

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 just before she shot herself. A torn piece of yellow paper is found at sight of which General Farrish is 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, Lock 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 investigation. He discovers that the dead woman is Sarah Sackett 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. He sees Crandall, whom he recognizes as "Cook," enter the Farrish home. Louise again implores Kent to drop the investigation and refuses to give any explanation. Later Kent sees Crandall and Louise in an automobile. Kent returns to Ardway. Davis announces that he has planned to arrest the missing postmaster and also the master criminal. While seeking the criminals, Kent comes across Louise and Crandall. Pursued by Davis, the postmaster jumps off a precipice and is killed. Aleck Young, the master criminal, is found in a hut in a marshy stupor.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Strange Vigil.

Dawn found Inspector Davis and me keeping strange vigil in the deserted cottage. Louise was gone. Crandall was gone. Constable Dodds was gone. Only the two of us were there, and on a rude couch in the corner, inert, unconscious with the death-like stupor of the confirmed user of morphine, lay the wreck of a man whom Davis had termed the master criminal.

On the inspector's return from his pursuit of the postmaster he had at once assumed the position of director-general of the little group at the cottage. He had decreed that Crandall should take Louise back to town in the automobile as soon as she was able to travel.

"After she has had an hour's rest here," he said authoritatively, "her nerves will have recovered sufficiently. It is important that the wound in her arm should be dressed as quickly as possible. It will be well, too, for her to return as speedily as possible to her father and sister. Her continued absence, if it reaches their ears, will needlessly alarm them both. You, Mr. Crandall, will take her back in the machine in which you came, of course."

"Certainly," said Crandall—overeagerly, I thought—"but, if you will pardon me for asking, who are you?"

For reply Davis handed him his card which bore his official title.

"But," stammered Crandall, "I don't understand you. What are you doing out here?"

"I'm here," said the inspector, "I fancy on the same mission that brought both you and Kent here—to find the sender of the yellow letters that have been menacing the peace and happiness of the house of Farrish."

"But," protested Crandall again, "how did you know it was Aleck Young?"

"So you know him?" said the inspector, with a note of inquiry in his voice. I had been taking no part in the conversation that was carried on. I was sitting with Louise's head pillowed on my knee endeavoring with my handkerchief to staunch the slight flow of blood that was still coming from the bullet wound. I had been strongly tempted to voice a protest, when I heard Davis arrange for Louise's return in the automobile with Crandall, for while Davis seemed to think he, like ourselves, had been in pursuit of the criminals, I still believed it was for the purpose of warning them instead of capturing them. Yet, on the other hand, I knew nothing about running a car. It was clearly out of the question for me to take Louise back, much as I distrusted Crandall. Anxiously I waited for his confession of acquaintance with the man in the hut.

"Yes, I knew him—only too well," said Crandall.

"Tell me about him," said the inspector. "But wait—let us carry Miss Farrish inside the cottage where she will be sheltered from the night air until you are ready to start."

"I can walk," said Louise. "In fact, I think I was more frightened than hurt."

I helped her to her feet and assisted her into the cottage, while I piled some cushions that were lying about to make her comfortable. The noise

"He will not wake for several hours," said Davis after feeling his pulse. "Kent and I will stay here until then. You, Mr. Crandall, will take Miss Farrish home, and you, Dodds, as soon as it's daylight, had better go look for Rouser's body."

"I don't have to look for it," said the constable with a shudder. "I know just where it is. It's a long ways round by the road, though."

"Take the backboard," said Davis, "and when you reach the body go through all the pockets carefully and bring me everything you find. You'd better not take the body back to Ardway yet. Is there some place else you can take it?"

"Sure," said Dobbs, "I can take it over to Millervale. It's just about as far in the other direction. But what in the land's sake I'll tell about it, gets me."

"That's easy," said the inspector. "You can explain that you were driving over there and as you came by you saw the body lying on the road. You can explain that he must have fallen over the cliff in the dark. By the time they get through talking about it and having an inquest over in Millervale we will have had a chance to finish any more investigation we want to do. You can start about dawn."

"All right," said the constable, "but what will I do with them warrants?"

"Leave them with me. After you have disposed of Rouser's body you can stop on your way back and we'll take this one in with us. Come on outside, Dodds, and you, too, Crandall, I want to ask you some questions about our friend over there. You, Kent, stay here with Miss Farrish."

The three of them went out, leaving Louise and me alone together, a circumstance that I couldn't doubt that Davis had planned, realizing that there was much we would say to each other. Hardly were they out of the door before Louise turned to me, with suppliant arms, and cried out, with a sob in her voice: "Harding, forgive me for having deceived you."

"It is you," I cried, "you, who must forgive me for having disobeyed your wish, for having come out here after you had asked me not to, for having almost put a bullet through your dear heart."

"You didn't know—you couldn't know that I was here," she sobbed. "But how can you ever pardon the lies I told you?"

"Lies," I protested. "Dear girl, you never lied to me. Whatever these dear lips have said, I knew, I always knew your heart was true."

"Katharine asked it and I had to promise her."

"You mean about Hugh Crandall?"

"Yes," she breathed. "I don't know yet what it is that is between them. It's something about—about my father. Crandall knew it and Katharine found it out. Whatever it is, they determined to keep it secret between them. Katharine made me promise that I would tell no one, not even you. She swore me not to reveal to anyone that I had even seen Hugh Crandall. I had to promise her, you understand, don't you?"

My answer was a kiss full on her lips, while my arms went about her and held her tight to me.

"Of course, dear girl," I breathed, "I understand. I understood all the while."

"I was so afraid," she murmured, "afraid you would think I was deceiving you, that I didn't love you."

As our lips met in a long, sweet kiss, a wave of joy swept over me that all but obliterated thoughts of the dreadful yellow letter. I forgot for the moment the drug-addicted creature lying in the corner, not twenty feet away from us.

The spell was broken by a slight twitching of the man across the room. We came to ourselves with a start as from a dream. I went over to his side and looked at him. He was still dead to all around him.

"You understand, Harding, dear, don't you?" said Louise, as I resumed my place beside her, "why I asked you to drop your search? As soon as Katharine became conscious and I told her that you were on the trail of the yellow letter, she became greatly excited. She insisted that I should make you withdraw at once. She was determined to know all about what you had done, and I told her of your being here in Ardway. She, weak and ill as she was, made me swear that I would recall you by telephone. She wanted me to telephone to Hugh Crandall, too, but I did not know how to reach him. I had to promise her everything she asked."

"Of course you did," I said. "But, dear, I loved you so that I could not rest while this terrible mystery that hung over your dear ones was unsolved. I felt that it was my duty to disregard your wish. I realized that you were being compelled by some influence you could not withstand to act in a way that would not anger with her speedily than all the doctors in the world," he answered.

"Did he mean the yellow letter?" I queried.

"I don't know. I asked him if that was what he meant and he would not answer me. The only thing he did tell me was that there had been strange developments in the case since he had undertaken to get this paper for Katharine. They seemed to puzzle him greatly. He said that something with which he had nothing to do had alarmed the man we were going to see and that he had disappeared, gone into hiding."

"How will we find him?" I asked.

"He is as anxious to see me as he is not to see some one else," Crandall said. "He wrote me plain directions

"But tell me," I asked, "what of Hugh Crandall? What is his connection with this dreadful mystery?"

"I don't know," she answered thoughtfully.

"I have thought all along that he had something to do with it, and you saw just now that he admitted knowing this man here whom the inspector insists is at the root of everything."

"Katharine trusts him, yet I know my father for some reason forbade him the house."

"I'm sure he is guilty," I cried. "Katharine's eyes have been blinded by love to his real character."

"I think you must be mistaken," said Louise. "He knows about the existence of a paper that gave some man a strange hold on my father. Katharine knew of it, too. He may have told her. She insisted on my accompanying him out here to try to help recover it."

"Didn't he tell you about it on the way out?"

"No. I asked him what it was. He told me that too many people knew its contents now. The more I think about it the more perplexed I am about the mysterious manner in which both he and Katharine acted about this document."

"Tell me everything," I insisted, all my suspicion against Crandall returning anew.

"To begin with, he insisted on our leaving the chauffeur in Newark, though it had been my intention to have him come with us. Crandall would not hear of it. Katharine put you in my charge, and it is her wish as well as my own that we take every precaution for secrecy. It is better that only you and I go on this mission. We want no servant gossiping about this matter. But where are we going, and why? I asked him. 'Surely I have a right to know that.' 'We are going to try to recover from the hands of the wickedest blackguard on earth a certain document that has come into his possession. It is a question whether or not we shall succeed. If we do, I shall put this document in your hands and you must promise that it shall not go out of your possession until you have placed it in your sister's hands. You must promise me, too, that you will ask no questions about it and that you will not read it. When Katharine has seen it, do with it whatever she tells you. She probably will say that you are to burn it without reading.'

"Can't you see, Harding, what a dilemma I was in? I felt that what Mr. Crandall asked me to do was Katharine's wish. They had talked together for nearly half an hour just before you came to the house. I had to promise what he asked, though I protested first. It seemed to me that carrying back the document to Katharine would excite her and retard her recovery, and I told him so."

"The sight of that document safe in her own hands will do more to cure

ment there for nine o'clock tonight."

"Why," I asked Louise, "do you suppose that he and Katharine insisted on you coming out here? Why could not Crandall himself have recovered the document and restored it to Katharine?"

"I asked him that. He told me that the man who held it had made the condition that it should be received by either my father or Katharine. They did not wish it known that my father had happened, and as they were certain this man knew neither Katharine nor me, I was to go with him and impersonate my sister."

"Did you get the document?"

"No, we failed," said Louise, "and I do not know what in the world I am to tell Katharine. We came out here in the afternoon. Crandall thought it advisable to find the place by daylight. We ran the automobile up the lane that leads to this place and crept through the thicket until we came in sight of the cottage. There were two men moving about in the cottage. Young and another man whom Mr. Crandall told me was the postmaster at Ardway. He seemed surprised at the presence of the postmaster. We watched for half an hour and then took the automobile back to a little hotel about three miles away from Ardway. For some reason, Mr. Crandall did not want to stop in Ardway."

"I guess I was the reason," I replied. "But when did you return here?"

"We had dinner at the little hotel, and as soon as it was dark, started back for the cottage. When we arrived we found a light in the window and saw Young there in a stupor just as you see him. The other man was nowhere around. After trying to awaken Young, without success, Mr. Crandall searched his clothes, but there was nothing in any of his pockets. He even felt all the seams, and took off his shoes in search of the paper we wanted, but it was nowhere on him. He ransacked the cottage as well as was possible in this dim light, but could not find any suggestion of a hiding-place. Out in the little shed that serves as a kitchen he found a slip on which was written a list of eatables—bread, milk, eggs and such things. We decided from this that the other man—Rouser, I think Mr. Crandall had said his name—had gone to some neighboring farm-house or store to lay in supplies and probably would soon return. Mr. Crandall suggested our hiding in the bushes until his arrival, and we did so. We had hardly taken our place behind the bushes before we heard him coming. Mr. Crandall stepped out, and the rest is so mixed up I don't know just what happened. I heard shots and felt a pain in my arm and I think I screamed and then I don't remember any more until I found you bending over me."

"To think that it was my bullet that hit you!" I cried. "I might have killed you."



"Lies," I protested. "Dear Girl, 'You Never Lied to Me.'"

"It's only the lightest sort of scratch," she protested. "It doesn't even hurt any more. It does not bother me half so much as to know how to tell Katharine that we failed in our business."

"Tell her," said I, "that one of the conspirators is dead and that the other is safe in the hands of Inspector Davis and myself. Tell her that any document either of us finds that in any way relates to her father will be placed in her hands at once. Tell her that I will not leave the prisoner's side until I have it safe and that my honor is pledged both for Davis and myself that no word affecting her father will ever become public. Crandall is out there now talking with Davis, and I think you will find that he, too, will tell her the same thing."

BACK YARD FARMER

Interesting Pointers on Gardening for the City Man or Suburbanite.

WHAT TO PLANT AND WHEN

Advice by an Expert on Agricultural Matters—How to Plan the Garden—For the Chicken Raiser—Grow Rhubarb.

By PROF. JOHN WILLARD BOLTE.

We are frequently asked to give suggestions regarding the best way to utilize the ordinary city back yard for gardening purposes. Space does not permit of our answering such a comprehensive question for each inquirer and we take this opportunity to cover the subject in detail.

Let us suppose that your back yard is about 25 feet wide and 80 feet deep. It is fenced in and is pretty sunny most of the day. There is a back gate and a walk leading from the house to the gate. How shall we lay out our garden to get the greatest amount of returns in fruit and at the same time secure the most beautiful effect?

In the first place, give fruit and vegetables the right of way, using grass and flowers to fill in the odd corners. Most of our fruit bearing shrubs and trees are as beautiful as any flowering shrubs, many of the fruits themselves are highly decorative, and our anticipation of harvest time lends a very tangible interest, which is lacking in merely decorative plants.

Plant a row of dwarf pear trees flat along the south side of one wall and train them in the espalier, vine like, form on a trellis. Use Dwarf Seckle and Bartlett pears. Along the wall facing east plant dwarf peaches (Crawfords are fine) and train them in the same way. Plant from four to six feet apart and allow from four to six main branches to grow.

Dwarf cherries or dwarf apples may be planted against the other walls, where they will take up very little room, but care must be taken that plants near the north side of any wall are far enough away to get some sunshine.

A very satisfactory plan for the walk is to cover it with a latticed pergola and train grapes over it. Delaware grapes on the shadier side and Concord on the sunny. Grapes make a fine screen for any small buildings, ash boxes, etc., in the yard.

A strawberry bed 10 feet by 20 feet, close to the pears, and three rows of 20 plants each of blackberries, raspberries and currants will fill up the half of the garden next to one long side and the balance can be devoted to vegetables and flowers.

We prefer dwarf fruit trees to the full sized ones because they come into bearing very early, require much less care, and produce finer fruit in very good quantity. Dwarf pears are very satisfactory. Prune and fertilize and spray properly and your dwarf fruit trees will bear heavily every year.

By planting them against the sunny side of a wall and training like vines, the fruit matures earlier, the trees decorate the wall and they take up much less room than if planted in the open. The amount of edible fruit produced will be nearly as great. Try some dwarf fruit trees yourself this year.

There is no agricultural subject of greater interest to all classes of people than poultry keeping in some form or other.

Overly eighty out of a hundred farmers, large and small, the country over, keep hens. About forty per cent. of the householders in small towns and villages keep backyard flocks, and the number of flocks in the great cities is positively astounding.

Almost every man you know has at some time been possessed with the idea that the easiest way on earth to make a living is with chickens. If you doubt it, ask the next man you meet what he thinks about the chicken business.

Go to a few poultry shows next winter, after having industriously read the monthly issues of a couple of good poultry journals this summer, and by the time the incubator salesman gets in his work it will take a straight-jacket to keep you from starting to keep chickens. And really, it is a very fascinating occupation.

No one need be ashamed of being a chicken "crank" in these days, because the poultry industry of the country is assuming such vast proportions that it bids fair to overtop any other single agricultural product in value at the time of the next census. Further than this, no other product can equal it for net profits to the producer, because the investment in stock and equipment is exceedingly small compared to the returns. The labor, land and building investment represented by one dairy cow would take care of enough hens to bring in three times the profit.

Now then, can a man of ordinary intelligence, no experience and a small capital, hope to get rich by raising chickens? There is but one answer and that is, that he may hope to, but he will not make good.

The writer is personally acquainted with prominent poultry men in nearly every state in the Union, and while many of them are well to do, not one is rich, even from the farmer's standpoint.

The poultry business offers the hard

working, thoughtful man, a good living, a steady joy and an assured home.

The production of eggs is the safest and easiest field for the beginner and where this is to be the specialty, the White Leghorn breed is pre-eminent for large flocks, outside of New England and other districts demanding brown-shelled eggs.

In order to be successful, the start must be made in a small way, and the ideal plan is for the prospective owner to work on some successful poultry plant for at least six months or preferably a year, in order to learn the business from the inside. Do not underestimate the importance of this, as this business is the most detailed and intricate of all the agricultural industries.

The returns are very satisfactory when the plant is intelligently handled. Thousand hen plants may be equipped with an investment of from four to six thousand dollars and the net returns are from a dollar per hen up to the high figures secured by the fancy stock breeders.

We knew three men in southern New England, one making \$3,600 from a thousand hens, another making \$5,000 with only four hundred hens, and the third spent a hundred thousand dollars on his poultry plant and lost it all. The first two started small and grew slowly. The last one started big and ended small.

Rhubarb.

How few rhubarb plants one sees growing and how nice that old-fashioned spring tonic is! Considering the fact that it costs practically nothing to plant it and the plants come up year after year, there is no reason why we should not, all of us, have all of the pieplant pie that we can eat every spring. Half a dozen hills will supply an average family.

Harvest time for rhubarb is the spring and early summer, but we frequently get a second crop in the fall. Sandy loam is best for this plant, but it will grow well in any rich, warm, moist soil. You cannot get the soil too rich for rhubarb, and it does not stand drought very well.

Do not try to grow the plants from seed if you can secure root cuttings from a good, strong old hill. Each cutting should have two buds or eyes. Plant them in rows three feet apart, with the eyes an inch below the surface. They will begin to grow at once and, if planted early, a few stalks can be pulled the first year.

As fast as seed stalks appear cut them off. If very fine, large stalks are wanted, and why not have the best, thin out all but the center buds, so that the entire strength of the plant will feed these.

After the leaves are cut back by frost in the fall cover the plants with four inches of straw or manure. This prevents freezing and makes the next year's crop earlier.

While the plants will start early, at the same time the leaves will not push through this covering until after danger of spring frosts is past, hence it should not be removed too soon. Many commercial growers keep the soil covered with straw the year round in order to keep weeds down and hold moisture without cultivation. Cover the plants in the winter anyway. It will avoid disappointment and increase the plant food.

Every three or four years it is advisable to dig up the plants, divide them and replant in another spot. If this is not done, the plants run out and the stalks grow small and pithy. Division and a new location start them off again as good as new.

Any surplus can always be sold in the spring at a good price as we seem to have a natural craving for the fresh green acid qualities of this old-time "pie fruit." Eat lots of it. Eat it raw and cooked, in pies and out of pies, put up all you cannot eat and save it for winter, but grow it yourself if you have a two by four patch of ground where the sun shines. It costs nothing to raise and it tastes lots better when it comes out of your own patch. And, furthermore, it is a much better spring tonic than sulphur and molasses, or sassafras.

Cold Storage for Fruit.

Three systems of cold storages are commonly used for fruit—the ammonia system, carbonic acid gas and calcium chloride—says the New England Homestead. All are chemical storages; but in a region where natural ice can be obtained cheaply, the calcium chloride gravity system seems to be much cheaper than the two first, and equally good. The ammonia system has to be pumped at a pressure of 200 pounds to 400 pounds to the square inch. Both these require expensive duplicate machinery and high-priced engineers night and day, while the calcium chloride uses cheap machinery and ordinary help. G. H. Powell, formerly with the United States department at Washington, says the calcium chloride gravity system is the best for northern localities.

Teaching Agriculture.

I believe it would be to the interest of all agricultural people in every state to have an agricultural department attached to the high school. I would have the teachers so prepared to teach agriculture that they could also teach it in the common school to a certain elementary degree, say, writer in an exchange. I have forgotten of the farmers' boys and girls brought up on the farm very much cannot tell even the name of the common weeds that grow in the father's fields. It seems to me that the time has arrived, especially in agricultural education when we should take this matter up and begin to establish these schools.