

THE FLORENTINE DAGGER

By BEN HECHT.

INSTALLMENT V.

The Leading Characters:

JULIEN DE MEDICI, a playwright and direct descendant of the famous Italian family of murderers. He rejoices that the finger of suspicion for the recent murder of her father points to his fiancée.

FLORENCE BALLAU, beautiful and talented daughter of Victor Ballau, the murdered man she finds lying on the floor with a Florentine dagger in his heart and a candelabra by his head.

JANE, the Ballau housekeeper.

NORTON, chief of detectives, who believes the crime to be merely a case of suicide. Norton points to the fake moustache that is clutched in the dead man's hand and says that, and the disordered condition of the room, indicate that Ballau wanted to divert attention from his self-destruction. Norton, however, overlooks a discrepancy in Florence's account of how she rushed home from the theatre in response to a telephone call. She doesn't tell him of the phone call. At the inquest Norton asks Jane at what time, on the evening of the murder, Florence came home. Norton strengthens his theory of suicide by proving that Ballau was bankrupt and desirous of Florence collecting his insurance money if murder could be established, as no money would be paid in case of suicide. Florence again neglects to mention the mysterious phone call, but De Medici, whose inherited morbid love of murder still exalts over his fiancée's evident guilt, realizes that Norton, too, must know something, and is only playing a crafty game. Julien is called to the stand.

CHAPTER IX.

"She Acts."

The coroner spoke again. "What time did you call for Miss Ballau at the theatre?" he asked.

It would be necessary to his here. But he must be careful and evasive

SECRET OF HIS SUCCESS

One of the most noted, successful and richest men in this country in a recent article said, "Whatever I am and whatever success I have attained in this world I owe it all to my wife. From the day I first knew her she has been an inspiration and the greatest helpmate of my life." Health is the first essential of every woman who wants to be a successful wife and to hold the love and admiration of her husband. If a woman finds her energies flagging and dark circles appearing under her eyes, she has backache, headaches, nervousness and "the blues," she should take Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, the medicine which holds the record of helping 98 out of every 100 women who try it. There is nothing better.—Advt.



MRS. ELIZA KILLINGBECK

Could Hardly Lift Her Hands

Terrible Weakness Caused by Digestive Disorders Quickly Relieved by Dreco. Peterboro Lady Now Has Splendid Appetite, Sleeps Soundly and Strength Is Returning Every Day.

"For years I had suffered from stomach trouble and indigestion," says Mrs. Eliza Killingbeck of 200 Edinburgh street, Peterboro, Ont. "I had a very poor appetite and would bleed terribly after eating. I had frequent dizzy spells and felt very weak and run down. My nerves were all on edge and I couldn't sleep at nights. Sometimes I was so weak I could hardly lift my hands to my mouth. My kidneys, too, were bad, and I suffered no end of misery from them. I was also chronically constipated.

"I took all kinds of medicines and dear knows how much money I spent trying to get relief, but nothing did me any good. Finally, my son advised me to try Dreco, and after taking four bottles, I can truthfully say that I feel 100 per cent better. While I still have to watch my diet, everything I do eat agrees with me, and my nerves are steadier than for years. I sleep soundly, have no more dizzy spells or bloating, and my kidneys are in good condition. My constipation is also relieved, and I feel that my experience with Dreco justifies me in recommending it very highly."

Dreco is the most reliable corrective and tonic for digestive disorders made. It stops suffering by stopping the cause of it, which, in most cases, is nothing but weak, lazy digestive organs. Dreco strengthens and regulates these organs till they do their work properly. It contains no mercury, potash or habit-forming drugs, being a purely herbal preparation with absolutely nothing injurious in it.

Dreco is being specially introduced in London by Standard Drug, Limited, and is sold at all their stores in London, St. Thomas, Woodstock and Stratford. It is also sold as follows: Chatham, Liggett's Drug Store, Clark's Drug Store; Sarnia, Liggett's Drug Store; Galt, Cant & Cant; Ridgeway, D. H. Stewart; Bothwell, Bothwell Drug Store; Lucan, H. S. Stanley; Goderich, H. C. Dunlop; Strathroy, F. L. Grieve; Tillsonburg, C. V. Thompson, the Rexall Store, and by a good druggist everywhere.



is collectable if Mr. Ballau was murdered, the theory becomes untenable." Lieut. Norton leaned forward and spoke for the first time.

Have you any particular interest in proving that a murder has been committed instead of suicide?" he asked.

"I see what you mean," De Medici smiled slowly. "I am engaged to marry Miss Ballau, and you think I have a personal interest in securing the collection of the insurance money left her by her father. I have no such interest."

The coroner, after a pause, continued his questioning.

"Did you have any discussion with Mr. Ballau concerning the weapon after he had taken it home?"

"I think we did talk about it." "On that night in the library you asked Lieut. Norton whether he had observed any finger-prints on the hilt, did you not?"

"Q—What did you say to Mr. Ballau concerning the dagger?"

"A—I told him I didn't like it. It had belonged to an ancestor of mine whose deeds I have never admired."

"The inquest is a farce," De Medici mused. "They have determined on this clumsy ruse of throwing some one off guard as I thought that night."

Lt. Norton, summoned to the witness chair, was reciting again the details of the case. De Medici listened. With logic and a remarkably convincing mass of detail, the detective was going over the circumstances surrounding the death of Victor Ballau, and bit by bit reconstructing for the jury his theory of the grotesque suicide which the dead man had committed.

"The inquest stands adjourned until tomorrow," Coroner Holbein announced as the lieutenant concluded. De Medici remained, without moving, beside the girl. "Come," he whispered, "I would like to talk to you."

They made their way through the crowd of friends. De Medici nodded politely in return to the guests that followed his passage through the room. Norton was watching them, watching them go out together. There would be some one listening when ostensibly from behind concealed evidence.

"May I speak openly?" De Medici inquired. He had leaned forward in his chair. He caught a nod from the lieutenant. The coroner answered:

"Yes. Go on and tell us in your own way what you believe happened."

"From the questions that were asked Miss Ballau," De Medici began, his eyes fixed on the lieutenant, "it struck me that one of the police theories might be that Miss Ballau killed her father in order to profit by his insurance money, knowing at the time that they were financially ruined. This is obviously a ridiculous notion. For Miss Ballau has testified from the first that she is convinced her father committed suicide. Inasmuch as she knows that if this is proved the insurance company will not have to pay her the money that

"What do you want?" she asked. "I love you," he whispered. "You have forgotten that."

"Yet you hide from me." "What do you want?" she repeated.

"To warn you," he whispered. "They know about the telephone call. And about the time you spent in the apartment."

"Yes." His voice was soft. His hand sought hers.

"Ah, Francesca mia, do you think I care? Does it matter to me? Look at me. Do my eyes hide from you? I adore you. Tell me . . . and I will fall at your feet. I will kiss your hands."

"You believe I killed him?" "I found a purse in the chair that night," he whispered. "With your initials on it."

"Give it to me." She held out her hand. He shook his head.

"First you must tell me what you know. Then I will obey you blindly." "There is nothing to tell."

De Medici smiled at her. "Some one called you on the telephone," he said softly. "And you answered, 'Oh, God!' and fled. You were in the apartment for a half-hour or more before you gave the alarm. And you removed your costume—the 'Dead Flower' costume—which you had worn out of the theatre. You washed your hands and face—for there was no make-up on you when I saw you in the vestibule."

"Look at you!" she cried. "God in heaven! You are mad!"

"Can you drag yourself out of your delusions long enough to think sagely?" the doctor cried.

"My mind is perfectly clear," De Medici answered. "You have discovered that someone telephoned her at the theatre, that she was in the apartment more than a half-hour before giving the alarm. And other details."

"Yes, other details," Dr. Lytton repeated wearily. De Medici sighed.

"Ah," continued De Medici in a murmur. "Are you interested in my symptoms, Hugo?"

"Go on," the doctor answered. "From a distance," repeated De Medici, "my gestures seem to change. My eyes droop and I keep staring out of their corners. The tears leave me, however. There is nothing to fear in this dream. Last night I sat there staring at the curtains and waiting. But there was no fear. And finally the hallucination came. As it did once before on the night of the murder. I was in my apartment and she appeared for an instant in the doorway. A long robe and a dagger in her hand. The dream is horrible and beautiful. An exaltation comes into me."

"And are you aware of its unreality at the moment?" Dr. Lytton asked quietly.

"Alas, yes! I watch from a distance. I repeat to myself—a hallucination! But even then there is something truthful about her. The woman with the dagger is Florence. . . . We must save her," he whispered.

Dr. Lytton granted.

"Yes," he agreed. "It fits in. That vision of yours. Yes, an odd psychological phenomenon. I have had a similar image in my mind for a week."

De Medici's voice had undergone a change when he spoke again. It was crisp and with a precision in its sound.

"Now tell me, Hugo," he asked. "What you've found?"

"First," countered the doctor, "what are you hiding?"

De Medici nodded as the doctor's eyes glittered at him. Moving to the table, he opened a drawer and removed the purse he had picked up in the Ballau library.

"In the chair near the body," he explained. "It had been in the corner. And inside a theatre program for a performance of 'Iris' in a London theatre in 1899."

"Good God!" Dr. Lytton said abruptly. "I knew it. Yes, I was right."

"He came here to corroborate something," De Medici continued to himself. "He suspected that I and not Florence did the murder. Yes, an obvious and romantic theory. I turned De Medici for a moment and killed a man." Dr. Lytton's eyes beamed excitedly over the program.

"Twelve names in the cast," he continued. "I'm taking them down. Names are always something. A name is a beginning. Did you tell Florence of this?"

"Yes." "And she grew excited," pursued Dr. Lytton as he finished his writing. "Did you mention the Goldsmith Theatre to her?"

"No." "This was before she left town?" pursued Dr. Lytton.

"I didn't know she had gone," De Medici murmured.

"Yes," Dr. Lytton continued, "she went to a place called Rollo, in Maine."

"I didn't know," repeated De Medici uncomfortably. So she had gone away! Remorse and tenderness overwhelmed him, and a feeling of self-revulsion. "Where?" he asked. "Playing with evil dreams while her heart was breaking. He saw, in retrospect suddenly, the laughing-eyed, vivid young woman whom he had loved. Guilty of the murder of her father! A mystery beckoned behind the inexplicable conduct of the girl. Victor Ballau, there had been something about him. Trembling fingers and averted eyes . . . a secret pantomime behind the fastidious exterior."

Dr. Lytton was talking. De Medici's ears again picked up the man's excited ramblings.

"In part the mystery lies with Ballau. A London theatre program. You know he lived in London before he came here. I found out something about him. He was married in London. Have you ever talked to Florence about her mother, Julien?"

Dr. Lytton waved the paper on which he had copied the names. "Names are mysterious in themselves," he went on.

A muffled sound was repeated at the door.

Harding, his bland-faced valet, entered.

"A special delivery letter," he said. "Thanks," De Medici took the proffered envelope. The valet stepped through the curtains.

"Dear God!" the voice of De Medici came softly. He had become rigid. His face had grown into a sombre and elongated mask. Dr. Lytton sprang to his side. De Medici had waved and stumbled against the table edge. His hand shot out, fingers spread in a gesture of horror toward the fluttering shadows on the curtains.

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Tomorrow—At the Police Station.

SIX-YEAR-OLD BOY DROWNS IN LAKE

Body of Edward Ryan Recovered After Two Hours' Search.

Special to The Advertiser. Kincardine, May 15.—Edward, 6-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Tim Ryan, who was missing since 5 o'clock this afternoon, was found at 7 o'clock by a search party, drowned, under the north dock close by the lighthouse.

Doubtless the little fellow was playing beneath the dock and slipped into the deep water on the harbor side, despite all efforts of resuscitation, he was pronounced dead by Dr. Ferguson when he arrived, probably having been in the water over an hour. No inquest will be held.

"Can you drag yourself out of your delusions long enough to think sagely?" the doctor cried.

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Tomorrow—At the Police Station.

Canada's Birth Rate Increases

Canadian Press Despatch. Ottawa, May 15.—The net increase in Canadian-born during the ten years 1911 to 1921 was 1,213,065, or 21.58 per cent, as compared with an increase of 947,867 or 20.29 per cent in the previous decade, according to a census bulletin issued today.

Every province, with the exception of Prince Edward Island, shows an increase for 1921 over 1911 in the number of persons born in the province and living in Canada.

THAMESFORD LIBRARY BOARD. Special to The Advertiser. Thamesford, May 15.—The public library board held their monthly meeting in the library room Tuesday. G. C. Francis presided. Seven members were present. It was decided to hold a social evening and secure a speaker on library work some evening near the end of the month.

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The surest, cheapest, easiest way to have hot water always in your home is to own a Gas Water Heater. The fears of a sleepless night, the terrors of insomnia, vanish under the relaxing influences of hot water.

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And Have All the Hot Water You Need, When and Where You Want It.

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SATURDAY SPECIAL

WONDERFUL NEW STOCK OF EXQUISITE HATS AT BIGGEST REDUCTION OF SEASON

These hats are all new stock—nothing old, nothing out-of-date—all brand new. We bought 63 of these wonderful modish hats from a manufacturer at an outstanding reduction, and we are passing this saving on to you.

Included in this lot are all the latest shapes and materials made up for street or sport wear. Every one excellent, these hats would retail in the regular way at from \$8.00 to \$9.00. On sale tomorrow

\$3.95

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Ask to see our new model hats and special summer hand-made hats. All the very latest style hats anticipated and shown in these new creations.

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