

The Strange Case of MARY PAGE

The Great McClure Mystery Story. Written by **FREDERICK LEWIS** In Collaboration With **JOHN T. M'INTYRE**, Author of the Ashton Kirk Detective Stories. Read the Story and See the Essanay Moving Pictures

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SYNOPSIS.

Mary Page, actress, is accused of the murder of James Pollock and is defended by her lover, Philip Langdon. Pollock was intoxicated. At Mary's trial she admits she had the revolver. Her maid testifies that Mary threatened Pollock with it previously, and Mary's leading man implicates Langdon. How Mary disappeared from the scene of the crime is a mystery. Brandon tells of a strange hand print he saw on Mary's shoulder. Further evidence shows that horror of drink produces temporary insanity in Mary. The defense is "repressed psychosis." Witnesses described Mary's flight from her intoxicated father and her father's suicide. Nurse Walton describes the kidnaping of Mary by Pollock, and Amy Barton tells of Mary's struggles to become an actress and of Pollock's pursuit of her.

AMY'S STELLAR ROLE

NATURE had intended Amy Barton to be a great actress. Emotional roles of any sort would have sat absurdly upon her slender shoulders, but in the part of the insouciant ingenue she never failed to score.

She was the quaint blending which modern life has evolved, of an old-fashioned small town upbringing, veneered with a bright crust of bravado born of battling for her living in a city brimming with temptations, but she had never lost her gay defiance nor had she lost the cornerstones of her simple creed. "Be decent, loyal to your friends and don't go around with a grouch."

Her gaiety was infectious, and as she tripped up the two steps to the witness-chair she nodded a familiar greeting to the judge and smiled at the jury.

"Miss Barton," said Langdon, "you have told us of the experience with Mr. Pollock that led to your sudden resignation from 'The Blue Feather' company. Did you see him at any time after that?"

"See him again?" she retorted. "Why, that man was a regular epidemic!" A delighted giggle greeted the words, emanating from the jury-box itself. "We bumped into him the day we landed our first real job for the road."

"We were on our way to the Prentiss Agency. We'd been there before and they'd handed us the 'call again' sign, so we were playing a return date though we hadn't much hopes. Old Miss Prentiss is such a sour old maid she'd never hand anybody a job if she could get her commissions any other way, but she has the inside with some of the good managers and you can't overlook any bets in the show business. So we went back, and while we were going down the hall Mary looked so blue that I had to play Little Sunshine with much business of 'I've-a-hunch-that-we'll-land-today'-totry and make her smile and look pretty for any possible manager. That's why we didn't see James Pollock till we fairly bumped into him, and he made a grab for Mary's hand."

"Then he began to spill out an apology. He said he'd been searching every theatrical agency and every theatre in town looking for Mary. 'I've been wretched, Mary,' he said. 'I think I must have been crazy that night at the "Blue Feather." I was jealous and angry and hurt besides, and I lost my head. Won't you forgive me? I'm not going to bother you any more."



"Your honor and gentlemen of the jury."

but I can't live without your forgiveness." By that time Mary had got the power of speech back and she jerked her hand away from his as if it burnt. "I am perfectly willing to forgive you," she said, "and accept your apology, but I do not care to continue my acquaintance with you."

"Did you and Miss Page secure positions in that new company?" "Yes. The minute the manager spotted Mary, he picked her for the lead because she was the proper type, and Mary, the darling, said she couldn't take the job unless I went along too. So he handed me an ingenue role with about ten sides and twenty-five beans as salary. Mary's was to be featured in the play which had the giddy moniker of 'A Woman's Pledge.'"

"May it please the court," broke in the prosecutor, getting lazily to his feet, "all this is no doubt very interesting—delightful, in fact, and might prove of great help to us if we had stage aspirations. But," (with a sudden change of tone) "we are here to decide the guilt or innocence of Mary Page, whom the State declares has murdered James Pollock. I fall to see, your Honor, where the somewhat rambling fable in slang which the witness is telling has any bearing upon this case."

"Your Honor, and gentlemen of the jury," Langdon's voice rose before the words of the prosecutor had died away, "the story which the witness is telling has everything to do with the question of the murder of James Pollock. It will show how again and again he forced his attentions upon Miss Page, and of the horror in which she held him; and of the almost inevitable mental collapse that followed his brutal efforts to make her marry him. If I have allowed the witness to tell the story in her own way, it is simply that I wish to bring before you the picture of these two young girls, so brave and hopeful, and hard working, whose positions and good character were attacked by James Pollock."

For a moment the judge hesitated, and the court held its breath—aggressive, even antagonistic at the mere thought of losing the gay little witness who was looking from the judge to Langdon with such childishly startled eyes. Then his Honor said slowly:

"I cannot sustain your objection to the testimony as irrelevant, sir. I consider all that has a bearing upon the curious relations existing between Mr. Pollock and Miss Page as of paramount importance. At the same time," he added, turning to Langdon, "I would suggest that you instruct your witness to confine her testimony to mere statements of fact."

The entire courtroom, not excepting the jury, heaved a sigh of relief, and Langdon's face showed a flush of triumph as he asked:

"How long did your engagement in 'A Woman's Pledge' last, Miss Barton?"

"Six weeks, but we only got salary for four." "Where did the tour end?" "It didn't end. It blew up in a one-tank rube town called Prindleville. It was one of those towns that have the railroad station on one side of Main Street, the hotel and 'Opry' house at the other and the rest of the buildings scattered about wherever they happened to drop."

Again a gust of laughter lifted through the dingy room, but Langdon frowned and shook his head at Amy.

"Never mind descriptions," he said more sharply than he had spoken so far. Amy, far from being awed by his sternness, pouted at him with a gay little moue and went on with her story in her own fashion.

"We were all feeling pretty grouchy when we hit Prindleville, because the ghost hadn't walked for a month, and nobody knew whether we'd ever get back to New York or not."

"Did you give the performance that night?" broke in Langdon impatiently.

"Well, we started to, but it never got beyond the ticket-taking stage, for the sheriff blew in with a badge as big as a saucer and said that he'd been ordered to hold all our trunks and props for unpaid board bills in the last four towns, and that meant that we were stranded with Broadway doing the Sheridan act many miles away. We went back to the hotel and said what we thought of the producer and tried to borrow carfare from the hotel proprietor. That was when we saw James Pollock again. He arrived in town by the last train, and walked into the lobby while we were there. He came over and said he was going through the town on a business trip, and seeing Mary's name on an eight sheet—you know—big poster—he had jumped off on impulse. He said he was awfully sorry that the tour had ended so unfortunately, and begged her to let him arrange for our return to New York."

"Did Miss Page accept?" "No. She refused absolutely. She—she looked as if she would scream if he touched her. She held onto my arm so tight it made a black-and-blue spot, and you could see the pulse in her throat jumping the way it does before a woman dissolves into hysterics. The proprietor of the place was a decent old Rube with a fatherly eye and soft heart that wore the make-up

of a grouch, and when Mary offered him a ring that had been her mother's, as a pledge for our board, he kind of gulped and handed over the key to our room without a word."

"You say 'our room'. That means that you remained with Miss Page?"

"Why, of course," she said in obvious surprise. "You don't suppose I'd go back on Mary, do you? We went upstairs and had a little cry," she said whimsically, a fortive double show, as she spoke. "Then, having powdered our noses and cheered up, I left Mary resting while I went to the head of the stairs to see what was doing in the office, and what had happened to the rest of the bunch."

"Could you see those in the office from the stairway?"

"Triadly, by going down to the first landing and looking through the banisters."

"Was the rest of the company still there?"

"Yes."

"Was Mr. Pollock with them?"

"Yes; he was playing a leading role and making a speech."

"Could you hear what he said?"

"Sure! Of course I missed the first part of it, but when I got to the landing he was saying, 'I have always taken a great interest in the theatre, and can thoroughly sympathize with your predicament.' Then he pulled a time-table out of his pocket and tapped it, saying, 'The New York train goes through in six minutes. It can be flagged to take you aboard and I'll pay your fares to New York and settle the claims of the sheriff—for no reason except that I don't want to see you stranded.' At that the company set up



"She looked as if she would scream if he touched her."

a cheer and beat it like crazy people for their suit-cases, and Mr. Pollock pulled out a great wad of bills and began peeling them off for everybody, including the sheriff himself."

"What did you do then?"

"I ran back and told Mary, but we could see through his game. It was a case of either accept his help or be stranded and walk the ties."

"What did Miss Page say?"

"She said, 'You go, Amy, because you want to get back, but I'll walk every step of the way and earn my food by scrubbing before I'll accept a penny of James Pollock's money or give him a chance to speak to me again.'"

"Did you agree to go?"

"No. I said that burrs weren't in it with me when it came to stickin', and if there was going to be any walking or scrubbing I would be on the job to do my share. That Mary and I were pals—and we'd take what was coming together. Well, anybody would have stuck by Mary. She—she's the best ever."

"Did Mr. Pollock leave with the company?" asked Langdon, a warning note in his voice, and with a little start she turned back to him.

"No. We thought he had gone, but after the train had pulled out I looked out of the window and saw him coming back to the hotel—grinning."

"Did you tell Miss Page?"

"No. I thought it was better for her to think he was gone, so that she would get a good night's sleep. Afterward I wished I had told her."

"Why?"

"Because it was such an awful shock to her when he came to our door in the morning."

"Will you tell us the circumstances of that meeting, please?"

"Well, Mary and I were both dressed and ready for breakfast, and we were talking over the chances of getting some sort of work to do in the town till we could get word home to mother to send us car fare. It costs quite a lot from Prindleville to the big town, and we knew it might be days before the old lady could raise it, and we had to eat in the meantime. While we were still talking we heard a knock at the door, and thinking it was the chambermaid or maybe the proprietor Mary

stings out, 'Come in.' And at that James Pollock opened the door."

"What did Miss Page do?"

"She screamed and turning, hid her face against my shoulder for a moment. Then she stood up and faced him. 'How dare you come here?' she asked, and he had the decency to look pretty foolish. 'I dare because I am worried about you,' he said. 'I can't go and leave you stranded here; you've got to let me help you.' 'I shall never accept your help,' cried Mary, and I could tell by her voice that she was pretty close to tears, so I stepped forward and said, 'Look here, James Pollock, it's a pretty mean trick for any man to persecute a girl, the way you're persecuting Mary. Haven't you a shred of decency in your poor little soul? If you have you'll best it—while the going's good.'"

"Did he answer you?"

"Yes. For a minute I thought he was going to hit me. Then he said, 'Miss Page is thoroughly capable of answering for herself, Miss Barton, and I must ask you not to interfere in what does not concern you.' 'Anything that concerns Mary concerns me,' I retorted, but Mary put her hand on my arm, 'Mr. Pollock,' she said, and there was a queer note in her voice. 'I thoroughly agree with what Amy has said—you are persecuting me; you are torturing me—and I cannot bear any more. For God's sake go away and leave us in peace.' At that Mr. Pollock flung out his hands and said honestly, 'Mary—Mary—you can't mean that. Aren't you tired of this poverty and misery? Haven't you had enough of this life? One would think to hear you that I was some brute pursuing you, when all I ask is to honorably marry you and protect you from hardships.' 'Honorable!' cried Mary. 'Do you call it honorable to assist the others because you knew it would leave us stranded and helpless? Is it honorable to force yourself upon us in this fashion? Is it honorable to persecute me, when I've told you over and over that I'll drudge all my life and wear my fingers to the bone with work before I will marry you? Then she burst into tears, and I ordered Mr. Pollock out of the room, saying that he'd gotten his answer and he might as well go."

"Did he leave?"

"No—but it didn't matter, because just then the door opened and the good old pink that ran the place came in. He said he'd heard enough of what was said to realize that we girls needed some help and advice, and suggested that since Mr. Pollock seemed determined to stay there, that we might go down to his office. He handed us each a job as biscuit-slingers in the dining-room. Mary was to administer the table d'hote to the regular and I was to be on the job with the transients—and SOME transients they were, too! Of course Mary made a bit right off."

"It's a good thing, your Honor, that they don't leave any cold poison lying around in rube hotels, because the first customer I got was James Pollock! I did stick my finger in the oatmeal I was taking him and say, 'I hope you choke' three times, but it didn't work."

Again her bubbling laugh rippled out, followed by a guffaw of delight from the listeners, but as if it were a signal, the prosecutor leaped to his feet.

"Your Honor," he stormed, "I object to the testimony of this witness being admitted as evidence! Is this a courtroom or a burlesque show? And is my learned opponent revealing to us the gay life of Miss Barton or evidence dealing with the murder of James Pollock?"

"May it please the court," retorted Langdon, "the events which took place in Prindleville had a very definite effect upon the relations between James Pollock and the defendant. I crave the patience of your Honor and the gentlemen of the jury with the witness—who is—er—not exactly conversant with the legal brevity demanded by law."

"I think," said his Honor, the ghost of a smile still twitching at his lips, "that the witness may go on with her story. But," he added, leaning forward with an admonishing gesture towards Amy, "you must remember, Miss Barton, that you are here not to amuse us, but to answer as briefly as possible the questions put to you by counsel for the defence."

"How long did you remain at the hotel in Prindleville as a waitress?"

"About three weeks."

"Did Mr. Pollock remain there during that time?"

"Yes."

"Did he speak to you at any time?"

"Well, he had to speak to me, but he limited it to, 'Two boiled eggs and dry toast,' or 'Gimme roast chicken and mashed potatoes,' but with Mary it was different. He didn't speak to her, but he never let her get out of his sight if he could avoid it. He used to sit in the hall where he could watch her in the dining-room, and if she went out for a breath of air, he always followed her. It got on her nerves so she used to cry half the night, and say she would go crazy if he didn't go away."

"Miss Barton, you say that you remained at the hotel about three weeks. Why did you leave at the end of that time?"

"Because of the behavior of some of the men who came to the place."

"What do you mean by their behavior?"

"Their—their—freshness," she said, flushing a little. "You see, when we first went to work, they were all very decent, especially to Mary, and everything was fine. Then they—they seemed to change even to me. Finally something the landlady said put me wise to the fact that our characters weren't worth a two-cent stamp in Prindleville. I didn't want Mary to know, so I kept quiet till the day when the guy that always came for lunch got fresh and tried to kiss her. The landlady had just told me that her 'regular girls' were objecting to

work with us, because of our bad characters, when the door of the dining-room banged open and Mary, taking her apron off as she went, ran past us and up the stairs. The landlady called her, but she never even looked around, so I started after her. Just as I did so a cheap, flashy guy who was a regular boarder came out of the dining-room, looking sheepish and with one cheek bright red and the other very pale. I've seen a good smack make that kind of a complexion before, so I kind of waited around to see what he would do."

"Did he leave the hotel?"

"No. He walked out into the office and across to where James Pollock was sitting and dung himself into a chair



"Their—their—freshness."

beside him. He ripped out a good round oath or two; then he said, 'Say, look here, from what you told me, that Mary Page is no better than she should be, but crickey, she swung a right onto my jaw that jarred my brains in there, just because I tried to give her a little kiss—and offered to take her to the movies.'"

"Did Mr. Pollock reply?"

"No. First he looked as if he was going to land the clump one himself, then he laughed as if he was satisfied with something, and I ran up stairs to Mary. She was crying, and packing her grip. She said that for the last two or three days she had noticed a decided difference in the attitude of the men towards her; and that at noon one of them had insulted her and she had slapped his face. The worst of it was, she said, the man said that he had been told that she wasn't so particular with others, and was notorious where she came from. When we went downstairs with our suit-cases in our hands the proprietor's wife was giving him an

earful of what she had heard about us, of how bad we were and all the rest, and Mr. Pollock was sitting there taking it all in, but pretending to read. He jumped up when we came in sight, however, and started to speak, but we pushed by him and I walked right up to the proprietor and said, 'Look here—you've been pretty white to us, but somebody is spreading a lot of lies around here, and we're going to quit P. D. Q., and we'd like whatever of the long green is coming to us after our room rent is paid.' The old guy, seeing Mr. Pollock was listening, said we'd better all go into the dining-room to settle it; but Mr. Pollock followed us in, and said that as he was a friend of ours, that he had heard that there were a good many rumors about Mary's past, and that of course no actress could expect to have any reputation, as everybody knew what road companies were. Then he grabbed Mary's hands, saying, 'I at least care nothing about gossip. Knowing Miss Page, I have repeatedly offered to marry her and now—now I ask again, Mary, you can kill this slander in a minute by marrying me! That wised me to his game all right, but before I could tell her, she had dragged her hands away from him with a scream and backed against the wall, staring at us as if—as if—she was—crazy. I called out 'Mary! Mary!' but she didn't seem to hear me. She just kept staring at Mr. Pollock."

"Was he much excited?" snapped Langdon.

"Yes, but he was half drunk, too. He'd been drinking a lot all day, and it showed plainly on him. It was that, I guess, that made him act like a fool and try to catch her in his arms, crying that there was nothing ahead of her but disgrace and disaster unless she married him."

"Did she reply?"

"No—she didn't answer. She struck at him—twice—then she screamed and ran out—and across the street to the railroad. We—we followed as quickly as we could, and then—" she choked, and her hand went waveringly to her throat, as if the words would not come—and then—we saw the man waving his flag and knew the train from New York was coming in. I—think I went crazy myself for a minute. I screamed and screamed and I heard Pollock screaming too, and we ran like mad—but we couldn't catch her—only—thank God—the man with the danger flag saw her and stopped her just in time!"

"Did she fight against capture?"

"No. She just fainted dead off in his arms, and when we got to her, he had carried her over and laid her on the platform. It was then that I saw Mr. Langdon. He had just gotten off the train, and when he saw the crowd and Mary lying there, he turned white as a sheet and came running over. But I told him that she had only fainted and he'd better carry her over to the hotel."

"Was Miss Page conscious when you reached the hotel?"

"No. But after she had been laid on the sofa in the parlor and the landlady had bathed her forehead a while she opened her eyes and smiled at us, and the old woman, who was a good

son, at heart, drove us all out, saying that Mary needed rest."

"Was Mr. Pollock in the hotel at that time?"

"Yes. He was at the parlor door, but when we came out he kind of edged away and stood scowling at us. Then I told Mr. Langdon that I believed he had been spreading slander against Mary all through the town and had driven her half insane so that she had attempted to end it all by flinging herself in front of the train. Mr. Langdon started to tell me something then, but before he could get a word out, the landlady came to the parlor door and said Mary wanted me. Mr. Langdon went in with me. When Mary saw him, she just gave one cry, and came running to him, like a kid that's been scared in the dark and sees it's mother coming with a lamp. But when she saw Mr. Pollock pushing his way in with some of the others, she turned kind of white again, and Mr. Langdon, turning to see what had started her, got a glimpse of him. At that he suddenly pulled a bunch of papers out of his pocket, and marching up to Mr. Pollock said, loud enough for all of us to hear: 'Through certain investigations which I made in New York, James Pollock, I have discovered that you are the biggest scoundrel unhung! I have actual proof that you backed 'A Woman's Pledge' Company, and allowed it to strand in order to leave Mary Page penniless and alone in a strange town; and what is more, curse you, I believe you yourself spread the lies that have been told about her!'"

"Did Mr. Pollock deny these accusations?"

"He started to, but apparently changed his mind and didn't say a word. But the good old Rube proprietor did. He jumped up and shook his fist under Mr. Pollock's nose and shouted, 'You scoundrel! I've had my doubts about you for some time. Now I know—and you get out of my hotel—and get quick! This town is no place for hounds that persecute women and slander 'em, and if you don't want some rough handling you'd better get away before word of this dirty work gets around.' At that Mr. Pollock turns about like a dog that's had a licking and slunk out and Mr. Langdon laughed and said, 'There's a train home in twenty minutes, and we're going to catch it!'"

"That is all, Miss Barton," said Langdon, but his tone was thoughtful, and when the prosecutor waived cross examination, and the judge adjourned court, he showed obvious relief. He followed Amy into the witness room, drew her aside and asked:

"Amy, have you seen anything of Daniels lately?"

"Why, sure," she answered. "I saw him yesterday, and, say, he looks about the sickest thing I ever saw in the show business. Honest, I felt sorry for him."

"Well, you may feel even more sorry for him, before long," muttered Langdon, and hurrying out through the now gloomy corridors he passed through the clanging door and down into the cells. At a word to the turnkey he was admitted to the narrow room where Mary lay flung across the narrow bed. Stooping over her he whispered softly:

"Mary—my dear—"

"Oh, Philip," she sobbed, turning and clinging to him. "It—it's like living all the horrors over again to go through this day by day. Is it worth while? Will it help any?"

"Help? Why, dear, I'm more hopeful tonight than I've been since the beginning," he cried cheerily. "And what's more, I believe I've got a line on a new cue—that will work up well."

"Oh, what?" she cried, sitting up and smiling at him rainbow-wise through

the tears that begemmed her lashes; and Langdon, holding her hands against his lips, said softly:

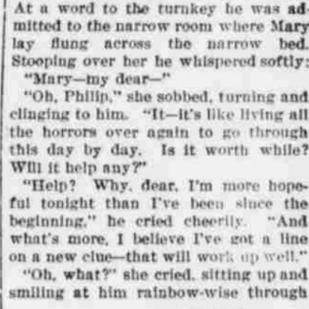
"Dearest, you know that long after he deliberately planned to strand you, Pollock also backed Daniels to star you. I'm going to summon Daniels and make him explain their exact association, and then I think—the end will be in sight. Just be brave a little longer—and trust me."

"Oh, I do—I do," she whispered; and when he left her she followed him to the door and, thrusting her slender hands between the bars, caught his and said in a voice that thrilled with sweetness:

"Philip, dear—I am hopeful—and I am brave—don't forget that—and please go home tonight—remembering that I was smiling when I said goodbye."

But Philip, burying his face in the slender palms, could not see the bravely sweet smile because of the scalding tears that burned his eyelids, as he hurried down the echoing corridor.

(To be continued.)



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