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The Marathon Mystery

A Story of Manhattan

By BURTON E. STEVENSON

Author of "The Holiday Case"

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I only had a chance to study Tremaine, to hear him talk, to watch him without being seen. That would be worth more to me than all this theorizing. Then I'd have my feet on solid ground; I could—sh!—who's that?"

A door opened and a step crossed the hall. There came a tap at my door.

Godfrey shot me one electric glance, then, lightly as a panther, he seized coat and hat and disappeared into the bedroom, leaving the door slightly ajar.

CHAPTER IX.

"I HAVE come to thank you for your kindness of last night," said Tremaine as he entered. "It was indeed a great favor."

"It was nothing," I protested, waving him to a chair. "I was glad to do it. I had a very pleasant time myself."

As he sat down he laid a handful of cigarettes on the table beside him. "You see, I've come for a chat," he said, with his inimitable smile. "I hope you will help yourself."

"Thank you," and I suited the action to the word. Tremaine's cigarettes would have tempted any one.

"I have been curious to see," he said, "how Cecily would affect New Yorkers. She is certainly well stared at."

"And no wonder!" I said. "She would make St. Anthony turn his head."

"Ah, you think so?" and he shot me a quick glance. "You admire her, then?"

"Admiration is hardly the word," I said slowly. "It is too weak, too thin—Evidently he misunderstood me, for he did not wait for me to finish, to explain myself."

"That makes it easier for me," he interrupted. "You have perhaps suspected that the union between us is not a—ah—a legal one?"

"Yes," I said, "I had suspected that." "Such unions are the rule in Martinique," he continued calmly, "and have been from time immemorial. They are a part of the life there. They are a matter of course, and frequently they are as permanent and happy as any regular one could be. Cecily is what is known as a fille de couleur—physically, I believe, the most beautiful women in the world."

"Then she is not an exception?"

"Oh, no—she's a type—physically, at least. Mentally, I believe she does differ somewhat from the typical capresse. For instance, I never knew another attempt to tame a fer-de-lance."

"It seemed to me," I observed, "that she had as many possibilities as the snake."

He laughed lightly. "For evil, you mean? That's merely the effect of the first view. Really, the capresse girls have an excellent reputation for docility and all the rest. Not that it would matter much in Martinique—the people there are used to living over a volcano and don't mind. Of course," he added in another tone, "I shall before long have to break it off. Society here is differently organized—different climates, different morals, you know; I feel that I must conform to it. Indeed, I even wish to do so. It is time that I settled down, ranged myself, became a man of family. I have been a wanderer long enough. Cecily can't endure this climate anyway. I'll send her back to St. Pierre."

"What will she say to that?" I asked, with a vivid memory of the adoring way her eyes always dwelt upon him.

"You think it sounds a little brutal?" and he smiled gayly. "It isn't, in the least. You've put Cecily on too high a pedestal. They have an axiom down there: 'Née de l'amour, la fille de cou-

leur nit d'amour, de rires, et d'oubli—her life is a thing of love, laughter and forgettings. I think it's essentially true. At the same time," he added more seriously, "I don't wish to be needlessly cruel. That's the reason I'm telling you all this. It's a sort of introduction."

"Ah," I said, and looked at him. "I'll blurt it out in a word. I'll be out of town next week—all week—my business demands it—and it's absurd for me to think of taking Cecily with me—it's absolutely impossible—it would ruin the whole affair. What I want to ask you is this—look in on her occasionally, cheer her up, take her to the theater, if you'll be so good. She knows no one here, and she has a ridiculous need of companionship, of chattering to some one, of having some one to admire her. It's born in the blood, I suppose; it's an inheritance from two centuries of ancestors. Left to herself, she'll soon mope herself sick. Will you do this for me, my friend?"

There was a compelling wizardry in his eyes as he looked at me, yet I had self control enough to pause and reflect. Still, I saw no reason why I should refuse, even had my own inclination not greatly urged me forward. Here would be an opportunity to unveil such secrets of his as Cecily might know—especially as to where they had been on the evening of the murder. Perhaps she even knew the victim; could give me a clue to the connection between him and Tremaine, if such a connection existed. There were unlimited possibilities. And yet a feeling of shame held me back. To take advantage in this way of a man who trusted me, against whom there was nothing but the merest, most intangible suspicion—

I looked up and met his intent gaze. "You were reflecting?" he said.

"Merely that it is a delicate trust. I'm not at all unwilling to undertake it, only—"

Again he misunderstood; again he did not wait for me to finish. It was the only weakness I ever detected in him—he made a false step that could never be retraced.

"Only you are flesh and blood, you would say?" and he shot me a smile which illumined as a lightning flash the depths of his character. "On that score, do not worry, I beg of you. I am not of a jealous disposition. I shall not—"

A knock at the door interrupted him or I might have answered in a way that would have wrecked Godfrey's plan forever. I flung the door open and saw Higgins standing there.

"A call at the telephone for you, Mr. Lester," he said.

"Excuse me, please," I called over my shoulder to Tremaine, and strode down the hall after the janitor.

It was Mr. Royce who wanted me; he had been called suddenly out of town and wished to give me some instructions for the next day. Our conversation lasted perhaps five minutes; then I hung up the receiver and mounted to my rooms. With a hand not wholly steady, I opened the door. Tremaine was sitting in the chair where I had left him and was just lighting another cigarette.

He arose with a smile as I came in. "I must be going," he said. "And you will keep an eye on Cecily?"

"Yes, I'll be glad to. Good night," I answered, and closed the door.

As I turned Godfrey walked calmly out of the bedroom.

"What do you think of him?" I asked.

"I think," said Godfrey slowly, "that he's one of the most consummate scoundrels I ever had to deal with. However, we'll unmask him. He's letting us into his citadel."

"Did he sit still while I was away?"

"Not for an instant. I was sure he wouldn't. Therefore as soon as I caught Higgins' errand I dived behind your raincoat. Luckily, it's a long one."

"Yes. And then?"

"And then he took a quick look through the bedroom. I heard him open the closet door and drop on one knee to glance under the bed. Then he went on into the bathroom and finally came back again to the sitting room."

"Well?" I asked, for I saw that there was something yet untold.

"Well," continued Godfrey, "after a minute or two I thought it safe to venture out from under the raincoat, more especially as certain peculiar sounds from the other room awakened my curiosity. The sounds were a sort of slow, regular scraping."

He paused a moment to look at me. I could only stare at him.

"I crept to the door and peeped through. Guess what I saw! You never could guess, though. Tremaine was crawling slowly about the room, rubbing his hands carefully over the carpet. He was searching for the diamond."

CHAPTER X.

"WELL," I said at last, "it seems to me we're weaving a pretty strong chain about our friend Tremaine. But why should he have waited this long to look for the diamond?"

"Perhaps he's just discovered its loss," suggested Godfrey.

"Or perhaps this is the first opportunity he's had. I've never before left him alone here, and I keep the snap on so that the door locks itself whenever it's closed."

Godfrey sat for a full minute motionless, his eyes fixed on the door.

"Of course," he said at last, "it may not have been the diamond he was looking for, though I can't imagine what else it could be. But I've a theory I want to test. Suppose we take a look at your bedroom."

I followed him in and turned up the light. He glanced around keenly and went finally to the closet, which was almost opposite the door leading into the sitting room. He entered the closet and closed the door behind him. After a moment I heard a scraping noise and perceived a knife blade working back and forth in a crack of the door. Finally the blade was withdrawn, the door opened and Godfrey came out. He examined the lock, tried it once or twice with the key, which was in it, then he turned to me.

"What time do you leave in the morning?" he asked.

"About 7:30."

"Seven-thirty. Very well. Now I must be going. Look for me in the morning."

"Wait," I said, for I, too, had a sudden idea. "You have a photograph of Thompson, I suppose? Bring it up in the morning with you. I should like to look at it."

"All right," he said, and after I had made sure that the coast was clear he stole away upon tiptoe.

Scarcely was I out of bed next morning when there came a light tap on my door and Godfrey slipped in the instant I opened it.

"I had a few properties to arrange," he explained, smiling, "and so though I'd best come early."

He went on into the bedroom and opened the closet door. Then he took from his pocket a stout bolt, with screws and a screw driver, and proceeded to affix it to the inside of the door.

"Now, my dear Lester," he said, rising when the task was finished, "I'll have to ask you to run up this noon and let me out."

"Let you out of where?"

"Out of the closet. You see, unfortunately, this lock works only from the outside, so you'll have to lock me in before you go. I've put on the bolt as an extra precaution."

"You mean you're going to spend the whole morning in that closet?"

"That's precisely what I mean."

"But you'll suffocate."

"No—you see I've cut a hole through. That will let in the air; besides, through it one can get an admirable view of the outer room."

"Ah!" I said, beginning to understand. "It's a trap!"

"Yes, a trap. Maybe we'll catch something; and maybe we won't. What time do you usually go to lunch?"

"About 1 o'clock."

"That ought to bring you here by 1:30. Very well; lock me in and take the key with you."

I did as he bade me, though not without some reluctance, and I confess that I thought of little else during the morning.

ried out and took the elevated uptown as the quickest way of getting there. It was just 1:20 when I opened my door. With a little shiver of apprehension I inserted the key in the lock of the closet and threw back the bolt. Godfrey walked out on the instant. He was smiling, but pale with fatigue.

"If you've got such a thing as a nip of brandy anywhere about, Lester," he said, sinking into the nearest chair, "I'd be infinitely obliged for it. I feel rather shaky in the knees."

I brimmed a glass for him, and he set it down empty, with a sigh of satisfaction.

"That's better. Do you know, I thought for a time toward the last that I was going to collapse. One little crack is scarcely ventilation enough for an active pair of lungs. However, I was repaid."

"You were?"

"Yes," and he smiled at my impatience. "I'll tell you the story and see what you make of it. First came the chambermaid, who performed her duties with neatness and dispatch. Then a dreary half hour passed. I had about come to the conclusion that I might have spared my pains when I caught the sound of a key in the lock of the outer door, I heard the door open and close, and an instant later our friend Tremaine appeared within my range of vision."

"Tremaine!" I exclaimed. "Then he had Thompson's key?"

"Yes," agreed Godfrey. "But my story's only begun. Tremaine took a look through the rooms to assure himself that there was no one here. He tried the closet door, but didn't seem surprised or suspicious when he found it locked. Then he went back to the outer room, dropped on his hands and knees and began to search."

"For the diamond?"

"So I thought at first. I couldn't see him for a little while, but presently I perceived that he wasn't searching over the body of the carpet, but around its edges. He seemed to be looking for a place where it was loose, for he went very slowly from tack to tack. Once I thought he had found it, for he came to a place where a tack was wanting and ran his hand under eagerly. But in a moment he brought it out again empty."

"So it couldn't have been the diamond," I remarked in perplexity.

"No, it couldn't have been the diamond," assented Godfrey, his eyes shining. "But Tremaine wasn't done yet. Really, he'd make an admirable detective. I admired his methods, though they also gave me a clue to what he was looking for. He placed a chair just here, before this desk, just opposite the bedroom door. You'll remember that Thompson also had a table and chair similarly placed."

"Yes, I remember."

"Then he sat down in the chair and began a minute scrutiny of the walls. First that one yonder. He went over it inch by inch until he came to the speaking tube. Then he sprang up and opened it and peered inside, even holding a lighted match in. Let us see," and Godfrey also examined the tube. "It's empty."

"Yes," I said, "I've used it once or twice, and it works all right."

"Well, Tremaine wasn't satisfied with that. He ran his hands along the top ledges of the doors, mounted a chair and peered above the windows, examined every nook and cranny. At last he gave it up, replaced things just as he had found them, glanced at his watch and went away. Now, what was he looking for?"

I nudged my brain.

"I don't know," I said. "I can't imagine."

"Let me help you," said Godfrey, his eyes shining still more brightly. "I had time to think it all out in the closet there. In the first place, he looked only in the outer room; in the second place, he was plainly looking for something that had been purposely concealed; in the third place, when he examined the room he placed his chair just where Miss Croydon had sat."

A flash of light burst upon me.

"The clippings!" I cried.

"The clippings. Just that. I haven't the least doubt of it. And that explains another thing which seemed very puzzling. It explains why Miss Croydon was so anxious to rent this suit."

"But how did he find out about

them?" I asked at last.

"I think they contain some secret of his, and he's concluded she hasn't got them because she hasn't produced them against him. And he's reasoned correctly in supposing that if she hasn't got them she must have hidden them here."

It was a good guess; an adroit one. "The question is," added Godfrey, looking about him, "where did she hide them?"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

When a horse is so over worked it lies down and in other ways declares its inability to go further, you would consider it criminal to use force. Many a man of humane impulses, who would not willingly harm a kitten, is guilty of cruelty where his own stomach is concerned. Overdriven, overworked, when what it needs is something that will digest the food eaten and help the stomach to recuperate. Something like Kodol For Dyspepsia that is sold by Lamborn Drug Co.

When Everything Is Poisonous. All substances, even eggs, are poisonous when they are injected in certain quantities into the circulatory system of an animal. A French investigator has taken the powdered yolk of a duck's egg, treated it with a 20 per cent solution of salt and injected it into the veins of an animal until it died. In order to kill a rabbit fifty-five grains of the substance were required for each pound of the rabbit's weight. The yolk of a hen's egg is less poisonous, but that of a turtle more so than that of a duck. The albumen of eggs is also poisonous.

Far Enough. One day when William M. Everts, secretary of state under President Hayes, was a college student he was called on to read Virgil in class.

He started out bravely. "Three times I strove to cast my arms around her neck, and— and"—adding lamely—"that's as far as I got, professor."

"Well, Mr. Everts," said the professor, "I think that was quite far enough."

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