

# The Yellow Letter



by William Johnston

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Illustrations by V.L. Barnes

## SYNOPSIS.

Harding Kent calls on Louise Parrish 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 Parrish, 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 Parrish 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.

## 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 O141 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, "O141 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 that what I had begun to suspect—that "O141 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 see 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 overslept 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."

"I noticed when I come along here last night that the post office was

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."

# NATIONAL CAPITAL AFFAIRS

## Uncle Sam's Aero Boat Experiments Are Watched



WASHINGTON.—Foreign governments have had their military and naval representatives in Washington watching the experiments that this government has been conducting at the Washington navy yard with the new catapult device for launching aeroplanes. The launching machine is the design of Capt. W. I. Chambers, in charge of aviation in the navy. It practically is a compressed air gun that shoots the aeroplane into the air so that it can be launched from a warship at any time and the catapult then stored below, out of the way.

Several tests of the device have been made, various hydro-aeroplanes being used. What was generally considered the supreme test was made the other day when the new aero-boat that has been built for the navy by Glenn Curtiss was shot into the air for a successful flight with Lieut. Theodore Ellyson, the first of the navy aviators, at the helm.

The new boat is larger and heavier than any other hydro-aeroplane the government has used. It has a body like a light, fast powerboat, and seats

two passengers side by side, with a double-control mechanism, so that either man can act as aviator. The boat is driven by an eighty-horse power motor, and is capable of a speed of fifty miles on the water and sixty miles in the air.

This launching device is the first that has been practical and successful from a navy standpoint. It was evolved more than a year ago, when Eugene Ely flew from the scoutship Birmingham and afterward flew and alighted on the battleship Pennsylvania, that the aeroplane could be launched at sea. In both these cases, however, a special platform was built and extensive preparations were made for the flight.

The new catapult can be clamped to the top of a turret and the turret revolved to shoot the aeroplane into the teeth of the wind without even turning the wheel of the vessel. The device takes only half an hour to erect.

Lieutenant Ellyson has been the acrobatic aviator of the navy. He has been willing to try anything, and allowed himself to be shot from the catapult the first time it was used, when it was not known what effect the sudden shock would have on either the aeroplane or the aviator. He has been anxious to develop some practical form of aeroplane launching that could be used on a warship, and some months ago flew an aeroplane at Hammondsport off a steel cable which was stretched for an inclined launching way.

## Postmen Cannot Loiter When Mike Is on Duty

CHARLES B. MATTHEWS, superintendent of carriers in the Washington postoffice, and the man who originated what is known as the "block" system of mail delivery, a system that has been copied all over the country, said today:

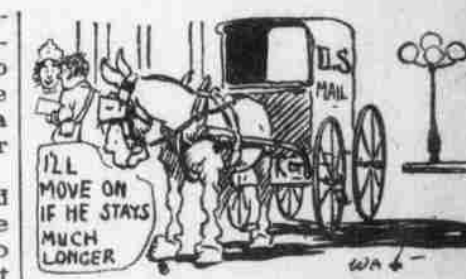
"One of the most intelligent and faithful assistants I have is Mike. Mike is a very humble sort of somebody, so humble, in fact, that he even hasn't any other name.

"Mike is just an old white horse, sound of body, clean of limb and brighter in his intelligence than many human beings that have been sent to me for service.

"He has spent about seven of his twenty-four years helping deliver the mail to the local hotels. He knows his route as well as any man who has ever served it. And, better still, he knows just how long it ought to take the carrier to deliver the mail for a given hotel.

"You can't fool him. When the hour for starting on his route comes and Ernest Miller, the carrier who owns him, in full uniform, gets in his seat, Mike looks first up and then down the street to see if his road is clear, being particularly careful to watch a little longer to see if an electric car is about to start on its way to Alexandria.

"Once started, he takes in each ho-



tel in its turn. He will not permit the carrier who goes with him to stop on his way or loiter. If he tries to do so Mike simply walks on. So when he arrives at the hotel he allows time for the carrier to take the mail in and get back, and if he does not come back within that time Mike simply moves on to his next stop.

"Why, I can send the greenest sub in the office out with Mike and he won't go astray, if he knows how to read the labels on the mail sacks.

"He is never sick and has never lost an hour's time. When we are ready for him in the morning it takes two men to hitch him, he is so eager to get on his job. He never stands in a sleepy way like some horses. His eyes are always wide open and he seems to be always on the alert, but there is a conservatism and a dignity about him that makes me feel proud of him as a member of our delivery force."

## Whites on Reservations Are as Dry as Poor Lo



WHITE men are not to be allowed to have "booze" while the Indian goes dry on Indian reservations. There is not to be one law for the red man and another for his white brother where they dwell together on the Indians' lands, the Indian bureau chief declares.

The white man can have readier access to the red ink that is really a writing fluid and which has proved palatable and exhilarating, according to the records, to those who need alcoholic excitement and find other sources dried up. And he may slake his acquired thirst from the muclage

bottle with greater facility perhaps. These and other devices have been known to the Indian while seeking ease for a parched throat.

But the white man on an Indian reservation from now on may not have whisky or other alcoholic beverage, either, for refreshment or to cure his ills or as a precaution against ailments, even on a physician's prescription, as long as the ban is on the Indian. The only intoxicant not under prohibition remains the wine intended solely for sacramental purposes, to be brought into the reservations under church authority.

Circular No. 695, Indian bureau signed by Acting Commissioner H. Abbott and indorsed by the secretary of the interior, addresses the superintendents of Indian schools and agencies, directs observance of the law in strict conformity with its letter. It also calls attention to irregularities in observance of the law that have come to the attention of the bureau.

## Much Interest Being Shown in Muskrat Farming

ACCORDING to the annual report of the biological survey recently submitted to Secretary Wilson, the rearing of fur-bearing animals in the United States for their pelts continues to be a subject of much interest.

Skunks, muskrats, minks and foxes are reared in captivity or on preserves under control of breeders. The large prices asked for mature black foxes for breeding purposes have resulted in confining the industry in the hands of a very few. Comparatively few attempts have been made to raise minks in the United States, but experiments are being conducted in co-operation with the National Zoological park with a view to determining the most successful methods of rearing these animals. Muskrat farming has probably reached its highest point of development on the eastern shore of Maryland. Muskrat marshes are worth more, measured by their actual income, than cultivated farms of like



acreage in the same vicinity. Only one other animal in the world, the European rabbit, exceeds the muskrat in the number of skins marketed.

The report also calls attention to the experiments for the extermination of prairie dogs, ground squirrels and gophers that are being conducted by means of poison baits, traps and other methods. It is a surprising fact that the daily forage of 32 adult prairie dogs equal that required for a sheep, and that 350 eat nearly as much as a cow.