

# MISSING JOHN HUDSON

The First of a Series of Mystery Stories



Hudson Grouched at His Plight.

## By Alan Braghampton

Drawings by Karl Anderson

THE Master of Mysteries bent over the onyx lectern for a moment to gaze at the monograph, and then chuckled derisively. "Oh, these German Symbolists!" he said half aloud. "For unadulterated humor, give me a Teuton that has joined the ranks of the Symbolists. It is hardly to be wondered that ninety per cent. of them have died in madhouses, and that Max Nordau has scheduled the rest of them for suicide!"

He paused again to give a final glance at Ehrenfeld's little book on tone color in vowels. "The letter A," he translated rapidly, "suggests at once bright red, and symbolizes youth, or joy; the letter I is suggestive of sky blue, and symbolizes intimacy, or love—*et cetera, et cetera*." He stopped from sheer exasperation. "Poor Arthur Rimbaud! Poor old sodden Verlaine! What crimes are committed in your case?"

The door opened softly, and he turned to greet a beautiful, blond haired girl, who entered.

"Valeska, if I was making up a list of the tonal essences in vowel sounds, I should say the A was yellow, in disagreement with our friend here, Mr. A. W. Schlegel. The U would be purple, verging on maroon. By the way, did you happen to notice that woman who was here this afternoon?" He gazed abstractedly at the floor. "Seemed to me," he went on after a few moments' thought, "as if she possessed distinctly purple vibrations, denoting unrest."

"Which one?" was the quick reply. "The one in black satin, with jet ornaments, who wore gold-frosted eyeglasses and limped?"

"Of course; but I should describe her as the woman who was worried and was jealous of her husband; very suspicious of him; also abnormally anxious for money."

"I didn't talk to her; I was too busy."

"You must do a few palms some day, just to see how you are getting along in your study of the science of human nature. You noticed nothing else about her?"

Valeska put the end of her pencil to her lips and considered it abstractedly for a few moments.

"Let me see—" she began. "She carried two books, didn't she?"

"Precisely. One was a Baedeker's 'Northern Italy,' and the other was a church report.—Park Avenue Presbyterian. But the point is that she's coming here again, possibly this evening or to-

morrow. She was literally perishing with the desire to ask me something which she did not at the time dare to."

AT this moment there came a ring at the office door bell.

"There she is now," went on the mystic. "Did you notice that was a nervous ring? It came twice. She wasn't quite sure the first time whether she had pressed hard enough. Show her in, Valeska."

A few minutes intervened before his visitor appeared, pausing undecidedly on the threshold. "Could I see you for a short time about something of importance?" she questioned.

"Have a seat, madam," Astro had risen, and placed a chair, apparently innocently enough, where the full glare of the drop electric light would illuminate her. His eyes did not appear to survey his client; but under his long lashes they were busy noting detail after detail. She sat down and again hesitated to begin.

"I—I suppose that what I am about to say, sir, will be kept in perfect confidence?"

"Assuredly, madam. You are worried about your husband, I presume?"

She started in surprise, looked curiously at him, and then said, "Yes," in a faint, tremulous whisper. At once she added, "You told me things this afternoon which were so wonderfully true that I thought I might trust you to give me some help on a far more important affair which has been worrying me for sometime. The fact is, Mr. Hudson, my husband, has disappeared. I haven't seen him for over a week."

At this Astro manifested no surprise, and merely remarked, "I was aware that he was away, madam, when I read your palm this afternoon. No doubt I can find him, if that is what you wish; but it may take some time; for I shall have to go into a trance of course, and gaze into my crystals. It will also be necessary for me to go to your house,—into his room, in fact,—in order that I may first take his atmosphere."

"Oh, I understand," she exclaimed. "To tell the truth, I'm very, very, much worried, and

anxious to have you go to work as soon as possible. I daren't go to the police; for, after all, there may be nothing serious in the matter, and it would cause a lot of talk; and I wouldn't want him to ever know that I'd employed a detective for anything like this. But of course you are different."

"I am 'different,' as you say," responded Astro, smiling. "I shall be able to trace him, no doubt, without anyone ever suspecting me. Just when did you see him for the last time?"

"On Tuesday, the tenth."

"And now it is the twentieth. He has had no business troubles?"

"On the contrary, he was doing remarkably well in his real estate business. We've been saving up to go abroad, you see; it has been a plan we've had ever since we were married. It's a sort of delayed honeymoon, I suppose. We hoped to live in Italy for a year." She sighed.

"You are a church member, I presume?"

"Yes; I go to the Park Avenue Presbyterian church. Mr. Hudson is a deacon there."

"I see. He is well off, you say?"

"Oh, no; not that. But we have been quite encouraged of late. Mr. Hudson was quite hopeful about our European trip."

"Very well, Mrs. Hudson; I shall be up at your house at nine o'clock to-morrow."

VALESKA entered the room again as soon as the visitor had left, and looked at the palmist with a question in her eyes.

Astro waved his hand carelessly. "As I thought," he began, turning to his narghile, lighting it, and blowing the fumes through his nose luxuriously. "John Hudson has disappeared." She asked several pointed questions about him this afternoon, although she thought that she guarded herself well. They are both church members, and their ambition is to go abroad. He is in the real estate business. Can you put two and two together?"

Valeska's pretty eyebrows creased themselves in thought. "Let me see. Judging from her appearance, they can't have been making very much money in the real estate business. You say they wanted to go to Europe,—wanted to stay a year in Italy, wasn't it?—and wanted all this badly. He'd naturally try to get the money in other ways; perhaps illegitimately. It might even lead him into crime. Being religious, he would naturally want to