



The Mystery of the Tower

By Andrew Loring

Author of "Tom King of Nowhere," etc.

A NEW SERIAL STORY

SYNOPSIS.

Motherless Margaret Lee flees from Paris and her keeper, Mrs. Gascoigne, to see her father in London. During the first evening at home, she looks through the father's pet telescope and sees a sight which is the basis of all the events to be narrated. In the first excitement, her father drops dead, and her only friend is Mr. Percy Marshall a chance acquaintance. Mrs. Gascoigne comes to London and a mysterious Mrs. Carlingford, a friend of her father, appears also. The former is easily driven out, but the latter is mistress of the situation. In the meantime Marshall sets out to solve the church tower mystery. He finds the church, gets in and discovers that the telescope tells the truth. His entrance is noted, he escapes cut off, and he climbs down the lightning rod only to be struck senseless. Meanwhile, a woman gains entrance to the Lee home, and while Margaret is asleep, secures a paper from Mr. Lee's private box. When Margaret awakens she takes it for granted that her visitor is Mrs. Carlingford, her father's friend, and gives her her full confidence, including the Mystery of the Tower which Percy Marshall has determined to solve.

"I AM very anxious," answered Margaret. "He did not come; I have not heard from him. I am afraid; I fear anything—everything. I ought to go to the police, I am sure of it; don't you think so?"

"Of course I will go with you if you insist," said Mrs. Carlingford, after a little pause; "but if I were you I should wait till to-morrow, at any rate. I know you won't mind my frankness; but your story is a very strange one. I have looked through the papers this morning; nothing about it there. You run a risk, my dear—a risk of making yourself ridiculous. The police would smile—and do nothing; I am sure of it."

"You don't mean that they wouldn't believe me?" Margaret was indignant at the suggestion.

"I'm afraid that might happen," answered Mrs. Carlingford, gently. "It is almost incredible, you know."

"You are doubtful too?" exclaimed Margaret in a hurt voice, looking reproach.

"My dear, how can I help it?" Mrs. Carlingford laid her hands caressingly on the girl's shoulders. "I don't for an instant doubt that you believe you saw it all; but I'm sure the explanation lies in some trick of the eyesight; some peculiar effect of lightning; some freakish illusion of the senses. Our eyes are not always infallible, you know."

Margaret bit her lip in distress, but she could not resent the words; they were uttered in too kindly a way. Still less could she argue; against blank unbelief, expressed with tenderness and consideration, there was no weapon. It was useless to go on repeating over and over again that what she had seen she had seen.

"But how do you account for Mr. Marshall's silence?" she asked.

"An absolute stranger, remember that, dear. You know nothing about him—Oh, yes!"—the girl had opened her lips in protest—"I know he behaved well, but any gentleman would have done as much. He is young, and you are very pretty—and you were in distress. But to hunt London for a church tower simply on the word of a girl who has had enough trouble to make him suspect hysterics—no, dear, hear me out—this is making a great demand on his chivalry. You are young; you have not had much experience of life; you have met few men. You do not know how they fear ridicule more than anything else in the world, and not even for a beautiful girl will a man run the danger of being laughed at."

"But he promised," cried Margaret, flushing. She could not answer Mrs. Carlingford's arguments; she knew that there was reason on Mrs. Carlingford's side, yet she never wavered. "Mr. Marshall believed my story absolutely. I know I am right about this."

"What could he do but say he believed, my dear? You would have gone to the police, you admit it. He wished to spare you the humiliation of being laughed at; hoped to quiet you until the delusion has passed from your mind."

"I am hysterical, and he—he does not speak the truth. Neither idea is right, Mrs. Carlingford. I believe in my own eyes, and I believe in him." The comment was brusque, but Mrs. Carlingford's patience and tact were disarming.

"I admire you for your trust," she said, smiling, "but take my advice and wait one day longer. You may upset his plans; you may annoy him by making him look foolish. If you are right in believing in him, he has not come because he has nothing to tell you yet. If I am right in thinking he was only putting you off, you will probably hear from him all the same."

"And you will help me about it to-morrow?"

"Yes, if you hear nothing in the meantime I will go to the police with you."

"I will wait."

"I think you are very wise," answered Mrs. Carlingford, patting Margaret's hand, "and I thank you for yielding so nicely. I think only of what is best for you."

"I am sure of that, dear Mrs. Carlingford."

"And now about the future, about to-morrow, and after. You won't want to return here after the funeral, will you?"

"Oh, I should love to leave it all," cried the girl, looking round her with a little shiver, "but I'm tied. Mr. Marshall—"

"Of course, I do not forget him. You needn't go far away. You needn't leave London. We could go somewhere near; somewhere accessible—"

"Yes, let's do that. I've been thinking of it; of what I ought to do. I shivered when I thought of staying here. You say 'we' Mrs. Carlingford; can I really be with you for a little time?"

"Of course, my dear girl. I never thought of anything else. This is a place of horrors for you. It is no proper address for you at any time. You can never live here alone. You must cut it, once and for all. You had better dismiss the servants, shut up the flat, and start quite afresh. May I arrange it all for you?"

AND Margaret was only too glad to acquiesce, with many expressions of sincerely felt thanks.

The dressmaker came to fit on the mourning which had been ordered the day before for the two ladies. This vexatious but inevitable interruption took some time, for Mrs. Carlingford, it seemed to the impatient Margaret, was absurdly particular.

"I cannot help it, dear," she said, when Margaret ventured a protest. "Grief does not excuse a woman for being dowdy. It is always her duty to appear as well as she can."

Mrs. Carlingford's mourning was, of course, not as deep as that of Margaret. She had said it was necessary that she should wear black because she must appear at the funeral.

"Your father," she explained, with a mournful accent, "lived so entirely alone that he has no friend left to follow him to the grave. You and I will be the only ones, my dear, and so I must be suitably dressed."

The long, dreary day passed heavily, but the unrelenting brightness and tact of Mrs. Carlingford helped Margaret to endure the always growing suspense. The night, however, was an unending time of misery. In troubled dreams the anxious girl pictured Percy Marshall in danger, ill, injured. In the restless waking hours, imagination played fantastic tricks more terrible than dreams. The letter which came in the morning was almost a relief, though its contents surprised and wounded her.

"Dear Madam," he wrote, "I regret that pressing engagements have prevented my being able to write to you before. I made some enquiry about

churches, and found one that seemed to answer your description, but there was nothing of a suspicious nature about the tower. I referred the matter to the police, as I thought that would be your desire, but I was not surprised to find that in the absence of substantial grounds for suspicion they were, to put it plainly, only amused at the story. Under these circumstances, it does not seem to me that there is anything further to be done. Extending my sympathy in your bereavement, and regretting that my sudden departure on business must prevent my expressing it in person, I remain, dear madam, yours sincerely.—Percy Marshall."

Margaret re-read the letter, cut to the quick. So Mrs. Carlingford had been right, after all; and men did things like this, and he was just like all other men. She doubly resented the absence of an address. Did he fear that she would make other demands on him? With quick indignation Margaret tore the note into fragments.

When Mrs. Carlingford came the girl simply told her that Mr. Marshall had written to say that he was unable to find the tower, and had left London."

"How fortunate," she cried, "that we waited."

"Yes, it was," said Margaret, slowly.

"I am glad it happened so," continued Mrs. Carlingford. "You are rid of one who might have been a dangerous acquaintance. He has at least the grace to disappear; but he was not kind; he didn't know but that you were still alone. He feared responsibilities and trouble, no doubt."

MARGARET dismissed the subject with a shrug of her shoulders. Brought up in France, under the guarded conditions usual there, Margaret had met few young men. The peculiar circumstances of her meeting with Percy Marshall, his ready tact, his kindness, his never-failing courtesy, and most of all, his veiled yet obvious admiration of herself, had all tended to invest him with almost a halo of romance. This, the second disillusion of her young life, left her proud and silent. She would not admit, even to herself, how disappointed she was.

Mrs. Carlingford watched her from beneath lowered lids. Then, seemingly satisfied with what she saw, she told Margaret of the arrangements she had made as to the funeral, which was to be that day.

"Your father is to be buried in the country," she explained. "He once had local associations with the place, and it is a beautiful spot. I sent a messenger to the Vicar. He is an old friend; and everything is arranged."

"I am pleased that it is in the country; thank you, dear Mrs. Carlingford. What should I have done without you?"

"My dear, don't thank me. I should not be human if I did not do what I could, you poor lonely child. We leave soon. Your trunks, are they ready?"

"All packed."

You are prompt. We will send them away now." The hall porter was summoned, and the luggage was sent on to the cloak room at Euston Station, to be called for later. The servants received liberal payment, and arranged to leave that morning. Mrs. Carlingford seemed to forget nothing. She even gave a sum to the hall porter to pay any forgotten little accounts.

"Did you find any money among your father's things?" she asked; and the question must have been superfluous, for she herself had seen rolls of bills and a box of sovereigns in the case under the bed where the dead man lay.

"Yes, Mrs. Carlingford—a great deal, I thought."

"You must take it. It is not safe to leave it."

Margaret shook her head. "It is in there," she said, pointing, "and I can't take it—not now. I brought enough from Paris."

"As you please, dear. We shall not be coming back for some time, though."

"It must wait," said Margaret, indifferently; and then the undertaker's men came.

"Oh," whispered Margaret, as they drove slowly away, "we ought to have left our address."

"I've told him," answered Mrs. Carlingford; and then they relapsed into a long silence.

Margaret leaned back in the carriage, staring out into the busy streets at the hurrying throngs, who gave a cursory glance at the slowly-moving cortege with its one mourning coach. She felt as if she were in some strange dream, from which she should wake and find herself back in Paris. That she was following the body of her father to its last resting-place seemed fancy; she could not realise it. She had met a strange old man—one whom she had never known, who had talked to her for a short hour, who had died. That was the story of it all to her throbbing brain.

She got mechanically into the train from Pad-