The Exploits of Elaine

A Detective Novel and a Motion Picture Drama

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The Well-Known Novelist and the Creator of the "Craig Kennedy" Stories

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Seventeenth Episode—Continued.

Although she had intended to sit up until she received some word from Kennedy that night, the long strain had told on her, and in spite of her worry about Elaine, she decided, at length, to retire.

Aunt Josephine, clasping the jewel case tightly, mounted the stairs and entered her room. She locked the door carefully and put the jewelry case under her pillow. Then she switched off the light.

A moment later a small piece of the vase seemed to break away from the rest of the mosaic, as though it were knocked out from the inside. Then a large piece fell out, and another.

At last from the strange hiding place a lithe figure, as shiny as though bathed in oil, naked except for a loincloth, seemed to squirm forth like a serpent. It was Wu Fang—the watchful eye which, literally as well as figuratively, had been leveled at us in one form or another ever since the kidnaping of Elaine.

Silently he tiptoed to the doorway and listened. There was not a sound. Just as noiselessly then he went back to the library table and, muffling the telephone bell, took down the receiver. He whispered a number, waited, then whispered some directions.

A moment later he wormed his way out of the library and into the drawing-room. On he went cautiously, snake-like, up the stairs, until he came to the door of Aunt Josephine's room.

He bent down and listened. There was no sound except Aunt Josephine's breathing. Silently he drew from a fold in the loin-cloth a screwdriver and removed the screws from the hinges of the door. Quietly he pushed the bedroom door open, pivoting it on the lock, just far enough open so that he could slip through.

Creeping along the floor, like the reptile whose sign he had assumed, he came nearer and nearer Aunt Josephine's bed. As he paused for a moment his quick eye seemed to catch sight of the bulging lump under her pillow. His long, thin hand reached out and quietly removed the jewel case from under her pillow.

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In a country roadhouse Long Sin was waiting patiently. The telephone rang, and the proprietor answered. Long Sin was at his side almost before he could hand over the receiver. It was Long Sin's master, Wu.

"Beware," came the whispered message over the wire. "Kennedy has made a false ring. I'll get the real one. By the great Devil of Gobi, you must cut him off."

"It is done," returned Long Sin, hanging up the receiver in great excitement.

He hurried out of the room and left the roadhouse. Down the road in an automobile, bound between two Chinamen, one at her head and the other at her feet, was Elaine, wrapped around in blankets, not even her face visible. The guards looked up startled as Long Sin streaked out of the shadow to the car.

"Quick!" he ordered. "The master will get the ring himself. I will take care of Kennedy."

An instant and they were gone, while Long Sin slunk back into the shadows from which he had come.

Through the underbrush the wily Chinaman made his way to an old barn.

In the dim light of a lantern hanging from a rafter could be seen several barrels in a corner. Without a moment's hesitation Long Sin seized a bucket and placed it under the spigot of one of the barrels. The liquid poured forth into the bucket, and he emptied the contents on the floor, filling the bucket again and again and swinging it right and left in every direction, until the barrel had finally run dry.

Then he moved over to the window, which he examined carefully. Satisfied with what he had done, he drew a slip of paper from his pocket and hastily wrote a note, resting the paper on an old box. When he had finished writing he folded up the note and thrust it into a little hollow-carved Chinese figure, which he took also from his pocket.

With a final hasty glance about he extinguished the lantern, letting the moonlight stream fitfully through the single window. Then he left the barn, with both front and rear doors open.

Taking advantage of every bit of shelter, he made his way across the field in the direction of the crossroads, finally dropping down behind a huge rock some yards from the finger post that pointed each way to Williams and Brownlee avenues.

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Late that night Kennedy left his apartment prepared to follow the instructions in the note which had been so strangely delivered in the vase.

As he climbed into a roadster he tucked the robe most carefully into a corner under the leather seat.

"For heaven's sake, Craig," I gasped from under the robe, "let me have a little air."

I had taken my place under the robe before the car was driven up in front of the apartment lest some emissary of Wu Fang might be watching to see that there was such a trick.

"You'll get air enough when we get started, Walter," he laughed back under his breath, apparently addressing the engine.

We had reached a point in the suburbs which was deserted, and I did not recognize a thing when he pulled up by the side of the road with a jerk.

A moment later he pulled the robe partly off me, and bent down as though examining the batteries on the side of the car.

"Get out on the other side in the shadow of the car, Walter," he whispered hoarsely. "Go down the road a bit—only cut in and keep under cover. This is Williams avenue. You'll see a big rock. Hide behind it. Ahead you'll see Brownlee avenue. Be prepared for anything. I shall have to trust the rest to you. I don't know myself what's going to happen."

I slid out and went along the edge of the road, as Craig had directed, and finally crouched behind a huge rock.

After a moment to give me a chance, Craig himself left the car pulled up close by the side of the road and went ahead on foot. At last he came to the crossroads just around the bend, where, in the moonlight, he could read the signs: "Williams avenue" and "Brownlee avenue." He stood there a moment.

Suddenly, at his feet in the dust of the road something heavy seemed to drop. He looked about quickly. No one was in sight.

He reached down and picked up a little Chinese figure. Tapping it with his knuckles he examined it curiously. It was hollow.

From the inside he drew out a piece of paper. He strained his eyes in the moonlight and managed to make out:

"The Serpent is all-wise and his fang is fatal. You have signed the white girl's death warrant."

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Meanwhile I had made my way stealthily, peering into the bushes and careful not even to step on anything that would make a noise and was now, as I have said, crouched behind the big rock to which Craig had directed me.

I had begun to wonder whether Kennedy might not have made a mistake when, suddenly, from behind the shadow of another rock ahead of me, but toward Brownlee avenue, I saw a tall, gaunt figure of a man stealthily rise up into the moonlight.

My heart gave a leap as he quickly raised his right arm and hurled something as far as he could in the direction that Kennedy had taken.

I stole out from my own hiding place in the shadow of my rock and darted quickly to the shelter of a bush, nearer the figure.

It turned to steal away.

I leaped at him and he went down, rolling over and over in the underbrush and stubble.

He was powerful and stronger than I and after a tough tussle he broke loose. But I had succeeded, nevertheless. I had delayed him just long enough. Kennedy heard the sound of the struggle and was now crashing through the hedge at the crossroads in our direction.

I managed to pick myself up, just as Kennedy reached my side, and, together, we followed the retreating figure as it made its way among the shadows. Across the open space before us we followed him and at last saw him dive into an old barn.

A moment later we followed hotfoot into the barn. As we entered, we could hear a peculiar grating noise, as though a door was swung open. Evidently the man had gone through and closed the back door.

We threw ourselves against the back door. But it did not yield. There was no time to waste and we turned to rush out again by the way we came, just as the front door was slammed shut.

The man had trapped us.

We could hear his feet crunching the dry leaves and twigs as he went around the side of the barn again.

Suddenly the pale silver of the moonlight on the floor reddened.

The man had struck a match and thrown it into a mass of oil-soaked straw and gunpowder which protruded through one of the weather-beaten boards, near the floor.

For a second I looked dismayed at the rapidly mounting flames.

"A very pretty situation," I forced with a laugh. "But I hope he doesn't think we'll stay here and burn, with a perfectly good window in full view."

I took a step toward the window, but before I could take another, Kennedy yanked me back.

"Don't think for a moment that he overlooked that," he shouted.

Craig looked around hastily. In a corner, just back of us, was a long pole He snatched it up and moved cautiously toward the window

"Keep back, Walter," he muttered, "just as far as you can."

He had scarcely raised the window a fraction of an inch when an old, rusty, heavy anvil and a bent, worn plowshare crashed down to the floor directly over the spot where I should have been if he had not dragged me away.

"I think you may try it safely now, all right," smiled Kennedy coolly.

We climbed out of the window, not an instant too soon.

Having gained the clump of woods, the gaunt figure had paused long enough to gloat over his clever scheme. Instead, he saw us making good our escape. With a gesture of intense fury he turned. There was nothing more for him to do but to zigzag his way to safety across country.

"Let Us Be Enemies No More," Says Wu.

Kennedy did not pause an instant longer, but in the light of the burning barn, as best he could, started to follow the trail in a desperate endeavor either to overtake Long Sin, or at least to find the final direction in which he would go.

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At the entrance of the passageway which led to the little underground chamber in which we had sought the treasure hidden by the Clutching Hand, Wu Fang was seated on a rock waiting impatiently though now and then indulging in a sinister smile at the subtle trick by which he had recovered the ring.

The sound of approaching footsteps disturbed him. He was far too clever to leave anything to chance and like a serpent, he wriggled behind another rock and waited. It was only a glance, however, that he needed to allay his suspicions. It was Long Sin, breathless.

Wu stepped out beside him so quietly that even the acute Long Sin did not hear. "Well?" he said in a guttural tone.

Long Sin drew back in fear. "I have failed, oh, master," he replied in an imploring tone. "Even now they are following my tracks."

Wu frowned. "We must work quickly, then," he muttered.

He picked up a dark lantern near by, indicating another to Long Sin. They entered the cave, flashing the lights ahead of them.

"Be careful," ordered Wu, proceeding gingerly from one stepping stone to another. "We shall be followed no further than this."

He paused a moment and pointed his finger at the earth. Everywhere, except here and there where a stone projected, was a sticky, slimy substance. It was an old trick of primitive races.

They passed on from stone to stone until they came to the subterranean chamber itself.

Long Sin watched his master in silent admiration as, at last, he drew forth the mystic ring for which they had dared all.

Without a word Wu dropped it in the slot, a protuberance hit a trigger and pushed it a hair's breadth.

On the other side of the chamber, a great rock in the ground slowly turned, as though on a pivot. They watched, fascinated. Even then Wu did not forget the precious ring, but as the rock turned, reached down quickly and recovered it from the cup at the floor.

Inch by inch the pivoted rock moved on its axis. They flashed their lanterns full on it and, as it moved, they could see disclosed huge piles of gold and silver coins and bars and ornaments, a chest literally filled with brilliants, set and unset, rubies, emeralds, precious stones of every conceivable variety, a cave that would have staggered even Aladdin.

For a moment they could merely stand in avaricious exultation.

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Painfully and slowly we managed to trail Long Sin's footprints, until we came to a road where they were lost in the hard macadam.

Kennedy chose the most likely direction, for the trail had been at an angle to the road and Long Sin was not likely to double back. We had not gone many rods before Kennedy paused a minute and looked about in the moonlight.

"It's right, Walter," he cried. "Do you recognize it?"

I looked about. Then it flashed over me. This was the back road that led past the entrance to the treasure vault at Aunt Tabby's.

We went on now more quickly, listening carefully to catch any sounds, but heard nothing. At last Kennedy stopped, then plunged among the rocks and bushes beside the road. We were at the cave.

"You go this way, Walter," he directed. "I'll go around and down where it caved in."

I had gone only a yard or two when it seemed as though something had grasped my foot

With a great wrench I managed to pull it loose. But the weight on my other foot had imbedded it deeper in something. I struggled to free this foot and got the other caught. My revolver which I had drawn, was jarred from my hand, and in the effort to recover it, I lost my balance. Unable to move a foot in time to catch myself I fell forward. My hands were now covered by the slimy, sticky stuff, and the more I struggled, the worse I seemed to get entangled.

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Wu and Long Sin paused only a minute in astonishment. Then they literally fell upon the wealth that lay before them.

Suddenly they paused. There was the slight tinkle of a Chinese bell.

Kennedy had reached Aunt Tabby's garden, outside the roof of the subterranean chamber where it had given way, had gone down carefully over the earth and rock, and in doing so had broken a string stretched across the passageway. The tinkle of a bell attached to it aroused his attention and he stopped short, a second, to look about. Wu Fang had arranged a primitive alarm.

Quickly, Wu and Long Sin blew out their lanterns while Wu gave the rock a push. Slowly, as it had opened, it now closed and they stood there listening.

I was still struggling in the bird lime, getting myself more and more covered with it, when the reverberation of revolver shots reached me.

Wu and Long Sin had opened fire on Kennedy, and Kennedy was replying in kind. In the cavern it sounded like a veritable bombardment. As they retreated, they came nearer and nearer to me and I could see the revolvers spitting fire in the darkness.

I watched them fearfully as they hopped deftly from one stone to another to avoid the lime—and were gone.

"Craig! Craig!" I managed to cry feebly. "Be careful. Keep to the stones."

Stepping from stone to stone, he followed the retreating Chinamen. But they had already reached the mouth of the cave and were making their way rapidly down the road to a bend, in the opposite direction from which we had come. There Wu's automobile was waiting.

A moment later Kennedy appeared, but they had made their getaway. Baffled, he turned and retraced his steps to the cave.

"They got away, Walter," he said, lighting a lantern they had dropped. "By George," he added, I think a little vexed that I had not been able to intercept them, "you are a sight!"

He was about to laugh, when I fainted. I can remember nothing until I woke up over by the wall of the chamber where he dragged me.

Kennedy had been working hard to revive me, and, as I opened my eyes, he straightened up. His eye suddenly caught something on the rock beside him. There was a little slot carved in it, and above the slot was a peculiar inscription.

For several minutes Kennedy puzzled over it, as Wu had done. Then he discovered the little cup near the ground.

"The ring!" he suddenly cried out.

I was too muddled to appreciate at once what he meant, but I saw him reach into his fob pocket and draw forth the trinket which had caused so much disaster, as if it had been cursed by the Clutching Hand himself. He dropped it into the slot.

Struggling to my feet, I saw across from me the very rock itself moving.

"Look, Craig!" I cried, involuntarily pointing.

He turned. No, it was not a vision. It actually moved. Together we watched. Slowly the rock turned on a pivot. There were disclosed to our astonished eyes the hidden millions of the Clutching Hand.

I looked from the gold and jewels to Kennedy, in speechless amazement.

"We have beaten them anyhow," I cried.

Slowly Craig shook his head sadly.

"No," he murmured, "we have found the Clutching Hand's millions, but we have lost Elaine."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

His Handicap.

"As I was engaged in the very disagreeable and undignified task of splitting up some hickory knots yesterday," related Jay B. Iden, the poet, "a wayfarer came along and offered to relieve me of the job in return for a pair of my old trousers. Unfortunately, I had them on at the time and the reading circle was convening in the house. On that acount I was unable to avail myself of his kind offer."—Kansas City Star.

Bluebird a Friend of Man.

Like the robin, the bluebird is very domestic, but unlike the robin, it does not prey upon any cultivated product or work any injury whatsoever to the fruit grower. During the fruit season in fact five-sixths of its food consists of insects. It seems, therefore, that the common practice of encouraging the bluebird to nest near houses by placing convenient boxes in which it may build its home is thoroughly justified.

Japanese Breakfast.

The usual Japanese breakfast consists of rice, miso soup, pickles and occasionally fish. Tea is always served with meals, and is drunk clear, without sugar or cream. Miso soup consists of strips of radishes, seaweed, eggplant, or other vegetables cooked with bean curd and water. The cooking is not continued for a long period, and so few vegetables are used that the soup partakes only slightly of the flavor of the ingredients.

South American Industry.

The sap of the sapodilla tree is very largely used in the manufacture of chewing gum. The tree is cultivated in Mexico and Central America, and the method of collecting the sap called "chicle," is very similar to that employed in extracting maple sugar. Mexico alone in 1910 exported chicle valued at $170,000, which will give you a good idea of the extent of the chewing gum industry.

Beyond Kindness.

When men and women die, and are beyond all earthly troubles and crises, then the rule is: "Speak no evil of the dead." But is it not worse to speak evil of them while they are alive, while the evil word can wound or injure them? Why wait to be kind and merciful until it is no use whatever?

Fond Memory.

Open season for recalling how good stolen turnip used to taste to you when you were a small boy.—Connersville Examiner.