

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 Katherine. Kent starts an investigation and finds that Hugh Crandall, auditor for Katherine, who had been forbidden the house by General Farrish, had talked with Katherine 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 Katherine 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. Katherine'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 dropped 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 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.

CHAPTER XII—(Continued).

"Wait a minute," said Davis, and the constable checked the horse. Jumping out quickly the inspector seized the lantern and dropping back a few paces began making what appeared to be a minute examination of the road. "Taint much of a road," the constable whispered to me while we waited. "It's only used for logging, though when we come up here this afternoon there was automobile tracks both going and coming." "Any idea who made them?" I asked. "Nope, but I guess he knows," with a gesture in the direction of the lantern light. Just then Davis rejoined us, hanging the lantern over the dashboard again. Instead of resuming his seat, he knelt on the floor of the buckboard, peering down at the road as it was dimly revealed by the lantern. "Go ahead slowly," he ordered. As Dodds clucked to the horse I leaned down beside Davis and asked: "What did you find?" "Just what I expected. The automobile is somewhere ahead of us." "Whose is it?" "I don't know yet." My curiosity would be denied no longer. Hitherto I had kept silent, hoping that Davis would confide in me the object of our strange journey. "Whom are we coming out here after?" I asked. "The postmaster and his accomplice, of course." "Who is his accomplice?" "I'm afraid I misstated the case," said Davis with a grim chuckle. "The postmaster is the accomplice. The other is the master criminal." "Who is the other?" I persisted. "Is it Hugh Crandall?" He was silent for a moment before answering. I attributed it to hesitation in admitting that he had been wrong and I right, and it was with considerable satisfaction that I finally heard him answer: "I should not be surprised if we found Crandall somewhere in the vicinity." He continued to peer down into the road as the horse struggled up the hill till we came to a comparatively level plateau. "Stop here," he called out authoritatively. "The deserted cottage is at least a mile farther on," volunteered the constable. "We'll walk it," said Davis. "We cannot take any chances of the wheels being heard." Dodds pulled off the road and fastened the lantern Davis made a search of the road, finally returning the lantern to his place, after carefully extinguishing it. "Come on this way, as quietly as you can," he directed. "I've got this," I said, showing him the little pocket electric light with which I had explored the post office. "Do you want it?" "Keep it in your pocket. We may need it, but it is better not to show a light if we can avoid it." I put it back in my pocket and took the precaution of placing the revolver Davis had given me in the side-pocket of my coat where it would be more easily available. Davis moved off soundlessly through the clearing with the constable, I close at his heels. "This ain't the direction of the cottage," whispered Dodds. "I know. I want to find something else first," Davis explained, keeping straight on through the darkness, like a hound on a fresh scent. He moved rapidly forward for a hun-

ded and fifty yards and then brought us up short with a sharp "Hiat." As we strained our eyes into blackness we made out the shape of an automobile just ahead. Its lights had been extinguished and its engine was dead.

"Wait here," Davis again commanded as he crept silently toward it to make sure that the tonneau was unoccupied. He was back with us in a minute.

"Let me have that lamp of yours, Kent," he whispered, at the same time lighting a cigarette.

"Is that safe?" I exclaimed in surprise, amazed that he would dare to smoke when he had been taking such precautions against our being discovered.

"Sure," he replied laconically. "Whoever was in that automobile is at least half a mile away by now. The glass on the front lamps is nearly cold. I want to see the number, though. We may find it useful."

Taking my little electric lamp he advanced toward the machine again, flashing the light for a second on the number, and then peering by its light into the tonneau, exclaiming as he straightened up: "I thought so."

If it was safe for him to smoke, the constable and I felt that it was safe for us, too, to relax our precautions, and together we had advanced until we were beside him.

"What did you find?" I asked, wondering at his exclamation. "What I expected," he replied enigmatically.

The manner of his answer provoked me and I determined then and there to have it out with him.

"Look here, Davis," I said; "I brought you into this case and I do not like the way you have acted about it. I have freely told you everything I have discovered and have aided you in every way I can. Before I go a step farther on this trip I want to know more about it."

"What is it you wish to know?" he asked. The constable edged nearer for fear he might miss something of our conversation.

"First, where are we going?"

"To what is known as the deserted cottage, about a half mile farther on, at the edge of this clearing, a shack that was built for a shelter for lumbermen or quarrymen—which was it, Dodds?"

"Built for one and used by 'other," the constable replied, "but 'tain't been used by either, so far as I know, for a dozen years."

"How do you know the missing postmaster is there?"

"Traced him."

"How?"

"Bicycle tracks," he answered with a chuckle. "You were not the only person who discovered that Rouser, when he disappeared, went on bicycle. In fact, Kent, you are a little slow as a detective. By the time you had ascertained that much, I ascertained where the bicycle tracks led to and had even gone so far as to have Dodds get warrants for Rouser and his accomplice."

"I still do not see how you got evidence enough to get a warrant for Crandall. Did you find him out here with the missing postmaster?"

"I didn't say I had a warrant for Crandall," replied the inspector sharply. "Did you ever hear of a John Doe warrant?"

"How do you know they are out here now?" I asked. "We'll soon find out. Come on," he answered, starting across the clearing almost at a dog-trot.

There were many more questions I wanted to put to him, but there was no opportunity, and, besides, I doubted much if he would have answered them. At first he made little effort to move quietly, but after we had gone a quarter of a mile or more he called back in a whisper, "Quietly now."

We had come to a path which led us through a short thick growth of underbrush. As noiselessly as Indians following a trail we felt our way along, the silence broken now and then by the sound of a bough bent back, or a rustling leaf. Soon the path brought us out on some rising ground. Not fifty yards ahead of us appeared the deserted cottage.

"That's it," whispered Dodds. "Shh!" answered Davis. "Wait here!"

We stopped there just at the edge of the underbrush, peering into the darkness, straining our eyes to see and our ears to hear. From the one window in the side of the one-story log hut a dim light shone, proving that the place was either occupied or had been very recently.

As we became more and more accustomed to the darkness I could see that there were apparently two paths, the one on which we were standing and another leading off at about right angle.

As we looked and listened I heard a sharp crack, like the breaking of a twig that had been stepped on.

The sound, so far as I could judge, came from the other path, apparently a hundred feet away from the cottage. I turned toward Davis and saw

he, too, had heard it. He was standing with his whole body tense, his head bent forward a little as if ready to spring at any instant.

As we listened, another sound came to our ears. At first indistinct, it quickly took the rhythm of footsteps hurrying along the path, a man walking rapidly, I decided. The hurrying footsteps came nearer and nearer. Davis now was crouching like a runner about to make a hundred-yard dash.

It was only a minute of suspense and yet the effect on my nerves was indescribable. I wanted to scream like a hysterical girl; I wanted to run, forward or back, it made no difference; I wanted to do something, anything—anything but stand there and wait in the darkness.

All of a sudden the form of a man hurrying along the other path became visible. He seemed to be carrying something. Davis took two or three noiseless steps forward and stopped abruptly. From the shadows, from nowhere it seemed, the figure of another man appeared directly in the path of the oncomer.

"Hold on here!" it said, or something like that.

With a curse the first man dropped whatever he was carrying and started to run. The second man started after him. With not more than ten paces between them the pursued man suddenly wheeled. A revolver flashed and the pursuer with a muttered curse fell headlong in the path. The hunted man turned and, with headlong speed, plunged down the path.

At the revolver shot Davis had leaped forward, and, needless to say, Dodds and I were not far behind him. Fast as the fugitive was vanishing Davis was even faster. With the movement of a trained runner he, the wiry inspector, quickly outdistanced Dodds and myself and was close on the heels of his man.

As I ran breathless behind him, hoping to arrive in time to help him in his capture, I saw the man ahead halt and turn. Instinctively I knew he was about to shoot again, and, raising the revolver I had been carrying all the while, without even trying to aim, I fired in his direction just as I saw the flash from his revolver.

There was hardly a second between the two reports and then—

A woman shrieked. I turned sick with horror. There could be no mistaking it.

It was the voice of Louise Farrish. With overwhelming dismay it came to me that I had shot the woman I loved. Too stunned to move I stood there. My whole body seemed turned to stone. My arms hung helpless at my sides. My legs refused to move. My mouth was fever-dry and my tongue lay lifeless. Yet my vision, I recall, seemed clear and strong, penetrating the darkness as if it had been

ground and sprang after him. I found him bending over an unconscious form on the ground. Just as I reached the spot he had lighted a match. He lifted it to see my face, and as he did so I saw that the woman lying there apparently lifeless was indeed my Louise.

Overwhelmed with anguish and remorse, I flung myself beside her, entreating her forgiveness. The other man shoved me roughly aside. "Don't be a fool," he exclaimed. "She has only fainted."

"She's shot! She's killed!" I cried. "I shot her!"

"I tell you she has only fainted," he cried angrily. "Help me carry her over there by the window."

Together we lifted her and bore her gently to the side of the cottage, where we laid her on the ground. Joy surged in my heart as I saw and heard that she was still breathing, joy that was not even abated when I saw by the window light that my companion was none other than Hugh Crandall.

But just then all other thoughts were driven out of my head by the sight of a thin stream of blood trickling down the sleeve of Louise's automobile coat.

"I tell you she is shot. See," I cried, all my anguish coming back anew.

With trembling hands I helped Crandall cut away her sleeve, dreading all the time to see and know the worst.

"It's only a scratch," said Crandall, with a sigh of relief.

Across her rounded arm was a reddening gash where the bullet had cut its way through the tender flesh. While my head told me that Crandall was right, that it was only a flesh wound and not in the least dangerous, in my heart I still felt little better than a murderer. Three inches to the right, and the bullet from my revolver would have stilled her heart for ever.

She opened her eyes and stared at us in a puzzled way.

"Why, Harding, dear," she said in feeble surprise, "are you here—here with Mr. Crandall?"

For answer I bent and kissed her. What mattered it if Hugh Crandall was the criminal? What mattered it if the chain of mystery was still unsolved? What mattered it if the author of the yellow letters had escaped from the inspector? Louise lived! She loved me!

Davis and the constable came running up the path, panting from their chase, but empty-handed.

"Is she hurt?" asked Davis as he saw the three of us grouped under the window.

"A flesh wound, not at all dangerous," Crandall answered, while I knelt there caressing Louise's hair and whispering softly to her.

"How about you?" asked Davis. "He didn't hit me," Crandall answered with a short laugh. "I tumbled



"A Flesh Wound, Not at All Dangerous," Crandall Answered.

broad day. I seemed to see, as if the sight belonged to some one else, some one outside myself. I saw the inspector and constable, both apparently unhurt by the shots, dash on in pursuit. I saw a man's figure rise up from the path. I seemed to hear him call out: "Louise, Louise, where are you? Are you hurt?"

There was no answer. Almost I had persuaded myself that the strain on my nerves, the horror of the night and the shock of the shooting had given me a hallucination, that the woman's shriek I had heard was but a phantom of a fevered brain, when the figure I had seen rise from the path, dashed into the thicket, repeating its agonized cry of "Louise, Louise, where are you?"

At the sound, life came again into me. I dashed my revolver to the

over the bucket of milk he was carrying and dropped when he saw me. Didn't you get him?"

"He's safe," answered the inspector. "He ran plump over the edge of a precipice in the dark. We heard the thud of his body on the rocks below. He must have been instantly killed. We'll get the body in the morning. He must have fallen two hundred feet."

"A good two hundred," the constable added as Davis turned to peer in the window of the hut.

"And inside there," said the inspector after a minute's survey of the interior, "is the other one, the master criminal—safe enough for the present."

"Why," said the constable, who had followed the inspector's example in looking through the window, "why that's Aleck Young."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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—Chickens and Winter Laying—Raising Small Fruit—Garden Information.

By PROF. JOHN WILLARD BOLTE.

If you want eggs next winter, you must get some of this year's chickens hatched mighty soon. This is the most important consideration in getting winter eggs. Get the pullets hatched early, keep them growing as fast as is safe, get them into their winter quarters before snow flies next fall, and you will have no trouble getting the eggs from your flock while most of your neighbors are paying five cents apiece for theirs.

Of course there are a number of other things that are of prime importance in securing a satisfactory number of eggs during the off season, but the one great essential feature is early hatching. With some breeds of chickens the middle of February is none too early for the first hatches, and Plymouth Rocks hatched then will often begin to lay early in August, and will lay right through the winter without skipping. The smaller breeds can come along in March and early in April, but pullets hatched later than this will frequently fail to mature before cold weather sets in, and will often be delayed several months in starting to lay.

The pullet that lays her first few eggs before frost stands an excellent chance of keeping it up right through the winter. The pullet that does not lay before frost is frequently discouraged from exercising her acquired function until the advent of the natural laying season, and that is when we need her eggs least of all.

Old hens do not, as a rule, begin to lay until toward the end of the winter. They molt late in the fall and are not in full feather before cold weather comes on. Getting, as they necessarily do, a long rest, their eggs are usually larger, heavier shelled, more fertile and more hatchable than those of pullets that have been laying during the cold weather. For this reason it is much preferable to set eggs from mature hens for hatching purposes.

When you are saving eggs for hatching, be sure to gather them as soon as possible after they are laid, so as to avoid the possibility of the germ getting chilled. Eggs will freeze in a remarkably short time in the nest. Never attempt to set eggs that have been chilled.

Bring the eggs into a room with an even temperature above the freezing point, place them in a receptacle with the small end downward, and cover them up to prevent evaporation. Set them as soon as possible after laying, as it has been proven time and again that every day which passes lessens the chances of an egg to hatch a strong lively chick.

Unless you are going to set at least a hundred eggs this spring an incubator will not pay you, except in the fact that it will enable you to hatch your chickens whenever you desire to do so, instead of waiting for hens to feel inclined to set. For the average city poultry keeper an incubator is an extravagance. The small flock will not lay eggs fast enough to fill up the smallest incubator, and it will be better either to depend on hens for your hatching under such conditions, or to buy day-old chicks from some of the large hatcheries in your vicinity. The setting hen is a great nuisance in every way, and she is a persistent time killer, wasting not only her own time, but that of her owner, but man has never yet been able to develop a brooding device that would take her place in the small flock. For this reason, even if you do buy your little chicks, it will be well to have a hen about ready to come off when you get these chicks, slip them under her the night they arrive, and she will raise them as if they were her own.

Raising Small Fruit.

April is the very best month to set out a new strawberry bed, although some climates will permit of this being done earlier, and many successful beds are set out as late as June 15. Select well drained, warm land which has been used for a garden patch the previous year, if possible. Perfect drainage is highly important for strawberries. Plow or spade the ground from six to eight inches deep, turning under a couple of inches of well-rotted stable manure, and then cultivate the surface until it is very fine and smooth.

Buy good plants from your seedsmen, or, better still, from some man who has a good strawberry bed already started, and be careful to get good strong plants which are not run down. The variety which will do best on your soil depends so much upon local conditions that it is not possible to give advice in this department, but you will be safe in getting your plants from any reliable seed house or from some grower in your neighborhood who has a successful bed of his own.

The rows may be placed from two and a half to three feet apart where the bed is to be cultivated by hand, or four feet where a horse cultivator is to be used. Make a furrow just deep

enough so that the plant roots are well spread and the crown of the plant, the point where the roots and the stems join, is just above the surface of the soil. Cover the roots deeply, and tread the soil firmly around the plants. Pick off the blossoms and dead leaves and keep the blossoms of the plants during the first season so as to conserve the energy of the plant and get it well established. Be careful not to allow the roots of the plants to become dry before they are placed in the ground.

Some of the plants are perfect and can fertilize the seed, while other plants in the same bed do not produce pollen, hence require pollen from other plants to produce fruit. For this reason it is a good plan to set one row of perfect plants for every two rows of the imperfect plants, although this rule admits of a great deal of variation.

As soon as the plants are set in the ground, water them well to bring the soil particles in close contact with the roots, and then either cultivate the ground between the rows or cover it with straw to prevent weed growth. The cultivation is much preferable during the first season. However, many successful growers find it advisable to cover the ground with straw until after the fruit is harvested from a bearing bed, as it not only prevents the growth of weeds by shading them, but it keeps the ripening fruit from being covered with mud when it rains during the picking season.

The plants should be set about 18 inches apart in the row, and the runners, or vine-like tendrils, must be kept back with a hoe the first season.

Preparing the Garden.

Any one who has a little patch of back yard can have a vegetable garden this year. By all means make the effort. It can not only furnish you with delicious, fresh vegetables, but you will get health and pleasure out of its care.

If your soil is sandy it will produce the early crops to great advantage, and you can get radishes, lettuce, and similar vegetables several weeks ahead of your neighbor with a clay garden, but the sandy soil does not stand the hot dry weather of the summer months as well as the clay or loam. For this reason it is usually desirable to cover a very sandy plot with several inches of barnyard manure or loam or black muck soil to give it some body and moisture retaining power. This top dressing should be evenly spread on just before plowing in the spring and it should be thoroughly turned under.

A loamy soil is ideal for general garden crops, the sandy loam being a little earlier, and the clay loam a little better in the hot weather. Loam soils do not need any other treatment than manure, every other year, unless the location is too wet. If this is the case, either surface or tile drainage will have to be installed in order to secure the best results.

Clay, either blue, yellow or red, is about the toughest proposition the gardener has to tackle. It possesses plant food in abundance and can be made to bear profitably, but it will need a lot of cultivation and treatment of various kinds before it can be handled with ease. In the first place it must be plowed or spaded deeply in order to break up the solid texture of the soil. Large quantities of well rotted manure containing considerable straw should be plowed under every year, and at the same time it will be well to plow under about two inches of sand, or sandy loam. After the last crop has been taken off any portion of the garden in the fall, sow the vacant ground to some fast growing cover crop and turn it under just before frost cuts it down. All of these factors will assist in loosening a heavy firm soil, allowing better penetration of air and water, and reducing the tendency of the soil to form large hard clots.

Don't strip the soil from a new garden. Turn it under by all means, as it will make the texture of the soil very much better. The greater the amount of decaying plant matter you can incorporate in the soil, the better will be your crop.

Plow or spade your garden as soon as the soil is dry enough to "scour" off the plowshare nicely. Plowing before this will leave the soil in a clotted or puddled condition and it will take a couple of years' hard work to correct this mistake, if the soil is heavy. With sandy or loamy soils the time of plowing is not so important as they are not liable to form clots, and they can be plowed when much drier than a clay. The owner of the clay patch or the muck garden, has to be extremely careful regarding this important feature, however.

After plowing, the treatment of all kinds of soil is practically the same. Cultivate, rake or harrow the soil until the surface, which is known as the seed bed, is as fine as you can possibly get it. The finer the better for all kinds of seed. This is because the particles of soil can get into closer physical touch with the little seeds and plant roots. They hold the soil water closer, and make their food contents much more available for the roots.

Good House Emulsion.

The following emulsion has given excellent results in ridding house plants of mealy bugs and scales: One pound of good white soap, melted, and add to it, while hot, one teacup of coal oil. Mix one part of this emulsion with ten parts of water and use as a spray to dislodge the pests. Keep in bottles well corked and after routing the enemy apply once in a while as a preventive.

Light Feeding is Risky.

Light feeding is a risky speculation, because the pigs cannot be carried along without expensive grain foods.