

The Yellow Letter



by William Johnston
Illustrations by V.L. Barnes

COPYRIGHT 1911
THE BOBBY-MERRILL COMPANY

SYNOPSIS.

Having 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, tutor 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, 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 to 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 morphia stupor. Louise tells Kent that she and Crandall had come to get papers from Young which gave him a strange hold over General Farrish. It is shown that Crandall's only interest in the case was to help Katharine recover her father's papers. Young is shackled and bound, with morphia just out of his reach, in an attempt to make him confess and give up the papers. After 48 hours of torture from morphia hunger Young gives up and reveals the blackmail plot.

CHAPTER XVI.—(Continued.)

As Davis finished reading the letter I took it from his hand and carefully re-read it. There could be no doubt that it was the same in form as the scrap Louise and I had found. As I scanned the lines, the words at the beginning of each, from the seventh on to the thirteenth, were the same as those over which we had racked our brains. The context now made them plain enough, but still I failed to see what deadly import the letter had or what sinister meaning in it should drive its recipients to desperation and suicide. Surely on its face it appeared to present the harmless whim of an old man's slightly unbalanced brain. I turned to Davis for an explanation.

"An ingenious letter," Davis was saying. "And they fell for it?"

A look of pride came into the prisoner's face.

"Wasn't it great," he exclaimed. "Why, they ate it up like hot cakes!"

"Just plain blackmail," said the inspector.

"No, indeed—fancy blackmail," said Young indignantly. "They never had it dished up to them quite in this way before. I insist, if I've got to go to jail for it, on at least receiving credit for a new criminal invention."

"I fail to see," I interrupted, "just how the letter was a criminal one or why it should have bothered any one."

"I'm afraid you will never make a good detective," said the inspector pityingly. "Don't you see how it worked? Young devised this letter. He needed the co-operation of some one in the post office to send it out without arousing suspicion. He tried yellow letters first on General Farrish to test the terrifying effects. Satisfied that his yellow letter plan would bring results, he recalled his acquaintance with Rouser, whom he knew to be weak and easily led. He returned to Ardway—his old home—and found it child's play to enlist Rouser's services. It was part of his general scheme for Rouser to send and receive all the mail through a lock box with a false name. His object in this was to enable him, in case the postal or police authorities got on his trail, to have all the documentary evidence point to Rouser alone. Before his connection with the letters could be established he could make his escape with the money the papers brought in." I protested, "how could letters could bring in money, exactly the opposite. They give away money."

"The cleverest thing about it," the inspector said, and Young's eyes glistened at this. "I can see how it works. Rouser, from tax from telephone of sources—was employed began sending began broad-reach reach shier, could he got for it! The haughty old gen-

eral ordered him out of the house and wouldn't let the daughter have anything more to do with him. I tried then to get him in on the scheme, but it was no go. For weeks he kept trying to worm my secret from me. I fired yellow letter after yellow letter at the general, but he kept defying me, and all the while Crandall kept after me to make me give up the papers. I was afraid I'd weaken. There are times the dope gets me and I hardly know what I'm doing, so I vanished. It struck me that if the general wouldn't come across maybe the daughter would. I put it up to Crandall and we arranged a meeting. I was to put the papers in her hands and she was to pay over the money. I slipped up on the first appointment and I guess you must have spoiled the second."

I still was puzzled. What could be the terrible mystery in proud old General Farrish's life that gave this miscreant such a hold on him? It was beyond my imagination to conjecture, so I put the question bluntly to the prisoner.

"Why ask me?" he snarled. "You've got the whole thing—every paper bearing on it in your pocket there."

Quickly I snatched the envelope from my pocket and was about to rip it open. At last I was to know the secret that had brought such unhappiness into the life of Louise. At last the mystery was to be cleared up. But just as my thumb went rudely under the flap, Davis laid a restraining hand on my arm.

"Wait," he said gently. "Would it not be just as well to deliver that envelope to Katharine just as it is? The fewer people know its contents the less unhappiness there will need to be."

Davis was right. I was beginning to think he was always right.

CHAPTER XVII.

The End of the Mystery.

With one of the conspirators lying in the undertaking shop of Miller-vale and the other safe behind the prison bars in Ardway, the documentary evidence against him in our possession reinforced by his full confession signed and witnessed, Inspector Davis and I that same afternoon hastened back to New York, where, it can be imagined, I lost no time in reaching the Farrish home.

As we waited for the train I had telephoned Louise and she was expecting me. She met me in the lower hall. One glance at my radiant face told her that our mission had been successful and she flung herself into my arms while I rained happy kisses on her lips, her cheeks, her glorious hair. But thoughtful ever of others, even in such a moment of ecstasy, she gently unclasped my arms and whispered: "The papers—did you get them?"

A little cry of joy came from her lips as I handed her the envelope.

"They are all here," she exclaimed with a sigh of relief as she passed them to Crandall.

"Yes," echoed Crandall happily. "They are all here."

"Burn them, Hugh; burn them at once," she demanded.

Crandall, gathering them up with the envelope in which they had been encased, crossed to the grate where a cheerful fire was burning and one by one fed the documents to the flames.

That was three months ago. Louise and I are married now and Katharine and Hugh are on their honeymoon, too, taking a six months' European trip. Though we never mention the mystery of the yellow letters it: the presence of our wives, for it recalls too many sad memories unnecessarily, my new brother-in-law and I had a good laugh the night before I married Louise. As I at first suspected him of being one of the conspirators so it seems he had suspected me. It was he who peered into the post office that night as I was examining the books by the light of my electric lantern. He knew that Young had an associate and was trying to find him.

The mystery of the disappearance of the yellow fragments that had given us the first clue is a mystery no longer. It merely had slipped behind the drawer in which Louise had put it. Aleck Young is serving a well-deserved sentence of fourteen years, as nonchalantly, I presume, as he underwent his trial. So long as prison keepers can be bribed to keep his supplied with his beloved drug, I doubt if he bothers over his lack of freedom. Sometimes I think his punishment falls far short when I recall all the misery and suffering he caused, yet my new-found happiness has softened my view of life.

As for General Farrish, he died three weeks after Young's arrest. Before the end he regained his faculties sufficiently to understand that the papers that had menaced his peace and reputation had been destroyed. In his last hour he put Katharine's hand into Hugh Crandall's.

What was in the documents that Katharine and Hugh Crandall burned? What was the secret with which Young threatened him for months and months?

I do not know.

Louise does not know. We never discuss it even among ourselves. It is better so. Only Katharine and Hugh Crandall and a poor drug sot in a distant cell know what those papers were. I might conjecture if I cared, and what would be the use? After General Farrish's death it came out that his vast estate had shrunk to almost nothing. Unfortunate investments in his old age had swept away his fortune. He was the custodian of various trust funds. It may be that in a scuffle effort to recoup his losses he had misused some one else's money and Young



"Burn Them, Hugh; Burn Them at Once!"

"Come," she cried jubilantly, "let's take it to Katharine at once! The sight of it will do more to cure her than all the doctors in the world."

Together we hastened to Katharine's room, where we found her sitting up in bed, much stronger than when I had last seen her, though a nurse was still in attendance. Hugh Crandall was seated in a chair beside the bed. The joy I read in the faces of Katharine and Crandall as Louise handed her sister the envelope was reward enough for all I had gone through since I had set out to solve the mystery.

Practically Katharine tore open the envelope and inspected three documents it contained.

with his devilish ingenuity, had found it out. Certain it is that while the papers commenced widely on the small estate he left, in none of them was there the slightest hint of scandal. Equally certain am I that neither his daughters nor his sons-in-law be moan the lack of an inheritance. Louise and I, I know, have learned that happiness lies not in wealth and luxury, but in loving service each to the other.

And one thing more. Both Davis and myself have quietly withdrawn our accounts from the Million bank.

The cashier's name is a la Haver Eberle.

[THE END]

Keep an Eye on SECRETARY OF FRIVOLOUS AFFAIRS



Bubbles Over With Fun

WATCH THIS PAPER

A pleasing romance of society life among the rich, in which mystery is blended with the love affairs of several young people.

Bright and Entertaining

Just the kind of a story you've been looking for.

You Can't Afford to Miss the Very First Installment

WANTED — Companion.
Wealthy woman recovering from nervous prostration, wants young, good-looking, well-bred, well-educated, well-read, tactful girl for companion. Must speak French, bridge, football, baseball, automobile and golf. Prefer a musician who sings. Name your own salary.

Are you bored with your business?

Are you bored with your dinner?

Are you bored with your wife?

Then Read

Secretary of Frivolous Affairs

and get right with the world

Our New Serial Story

Be Sure to Get the Issue with the First Installment

TO be sure, you may not be wealthy, or feminine, or recovering from nervous prostration, but we're certain you like that kind of a girl. And that's the sort of a girl the plot of our new serial

Secretary of Frivolous Affairs

weaves about and makes in the unfolding one of the most interesting "girl" stories you have ever read.

Watch This Paper for the First Installment