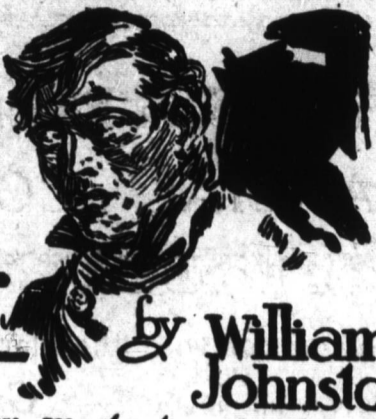


The Yellow Letter



by William Johnston

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Illustrations by V.L. Barnes

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, a doctor, and 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 H. 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.

CHAPTER VII.

Two Disappearances.

I looked at my watch and saw that it was nearly noon. I remembered that I had not yet called up Louise as I had intended to do the very first thing that morning. What a laggard lover she must think me! How heartless it must seem to her for me to leave her alone so long in the mansion where her father and sister lay dying, perhaps dead, with the black shadowy mystery still hanging over her and them! What must she think of me? Filled with self-reproach I sprang up without a word of apology or explanation to the others and hastened to the telephone booth I had observed in the hall.

"Give me 0141 Madison," I demanded of central.

"What's the matter?" she repeated, with surprise in her tone, which struck me peculiarly until I considered that long-distance calls from Ardway must be such a rarity as to surprise even the operator.

"I want long-distance—New York," I explained, enunciating distinctly, "0141 Madison."

"Again," central replied, flippantly, it appeared to me.

I repeated the number, more than annoyed by her response. "Oh, I've got your number all right by this time."

It was a good thing for her that she tried no more jocularity with me, or the rules of the company against profanity would have been shattered. There was a wait of several minutes, filled with the usual false alarms of long-distance telephoning, during which I stood and fumed. At last I heard my dear Louise's voice and hastened eagerly to ask after her welfare. Her voice seemed strong and cheerful, though she admitted that she had slept little the night before. I apologized for not having called up before. She told me that while her father's condition was unchanged, the doctor thought he was in no immediate danger, and that Katharine was much improved. The doctor believed now that she could live. She was conscious, but very weak, and Louise had been forbidden to speak to her and was allowed in the room only for a minute at a time. I hastily sketched for her the events of the morning.

"Oh, Mr. Kent," said Louise's voice—how I wished she would call me by my first name—"who do you suppose called up?"

"Who?"

"Hugh Crandall."

"What's that?" I exclaimed, hardly believing my ears.

"Hugh Crandall," she repeated a little louder and more distinctly. "He asked for Katharine, and the maid called me to the telephone. I told him my sister was ill and could not come to the telephone. He seemed greatly agitated and insisted on knowing what the matter was. He was so agitated and persistent I finally told him she had met with an accident. He was silent for so long I thought he had left the telephone, but all of a sudden he asked, 'Did she shoot herself?' and before I thought I answered 'Yes.' Then he cried out, 'Oh, my God!' or something like that and asked if she was fatally injured. I told him that she was alive but unconscious, and then, Harding, he asked if I had seen anything of a yellow letter. I thought I had better tell him nothing about that, so I answered 'No,' and then he rang off."

"That was right," I said. "Where did he call up from?"

"I have no idea."

"When was it? How long ago?"

"Not very long—within the hour."

Hastily I explained to Louise that a man that I believed was Crandall was here in the hotel with me and that I would find him at once and make him explain the mystery. Before I left the booth I got the Ardway central again and from her learned what I had begun to suspect—that "0141 Madison" had been called from the very booth in which I stood, not over an hour before. There was no longer any doubt about it in my mind—Cook was Crandall. He evidently had gone straight to the telephone booth after slipping

out of the room as I had asked the question about the yellow letter. From the questions he put to Louise, he must have been suspecting that Katharine would try suicide. Why else had he asked if she had shot herself? He must have known her motive. He surely could explain the dark mystery that burdened her father and herself.

I resolved to seek him at once and, even if I had to have him arrested on some pretext, or if I had to use physical force, to make him disgorge all he knew. I felt in my pocket to make sure that the revolver Davis had given me was there, and hurried back to the office.

"Have you seen anything of Cook?" I asked, trying to mask the eagerness with which I sought him.

"Not since this morning," the landlord volunteered. "I guess you saw him after I did. The coroner told me you saw him leaving the room during the inquest."

"I seen him," volunteered the clerk.

"Where? When?" I asked excitedly.

"About an hour ago, driving past here lickety-split with the black mare from Jones' livery stable."

"Which direction did he go?" I cried, all excitement at the thought that Crandall was escaping just at the very moment when I, for the first time, had made sure of his identity.

"He must be followed and found at once," I said, turning to the landlord.

"Don't his actions look to you like those of a guilty man? The minute he hears me ask about a yellow letter he disappears from the hotel. There is no train by which he can escape. So desperate is he that he hires a horse and tries to get away cross country."

I had hoped by my eagerness to stir in the landlord something of my own feeling in regard to Crandall's guilt, but these country yokels are hard to move.

"What do you suspect him of?" he inquired calmly. "Why should he want to escape from you? Have you got a warrant for him?"

I was not yet ready to divulge my reason for wanting Crandall captured. Even if we had him, what definite crime was there of which I could accuse him? I was morally certain that the yellow letter or letters emanated from him, yet how could I prove it? A new thought came to me.

"Where is his baggage?" I asked.

"He only had a hand-satchel with him," said Mr. Williams, "and I guess that is up in his room."

"Suppose we go look for it," I suggested.

"You don't do no such thing as that in my hotel," said the landlord decisively, "not unless you've got a warrant. He's paid for his room for a week in advance, and there ain't no law to prevent his going and coming as he pleases, so long as there ain't no warrant out for him. If he wants to get out of town behind the fastest horses in Jones' stable I ain't a-going to try to stop him, and what's more, if he has left his grip in his room it is going to stay there. Maybe or maybe not there are things in it, but there ain't no prying stranger going to know what's there unless he can show me due warrant of law."

"You may be defeating the ends of justice," I warned him sternly, indignantly resenting his remark, yet seeing no way in which I could successfully dodge his appellation of "prying stranger" without revealing my whole hand, and this I was determined not to do until Davis arrived and I had had an opportunity to consult with him.

"I may be blocking your plans," said the landlord gruffly, "but you'll get no more help out of me unless I know what it is you are after. The right kind of a mystery doesn't hurt the hotel business, but there's things that do, and if you want any help from me, young man, I've got to know what's going on."

"I wish I knew myself," I said mentally, adding aloud: "When I am ready to speak you will hear many things that will astound you. Meanwhile, I tell you that I have every reason to believe that that man who fled from here is a great criminal and that if you do not aid in his apprehension you will be doing a serious wrong to the community. I'll tell you this much, I am convinced that he was responsible for this woman's death and for other deaths."

"Maybe he is and maybe he ain't," said the landlord. "I saw the lady myself, and nobody can persuade me it was anything but a suicide. Why, I cut her down!"

"I am not denying that she committed suicide," I replied with some asperity, "but I am morally certain that if she killed herself she was driven to it by the man who has just fled. I insist on being allowed to examine his baggage."

"Look here, young man," said Mr. Williams, "I have told you once and for all that the baggage of no guest in this house is going to be examined without due process of law. And I want to say right here that it's evident that you yourself know a lot more about this case than you are telling

If you are an officer and can show me a warrant I am ready to give you all the aid and assistance I can, but until you do, I'd advise you to keep your nose out of things that ain't your business and to stay out of places you ain't got a right to be in."

The suspicion crossed my mind that it might be he who had discovered me in the post office the night before. I decided quickly that it could not have been, for he was in the hotel when I arrived. I felt sure it must have been either Crandall or the postmaster. Plainly, though, there was nothing further to be gained by argument with the obtuse Mr. Williams. After all, there ought not to be much difficulty in tracing Crandall by the vehicle in which he had driven away. That could wait until Davis arrived. Meanwhile I pondered on what I could do to throw light on the case. I had it. I would visit the post office again and see what I could learn about the holder of the lock box from which Davis believed the yellow letters came.

Abruptly leaving the landlord, I strolled out into the street, determined to go boldly to the post office and make inquiries. As I approached the building I saw a little group of villagers gathered in front of it, the faces of some of whom I had noted at the inquest. They seemed to be excitedly discussing some happening. It was not without some trepidation that I came closer. If my visit to the post office had been discovered and there was anyone in the crowd who could identify me, an awkward situation might develop. I put on a bold front, however, and approached closer.

"What's the matter?" I asked, trying to make my inquiry seem casual.

"The postmaster's disappeared," some one explained.

"Where?"

"Don't know," said my informant.

"He didn't come to the office at all today. When the people come for their mail after the New York train got in he wasn't here. Hank Rollins always brings it up on the stage, and as he's passing, throws it off on the board walk and the postmaster comes out and gets it. Nobody ever goes for their mail for a few minutes after that, to give him a chance to get it sorted. The first persons who got here today found the mail-sack lying just where the driver had flung it."

"Yes, sir," broke in an old man whom I heard them call "Dad" Hutchinson. "Yes, sir, I was the first to notice it. I was going to the office to see if maybe there was a letter for me from my daughter Mary, who lives up Boston way, and I noticed the sack lying right over there. I went into the office to tell the postmaster about it and kind of have a little fun with

dark," volunteered another of the crowd. "I don't know just what time it was, but it was just before it began to rain. I remember, now, thinking it kind of funny the office was shut up so early, but I didn't stop to investigate. I'll bet he wasn't here last night, either."

"It's burglars, that's what it is," said an excited youngster. "I saw them at work. I come along here last night and there was a flash, like from a dark lantern. Right in there behind the boxes, it was. They must a been at work then. I'll bet they killed him and hid his body and made away with all the money and stamps."

"How many of them were there?"

"Did you see them?"

"What time was it?"

Questions poured thick and fast on the youngster, who evidently had told all he knew and a little more. I took advantage of the furor his story had created to slip around to the rear of the building, where I found a self-appointed committee of citizens and the constable guarding the door.

"Has anything been stolen?" I asked.

"Not as far as we can discover," said the constable. "There ain't no disorder about the place and the safe hasn't been busted, as far as I can see. I ain't made any regular investigation, being as this is government property."

"Has no one any idea where the postmaster is?" I asked.

"That's just what we've been trying to find out. Jim, here, as soon as we found Rouser wasn't here, went up to the Widow Smith's, where he boards. Thought maybe he'd just overstepped or something like that, or maybe was sick. But Mrs. Smith went up and looked in his room and come down and said he hadn't been home all night."

"Yes," interrupted Jim, "and what's more, she said it was nothing unusual for him not to come home. There was lots and lots of nights recently when he didn't show up. She had no idea where he spent his nights. She's a woman that minds her own business and don't interfere none with her boarders' goings and comings as long as they pay their money regular."

"What are you going to do about keeping the office open?" I asked, much puzzled over this new mystery. How I wished for Davis! Mystery seemed to be piling on mystery with every step I took. Beyond the one conviction I had that Hugh Crandall was in some way to blame for it all, I saw nothing that would help me in my undertaking.

"We've arranged about that. We've sent for Jennie Cox to come over and take charge. She always takes hold when Charlie Rouser wants to take a



"The Postmaster's Disappeared," Some One Explained.

him, and bless my soul if there was hide or hair of him to be seen anywhere. Looking through the boxes, I could see that the back door was standing open, and I went around there and looked, and I couldn't see anything of him, either. It didn't seem right for the mail to be lying out there on the sidewalk, 'twas like taking undue liberty with government property, so I dragged the sack around and flung it in the door and went looking for the constable. Then I heard about the suicide and the inquest down to the hotel, so I went down there to fetch him, and all the crowd that had been down to the inquest come trailing along."

day or a half-day off. She knows the combination of the safe and the money-drawer, and has been sworn in as special assistant. She'll know what to do and who to notify."

"It may interest you to know that Post Office Inspector Davis will be out here tonight," I told them. "I left him in New York last night, and he promised to join me here."

Suspicion flashed into the faces of all my auditors.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Both Cold and Distant.
"Have you any distant relatives?"
"I should say so! My Uncle Tobias wouldn't live in the same town with me."

SIX DAYS WORK OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY

STEWART DIVORCE BILL AND ANTI-TRUST BILL PASSES THE HOUSE.

BILLS PASS FINAL READING

Five-Years Separation Ground For Action and Right to Remarry.—Justice's Measure Goes Through Without Discussion.—Other Work Done.

Senate—Wednesday.

Petitions were presented for a six-months school term from citizens of Forsyth county, other counties and several Farmers' Unions; for a better child law and a compulsory school law from various Junior Order councils; for a censorship of moving picture films from the Ministerial Union of Statesville; to increase the number of Superior Court judges to 24 from the bar of Goldsboro.

The following bills were passed on final reading:

House bill to build a bridge over South River, between Cumberland and Sampson counties.

Senate bill to repeal the act for a bridge across Pee Dee River.

Senate bill to repeal the Anson county road bond act of 1911.

Senate resolution for relief of Joseph S. Royster, sheriff of Vance.

A number of new bills were introduced in the Senate.

House—Wednesday.

Mr. Murphy for the Committee on Rules recommended the appointment of a Committee on Forestry, Drainage and Conservation.

Among bills receiving favorable committee report were: Providing bail for fugitives; foreclosure of certain conditional sales; bill relating to venue of action; bill amending the law as to making false statements to secure goods on credit; bill prohibiting tipping. The Committee on Health reported unfavorably the bill by Williams of Cabarrus to restrict the right of medical colleges to use bodies of paupers for dissecting.

There was favorable report for the bill allowing the Virginia, Carolina Railroad company to build a road in Ashe county.

Senate—Thursday.

The following final readings:

Senate bill to provide additional support for the graded schools of Newbern.

House bill to enable Kinston to vote on bonds for the Peeble-Minded.

Senate bill to repeal the act requiring the sheriff of Anson county to purchase and keep bloodhounds.

Senate bill to repeal the act of 1911 relative to stock law in portion of Pitt county.

Senate bill to amend the charter of the Watauga Railway Company, so as to allow it to take right-of-way before condemnation proceedings.

House bill to amend the charter of Elon College, as amended by the Committee on Judiciary No. 1, to strike out the provision making it a misdemeanor to sell on credit to a minor student without consent of the college authorities.

House—Thursday.

Among bills receiving favorable reports from committees were: Justice's legalized primary law, with minority report from Elections Committee by Mr. Bowie and five others, urging that it do not pass. To authorize Dunn to issue sewerage bonds; Stewart's bill as to divorce for abandonment, amended so divorce is available after five instead of two years; exemption of National Guardsmen from jury and road duty.

The House made a special order for the Justice primary election bill for the evening of January 31.

Senate—Friday.

Petitions were received from citizens of Richmond, Craven, Halifax, Madison, and Rockingham counties for a six-months school term, and from Junior Order Councils in Guilford, Davidson and Mecklenburg for a better child labor law and for compulsory school law.

The building and loan bill was laid before the Senate as unfinished business.

The bills as amended by the Committee, were then passed on final reading without division and ordered engrossed and sent to the house.

The joint resolution providing for a Standing Committee on Private and Public Local Bills was called up by Senator Hobgood, and adopted, after a little discussion, by a decisive vote.

House—Friday.

Numerous petitions for six-months school terms and for compulsory attendance were sent forward.

Taxation Plan to Remedy Problem.

The General Assembly is considering the taxation problem with the view of equalizing the burdens incident to government. The fact is well known, and has been the subject of much complaint that those who are able to pay and who derive the greatest benefits by reason of established government do not bear taxation burdens in proportion to the benefits derived but that on the contrary, the poorer people, those not so well able to bear the burdens, are forced to sustain the extra servitude.

There was also a petition for the repeal of the license tax on photographers.

Among the bills favorably reported from committees were:

To allow jurors to be drawn from counties other than that of trial in certain cases; the Williams of Buncombe vital statistics bill; to allow counties to establish hospitals; employer's liability bill making the Federal law apply in state cases; to prevent tipping; and to prevent children from using firearms.

Senate—Saturday.

The Senate suspended rules for Senator Stubbs and passed an employers' liability bill he only introduced today, which embraced all corporations. It extends to them the provisions of the act of Congress relative to common carriers' liability to employees, the bill applying this act to North Carolina.

The Senate passed the Council act to prevent a multiplicity of indictments below the grade of felony.

The Senate referred the joint resolution from the House asking for the passage of the Webb-Kenyon liquor bill by Congress to the Committee on Federal Relations.

Among bills which passed final reading were: To consolidate Winston and Salem; to authorize the construction of Watauga Railroad through Watauga and Ashe counties as part of the Carolina-Virginia road.

House—Saturday.

Just before adjournment Saturday the House found itself confronted with the condition that, there being no private or local public bills on the calendar, there was nothing that could be done further Saturday or Monday, owing to a motion by Justice of Guilford adopted that no public bills be considered during his absence. Members of the House insisted that they had not intended to vote any such motion, their understanding being that merely none of the bills introduced by Justice, or in which he was specially interested, should be considered.

Mr. Stewart's bill against tipping passed second reading in the House. A number of bills were introduced in the House.

Senate—Monday.

Senator Watts, chairman of the Committee on Appropriations, moved for the appointment of a clerk to his committee.

The followings bills passed final readings:

House bill to amend the charter of Town of Salem.

Senate bill to authorize Waynesville to issue bonds and complete the graded school building.

Senate bill to amend the charter of East Spencer, Rowan county.

Senate bill to authorize an election for graded school bonds in Scotland Neck.

Senate bill authorizing Forsyth county to issue refunding bonds or notes to pay for part of the construction of Roanoke & Southern Railway.

Senate bill to validate electric light bond election in Asheboro.

Senate bill to incorporate Town of Grandin, Caldwell county.

House—Monday.

There was the usual flood of petitions from all sections of the state for six-months school terms and a number for compulsory attendance and for child labor legislation.

There was favorable report for the Kellum bill to restore local self-government to New Hanover county, a bill that only provides for change in the number of justices of the peace for Wilmington township.

Senate—Tuesday.

Petitions were received from Gaston, Cabarrus, Cumberland, Rockingham, Rowan and Watauga counties for six-months school terms.

The following bills passed final reading:

Senate bill to amend section 3505 of the Revisal, so as to make the minimum punishment for horse-stealing four months instead of five years. This was opposed by Wakefield and Watts.

House bill to amend the Revisal, section 92, so as to require notice of refusal to pay an account by the administrator to be in writing, the Senate amendment not to apply to transactions prior to enactment.

Senator Studdert was added to the Committee on Penal Institutions.

House—Tuesday.

Raleigh.—The Stewart bill amending the divorce laws passed the House Tuesday afternoon. It originally provided that separation for two years be ground for divorce. The committee had amended this, making the time five years, the party abandoned without cause having the right to remarry.

The House passed the Justice anti-trust bill, which applies the Federal anti-trust law to the state, enacts the provisions of the old Reid anti-trust bill of the 1907 session and provides machinery for the Attorney General to enforce the law.

A number of bills passed final reading in the house.

For Six Months Public Schools.

Public demand and the attitude of those in charge of legislation for longer terms in the public schools indicate that a bill providing for six month's school terms in all public schools of the state will be enacted by the Legislature. The favorite provisions are contained in the bills introduced in the Senate by Senator T. T. Thorne and in the House by Representative Mark Majette, the two bills being identical and having the endorsement of the educational committees of department of education.