

THE STANDING ALISI OF H. STANLEIGH STORME

(By Wm. Hamilton Osborne.) (Continued)

some up here? "I know you did," replied Burke. "an' he came back an' he's in the pouverneur over there, an' don't you forget it." The other glanced at him, doubtfully. "Oh, that's it, is it?" he returned. "I didn't know. I only know I saw him—that's all—an' I wondered at the time where you was." Burke and the two men vanished into thin air. Once more the street became deserted. Dusk had come on—it was growing darker very moment. At a quarter to eight a man clad in a dress suit and a light overcoat emerged from the apartment house and sauntered down the street. In front of a house with an English basement stood an electric street lamp. He passed this, and the light shone full on his face. When he reached the corner he glanced up and down and behind him for an instant, and then, breaking into a fast walk, made for the west end of town. He had no sooner done so than a man emerged from the basement, another from an alleyway across the street, and a third from a recess around the corner. Without the slightest recognition of each other, they turned in and followed the man in the light coat, each man in his own way. Down at headquarters late that afternoon the sergeant called to a special officer. The officer hurried in. "Say, Flynn," he remarked, "look here. There's the man the banks want us to keep tab on. See him! The fellow with the slouch hat? Yes, that's the chap." "Now, look here, Burke is after him, but there ain't o signs of Burke around. He's slipped a cog somehow. S'pose you turn in and follow the fellow. The banks are standing behind us, and they're paying good money to keep track of this man, and it ain't our business to lose him. S'pose you reckon him up a bit." The officer nodded and started off. He kept his man in sight. It was difficult work, not only because his man was a rapid walker and swerved in and out of different thoroughfares with rapidity, but also because he kept constantly looking around behind him. Storme—for it was he—knew that he was being followed, and though he was the shadowed, he also was the shadower, for he kept his eye on his pursuer quite as faithfully as did the officer keep track of him. The afternoon passed and evening came, but still on and on walked Storme. They reached a residential portion of the town. Suddenly Storme turned swiftly down a dark, narrow street, and when his pursuer reached the corner, Storme had disappeared. Search as he would, there was no trace of the man. The special devoted some ten minutes to a fruitless search, and then retraced his steps to the corner whence Storme had disappeared. As he stood there, nonplussed, a man suddenly touched him on the back of the hand. The special knew the touch. He said nothing, but followed the man to a dark recess. "Well, Burke," he remarked, "what're you doin' here? I've been followin' your man all the evening, an' by George, I just lost him!" "At man?" demanded Burke. "Aw," returned the other, "you know, that fellow Storme." "Gee!" returned Burke, "have they put you on, too? Well, by George, with the crowd we've got, there ain't anything he can do without our seein' it. It's a blame good thing we got him in tow, too. Only we got considerable of a wait before us before he comes out." "Comes out where?" exclaimed the other man. "Why," replied Burke, "he's making a visit in that brownstone down there, No. 219, the one with the grounds at the side. Thou' you know that." "Knew that!" said the other. "Why, I jus' had him in tow ten minutes ago, an' lost him. So that's where he is, is it? I didn't know what became of him." "Sure," replied Burke, "he's been there an' hour already. It's about time he cut it and left, I'm thinkin'." The other man started. "An hour?" he repeated. "What you givin' us? I saw him on this here street not fifteen minutes gone. You're nutty, Burke, or else, he went on with a smile, "or else you

lost him, too. Come on, own up. You're givin' me a bit of a stiff, I guess." "Bit of a stiff, nothin'," retorted Burke. "I tell you, he's in there, all right, all right. I got a couple of men there watchin' the place. When he comes out they'll give me a flash of light. He's in there, all right." "Look here, Burke," went on the other, "I bet you he ain't. I tell you I saw him go around the corner. I know what I'm talking about." Burke looked at the special long and earnestly. "It might be," he admitted "that he gave us the slip again. I'll tell you we might as well be sure. You're a new man here. S'pose you do the leery act and go there an' find out. We'd better know, you know." Three minutes later the bell rang at the Dumont house. The maid answered it. A tough looking character with his coat collar turned up stood at the door. "Say, miss," he remarked confidentially, with a slight lurch in his direction, "want to see Mist' Dumont—old Mist' Dumont, y' know." He hiccupped slightly as he said it. The maid started back and called into the library. A man's voice was heard inside. "Wait a minute," it said, "I'll attend to the fellow." The owner of the voice stopped in the hall. The man who rang the bell stayed outside. "What do you want?" inquired the former. "Want to see Mist' Dumont (hic)—old Mist' Dumont." The man inside shook his head. "Mr. Dumont," he returned, "is no longer alive. He died about five years ago. So you can't see him. What is it you want?" He stepped back and turned up the light to its full strength. Both men could see each other perfectly. "Well," returned the other, sadly, as he shook his head, "want to see Mist' Dumont, that's all. 'Fo's dead, don't want see nobody." He turned and made his way unsteadily down the steps. "Goo' nigh," he called out. He looked back once or twice uncertainly and the man within held the door open until the other had made his way to the street. And as he held the door open, he stood so that light from the hall fell full upon his face. And the face was that of H. Stanleigh Storme—the man whom the other sought. An hour later, the door opened again, and Storme again appeared. He lightly descended the steps to the street, looked carelessly about him, and then started leisurely towards the center of the town. As he did so, four men emerged from their hiding places and followed him. And this time they never left his heels until he disappeared once more into the front door of the Gouverneur apartments. And when he had done so, Burke and one other sat down and camped upon his trail. And on that night the safe in the hardware concern of Canda & Willett was cracked, and something over seven thousand dollars stolen. CHAPTER VIII The Note that Came from Storme Helena Dumont was a peculiar young woman. She was rich, and yet she was happy. Her parents, both of them members of the most exclusive set in town, were long since deceased. She was mistress of her own house, and kept with her as a companion an aged aunt. Miss Dumont was a general favorite. Perhaps it was because she enjoyed life; because, unlike the crowd around her, she exhausted all that was good in existence, and rejected the bad. She entertained—not lavishly, but well. On her reception nights her house was crowded. It was the one place where one might go and feel at ease. Storme had never attended any of the functions except one large reception. He had pleaded some excuse. But she prevailed upon him to attend the last little dinner of the season. He did so. There were two or three people there he knew, but most of them he did not know. The dinner was about half over. People had begun to talk volubly, as they always do, once the ice is broken and their appetite has somewhat abated. Storme said but little; he listened. "It's absurd," one man was saying.

The police department say they can't stop it. Stop it? Of course they can stop it. They don't half try. "Here's Canda & Willett's the fifteenth on the list. And who knows how many never come to light? And it's the same fellow, by George, and he works in the safe some way every time. And they say they can't find him. Fehaw! Don't tell me." "Well," volunteered another, "the banks say they've got several parties under surveillance, and they claim they've narrowed it down to one man—and then again, they say that that's all tommyrot, that they haven't found him, after all." "I don't know what to make of it," remarked a woman, "and I wouldn't care so much if they'd confine their depredations to the banks; but they don't. Did any of you hear about Mrs. Bradley-Coates? Did you, Mr. Storme?" Storme shook his head. "I rarely read the papers," he replied with some embarrassment, "and I—I really have heard but little about anything of interest in the city. My time is so taken up that I have but little to give the newspapers." He said this in an awkward, stilted sort of manner, and as though he were trying to give an explanation he felt was needed. "Oh, it wasn't in the paper," interposed the woman. "They kept it out. But one night just a week or so ago, as Mr. and Mrs. Bradley-Coates were eating dinner in their own house—in their own house, mind you"—this, as though it would have been quite a matter of course had they been in somebody else's house—"while they were eating dinner they heard some sort of a noise outside, and she looked over her husband's shoulder, and there was a man's face staring into the room. "She couldn't see the face well, because his coat collar was turned up and the lower part was entirely concealed. He disappeared at once. They called the servants and raised an alarm, but they couldn't find the man. "And later they found the ivy vine on the side of the house all torn and broken, and the marks of feet around the window, but they never found the man." "Wasn't anything taken?" asked somebody. The woman smiled. She had been waiting for that inquiry. "Nothing much," she replied, "only every bit of jewelry that Mrs. Bradley-Coates had in the house—and you know what that means. You know how much she wore. Nobody knows how much they were worth—certainly a fortune in themselves." She stopped suddenly. "Why—why—Ethel, what's the matter?" They all turned and looked at a pretty girl who sat with wide open mouth and staring eyes, her gaze fixed upon the window. "Oh!" exclaimed the girl, shivering, her face growing paler every second. "I'm so scared. Just as you were talking I looked at the window, and there outside—there—there—there—" She pointed wildly with her hand and then reeled against her neighbor and fainted dead away. Storme sprang to the window, threw it open, and looked out. There was nothing to be seen. Every thing was quiet. Storme and two other men stepped outside and investigated. They found nothing at least suspicious. In the meantime the servants had ransacked the house from top to bottom, and found no one. Miss Dumont's jewels were intact. The dinner was resumed. The girl who had fainted concluded, with the rest, that she had been scared and that the whole thing was the result of her imagination. Order was restored, and the subject of the burglaries dropped. Only one man had the right of the affair, and his conversation on the corner of the street explained it. "By George!" exclaimed Mr. Burke, for it was he. "But I had a narrow escape. Somebody saw me lookin' in the window, and they pretty near nabbed me. That would be 'a' been a good thing." He waited a few minutes to determine whether there was any effort at pursuit, and then went on: "But he's there, all right, all right. He's there, and he won't get away without Jimmy Burke's stern. You can place your bottom dollar on that, Strumpy, to any tune you please." There was a second interruption at the Dumont place. "A note for Mr. Storme," announced the butler. Storme took and read it hastily. Then he looked at his watch. "I—I am called away," he exclaimed. "It's half-past eleven, and I must go. I'm sorry to—" He made his apologies and slipped out. Miss Dumont followed him. "What—what's the matter?" she inquired anxiously. "I don't know," he replied. "I thought tonight that I would be free. Here is the note; you may read it if you will." She started as she looked at it.

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Then she read it. It was as follows: My Dear Storme: Be at the Iroquois Club at 12 o'clock if possible. Some friends of yours will be there between twelve and half past two. Sorry to trouble you, imperative. The note was unsigned. "What does it mean?" she inquired. "I don't know, little girl. It's part of the general scheme of duties I must perform for a while yet, until—until I throw them up altogether." "I am sorry you—you must go," she went on, in a puzzled tone. "So am I, Helen," returned Storme, "and I have to leave you unprotected. These robberies that they talked about tonight are serious, it seems. You must be careful to keep the house locked up. If anything should happen—" He turned pale as he spoke. "If—if anything should happen to you, I don't know what I'd do." She looked up into his eyes with a reassuring smile. "You need not fear for me," she returned. "We are safe here. The coachman can be summoned in an instant, and William, our old butler, sleeps down stairs. One of the maids is on the same floor with me and within calling distance. "My aunt sleeps in the front room, and I sleep in one of the back ones—the one at the corner—" she indicated it with a gesture—"and the street lights shine upon it all night long. Our house is well exposed, and we've never had any trouble, and we never expect to, either. Nothing will happen—nothing at all." Storme bowed. "I sincerely trust not," he said gravely. "You will come tomorrow?" she asked as he prepared to leave. "I will come tomorrow," he replied. And then he went. After he had left she discovered that she had unwillingly retained possession of the note. She threw open the door and called after him, but to no purpose—he had gone. She closed the door and stood uncertainly beneath the light and read the note again. A troubled expression settled upon her face. She remained in an attitude of hesitation for an instant, and then, instead of returning to her guests, she ran lightly up the stairs to her room. It was a singular thing that as long as she had known Storme, Helen Dumont had received from him but two letters. Both had come within the past few weeks. She opened a drawer and took the letters out. She opened them and compared them carefully with the note which had come for Storme that night. Suddenly she gave a little cry—"What does it all mean—what does it mean?" she exclaimed. For she found that the note of tonight was written in the same hand as were the other two—in the handwriting of H. Stanleigh Storme. "What does it mean?" she cried again. And then she went down stairs. CHAPTER IX The Man among the Trees Storme plunged hastily down the front steps, turned to the right and disappeared in the darkness. To three men, however, he did not disappear—they followed him and kept him well in sight. This time he pursued no devious course, but headed straight for the Iroquois Club, which he reached and entered with alacrity. "The three men waited for him outside. They stood where they could see without being seen. Once more they camped upon his trail. Up in the Dumont house the guests were leaving. The fainting spell at the table had cast an air of gloom upon the crowd, and Storme's departure had acted as a sort of signal for the premature termination of the modest festivities. One by one the guests departed and left Miss Dumont alone. Half an hour later the lights on the ground floor were extinguished. Half an hour after that the lights upstairs went out. The whole house was dark. It was a cloudy night, and a sultry one. Helen Dumont did not retire—she lay on her side, sleep, instead, she took a seat by an open window and

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