

The Crimson Blind

By FRED M. WHITE

CHAPTER VII.

No. 218, Brunswick Square. The emotion of surprise seemed to have left Steel altogether. After the last discovery he was prepared to believe anything. Had anybody told him that the whole Bench of Bishops was at the bottom of the mystery he would have responded that the suggestion was highly probable.

"Still, it's what the inimitable Dick Swiveller would call a staggerer," he muttered. "Gates, the millionaire, the one great capitalist who has the profound respect of the labor world. No, a man with a record like that couldn't have anything to do with it. Still, it must have been from his house that the mysterious message came. The post office people working the telephone trunk line would know that a fact which probably excited the party who called me up. I'll go to Brunswick square at once, and see what man. Money or no money, I'll not lie under an imputation like this."

There was one thing to be done beforehand, and that was to see Mr. Cross. From the latter's manner he evidently knew nothing of the charge hanging over Steel's head. Marley was evidently keeping that close to himself and speaking to nobody.

"Oh, the man is better," Cross said, cheerfully. "He hasn't been identified yet, though the press has given us every assistance. I fancy the poor fellow is going to recover, though I am afraid it will be a long job."

"He hasn't recovered consciousness, then?"

"No, and neither will he for some time to come. There seems to be a certain pressure on the brain which we are unable to locate, and we dare not try the Rontgen rays yet. So on the whole you are likely to escape with a charge of aggravated assault."

David smiled grimly as he went his way. He walked the whole distance to Howe along North street and the Western road, finally turning down Brunswick square instead of up it, as he had done on the night of the great adventure. He wondered vaguely why he had been specially instructed to approach the house that way.

Here it was at last, 218 Brunswick square—20 above and, of course, 218 below the house. It looked pretty well the same in the daylight, the same floor, the same knocker, and the same crimson blind in the centre of the big bay window. David knocked at the door with a vague feeling of uncertainty as to what he was going to do next.

A very staid, old-fashioned footman answered his ring and inquired his business.

"Can-can I see your mistress?" David stammered.

The staid footman became, if possible, a little more reserved. It is a gentleman would send in his card he would see if Miss Ruth was disengaged. David found himself vaguely wondering what Miss Ruth's surname might be. The old Biblical name was a great favorite of his.

"I'm afraid I haven't a card," he said. "Will you say that Mr. Steel would like to see—Miss Ruth for a few minutes?"—Miss Ruth is exceedingly pressing."

The staid footman led the way into the dining-room. Evidently this was a frivolous house, where giddy but-terflies came and went; such gaudy insects would have been chilled by the solemn decorum of the place. David followed into the dining-room in a nervous kind of way, and with the feeling that comes to us all at times, the sensation of having done and seen the same thing before.

Nothing had been altered. The same staid, handsome, expensive furniture was here, the same mahogany and engravings, the same dull red walls, with the same light stain over the fire place a dull, prosperous, square-toed looking place. The electric fittings looked a little different, but that might have been fancy. It was the identical room. David had run his quarry to earth, and he began to feel a little rising. Doubtless he could scheme some way out of the difficulty and spare his phantom friends at the same time.

"You wanted to see me, sir? Will you be so good as to state your business."

David turned with a start. He saw before him a slight, graceful figure in a lovely, refined face in a frame of the most beautiful hair that he had ever seen. The grey eyes were demure, with just a suggestion of mirth in them; the lips were made for laughter. The electric fittings looked a little different, but that might have been fancy. It was the identical room. David had run his quarry to earth, and he began to feel a little rising. Doubtless he could scheme some way out of the difficulty and spare his phantom friends at the same time.

the table cover, he saw the lurking laughter in her eyes, and the purple black terror dilating the pupils. "I know you quite well by reputation," the girl gasped. Her little hands were pressed to her left side as she checked some deadly pain there.

"Indeed, I may say I have read most of your stories. I—I hope that there is nothing wrong."

Her self-possession and courage were compelled to keep my extraordinary story to myself, for otherwise you would never believe it. Do you or do you not know of my visit here?"

The girl bent her head till Steel could see nothing but the glorious amber of her hair. He could see, too, the fine lace round her throat was tossing like a cork on a stream.

"I can tell you nothing," she said. "Nothing, nothing, nothing."

"It was the voice of one who would have spoken had she dared. With anybody else Steel would have been furiously angry. In the present case he could only admire the deep, almost pathetic, loyalty to somebody who stood behind."

"Are you sure you were in this house?" the girl asked, at length.

"Certainly," David exclaimed. "The walls, the pictures, the furniture—all the same. I could swear to the place anywhere. Miss Gates, if I cannot prove that I was here at the time I name, it is likely to go very hard with me."

"You mean that a certain inconvenience?"

"Inconvenience! Do you call a charge of murder, or manslaughter at best, an inconvenience? Have you not seen the local papers? Don't you know that two nights ago, during my absence from home, a strange man was practically done to death in my conservatory? And during the time of my absence, as sure as heaven is above us, I was in this room."

"I am sorry, but I am sure that you were not."

"But you are going to disappoint me. And yet you know something. You might have been the guiltiest of creatures yourself when I disclosed my identity. No prisoner detected in some foul crime, ever looked more guilty than you."

The girl stood there, saying nothing. Had she rang the bell and ordered the footman to put him out of the house, she would have had time of the complaint. But she did nothing of the kind. She stood there torn by conflicting emotions.

"I can give you no information," she said presently. "But I am as positive one way as you are another that you have never been in this house before. I may surmise things, but as I hope to be judged fairly I can give you no information. I am only a poor, unhappy girl, who is doing what she deems to be best for all parties concerned. And I can tell you nothing, nothing. Oh, won't you believe that I would do anything to serve you if I were only free?"

She held out her hand with an imploring gesture, and her eyes were full of tears. David's warm heart went out to her; he forgot all his own troubles and dangers in his sympathy for the lovely creature in distress.

"Truly say no more about it," he cried. He caught the outstretched hand in his and carried it to his lips. "And there is maple time. Nor am I going to press you. Still, before long you may find some way to give me a clue without sacrificing a lot of your fine loyalty—to well, others. I would not distress you for the world, Miss Gates. Don't you think that this has been the most extraordinary interview you've ever had?"

"Then let us shake hands on the bargain. And now I am going to stagger you; I heard you state positively that two nights ago you were in this very room."

"I am prepared to testify the fact on oath anywhere, my dear Bell."

"Very well; will you be good enough to state the hour?"

"Certainly, I was here from one o'clock—say between one and two."

"And I was here also. From eleven o'clock till two I was in every room working out some calculations at this very table by aid of my reading lamp, no other light being in the room, or even in the house, as far as I know. It is one of my fads—as fools call them—to work in a large, dark room with one brilliant light only. Therefore you could not possibly have been in the house, to say nothing of this room, on the night in question."

David nodded feebly. There was no combating Bell's statement.

"I presume that this is No. 218?" he asked.

"Certainly it is," Miss Gates replied. "We are all agreed about that."

"Because I read the number over the faint light," Steel went on. "And I came here by arrangement. And there was everything as I see it now. Bell, you must prove logically to me that I made a mistake. So far as I am concerned, I am like a child struggling with the alphabet."

"We'll start now," said Bell. "Come along."

Steel rose none too willingly. He would fain have lingered with Ruth. She held out her hand; there was a warm, glad smile on her face.

"You must be successful, certainly," he said, "and I am pretty certain, that Ruth Gates knows a deal about the thing that is touching you. On the other hand, I know nothing on that head. Won't you let me into the secret?"

"I'll tell you part," Steel replied. "And I'll put it pitifully. For mere argument we assume that I am selecting a dress in a dress who lives at No. 218, Brunswick square. We will assume that the conversation leading up to the flatterer selection took place over the telephone. As a matter of fact, I take the telephone. The thing was involved with so much secrecy that I naturally hesitated. I was offered £1,000 for my services; also I was reminded by my master that money that I was in dire need of that money."

"And were you?"

"My dear fellow, I don't fancy that I should have hesitated at burglary to get it. And all I had to do was to get out of a certain difficulty. It all resolved itself round the synopsis of a proposed new story of mine. But I had better go into details."

David proceeded to do so. Bell, with his arm crooked through that of his companion, followed the story with an intelligent and flattering interest.

"Very strange and very fascinating," he said, presently. "I'll think it out in my Western road. Go on."

"Now we come to the point. I had the money, I had that lovely cigar case, and subsequently I had that battered and bleeding specimen of humanity dumped down in the most amazing way in my conservatory. The cigar case lay on the conservatory floor, never—swept off the table when I clutched for the telephone bell to call for the police. When Marley came he showed me the cigar case in my case. At first I said no, because, you see—"

"I see quite plainly. Pray go on."

"Well, I lost that cigar case; I leave it to the offices of Mossa, to whom I pay nearly £1,000 a month to spy on me, takes or sends the case to the police, who advertise it not knowing that it is mine. You will see why they advertise it presently."

"Because it belonged to the injured man, eh?"

David pulled up and regarded his companion with amazement.

"Do you mean to say that you know—"

"Nothing at present, I assure you," Bell said, coolly. "Call it intuition, if you like. I prefer to call it the result of logical mental process. I'm right, of course."

"Of course you are. I'd claimed that case for my own. I had cut my initials inside, as I showed Marley when I went to the police station. And then Marley told me I paid Mossa a sum of nearly £1,000; how the money must have come into my hands in the nick of time. That was pretty bad when I believed for the life of me give a lucid scandal, a prosecution, but for the reason for the possession of those notes; but there was worse to come. In the pocket of the injured man was a receipt for a diamond studded gun metal cigar case, purchased the day of the outrage. And Walden, the jeweller, proved beyond a doubt that the case I claimed was purchased at his shop."

"Be damned gravely."

"Which places you in an exceedingly awkward position," he said.

"A mild way of putting it," David replied. "If that fellow dies the police will have the evidence to hang me. And what is my defence? The story of my visit to No. 218. And who would believe that cock-and-bull story? Fancy a drama like that being played out in the house of such a pillar of respectability as Gilead Gates."

"Isn't his house," said Bell. "He only takes it furnished."

"In anybody else you remark would be puzzled," David said, irritably.

"It's a deeper remark than you are aware of at present," Bell replied. "I quite see your position. Nobody would believe you, of course, but you not go to the police and ask the number of the telephone that called you up from London?"

The question seemed to amuse David slightly. Then his lips were drawn humorously.

"When my logical formula came back I thought of that," he said. "On inquiring as to who it was rang me up on that fatal occasion, I learnt that the number was 007 Kensington and that—"

"Gates' own number at Prince's Gate," Bell exclaimed. "The plot thickens."

"It does, indeed," David said, grimly. "It is Wilkie Collins gone mad, Gaboriau in extremis, Du Toisbois going far from delirium tremens. I go to the police and ask the number of the telephone that called you up from London?"

"I can swear to that I have never been there before; the whole mad expedition was launched by the turning of the handle of the telephone in the telephone office of the East river, a distinguished, trusted, if prosaic, citizen. Somebody gets hold of the synopsis of a story of mine, heaven knows how."

"That is fairly easy. The synopsis was short, and I am supposed to have written it. Only a few lines, say 1,000 words, a sheet of paper. My writing is very small. It was tucked into a halfpenny envelope—a magazine office envelope. The case fits her case, and there were the proofs of a short story in the buff envelope."

"Which reached its destination in due course?"

"So I hear this morning. But how on earth—"

"Easily enough. The whole thing gets slipped into a larger open envelope, the kind of big-mouthed affair that printing firms send out to their clerks and patterns with. This falls into the hands of the woman who is at the bottom of this and every other case, and she reads the synopsis from sheer curiosity. The case fits her case, and there you are. Mind you, I don't say that this is how the thing actually happened, but how it might have done so. When did you post the letter?"

"I can give you the date. Say ten days ago."

"And there would be no hurry for a reply," Bell said, thoughtfully. "And you had no cause for worry on that head. Not need the woman who found it has kept the envelope beyond the delay of a single post, which is only a matter of an hour or so in London. If you go a little farther we find that the object, hence the £1,000 offer and the careful, and doubtless expensive, inquiry into your position. Steel, I am going to enjoy this case."

"You're welcome to all the fun you can get out of it," David said, grimly. "So far as I am concerned, I fall to see the humor. Isn't this the office you are after?"

Bell nodded and disappeared, presently to return with two exceedingly rusty keys tied together with a drab piece of tape. He jingled them on his long, slender forefinger with an air of positive enjoyment.

"Now come along," he said. "I feel like a boy who has marked down something rare in the way of a bird's nest. We will go back to Brunswick square exactly the same way as you approached it on the night of the great adventure."

CHAPTER IX.

The broken figure. "Any particular object in that course?"

"There ought to be an object in everything that even an irrational man says or does," Bell replied. "I have achieved some marvellous results by following up a single sentence uttered by a patient. Besides, on the evening in question you were particularly told to approach the house from the sea front."

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CASTRO TAKES ACTION.

Forbids the Landing of M. Taigny in Venezuela.

Caracas, Jan. 15, via Port of Spain, Trinidad, Jan. 17.—M. Taigny, the French chargé d'affaires, having gone on board the French line steamer Martinique at La Guayra yesterday under legal permission, the Venezuelan authorities have prohibited his landing again in Venezuela, and he must go to Colon.

Germany Stands Aloof.

Berlin, Jan. 17.—The foreign office calls the attention of the Associated Press to a London dispatch which asserts upon an ostensibly excellent Paris authority that President Casimir's attitude towards France is due to German intrigues. The foreign office says this is absolutely false. Germany has not interfered by a single word in France's controversy with Venezuela.

STORM SWEEPS OHIO.

Great Damage Reported From Various Parts of the State.

Cleveland, O., Jan. 15.—Dispatches from many points throughout Ohio show that great damage was wrought by the fierce gale that swept over the state during last night and early today. Telegraph and telephone lines were carried down at scores of points with the result that communication by wire was seriously crippled to-day.

In this city the gale reached a velocity of fifty miles an hour. Toward noon the wind moderated somewhat and was followed by a heavy snow.

PER CANADIAN

VOL. 53.

BELL AND JONES PREY OF

FIRE AT CARMAN W. OF INCEND

Loss Estimated at Two Dollars—C. P. R. W. Western Telegraph

Winnipeg, Man., Jan. 17.—Man, the entire party, the whole of the Manitoba Lumber Co. went up in smoke in a hour early in this morning and by almost superhuman fire was confined to the and buildings. There wind blowing at the hard to see how the fire had to keep the fire to the next building away. The books of the removed to the Union weeks ago. The loss of and stock between \$10,000 with insurance of \$14,000 chester, London, Liver New York. The fire started, and was undoubtedly diary origin, there having in the boiler since the several weeks ago.

To Improve Se

Winnipeg, Jan. 20.—M. kings, superintendent of telegraphs, received a report from a telegrapher the effect that his recent new appropriations for department, submitted a board by Vice-President he had approved of the company's decision in the telegraph lines and improvements of lines in west of Lake Superior.

MORE SEATS CAL

To-Day's Election Twelve Liberal G

London, Jan. 20.—The electoral struggle of proceeds. Out of 47 returned Liberals take 21 seats, were captured from. Among the Unionists seats is Sir Wm. Ansell, who was president from 1887 to 1892. Lieut. H. Lee, Conservative, lord of the admiralty, military attaché at W. later attaché with the during the Spanish-American re-elected for South division of Hampshire. The Liberal majority. Formed state for the home dept. Douglas, Conservative, elected.

NEW SIEGE

Improved Type Will Sandy Hook—Throvs Projectile.

Washington, D. C., Jan. 17.—The type of gun has been by the ordinance department Rock Island arsenal, and shipped to the Sandy Hook arsenal at Newport, R. I. The new gun has a caliber of 16 inches and weighs a sixty-pound projectile thrown from a distance of 10,000 yards. Models if the gun to be Hook proves satisfactory.

The chief characteristic of this gun is long range. It is given a steady carriage, carriage will not jump. It is fired as the case now in use, thus proving firer.

HARPER MEMO

Library Will Probably Chicago in Memor Professor.

Chicago, Ill., Jan. 19.—The firing of the election of a new President of the University of Chicago is long record. It is given a steady carriage, carriage will not jump. It is fired as the case now in use, thus proving firer.

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