

NEW STORIES OF MYSTERY BY ALICE ROYCE, GIRL DETECTIVE

No. 1—The Clue of the Little Horseshoe

By Charles Somerville.

THIS remarkable detective story and others equally fascinating to follow are drawn from real life and the only thing fictitious about the heroine of their thrilling adventure is her name. She is a real person.

For the protection of the confidence reposed in her by her many clients, and in order that a greater freedom might be given the author in telling of the strange cases in which Alice Royce has been engaged, the actual names and locations of the scenes in the stories have been frequently changed and also the names of the human characters who figure in the mysteries.

Alice Royce is now in her early twenties. Her advent into detective work was caused by David Belasco, the eminent dramatic author and director, to whom she once submitted a play. He was interested to the point of sending for her. He told the girl that her play showed imagination and a remarkably precocious knowledge of stage technique. But he said her people were not real. "They are dream people. You do not know life. Learn life, and then, I think, you will write a good play."

How better to learn life than in detective work—to learn the most intimate and the strangest phases of life at first hand?

Alice Royce had been employed by prominent detective agencies, by the New York Police Department, and on matters of great secrecy and delicacy by the Standard Oil. Her reputation has grown quietly in influential circles. In her work, the pretty, dark-haired, brown-eyed young woman has shown courage defying a man, an intuition sometimes almost uncanny; skill unswerving. Her work has carried her into criminals' dens and desperate situations; into the business and social worlds—the luxurious world, generally called "Society."

JOHAN CRAIG, the youthful manager of the Union Bank Note Company, looked up from his desk in surprise at the young woman who stood before him. Then he glanced back at the small card in his hand. He read again: "A Royce, — Investigator."

"Are you A. Royce?" he demanded quizzically. "Are you the detective?"

The girl smiled and slipped easily into a chair beside his desk.

"I'm Alice Royce," she said. "I'm the detective."

John Craig had heard that there were such creatures as female detectives. They were, he thought, invariably women of forty or more, with hard, shrewd features and angular bodies.

Miss Alice Royce, Investigator, however, was scarcely more than a girl. His stare changed to frank expression of approval at her trim little figure in its smart tailor-made gown of blue cloth, the graceful hands clad in tan gloves folded in her lap over a black leather, gold-mounted bag, the heavy coils of chestnut hair framing her rosy countenance, the fascinating prettiness of her small, half-uplifted nose and the freshness of her gracious, winsome mouth. He also saw that her large, brown long-lashed eyes were alert, splendidly intelligent.

However, he brought his mind back to the serious sinister affair that had caused him to appeal to the famous Blaney Detective Agency for aid.

"Frankly, Miss Royce," he said, "the Blaney Agency have given you a most difficult problem. I only hope you will be able to restore David Raynor to his wife and children and to us."

He paused and passed his hand over a frowning brow.

"The thing is such a black mystery," he said. "All my theories and efforts in the case have come to nothing. David Raynor has disappeared as utterly as if a great hand had reached out of the sky and snatched him from the earth."

"Just who is David Raynor?" asked the girl quietly. "Tell me what you can about him—everything, no matter whether some of the details seem important to you or not."

"Raynor, Miss Royce," continued Craig, "was our 'star' man—one of the most expert engravers in the United States. He has been with this company for fifteen years. His salary was \$7,000 a year. He is now about forty years old, a slender, mild-mannered man. He lived with his wife and two children in a pretty villa in Mount Vernon, well beyond the town itself, out on the old Eastchester road, with his home facing Seton's woods. I think you will find that his life was in every way exemplary; he was devoted to his work here, to his home, his wife and his children. His life was indeed an open book, simple, sober and kind—y. Neither his wife nor any of his associates can imagine the possible existence of an enemy, and his actions prior to his disappearance were altogether normal. He appeared to have

nothing weighing on his mind to its fear or discomfort. And—well, in short, there you are."

Miss Royce produced from her hand-bag a little gilt-edged morocco bound note book.

"According to the facts furnished me by Mr. Blaney," she said, "it is now seventeen days that Mr. Raynor has been missing, and that on Thursday, the day of his disappearance, he left his office as usual, met no one, and was seen by his fellow commuters on the train to Mount Vernon and was further seen to alight there?"

Craig nodded.

"Mr. Blaney stated to me," said Miss Royce, "that on Monday Mrs. Raynor had come to you to beg you to take the matter in hand, report it to the police and use your influence to stir them to take extraordinary measures to find her husband?"

"Yes."

"And you had consented to this most readily, but that a few minutes after she left your office she returned in great excitement to beg you not to do anything of the kind but to go on with only a private investigation of the case?"

"Exactly. At the very entrance to this building as she was departing a man, who was a total stranger to her, a dark-skinned, full-bearded man whose speech suggested Italian origin, came suddenly upon her. He told her that if she valued her husband's life she must not take the matter to the police, that her husband was alive and well but that his future well-being depended solely on her remaining quiet, discouraging investigation and awaiting such time as he would be restored to her."

"There was no demand for a ransom?"

"No, not then or at any other time since. No Black Hand letters, you know, or anything of that sort. Of course it was this threat passed to Mrs. Raynor that so thoroughly aroused me to a determination to do everything possible to learn what fate poor Raynor has met. Up to that time I leaned very much to the theory that Walsh, the foreman, had insisted must be the real explanation."

"And what was that, Mr. Craig?"

"That Raynor's close attention to his duties, the night work he had been doing for weeks in order to meet our contract for the delivery of new sets of plates for a South American republic's bonds and paper currency; the eye-strain and nervousness which frequently afflicts engravers had brought on an attack of aphasia and sent Raynor wandering, to return home, perhaps, when a period of rest cleared his mind. Even now Walsh says his theory is probably the right one."

Craig paused. Suddenly Miss Royce lifted her eyes to his face, brushing back a tendril of soft brown hair with a tan gloved hand.

"Where did that interview between you and Mrs. Raynor take place?"

"Right here—in this office."

"Was anybody else present?"

"No—er, that is, not at first. Walsh came in while we were talking, to extend his sympathy to Mrs. Raynor."

"And heard you promise to do your utmost to make the police take a keen interest in her husband's case?"

"Yes, he was here when he heard me promise to stir the authorities up to taking earnest action in the case."

"Which left the office first at the end of the interview—Mrs. Raynor or Walsh?"

"Walsh," answered Craig positively.

"Some time before?"

"Yes, for after he went away I looked up Raynor's account and made out a check to Mrs. Raynor for the money due him."

Miss Royce walked to the broad window and stared a few seconds at the towers of the skyscrapers. Then she turned decisively and said:

"Mr. Craig, kindly have Walsh come in here."

He entered the office lumberingly—a huge, big-handed man with a round head whose red hair was closely cropped. His face revealed rough, brutal features, lightened, however, by small, cunning, darting green eyes. When he was asked by Craig to tell Miss Royce all he could of Raynor and the circumstances of his disappearance, he stared at the girl and laughed.

"You are a detective?" he grinned.

"A sort of suffragette detective! Say, what's the Blaney Agency doing anyway, Mr. Craig—stringing you? What can a girl like this do in the case. It's just as I thought—they can't make their head nor tail of it themselves and so they send this kid around as a bluff. You ought to send this girl back to her knitting."

"Still," interrupted Miss Royce smilingly, "you might do me the favor of telling me what you know."

"What's the use?" retorted Walsh. "I'm tired talking about the thing anyway. And you'll see—in the end it will be just as I've said from the first,

Raynor got played out working long hours and got a little hazy in the head. He's wandering somewhere and he'll turn up in time all right."

"But how about the man who met Mrs. Raynor and threatened her husband's life if she sought the aid of the police?"

"Hysterics," snorted Walsh. "She's gone a little off, too with the worry of the thing. I don't believe there ever was any such man. Imagined it, that's what she did."

He turned angrily and lumbered out of the room.

"Miss Royce," began Craig, "I must apologize for—"

"There's no need of it, I assure you," she said easily. "He may be right, of course. I think I'll go now and see Mrs. Raynor."

One fact stood sharply out in the mind of the young detective as she left the offices of the Union Bank Note Company—the presence of Walsh at the interview between Craig and Mrs. Raynor. He had heard Craig promise to set the police hard upon the hunt for Raynor. Walsh had left Craig's office several minutes before Mrs. Raynor's departure. In that period of time the object of the distressed woman's visit to Craig had become known. At the very threshold of the Union Bank Note Company had stood the dark, black-bearded man who accosted her and threatened the life of her husband if the police were called to investigate his strange disappearance. How had the black-bearded man learned so swiftly of what had passed between Mrs. Raynor and Craig? The

what resembled oxidized silver. It was a perfectly curved little horseshoe, very carefully curved with the end deftly turned up and was complete even to little perforations to serve for the insertion of nails in affixing the shoe.

Mrs. Raynor smiled sadly as she looked at it.

"He belonged to no secret society," she answered. "That little horseshoe was sent to him for luck," her eyes filled with tears, "for all the good that's come of it. It's rather odd about the little horseshoe though. It was delivered to David the day before his disappearance."

"There is no stamp on the envelope," observed Miss Royce. "Was it delivered by hand?"

"Yes, a uniformed messenger brought it to him at the company's offices. What puzzled Dave was that there was no note or card from the sender. We talked it over, however, and decided that whoever it might be, the sender had simply in absent-mindedness failed to inclose a note or card."

"An A. D. T. boy?"

"Yes."

An hour later and she was sitting in the office of the general superintendent of the A. D. T. service.

As a result Miss Royce not long afterward was interviewing Jimmy Smith, A. D. T. 1524 at one of the downtown offices of the company.

"He was a dark guy," the boy said; "with a black beard. He met me right outside the office here when I was coming in from delivering another message. He gave me the letter and walked around to the Union Company Building

shoe to David Raynor."

"How?"

"Followed Walsh, the Union Bank Note Company's foreman. They had dinner together at a little Fourth avenue hotel where 'black beard' is stopping. He is registered as John Romano. He's leaving the hotel to-night. The porter has had his baggage checked and his berth purchased for Asheville, N. C. He goes on the 10 o'clock train from the Pennsylvania."

"Well, wherever he goes—at the end of the route, we'll find Raynor. I can't tell you little lady how grateful I am that you thought to let me in on this; that you figured out a missing engraver might have something to do with a counterfeiting plot. I can see the game right now. Raynor's straight as a die, but they've got him down there making him work on the finer touches of their counterfeit plates—making him work at the point of a pistol. They've probably promised him a safe return home after he has delivered the goods to them. But if that gang isn't landed before Raynor finishes his work—well, Raynor'll never see his wife and kids again. He'd know too much."

"Do you think they'd—the color left the girl's lips as she halted on the question."

"They'd kill him like a dog and leave his body to the vultures somewhere up in those Carolina mountains. I tell you it is the worst gang that ever operated—Romano, 'The Wolf,' they call him, and another Italian, 'The Rat,' a German, two Spaniards and a Greek. They've flooded half the countries of Europe with bad money. They've es-

anxiously peering up the road. Suddenly down the mountain path in a cloud of dust came a swaying, rattling buckboard drawn by two sleek, spirited, hardy mountain horses. With a shout of reproach at the driver for not having promptly met the train, "The Wolf" clambered to a seat beside the driver, a flaxen-haired, gaunt mountaineer; there came a cut of the lash across the horses' flanks and they went fairly galloping up the hill.

It took twenty minutes to locate a farmer who could supply them with a horse and buggy.

It was half an hour before "Billy" Fenton and Alice Royce started up the mountain. There had been a shower in the morning and the fresh wheel ruts of "The Wolf's" carriage were easily to be followed until after an eight-mile drive along the loneliest in front of a little hotel at Clyde, just over the North Carolina border into Tennessee. There the crossing of half a dozen carriages had so criss-crossed the track that further pursuit of "The Wolf" was hopelessly cut off.

On entering the hotel, Fenton walked up to the tall, dark-visaged man behind the desk and said as he registered:

"I guess I'll be here for a few weeks. I found a young lady at the station at Murphy trying to get over here so I gave her a lift. She's very pretty. Do you know her?"

The landlord looked sharply at Alice Royce as she entered and shook his head.

"I was hoping," smiled "Billy" Fenton, "that I might get an introduction."

This little talk was in pursuance of the plan that Alice and he had made on the way over. "Billy" Fenton let it be known among the hotel loungers that he was an engineer studying the practicability of establishing a trolley road from Murphy to Clyde and Greenville. Alice Royce informed the landlord's wife who seemed curious about her, that she was an artist, who had been told that rare scenic subjects were to be found in the neighborhood of the little Tennessee town. This served a double purpose, for it made seem wholly natural the long walks that the young woman took morning and afternoon with a little paint box and a light easel under her arm.

But a week passed and their reconnoitring had brought them no actual clue of the whereabouts of the counterfeiters' den. On the third night, however, Fenton showed her in his open palm four bright, new silver dollars.

"Counterfeit," he said, significantly. Discouraged, Alice Royce came in from a fruitless walk over many miles of the mountain paths. She wearily ascended the stairs to change her dusty walking garments for a house gown. But as she was about to enter her room she halted. She stood with the door knob tightly clutched in a hand that trembled. For tacked on the outside of her bedroom door she saw a little green horseshoe—the duplicate of the one that David Raynor had received!

She drew back, glancing swiftly up and down the hallway. Then she moved swiftly down to the end of the hallway and peered at the door of "Billy" Fenton's room. It was tacked there also—the tiny green horseshoe!

So "The Wolf" knew them—knew their errand at Clyde? Yet how could he have known? Only Craig knew the whereabouts of Fenton and herself. Could Walsh have wormed it out of him and sent the information to Romano? It seemed the only explanation. In any event she and Fenton were marked.

To her relief when she descended the stairs and stood on the little piazza it was to see "Billy" Fenton ride up on a tired pony, smiling and unharmed. He heard with a grave countenance the news she had to impart.

"Alice," he said, "this is mighty serious business. I had hoped to run down this gang myself. But with ourselves threatened, and poor Raynor—God knows what may have happened to Raynor by this time!—to be rescued if he has not been already murdered, I have called Harkness and his Revenue men over from Asheville to help us. He can be of the greatest use. He and his men were born to these mountains and woods, you know. I'll ride over to Murphy's to-night. Harkness should arrive there by that time."

He paused and laid his hand in brotherly fashion on her arm.

"Little lady," he said, "you must promise me that you will not move away from the hotel to-night. No prowling about on your own account. It is important for me to meet Harkness, but unless you promise me you'll stay in the hotel every hour and every minute to-night, I will not leave you."

"All right," "Billy," she said, and they shook hands.

"In case of danger?" he asked. "Are you armed?"

She patted the bosom of her gown.

"I've thought of that," she said. "It's a .032-calibre."

She watched Fenton ride away.

Wearied from her long day's tramp in the mountain it was only a little after nine o'clock when she decided to retire.

She stopped short, startled. She was conscious of another presence in the room. Her eyes could distinguish no shape, but she was certain that she had heard the sharp intake of a bated breath.

The cry that Alice Royce tried to utter was strangled by a huge, powerful arm sweeping swiftly around her neck. It closed against her throat with sickening, choking force. She tried to raise her hands to tear the terrible, powerful arm away, but she was already losing consciousness, and there resulted only a feeble flutter of her hands.

Vaguely the girl realized that she was being borne over mountain roads in a rickety-ramshackle carriage, that she was blindfolded and gagged and her arms bound to her sides. The ride seemed to last for hours. Vaguely she knew that the carriage had come to the journey's end. Powerful arms lifted her at her head and feet, and she was carried up a stairway and knew a minute later that she had been laid at full length on either a bed or a lounge.

Then supple fingers worked at the knots of the ropes binding her arms, the gag slipped from her mouth, and lastly, the bandage was whisked from before her eyes. She raised herself on an arm still numb from the thoughts that had bound it and stared—straight into the face of "The Wolf." He held out to her a glass of water which she took and drank eagerly. Then he stepped back and threw himself in an inlaid posture into a big, old-fashioned arm-chair.

The girl saw that she was in what had been the grand salon of an antebellum Southern mansion. There, seated at a big, square table in the glare of three big student lamps sat David Raynor. She knew him instantly. More than fifty times she had studied the photograph his wife had given her. It was surely David Raynor. He sat working at a bronze plate with a slender instrument. And on a chair near him was a rugged, yellow haired man with a great scar across his low, bulging forehead. And this man just then looked sharply at David Raynor.

Then the girl looked back at Romano. She looked at him squarely, without flinching.

"Well?" she demanded finally. "What do you mean to do with me?"

"I could have you killed," he said sharply. "I could have you killed here and your body never be found."

"You would have to answer to the Government," she replied steadily.

"The Wolf" laughed, showing great white teeth between his black beard.

"The Government—what does it amount to in this wilderness? There is no government here but me—I'm the government. You see, lady, what you have led yourself into. Perhaps you are relying on Fenton. Don't. We will have Fenton here to-night and—has Fenton told you what happened to Jim Hillary? Ah, yes—I see from your eyes that you know. The same will happen to him."

"And me?" asked the girl.

He arose, moved over to her and seized her roughly by the arm. In a flash the girl's hand went to the bosom of her dress. But she dropped it again, conscious of the uselessness of the gesture. She had realized that the revolver was no longer there. He led her up the broad, old-fashioned hallway and to a big, square windowed room.

"You will stay here," he said. "And who knows"—he bent toward her and smiled—"who knows but maybe we become very good friends?"

She drew away from him then in greater fear than she had before shown. But he did not follow her. He laughed and made a ridiculously elaborate bow, turned and the old stairs creaked under his heavy footfall as he descended.

Alone in the room the girl struggled and labored, dragging the heavy old bureau and bedstead near the doorway to be welded into a barricade if "The Wolf" or other of the gang sought to invade the apartment. Once or twice she closed her eyes in uneasy slumber, but only for a few minutes at a time. At dawn she went to one of the big windows and looked out. Beside a tree a lanky, red-bearded man stood looking up at her, a rifle in his hand. He leered and she drew quickly away from the window. An ashen-haired, shoulder-bent woman brought her a breakfast of corn bread, eggs and coffee.

Nightfall found the girl near the end of her nervous strength. Finally she had flung herself on the bed and given away to tears. She looked out at the great mass of giant trees and in the pale moonlight could see in a haze the far-away peaks.

Suddenly she heard a cry—a cry from her guard beside the tree trunk below. And then his gun flashed out.

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The huge, powerful hand closed against her throat with sickening, choking force

evidence pointed straight at Walsh.

In driving up to the Raynor home at Mount Vernon she noticed particularly its isolation, the stretch of woods separating it from its neighbors, no building near but an old, deserted church. It was a pretty home, with well-ordered lawns and the neatness and comfort of the furnishings within spoke favorably for the little, sorrowful woman, the missing Raynor's wife. That she was suffering keenly was noticeable, but she spoke quietly and coherently and there was no evidence of a nervous condition.

"After this man had spoken to you, what did he do?" asked Miss Royce.

"He walked quickly to the curb where a taxicab was waiting. He turned just before he got into it to look back and frowned savagely at me. Then he jumped in the cab and before I really had realized what had happened, the cab was gone."

Miss Royce seated herself at Raynor's desk and sorted the papers. Receipted bills from tradesmen, the fire insurance policy on his home, these and other papers of like nature were all that came to her hand until she paused holding an envelope with no enclosure save a small dark green object deep in one corner. Miss Royce shook it out, looked at it carefully and finally held it up for the gaze of Mrs. Raynor.

"Is this an emblem of any secret society to which your husband belonged?" she asked.

The object held up was a tiny horseshoe fashioned of a metal that some-

with me—just a couple of blocks. He says I'm to be sure not to give the letter to anybody but Mr. Raynor himself."

II.

"Good God!" cried "Billy" Fenton of the United States Secret Service, leaning far over a table in the Grosvenor restaurant and staring at the youthful Alice Royce; "where did you get that?"

The girl held up the little green horseshoe so that it was very near his eyes. He took it from her swiftly and looked at it more closely.

"That little horseshoe seems to have a special meaning for you, Billy Fenton," she said.

He looked up quickly.

"This is no case for you, Alice," he said gravely. "A girl's got no business in this. Alice, this is leading you up against the worst gang of counterfeiters in the country—counterfeiters and murderers, too. That little horseshoe is the sign of the gang. You know where I saw a thing like that last? I saw it in the hand of Jim Hillary in a little hut up in the mountains in Pike County, Pennsylvania. Poor Jim was stretched dead on the floor with a bullet through his brain and the Secret Service had lost one of its best men. He had grown too hot on their trail. First they sent him a letter inclosing one of these little things—nothing more. And then they left a little horseshoe in his dead hand as a warning to the rest of us."

"Billy," said the girl; "I've found the black-bearded man who sent that horse-

established some sort of Southern connection—we had a vague line on that. But now, thanks to you Alice, we may be led straight to their hidden mountain plant."

"And Raynor?" said the girl who, for all her courage, grew half sick at the thought.

"Billy" Fenton reached over the table and patted her hand.

"I don't suppose there's any use," he said, "asking you to keep out of this?"

"Billy," she said; "my assignment is to find David Raynor, and at any risk to myself to try and restore him to his family alive and well."

Pleasant-faced "Billy" Fenton nodded. "I was pretty sure you'd say that." Then he added more gravely: "They've had Raynor down there about three weeks now. They've probably gotten out of him all they want or nearly so. There's only one thing that looks hopeful. If sentence of death were passed on Raynor I hardly think it would be executed till 'The Wolf' got there. And we'll get there when he does—get there, I hope to God, in time."

At first the trailing of Romano, "The Wolf," was easy. They were his companions on the train to Asheville, and also when he changed cars there to board a little branch road whose terminal was at Murphy.

The serious setback came when Romano alighted at Murphy village. To escape observation they hung back in the little station waiting room watching as he strode impatiently up and down the platform, every few seconds

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