. A yellow letter also figures in this case. Kent calls Louise on the long distance telephone and finds that she had just been called by Crandall from the same booth. "Cook" disappears. The Ardway postmaster is missing. Inspector Davis arrives at Ardway and takes up the investigation. He discovers that the dead woman is Sarah Sacket of Bridgeport. Louise telephones Kent imploring him to drop the investigation. Kent returns to New York to get an explanation from Louise. He finds the body of a woman in Central Park and more yellow letters.

## CHAPTER IX—(Continued).

I was puzzled beyond expression. Why should Louise refuse to see me? I was conscious of having done nothing to offend her. If only I could see her for just a minute to find out what was the matter! I felt that I must reach her. For an instant I was tempted to brush past the maid and force my way in. Surely Louise of her own accord would not treat me thus. She must be beside herself with grief. Perhaps she was under the same malign influence that so distressed her sister. Yet even in the depths of despair we observe the conventionalities.

"Will you ask Miss Louise when she can see me?" I found myself saying in calm tones to the maid.

Again she closed the door in my face. Again I waited.

"Miss Louise says that she will see you if you will return in an hour," was the message that was brought me.

I left the Farrish door and stumbled blindly up the street. The plight in which I found myself seemed inexplicable, maddening. I was sure Louise loved me. Had she not turned to me in the first hour of her distress? Had she not telephoned me when her sister shot herself? Had she not permitted me to take her in my arms? Had she not commissioned me to solve the mystery of the yellow letter? Yet why had she bade me discontinue my search? Why had she shut her door to me? What could be her motive? What could have influenced her against me?

Torn by a hundred conflicting emotions, I traversed street after street, not knowing or caring whether my feet were taking me. I must have retraced my steps, for I found myself in the block where the Farrishes lived. I looked at my watch and saw it was still half an hour before the time I had been told to return. I turned away from the house and wandered aimlessly on. There was some mystery in Louise's conduct I could not fathom. She refused to see me, yet just ahead of me some one else had been admitted to the house. A wave of jealousy swept over me. Who was this other man? I racked my brain, striving to recall his appearance, trying to remember what there was that was familiar about him.

All at once it came to me. A wild rage filled me. I knew now who he was. A picture of the office in that little hotel in New Jersey came to my mind, as it looked when I stood by the stove drying my clothes. A man had come to the desk and got his key and had walked past me as he went to his room. I knew now where I had seen that man who was admitted to the Farrish home. It was the man called Cook.

It was Hugh Crandall.

## CHAPTER X.

### Who Was the Thief?

An unbidden and unwelcome guest, jealousy came and sat by the altar of my heart, stirring the fires of my love for Louise into furious darts of flame that scorched my soul. That Crandall—for I was positive now that the visitor who had entered the Farrish home had been he—should have been admitted to the house with so many things pointed to his guilt, while I, an accepted lover, and certainly Louise's faithful servant, had been barred with such scant courtesy, filled me with dumb, unreasoning rage. I felt that all claims of friendship and of service, even disregarding the still stronger claims of honest love, entitled me to far different treatment.

Yet even in the burst of anger that overwhelmed me there was not a single thought of harshness toward Louise. I felt that if I could but see her she would explain everything satisfactorily. It was toward Crandall that all my wrath was directed. Feeling as I did, sure that he was respon-

sible for Katharine's attempted suicide and for her poor father's plight, I feared that his visit to the house boded ill for Louise. Undoubtedly his malign influence had persuaded her to bid me drop my efforts to solve the mystery. He must have realized that I was close on his trail, so dangerously close that with the effrontery of the daring criminal he had ventured to come to the house in one last effort to thwart my plans for his exposure. As I became calmer I resolved on a course of action. Louise's strange request to me over the telephone must have been made because she was dominated by the fear of this villain who had brought disaster on her father and sister. Perhaps she feared that some evil might befall me if I persisted in trying to run him to earth. Possibly she was afraid that still greater evil might come to those she loved. I felt that for her own happiness it was necessary that I should continue my course. I would go on with my investigation and once for all free her from the crushing thrall of this hidden evil. I would wait where I was until Crandall had left the house, then I would insist on seeing her and telling her my resolve, nor would I permit her to dissuade me from it.

On the corner was a drug-store. Sheltered by its awning I took my stand to wait until Crandall left the house. I could see the Farrish door, yet my presence there under the awning would hardly be noticed. I had not long to wait. In about five minutes the door opened and the caller emerged. This time I had an opportunity to get a good look at him. I was right. His face was that of the man who had been registered in the Ardway hotel as Henry Cook, who had so abruptly left the room when the inquest was being held as I had begun to ask questions about the yellow letter, who had driven from the town behind the fastest horse obtainable.

He came swinging down the street past where I stood. As he came closer I was amazed to note that his face was not the unnatural color of the morphine user that I expected, but ruddy with health. His eyes, however, wore a strained expression and his brow was knotted with wrinkles. I was strongly tempted to spring out from where I stood as he passed, to seize him by the throat and to make him tell me all I wished to know about the hideous mystery. Yet better judgment withheld my hand. After all, the evidence I had against him was not of the tangible sort that would convict. Even though I knew of his telephoning Katharine just before she shot herself, even though General Farrish had learned something about him that barred him from the house, even though we had found in his rooms a hypodermic syringe and the address in New Jersey where the third suicide had taken place, even though I myself had noted his suspicious actions there, there was nothing definite enough to warrant seizing him as yet. I watched him as far down the avenue as my eye could follow and then turned toward the Farrish house. This time I was admitted without delay. Apparently the maid had new instructions.

"I'll tell Miss Louise you are here," she said as she showed me into the reception-room.

As I waited I tried to think how I should greet Louise. While there was much that I might reproach her for, I felt that surely it had not been her fault. I knew she must be acting under compulsion. I was determined, though, to let her know that I knew that Hugh Crandall had been in the house.

Suddenly I heard a smothered scream up-stairs and a second later Louise burst into the room. There was terror in her face as she ran to me.

"Oh, Harding," she gasped, "it's gone—stolen!"

"What do you mean? What's stolen?" I cried, seizing her hands tightly in my own.

She was trembling all over and her breath came in quick, short jerks. She was dressed in an automobile hat and coat, but even through the thick folds of her coat I could feel the palpitating of her heart. The new mystery, whatever it was, had been too much for her already overstrained nerves. She was in a condition closely bordering on hysteria.

"Tell me about it, what was it?" I said.

"The yellow letter—it's gone, stolen!"

"Where was it?"

I had taken it with me the morning I went down to Inspector Davis' office, but after he had compared it with the Elser fragment he had returned it to me. I had restored it to Louise when Davis and I called on her after our visit to Mrs. Trask's boarding-house. I had not seen it since then. My last recollection of it was placing it in her hand as Davis and I left the house.

"Let me think," she said, trying hard to regain her composure. "When

you and Mr. Davis were here the other day you gave it back to me. I took it up-stairs and put it in a drawer in a little desk in my room. I locked the desk and hid the key in a vase on the mantel. I went to the desk just now to get it and it was gone."

"Was the desk locked?"

She nodded.

"Who could have taken it?" I asked.

Even as I framed the question there came to me the thought of Crandall's visit. He had been in the hotel in Ardway where the woman committed suicide after reading a yellow letter and tearing it up. The scraps of that letter had disappeared. More likely he had come here just to get that scrap of yellow paper lest its evidence might bring home his crimes.

"Who has been in the house?"

"No one but the doctors and nurses and the servants," said Louise, flushing uneasily as she spoke.

I waited, expecting her to mention Crandall's visit, but though she hesitated for a second she said nothing of it.

"I wonder who could have taken it?" she said after an awkward pause.

"What motive could any one have?" I asked, determined to direct her thoughts to Crandall. "The only person who would have a reason for making away with it would be some one who feared that it might be used against him."

There was a silence while we both pondered the situation.

"You remember," said Louise suddenly, "the agitation my father showed at sight of that paper. If he were not lying paralyzed up-stairs I think he would have tried to gain possession of it."

"How is your father, and your sister?" I asked, suddenly recalling that I had asked after neither of them.

Katharine is much better," said Louise. "She is entirely conscious, though very weak, but the doctor says that she will in all probability recover quickly. My father's condition remains the same, though he seems to have regained the use of his right hand. He wrote some brief directions to-day about his business."

"Are you sure of all the servants?" I asked.

"All of them have been with us for years; all but one, ever since before my mother's death. I would not think of distrusting any of them."

"Are you certain the house has not been entered in the night?"

I was asking these questions with a view of convincing her that it was impossible for any one but Crandall to have taken the yellow scrap—for any one else to have even a motive for taking it.

"That would be impossible," she said. "All the doors and windows are protected by burglar alarms and I

"But—but—" I protestingly began. "I asked you to do what I requested without any questions. You have told me that you loved me. If that is the case I know you will do what I ask without trying to force my confidence. Isn't it enough for you to know that I wish you to do it?"

"Louise, dear," I said firmly, "a mysterious trail of hidden evil in some way has crossed your home. It has stricken your sister and your father. You yourself asked me to try to find the secret and I vowed that I would. I don't know what your motive is in making this strange request, but I can't believe you are doing it of your own volition. I am certain that you are influenced by fear—fear lest some greater evil will befall, if by my efforts to unmask the criminal are successful. Is it not so?"

"Don't ask me, Harding," she begged piteously. "I can't tell you. It is not my secret. I can tell you nothing. Please don't ask me."

More than ever now I was convinced that fear of Crandall dominated her. Quickly following on his telephone message he had come to the house and had cast over her the same mysterious spell as had fallen on her sister. More than ever was I determined to follow the trail of mystery to its end, no matter where it lay or what it cost. What was life to me if the woman I loved was to be for ever under a shadow, in the power of some hidden criminal who might prey on her as he had done on the other members of her family? I felt it my duty toward her to go on and, if I could, compel her to divulge something of what she was holding back from me.

"Why did you want that bit of the yellow letter? What were you going to do with it?"

"I can't tell you. Please don't ask me."

"Why do you want me to stop my inquiries?"

"I can't tell you. Please don't ask."

"What was Hugh Crandall doing here this morning?"

The question, direct and blunt as I put it, had almost the same effect as if I had fired a bullet at her. She caught her breath quickly and her face turned pale. I thought that she was going to faint. With a great effort she recovered, and looking me straight in the eye, she answered softly: "Mr. Crandall was not here this morning. What made you think he was?"

I did not try to conceal the open-eyed amazement with which I stared at her as she gave me this unequivocal reply. What could it mean? I could not, would not believe that this high principled, honorable girl would willfully deceive me, yet I was as sure as that I was standing there that



Sheltered by the Awning I Took My Stand to Wait Until Crandall Left the House.

know they are in working order or I would have heard about it."

"There is or there must have been," I said slowly, "some traitor in the house, some thief, some one who had an object in getting hold of that paper."

"There has been no one here," said Louise with a painful effort, "no one answering that description."

"How did you come to look for the paper in your desk?"

"I wanted—" she stopped short.

"Mr. Kent," she said, her entire manner toward me stiffening as she withdrew her hands from mine, "I asked you last night if you would not cease your inquiries at once."

Hugh Crandall had been in the house that morning. Could it have been that he had entered without her knowledge? Was it possible that one of the maids in the Farrish home was in his pay and had permitted him to enter without Louise's knowledge? That might explain the rifling of the locked desk. The maid might know of Louise's habit of hiding the key in a vase. It began to look as if I had a solution of this new mystery. Yet it could hardly be possible for Crandall to have been in the house for fully half an hour without Louise knowing it. Furthermore, why had admittance been denied me when I first called?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

# LAWMAKERS OF NORTH CAROLINA

IT NOW LOOKS LIKE STATE TAX COMMISSION.—PRIMARY IS REVIVED.

## BILLS PASS FINAL READING

Many Bills Are Introduced and Acted on in Both Branches of the General Assembly.—Other Legislative Work Being Done.

### Senate—Wednesday.

The senate passed the Ivey bill for the regulation of automobiles, fixing the scale of taxes at \$5 up to 25 horsepower, \$7.50 to 40 horsepower. Motorcycles will be taxed \$2. Speed limits will be 10 miles an hour in business sections and 15 miles in residence sections of towns and 25 miles on country roads. Dealers are to pay \$10 registration tax for number to be used on demonstration cars with exemption for 15 days. Municipalities are allowed to impose additional taxes.

The bill fixing minimum punishment for carrying concealed weapons at \$25 fine or 30 days imprisonment was defeated after a spirited argument.

### House—Wednesday.

The bill by Hall for tax of \$1 on male and \$2 on female dogs for benefit of the school funds in the counties was discussed, many Representatives asking exemption for their counties. It was then referred to the judiciary committee. The compulsory school attendance bill, pending as a deferred special order for today, was merely ordered printed and set for Tuesday of next week.

The Kellum bill to give the corporation commission power to regulate rates of power, light, gas and water companies, both corporation and municipality-owned and empowering the corporation commission to require physical connection of competing telephone lines passed and it was sent to the senate. The house voted to have a special committee appointed to investigate the hiring of convicts by the state to railroads and other enterprises and report relative to the advisability of passing the pending bill to require state convicts to be hired to all counties wanting them for road work before letting them to railroads.

### Senate—Thursday.

Of routine matters little was done Thursday in the senate. The session was interrupted by a joint session and an executive session. Senator Lawson called up his compulsory education bill again, with the provisions of his own measure inserted after the enacting words of the McCravy house bill, but debate was adjourned as usual.

The 1 mill school tax bill which was passed by the house in the senate, favorably reported with amendments.

### House—Thursday.

The senate bill to provide for the sale of the property of the State Hospital for the Insane by the sinking fund commission and the transfer of the hospital to State Park was passed to third reading by the house.

By a vote of 63 to 37, the house sustained the veto of the governor on the act to hold an election in Jasper county for the purpose of voting \$50,000 in bonds with which the supervisor and county commissioners could build a court house and jail. The original act creating Jasper county provided that the buildings should be erected by a commission of five.

The house refused to pass over the veto of the governor the act to empower the municipal authorities of Greenville to destroy alcoholic liquors seized by them.

The Berkeley delegation bill to require timber to be returned as personal property for taxation was passed to third reading by the house.

### Senate—Friday.

The Senate passed the bill to work convicts on the public roads after a lengthy discussion by members on whether the state is not throwing away its money in leasing convicts to build roads for stock.

The six-months minimum school term bill from the house was further discussed by the senate and passed on second reading 44 to 1. Or rather, this was the vote on the adoption of the Bryant amendment empowering counties to levy special five per cent tax for county purposes when county authorities deem this necessary in connection with the operation of the school term act. The bill passed second reading unanimously.

### House—Friday.

By a vote of 81 to 5 the house passed the Kellum bill providing for the semi-annual issuance of \$300,000 four per cent state bonds, to be used in financing road bonds issued by counties at five per cent for road building; the bonds to run for 41 years, by which time the one per cent sinking fund will have provided for liquidation.

The house received from committee and passed immediately, after considerable argument, the bill to in-

crease the membership of the Warren County Board of Education.

Mr. Stephens of Wayne presented and procured immediate passage of a joint resolution authorizing the placing of a bronze statue of Gov. Charles Brantley Aycock in Capitol Square.

Another bill received from committee and put under immediate consideration was the Bolick bill to protect human life by prohibiting persons from walking on railroad tracks.

### Senate—Saturday.

The six-months school bill was passed on third roll call reading and ordered sent to the House for concurrence in Senate amendment.

The Jackson county seat removal bill was passed on final reading and went to the House for concurrence in Senate amendment.

Senator Jones introduced a resolution declaring it to be the sense of the General Assembly that the School for the Blind at Raleigh be removed to another site. A committee of three Senators and five Representatives is called for to investigate and report to the Legislature.

Bills passed final reading as follows:

Senate bill for water and light bond issue by Benson.

Senate bill ratifying call for election on the county farm in Iredell county.

House bill amending the Iredell county road law.

### House—Saturday.

The House passed on final reading the Kellum bill for the state to issue semi-annually \$300,000 state 4 per cent bonds to cover county 5 per cent bonds for road building, and the bill goes to the Senate.

The House passed the Kellum bill to regulate elections in Wilmington, a comprehensive corrupt practices act. Great numbers of public local calendar bills were passed.

The house passed bills as follows that go to the senate for disposition by that body:

To incorporate Pine Bluff school district.

To fix boundary of Marshall school district, Madison county.

Good road bond issues for Cleveland county.

### Senate—Monday.

Senate bills passed on final reading were as follows:

Legalizing road bond issue in Inland Creek Township, Duplin county.

For additional support for Newbern schools and for bond issue for new building.

For road bond election in Person county.

Empowering Belmont to improve streets.

Rechartering Raleigh and election on commission government.

For road bond election in Edgecombe, outside the road districts.

Amending charter of Snow Hill.

Amending charter of Town of Mashall.

Authorizing bond issue for Gastonia.

Incorporating West Bladenboro, Bladen county.

### House—Monday.

The house passed and then reconsidered the vote on a Senate resolution by Ward urging Taft to not to veto the Webb-Kenyon bill. It had passed the senate by a vote of 13 to 14 and been rushed across to the house, where there was immediate passage and very soon thereafter a successful motion by Devin to reconsider the vote, this being carried 70 to 25.

House bills passed final reading as follows:

To regulate pay of jurors and witnesses in Brunswick county.

Road bill for Iredell county.

Road bond issue for Granville county.

To permit the City of Reidsville to borrow money.

Bond issue for Monroe.

Bond issue by Morning Star district, Mecklenburg county, for schools.

Good roads for Yadkin county.

### Senate—Tuesday.

In the Senate Hobgood introduced another legalized primary bill. It is defeated. Justice House bill over again, except that it excepts county officers from primary nominations, and even this was included in the committee substitute bill that the House killed.

Senate bills passed on final reading were as follows:

Empowering Pender County to levy special taxes for bridges and causeways.

Amending charter of Town of Councils, Bladen county.

Authorizing electric light bonds for Tarboro.

For waterworks and sewerage bonds for Tarboro.

Road issue for Wayne county to build court house.

Amending charter of Salisbury.

### House—Tuesday.

The House received through Chairman Williams of the Finance Committee the new revenue bill, which is to be taken up in committee of the whole and considered from day to day until it passes final reading and is sent over to the Senate for still further adjustment and enactment.

House bills passed on final reading were as follows:

Amending charter of Sylva, Jackson county.

Authorizing Avery county to borrow money to build bridge over Toe River.

For road bonds in Mannings township, Nash county.

Amending charter of Burgaw, Pender county.

Amending charter of Laurinburg.

Authorizing Lillington to issue sewerage bonds.