# THE SON

## The Mystery Romance of A Sealed Box and a Strange Heritage

### By W. B. M. Ferguson

(Copyright, 1916, by Street & Smith.)

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Arnold Hastings is secretary to John Marsland, a construction magnate, and is engaged to Marsland's daughter, Dorothy. Adolph Bergstrom, Marsland's right-hand man, is also in love with Dorothy. Bergstrom, in Marsland's presence, denounces Hastings as an impostor. He further declares that the secretary's real name is Forbes, and that his father was a notorious thief. A letter from Hastings's mother confirms this. Hastings resolves to use his entire little fortune in paying his dead father's victims. Dorothy breaks her engagement. Out of work disgraced, Hastings goes to his room and prepares to kill himself. He is interrupted by Graves, a friend, who dismisses him. Graves gets him a job and shows him how to revenge himself on Marsland. Hastings secures letters supposedly written by his own father and finds reason to doubt their genuineness.

### CHAPTER XV.

(Continued.)

#### After Fifteen Years.

"I WANT you to look at these," he said calmly, like a professor addressing a student. "One and all contain a very simple fact which your mother and you evidently failed to observe. I happened to notice it, however, the first time I saw them. I refer to the watermark."

"The watermark?" repeated Forbes mechanically.

"Yes. Of course, you know all notepaper bears a name or trade mark—the watermark as it's called—but it's impossible to see it unless one holds the paper to the light. Now look at this."

He held one of the letters against the strong incandescent light, and, watermarked on the paper, Forbes saw for the first time the words: "Stork's Fine Linen."

"Now look at this and this and this," added Mr. Blunt, picking up the remaining five letters and holding them as he had done the other. "You see? Stork's Superfine, Stork's Irish Linen, Stork's Far-Away Mail, Stork's Cream Wove, Stork's Old Irish Parchment. In short, although six different qualities of paper are represented here, they are one and all manufactured by Stork—a Massachusetts concern. Yet these letters are supposed to have been written in six different cities of Europe.

"Doesn't it seem rather strange that American note paper, and from the same firm, should have been used in each instance? Isn't it pulling the long arm of coincidence right out of the socket? It certainly struck me so, especially as I had an idea that the Stork concern had no export trade. However, to be sure, I made inquiries from the firm, and found I was right; they have no export trade and none of their paper is sold on the Continent. Therefore, this paper was bought here."

"Then—then you mean my father must have taken a stock of such paper with him?"

"No, I don't. That's possible, but not probable; very improbable, in fact. Your father is supposed to have left Chicago on a Thursday night in a great hurry and to have sailed on the St. Paul, leaving New York early Saturday morning. He mentions those facts, you remember, in his letter. He took no other belongings, no possessions of any kind in the way of clothes; why, then, should he lay in a stock of note paper and of half a dozen different qualities? Wouldn't that be sheer idiocy? Not, mind you, merely one box of paper, but six different brands. Doesn't the simple little fact of those watermarks—unobserved by ninety-nine people out of a hundred—raise a series of questions that refuse to be satisfactorily answered?"

Forbes spoke with difficulty. "Are you inferring, then, that my father did not write those letters?"

"I am. Those letters, or the majority of them, I venture to say, were written here in America; they were composed and written here and mailed in the different cities whose stamps and postmarks they bear."

"But it's my father's writing!" exclaimed Forbes. "I'll swear to that! My mother could have sworn to it too."

"Your father," replied Mr. Blunt, "wrote an extremely plain, legible hand, very easy to imitate by any one at all gifted that way. M. Blanco, the greatest handwriting expert perhaps in the world, will tell you so. I found occasion to acquire a specimen of your father's writing, and M. Blanco has compared it with these letters. I know a little about science, but he can explain to you far better than I wherein lie all the little differences, though they are remarkably good forgeries."

Forbes sat down, the sweat pearling his brow. "You mean then, my father wasn't a thief? You mean he didn't commit suicide?"

"No, your mother's faith was justified, Forbes, your father was murdered"——

"M-murdered!"

"Yes, I must tell you the truth. He was killed in defense of that seventy-five thousand dollars he has been accused of stealing. The unjust blot has stood against his name and memory for fifteen years, but at last time and events are going to do him justice. Now, before I go any further, you must give me your promise not to leave these rooms to-night, but to let this question rest entirely with the law, where it properly belongs. I mean the question of bringing your father's murderer to justice. Have I that promise?"

"You have, Mr. Blunt," replied Forbes, with pale, set lips.

The famous detective nodded and picked up the "suicide letter," the last letter written supposedly by Robert Forbes in London.

"This is a masterpiece," pronounced Mr. Blunt. "They are all gems in their way, but this one especially. One can hardly believe the writer was merely faking up the emotions he so vividly depicts, writing things he did not even feel remotely. And, as in the other letters, it shows an intimate knowledge of your father's affairs. Yes, they are the work of a very clever sort of person, but even the cleverest make mistakes, and it's an axiom in our profession that every crime has its 'monument.'

"Now this very clever person made two mistakes, left two monuments, in the writing of these letters; the first we have seen—failing to remember that note paper is watermarked. He knew enough to get different qualities of paper—seeing they were to be mailed from different cities—but he neither saw nor thought of the watermark. Without those watermarks none could say this paper was not purchased abroad.

"The second and far more deadly monument is present in this suicide letter; here the writer's cleverness has gone a little too far and got him into serious trouble. You observe these blots caused, supposedly, by your father's tears; that was a last artistic, realistic touch which, no doubt, at the time occasioned the writer much satisfaction. Let us see, however, what this inspiration, after fifteen years, has cost him."

Mr. Blunt produced a small, powerful magnifying glass, and held it over the blots. "See anything?"

Forbes shook his head. "Just a few faint, wavy lines."

"Lisping Jimmie" then brought out a small tube filled with a fine white powder; very softly he dusted the powder over the blots, spreading it evenly with the aid of a fine camel's hair brush. And slowly, before Forbes's eyes, the vague, wavy lines which he had seen began to assume a certain definite design, standing out white against the black.

"Now, look," said Mr. Blount, holding the magnifying glass.

"Fingerprints!" exclaimed Forbes in a low voice.

"Yes," nodded the other. "The dexter thumb and forfinger of the writer, the man responsible for your father's death."

Forbes could make no reply; he was still staring at the fingerprints as if fascinated. There was something horrific about them, something uncanny about the whole performance, in fact, as if they had taken shape and form in obedience to the wave of a magician's wand. And to think those blots had been there during all the years, holding a secret which at last had been wrenched from them by advancing science.

"They aren't very good," said Mr. Blunt apologetically, "for, of course, this isn't the first time they've been subjected to such a process; they've been enlarged and photographed at headquarters. But, considering the lapse of time, they were remarkable. All the letters, however, were preserved carefully from the light, and you notice the ink hasn't faded in the least, but looks as fresh as the day it was penned. There's something rather grim and ironic in all this, for, of course, when the letters were written, the subject of fingerprints wasn't universally known and hadn't become an exact science. Nowadays you'll find your criminal taking particularly good care not to leave such a deadly trade mark; but at that time, if the writer was aware what he had done in making those artistic blots, there was no reason to attach any significance to it. He had no reason to suspect he was indelibly expressing his own guilt.

"Now," continued Mr. Blunt, producing a sheet of paper from his wallet, "here we have another exhibit—another dexter thumb and forefinger. Here, however, black powder has of necessity been employed instead of white. This also has been photographed at headquarters, and, unlike the others, is perfectly clear and distinct in every particular; you can mark every line in the whorls."

"Isn't this a blank page from a ledger?" asked Forbes, taking the sheet.

"Yes. You see, sometimes it's necessary to secure finger prints without a subject's knowledge, and in such cases blank paper is used. Say, for instance, I want yours; I—or, if I am known to you, one of my operatives does the trick—call in the guise of a book agent. I open and show you, say, this ledger and induce you to examine it. While doing so my hands accidentally rest on yours for a moment, pressing your fingers against the paper. Of course, no mark is left, no impression apparent, but afterward, if the thing has been done properly, a little black powder and a camel's hair brush will bring out just such clear impressions as these.

"I needn't go into the infallibility of finger prints; you know that out of countless thousands no two are alike, and that this system of identification is now recognized and employed throughout the world, you may say.

"Now let us carefully compare these two exhibits, these two prints of dexter thumb and forefinger; notwithstanding that those on the letter are far from being perfect I think that, even to an inexperienced eye, the similarity of the whorls will be apparent. Here, take the glass."

Forbes, in a high state of excitement, obeyed.

"Yes, I see. I see!" he exclaimed at length. "They are alike. Whose—whose are these?" placing a trembling finger on the ledger leaf. "Whose are they?"

Mr. Blunt eyed him long and steadily. "Haven't you an idea, Forbes?"

"No! No! How could I? Why should I? Whose are they? Tell me!"

"John Marsland's!"

### CHAPTER XVI.

#### The Stage Is Set for a Visitor.

FORBES dropped the glass with a crash, pushed away the paper as if he had touched a snake, and cowered back in his chair, white and shaking.

"Marsland's!" he cried hoarsely. He covered his eyes with palsied hands, as if to shut out his own thoughts.

"They are Marsland's," repeated Mr. Blunt with set lips. "That's as true as you sit in that chair. Don't you see now why he hated you? This was the irreparable wrong done"—— He was interrupted by the violent ringing of the desk telephone, the sanctity of which, while demolishing the building, had been another of the Empire Company's vexatious problems.

Forbes roused himself with an effort and picked up the receiver.

"That may be for me," said Mr. Blunt. "I told them I was coming here and left the number."

"It is for you," replied Forbes, passing over the instrument. "Gentleman by the name of Smith."

"One of my operatives," nodded the detective.

He listened at the instrument without comment and rang off with a curt "All right."

"Marsland will be here in about fifteen minutes, Forbes."

"Will he?" exclaimed the latter hoarsely. "Then he comes at his own risk!"

"There will be no risk, Forbes. Remember your promise."

"I'm not going to him; he's coming to me. That wasn't in the promise!"

"Your promise was to let the law take its course," replied Mr. Blunt firmly. "I didn't know Marsland was coming here to-night; though, at that, I thought it not unlikely. He's been 'tailed' for the past week, and Mr. Smith, one of my operatives assigned to shadowing him, heard him give this address to the chauffeur of a taxi. That's why he called me up."

"And—and do you expect me to see him after this?" exclaimed Forbes, pointing to the finger prints. "Do you expect me to see him as if nothing had happened? You say he killed my father; then, if so, he's a double murderer, for he also killed the sister I never saw, that never lived! He ruined my mother's life! He—he"——

"Sit down," said Mr. Blunt, "and pull yourself together. I know all you must feel, but you've got to play a man's part, not a child's, and I know you'll do so. There's no occasion for taking the law into your own hands. If I can't rely on you absolutely to keep control of yourself I'll meet Marsland outside. He'll be trailed here by Smith."

"You're right," replied Forbes in a low voice. "I promise to keep myself in hand. Why is Marsland coming here?"

"I don't know, but I imagine it's for one of two reasons—to put you out of the way or to make a confession—I can't say which. In either case we'll be dealing with a desperate man. Marsland, I should judge, is on the verge of madness; if not actually insane, then he's mighty near it. There's been a great change in him; you noticed it, I suppose?"

Forbes nodded. He remembered the nervous hands, twitching mouth, and the occasional glare of the eyes; also Marsland's expression at his parting words: "Don't push me too far."

"Marsland's condition has been attributed to overwork," pursued Blunt, "but it's nothing but the working of fear and conscience, and it began when he learned that night from Bergstrom your name was Forbes, not Hastings; that you were the son of his victim. For fifteen years he had managed to forget, but now the crime suddenly rose up to confront him, as it were. The knowledge that you were the son of Robert Forbes must have been absolutely paralyzing."

Forbes nodded again, remembering how Marsland had acted on that occasion. Small wonder Bergstrom had been permitted to run on as he pleased, for Marsland had been absolutely incapable of thought or action.

"To Marsland," continued Blunt, "you became, unconsciously, a sort of Nemesis; he got rid of you in one direction only to have you crop up in another; you kept crossing him at every turn. You were right; he wanted to drive you out of the city, out of the country, if possible, out of his life and thoughts. He wanted to forget, but you wouldn't let him. He has tried to find forgetfulness in drugs and dissipation, with the result that he has become a wreck. This holdup was the last straw, and it has cost him his position with the Empire Company."

"What?"

"Yes, I understand he has resigned."

Forbes was silent a moment, then said: "Do you think he has any idea that you know all this? I mean about my father."

"That I don't know. But Marsland knows me, and he knows also that you and I are intimate—you remember he met me the other day as I was coming in here. He also knows—and has for a month past—that the remains of his victim have been discovered at last."

Forbes made an incoherent exclamation.

"In Chicago," said Blunt. "Do you remember the account in the papers? They were unearthed in the cellar of a Chicago house."

Forbes sat, white and motionless, feeling almost physically nauseated. Did he remember? There arose before his mind's eye the scene in the train, Bergstrom holding out the evening paper, the flat, white dimple on his nose, and asking if he had seen the sensational news. Bergstrom had merely used it as a method of introducing Chicago as a subject of conversation; he had his own ends to serve, and had not the remotest idea that the gruesome discovery was the remains of that Robert Forbes whom he had known, whose theft from the bank he had every reason to credit, whose disgrace he intended bringing home on the head of his son. And he, Forbes, had dismissed the article at a glance, little suspecting the awful submerged interest it held for him, little thinking he was reading about his own father. The truth was staggering, appalling.

"After the first discovery the case has been kept pretty well out of the papers," said Blunt, "for we didn't want a premature disclosure of our suspicions. We've been busy tracing the various owners of the Chicago house"——

He was interrupted by a peremptory ring at the hall door.

Forbes arose, pale and determined. "It's all right," he said, interpreting the other's look. "I won't lose my head; you may depend on me. If that's Marsland, shall I show him in here?"

"Yes. Try and act natural. I don't know what's up, but we may as well be prepared for the worst." And Mr. Blunt deftly transferred an automatic pistol from his hip pocket to the right-hand pocket of his coat.

"Watch him sharp, Forbes, and jockey him into walking ahead of you up the hall; don't let him get behind you for a moment. This is forcing our hand a bit, but we may as well come to a show-down right now. I don't want him to know I'm here until he enters the room."

Forbes nodded. "What about these?" he asked, hurriedly, pointing to the letters and loose-ledger leaf on the desk.

"Let them stay where they are," replied Blunt. "Now, then, take your pipe and a book, and don't show what you feel. I'll be watching through the crack of this door in case he should start something right off. He won't, though."

So Forbes, pipe in mouth and book in hand, strolled down the hall as the bell rang for the third time. With an admirable assumption of indifference he opened the door and confronted John Marsland.

Though his nerves were well under control Forbes could hardly repress an exclamation, for Marsland's appearance was positively awesome; the face, fat and puffy, had a sort of greenish pallor, the bloodless lips were set in a hard, rigid line, and the pupils of the congested eyes were so enormously enlarged as to fill the iris. He spoke thickly and with evident difficulty.

"Good evening, Mr. Forbes."

"Good evening, sir."

"May I see you a moment?"

Forbes nodded, stepping aside and closing the door as the other entered. "Straight ahead, Mr. Marsland. In the library, if you please, at the end of the hall." He remained in the rear, forcing the other to precede him; and he noticed that Marsland walked stoop-shouldered and slowly, like an old, old man.

Mr. Blunt, both hands thrust carelessly into his coat pockets, stood leaning against the mantelpiece when Marsland entered the room; their eyes met for a long moment, while a tense, perfect silence reigned. Then Marsland, with a twisted sort of smile and a little shrug, turned away.

"I didn't know you'd company, Mr. Forbes," he said calmly, "but perhaps it's just as well. Yes, just as well."

He was now standing by the desk, and his roving eyes fell on the letters and the loose-ledger leaf, so apparent even to the casual glance; a tremor seemed to shoot through him and the pupils of his eyes dilated, if possible, further. Slowly, as if yielding to a horrible fascination, a superior will power, he put forth a trembling hand and picked up the "suicide" letter; then in the same slow, numb manner he lifted the ledger leaf with its staring black finger prints. After a long, silent contemplation he lifted his hunted eyes, turning them from Blunt to Forbes and back again; his lips moved, but no sound issued forth.

Blunt was watching him, as a hawk watches the struggles of a field rat.

"I think, Mr. Marsland," he said matter-of-factly at length, "you've seen that ledger leaf before. You may remember an agent showing you some samples the other day. It's all of fifteen years, however, since you made those other finger prints. Those artistic blots proved rather an unfortunate inspiration, for you left, at the same time, the print of your dexter thumb and forefinger. You can see that for yourself. There's the magnifying glass if you wish to compare the two; headquarters, however, is quite satisfied that the one person made both."

The greenish pallor changed to a mottled gray as Marsland replaced the papers on the desk; he made a weary gesture of resignation and dropped into a chair.

"All very clever of you, Mr. Blunt, I'll admit," he said, with an effort, "but quite unnecessary. Quite unnecessary. You needn't put me through any third degree, any of your stage tricks; I'm all in, and I know it. I know as well as you that I've been shadowed for the past week. I suspected you were on the scent and might get me in the long run, for you're a capable bloodhound, Mr. Blunt; very capable, I'm sure. Still, I might have given you a lot of trouble; proving your case wouldn't have been easy. But what's the use? I can't stand it any longer, and I came here to-night to confess to Mr. Forbes, though, I suppose," glancing at the letters, "you've saved me that trouble."

Blunt nodded; the "bloodhound" expression had left his face, and with it the attitude of tense expectancy. He removed his hands from his pockets, and sat down. "Yes," he said gravely, "I've saved you that trouble, Mr. Marsland."

Marsland made another weary gesture. He spoke with increasing difficulty. "The game's up and my race is about run. I've got something the matter with me that nothing can cure—never mind what it is. It's occurred to me I should make whatever reparation possible, and so I've written the Chicago Second National, telling them the truth about Robert Forbes. It'll be in all the papers to-morrow, I suppose. I wish I could have kept this from my daughter"—— His voice faltered a moment, then grew stronger. "That's impossible, however, if justice is to be done. She'll live to curse my name, but, of course, that's part of the punishment; I'm not kicking and am ready to take my medicine; every drop of it.

"Another thing, Forbes, before I go on. That twenty-thousand-dollar check you got is from me personally; not a cent of it's Muller's. It represents my total interest in the Empire Company. There's no reason why Sol Muller should suffer for my misdeeds. For you were right; I knew the Sterling Company must be more or less of a swindle and had met Hammersly years ago. He offered me 25 per cent. of whatever I could induce you, or any other greenhorn, to invest; I needed the money and thought you were rich enough not to mind if you ever found out. Besides, I'd then be your father-in-law and you couldn't very well do anything. You fooled me completely about your financial standing, and, perhaps, quite unintentionally, I'll admit. At all events, I needed a rich son-in-law, and, of course, when I discovered your poverty and true identity the connection became impossible.

"Now I'll tell you about your father if you care to listen; I must get it off my mind, tell it to somebody. I needn't go into any other part of my past, for I daresay Mr. Blunt can oblige you with all details."

Marsland straightened up with an effort, biting his bloodless lips.

"Don't interrupt, please, for I find difficulty in talking."

### CHAPTER XVII.

#### John Marsland's Statement.

"TO begin with," said Marsland, "fifteen years ago I lived in Chicago, was a depositor in the Second National, and therefore knew Robert Forbes; not intimately, you understand, but enough to know where he lived and to gather something about his private life. For instance, I knew he was married, had one child, and was expecting another. I lived in the same neighborhood, if not the same street, and all this I didn't necessarily learn from Forbes himself. His wife didn't know me—though I knew her by sight—and I never went out with Forbes anywhere. We were simply friendly business acquaintances.

"Well, a day came when I needed money badly; I needn't go into the why and the wherefore of it. Enough that I needed money, and for some time had been thinking how I could best help myself to some of the bank's funds. Being a depositor and friendly with Forbes, I was familiar with the bank and all pertaining to it; for instance, I knew on what days it had the heaviest deposits, where the wires of the burglar alarm were situated, when the night watchman made his rounds, his habits and peculiarities; for instance, I knew he was an old man and could neither hear nor see too well. I made it my business to find out all this without arousing suspicion. And in those days, I might add, the Second National wasn't the great institution it now is.

"On the night in question, I met Forbes, apparently by accident, on his way home from the bank. I knew the nights when he worked late and that he carried the keys of the place. Also that generally he passed through my street on his way to and from the subway station.

"Well, this night I was waiting for him. Making the excuse that I wanted to speak about the renewal of a note soon due, I asked him to step into my house for a moment; always obliging and friendly, he consented readily. It was dark, late, and no one saw him enter—or, at least, they failed to recognize him." Marsland paused and wiped the sweat from his pallid face.

"I was a desperate man, but God knows I didn't mean murder," he continued in a low voice. "My idea was to force the combination from Forbes, tie him up, rob the bank and skip to a place where they couldn't extradite me. I lived alone. My wife was dead, and my daughter, then five years old, was staying with her aunt in New York. There were no servants in the house, and I was absolutely alone with Forbes." Marsland was speaking slower and slower, pausing between each word.

"I'll save you and myself the details; enough that Forbes proved far more stubborn than I'd expected, refusing to reveal the combination. I was in for it now; I couldn't go back, had exposed my hand and must see the thing through at all costs. I was desperate, and my temper, never very good, was aroused. I tried harsher methods and I wrung the secret from him at last, but—but he died on my hands"——

"You fiend! You tortured him to death!" The cry was wrung from young Forbes as he sprang at the other with distorted features and clenched hands.

Blunt stuck out an iron arm and barred the boy's way. Marsland had not flinched; he sat with closed eyes and bowed head.

"Don't think I'm finding any pleasure in this recital," he said in a monotone. "I'd have passed over that part, if possible, and I haven't enlarged on it. Let me finish; there isn't much more to tell."

Young Forbes mastered his emotion with an effort, and, fumbling for a chair, sat down in a dazed manner.

"After the—the accident," pursued Marsland, "I realized I was in for it unless I used my wits. I sat down, thought the whole situation over carefully, and slowly the plan I eventually followed occurred to me. It was my one chance, and I took it.

"Robbing the bank had now become more imperative than ever, and I proceeded to dress myself in Forbes' clothes and to make myself resemble him as much as possible. At that time we were much of a size, both of us fair-haired and clean shaven. I realized that boldness was the best policy. I possessed the keys and combination, knew the plan of the bank thoroughly, and determined to walk right in, take my chance on not meeting the watchman, or, in the subdued light, my chance of pretending I was Forbes. His presence would arouse no suspicion, and I could say I had returned to place some valuable papers in the vault or had forgotten something. I relied on the watchman's age, my knowledge of his impaired sight and hearing, to see me through if we met and my knowledge of his habits to obviate such a meeting.

"Accordingly, I locked up the house and went boldly to the bank, waiting until I knew the watchman would be making his rounds in a distant part of the building. I was wearing Forbes' light gray ulster and gray slouch hat, and, passing the corner policeman, he greeted me as Forbes. This was a good augury, and I boldly entered the bank. It was now almost midnight.

"The rest proved ridiculously easy; in those days the Second National had no time lock on its safe, and, possessing the combination, I opened it without trouble, helped myself to all the available paper currency, and packed it in a satchel taken from under Forbes's window. I didn't meet the watchman until about to leave; he appeared in the low hall as I was about to lock the outer doors. Speaking as much like Forbes as I knew how, I greeted him by name and he replied in kind, plainly thinking me the cashier. I returned to the house satisfied that the first part of my difficult programme had been a pronounced success. It gave me renewed confidence and courage.

"For the next forty-eight hours I was busily engaged in removing all traces of my crime and in making preparations for a trip abroad. I saw the agents of the house and took a five years' lease in order to obviate discovery of its secret. I also employed part of my time in composing and writing those letters," his sombre eyes turning to the ones on the desk. "They weren't thought out in a minute, and I wished to get the whole thing off my mind as soon as possible. I took the precaution of writing them on different brands of paper. Forbes's wallet contained specimens of the penmanship and also information which gave me a more complete knowledge of his private life—personal letters and such. His writing was easy to imitate, and you know," turning to Mr. Blunt with a grim smile, "I've always been rather gifted that way.

"The rest you know; I locked up the house, sailed for Europe, remained there six months or so, and mailed the letters from different cities.

"On my return I lived at the Chicago address for a few years, then sublet the place until my lease ran out, and moved to New York with my daughter and her aunt. That seventy-five thousand had given me a fresh start, and, eventually, enabled me to buy an interest in the Empire Company.

"The mistake of leaving my finger-prints I was quite unaware of until to-night. As for the discovery in the cellar of the Chicago house, that was an accident I could not foresee. It wouldn't have been unearthed for perhaps fifty years or more if the Chicago subway people hadn't pitched on that particular site for their new loop and station; otherwise the house wouldn't have been demolished." Marsland's voice had sunk to a hardly perceptible whisper.

"That's all," he said. "Now let the law take its course. I am willing." A spasm passed over his face, his eyes closed, and with a sigh he fell back, breathing heavily and with every muscle relaxed. In another moment he had lost consciousness.

"Call the nearest doctor," said Blunt, in a low voice, bending over the prostrate man. "You know the neighborhood better than I. But I'm afraid it's no use. He's poisoned himself—atropine, maybe. He must have taken a dose before coming here. Well, perhaps it's best, after all."

A few hours later John Marsland died without regaining consciousness. He had made his last earthly statement.

Later, James Blunt, in reply to Forbes's question, gave his side of the strange and sensational case.

"At the time of advocating the 'holdup' I was by no means sure of John Marsland's guilt; I mean in reference to your father," he said. "The Chicago house had changed tenants so frequently during the past fifteen years that it took time and trouble to establish the fact that the Marsland who had occupied it at the time of your father's supposed theft was this John Marsland.

"My acquaintance with him began twenty years ago, when he was arrested in Indianapolis for forgery; I was instrumental in bringing it home to him, but through a technicality he succeeded in beating the case. Thus he had reason to know me and I him. His early life had been none too good; his wife had been separated from him before she died, and that was the reason—at the time of the Second National Bank affair—his child was living in New York with her aunt. I suppose, after his sudden affluence and a promise to turn over a new leaf, they got together again. However, after the forgery business in Indianapolis, Marsland managed to keep within the law, and I lost track of him until finding him the President-manager of the Empire Company.

"Perhaps what first set me thinking about him in connection with your father was his hatred for you; it was entirely unreasonable to suppose that a man of his evident standing and position would take such measures, go to such extremes simply because you had accused his daughter and himself of deceit and hypocrisy. Even his part in the Sterling Mines Company swindle could not explain it. It struck me there must be another and infinitely greater reason, and when I learned that a John Marsland had occupied the Chicago house fifteen years ago, and had been a depositor in the Second National, it set me thinking all the harder.

"When at length we succeeded in proving beyond doubt that the president of the Empire Company had been a tenant of the Chicago house at the time of Forbes's supposed theft and disappearance, I felt I'd hit on the right track, more especially when, on digging into Marsland's past, I discovered he'd gone to Europe for six months immediately after the robbery. I knew, of course, his ability with the pen, and that the forging of such a hand as your father's would be quite in Marsland's line and simplicity itself. What I learned from the letters you know.

"There is no doubt," concluded Mr. Blunt, "that Marsland, as he claimed, could have given us a lot of trouble if he'd engaged a sharp lawyer and fought the case to the bitter end. I doubt if we could have hung it on him, even though proving him the author of those letters; for it's quite impossible to prove the remains those of Robert Forbes. Of course we know they are, but the law demands conclusive proof. Lacking that identification the case would fall to pieces, I think, for we could not show a motive. That's why no steps were taken for Marsland's arrest. I knew he was losing his nerve under the strain, and I wanted to give him enough rope to hang himself. I counted on a voluntary confession or on forcing one from him by springing these finger-prints—'stage tricks' as he called it."

It was characteristic of Forbes that, forgetting for the moment his own great happiness, his thoughts should turn to the innocent ones who were left behind to bear the brunt of Marsland's guilt.

"This will be awful for Miss Marsland!" he exclaimed. "What can be done, Blunt? Can't we keep it from her? Keep it out of the papers?"

The other shook his head. "How? Your father's memory can only be vindicated through publicity. Anyway, I believe Marsland spoke the truth when he said he'd written all the facts to the Chicago bank. And you simply can't keep such a thing quiet; the facts are bound to come out. I know how you feel, but that's the worst of such cases—that the innocent must suffer for the guilty. There's no way out, Forbes; it will be on the first page of every morning paper."

The former Dorothy Marsland is now Mrs. Adolph Bergstrom, being married the day Forbes and his wife, nee Willoughby, returned from their honeymoon. For Mr. Morris Levy, on reading the sensational news pertaining to his defunct, prospective father-in-law, broke the engagement in the prompt and cold-blooded manner of which Dorothy herself had once been guilty; thus at last Bergstrom's patience and fidelity were rewarded. They say he has not repented of the step, and those who knew his wife in the old days observe she has changed greatly for the better.

(The End.)

# Can You Beat It?

Copyright, 1916, by The Press Publishing Co. (The New York Evening World.)

By Maurice Ketten

If you should find a scrap of amber in a snowdrift—

And if you should find it was the clue to a terrible secret—

You would find yourself in the same odd position as the heroine of

# THE SECRET IN THE SNOW

## By MILDRED VAN INWEGEN

***Next Week's Complete Novel in The Evening World***

This is not quite like any other "love-and-mystery" story you have read. It is more than worth your while to read it.