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WITHIN THE LAW

Greatest Serial of the Day

By Marvin Dana From the Play of Bayard Veiller

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Continued From Yesterday

CHAPTER XIII—Continued

"Is that what they did to you, Joe? I'll have to speak to Cassidy about that. Now, just you sit down, Joe, won't you? I want to have a little talk with you. I'll be through here in a second." He went on with the writing.

Garson moved forward slightly to the single chair near the end of the desk, and there seated himself mechanically. His face thus was turned toward the windows that gave on the corridor, and his eyes grew yet more clouded as they rested on the grim doors of the cells. He writhed in his chair and his gaze jumped from the cells to the impassive figure of the man at the desk. Now the forger's nervousness increased momently—it swept beyond his control. Of a sudden he sprang up and stepped close to the inspector.

"Say," he said, in a husky voice, "I'd like—I'd like to have a lawyer."

"What's the matter with you, Joe?" the inspector returned, always with that imperturable air, and without raising his head from the work that so engrossed his attention. "You know you're not arrested, Joe. Maybe you never will be. Now, for the love of Mike, keep still and let me finish this letter."

Slowly, very hesitatingly, Garson went back to the chair and sank down on it in a limp attitude of dejection wholly unlike his customary postures of strength. Again his fear fascinated eyes went to the row of cells that stood silently menacing on the other side of the corridor beyond the windows. His face was tinged with gray. A physical sickness was creeping stealthily on him, as his thoughts held insistently to the catastrophe that threatened. His intelligence was too keen to permit a belief that Burke's manner of almost fulsome kindliness hid nothing ominous—ominous with a hint of death for him in return for the death he had wrought.

Then terror crystallized. His eyes were caught by a figure, the figure of Cassidy, advancing there in the corridor. And with the detective went a man whose gait was slinking, craven. A cell door swung open, the prisoner stepped within, the door clanged to, the bolts shot into their sockets noisily.

Garson sat huddled, stricken—for he had recognized the victim thrust into the cell before his eyes. . . . It was Dacey, one of his own cronies in crime—Dacey, who the night before had seen him kill Eddie Griggs. There was something concretely sinister to Garson in this fact of Dacey's presence there in the cell.

Of a sudden the forger cried out raucously:

"Say, inspector, if you've got anything on me, I—I would—" The cry dropped into unintelligible mumblings.

Burke retained his manner of serene indifference to the other's agitation. Still his pen hurried over the paper, and he did not trouble to look up as he expostulated, half banteringly.

"Now, now! What's the matter with you, Joe? I told you that I wanted to ask you a few questions. That's all."

Garson leaped to his feet again resolutely, then faltered, and ultimately fell back into the chair with a groan as the inspector went on speaking.

"Now, Joe, sit down and keep still, I tell you, and let me get through with this job. It won't take me more than a minute more."

But after a moment Garson's emotion forced him to another appeal.

"Say, inspector—" he began.

Then abruptly he was silent, his mouth still open to utter the words that were now held back by horror. Again he saw the detective walking forward, out there in the corridor. And with him, as before, was a second figure, which advanced slinkingly. Garson leaned forward in his chair, his head thrust out, watching in rigid suspense. Again, even as before, the door swung wide, the prisoner slipped within, the door clanged shut, the bolts clattered noisily into their sockets.

And in the watcher terror grew—for he had seen the face of Chicago Red, another of his pals, another who had seen him kill Griggs. For a time that seemed to him long ages of misery, Garson sat staring dazedly at the closed doors of the tier of cells. The peril about him was growing—growing, and it was a deadly peril! At last he licked his dry lips and his voice broke in a throaty whisper.

"Say, inspector, if you've got anything against me, why—"

"Who said there was anything against you, Joe?" Burke rejoined, in a voice that was genially chiding. "What's the matter with you today, Joe? You seem nervous." Still the official kept on with his writing.

"No, I ain't nervous," Garson cried, with a feverish effort to appear calm. "Why, what makes you think that? But this ain't exactly the place you'd pick out as a pleasant one to spend the morning." He was silent for a little, trying with all his strength to regain his self control, but with small success.

"Could I ask you a question?" he demanded, finally, with more firmness in his voice.

"What is it?" Burke said.

Garson cleared his throat with difficulty and his voice was thick.

"I was just going to say," he began. Then he hesitated and was silent, at a loss.

"Well, what is it, Joe?" the inspector prompted.

"I was going to say—that is—well, if it's anything about Mary Turner, I don't know a thing—not a thing!"

It was the thought of possible peril to her that now, in an instant, had caused him to forget his own mortal danger. Where, before, he had been shuddering over thoughts of the death house cell that might be awaiting him, he now had concern only for the safety of the woman he cherished. And there was a great grief in his soul; for it was borne in upon him that his own folly, in disobedience to her command, had led up to the murder of Griggs—and to all that might come of the crime. How could he ever make amends to her? At least he could be brave here for her sake, if not for his own.

Burke believed that his opportunity was come.

"What made you think I wanted to know anything about her?" he questioned.

"Oh, I can't exactly say," Garson replied carelessly, in an attempt to dissimulate his agitation. "You were up to the house, you know. Don't you see?"

"I did want to see her, that's a fact," Burke admitted. He had kept on with his writing, his head bent low. "But she wasn't at her flat. I guess she must have taken my advice and skipped out. Clever girl, that!"

Garson contrived to present an aspect of comparative indifference.

"Yes," he agreed. "I was thinking of going west, myself," he ventured.

"Oh, were you?" Burke exclaimed; and now there was a new note in his voice. His hand slipped into the pocket where was the pistol, and clutched it. He stared at Garson fiercely, and spoke with a rush of the words:

"Why did you kill Eddie Griggs?"

"I didn't kill him!" The reply was quick enough, but it came weakly. Again Garson was forced to wet his lips with a dry tongue and to swallow painfully. "I tell you I didn't kill him!" he repeated at last, with more force.

Burke sneered his disbelief.

"You killed him last night—with this!" he cried, viciously. On the instant the pistol leaped into view, pointed straight at Garson. "Why?" the inspector shouted. "Come on, now! Why?"

"I didn't, I tell you!" Garson was growing stronger, since at last the crisis was upon him. He got to his feet with lithe swiftness of movement and sprang close to the desk. He bent his head forward challengingly to meet the glare of his accuser's eyes. There was no flinching in his own steely stare. His nerves had ceased their jangling under the tautening of necessity.

"You did!" Burke vociferated. He put his whole will into the assertion of guilt, to batter down the man's resistance. "You did, I tell you! You did!"

"And I tell you I didn't!"

There passed many seconds, while the two men battled in silence, will warring against will. . . . In the end it was the murderer who triumphed.

Suddenly Burke dropped his pistol into his pocket and lolled back in his chair. His gaze fell away from the man confronting him. In the same instant the rigidity of Garson's form relaxed and he straightened slowly. A tide of secret joy swept through him as he realized his victory. But his outward expression remained unchanged.

"Oh, well," Burke exclaimed amiably, "I didn't really think you did, but I wasn't sure, so I had to take a chance. You understand, don't you, Joe?"

"Sure, I understand," Garson replied, with an amiability equal to the inspector's own.

Burke's manner continued very amicably as he went on speaking.

"You see, Joe, anyhow, we've got the right party safe enough. You can bet on that!"

Garson resisted the lure.

"If you don't want me—" he began suggestively, and he turned toward the door to the outer hall. "Why, if you don't want me, I'll—get along."

"Oh, what's the hurry, Joe?" Burke retorted, with the effect of stopping the other short. He pressed the buzzer as the agreed signal to Cassidy. "Where did you say Mary Turner was last night?"

At the question all Garson's fears for the woman rushed back on him with appalling force. Of what avail his safety, if she were still in peril?

Continued Tomorrow

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DEEP BREATHING

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