

THE MASTER MIND

Novelized by
Marvin Dana, author
of "Within the Law,"
from the suc-
cessful play by
Daniel D. Carter



CHAPTER XIV.
In the Alcove.

THE spirit of mistaken martyrdom which had driven Lucene to this confession for the sake of the man she loved now again nerved her to struggle in his cause.

"And now," she cried, "you'll let him go! Won't you? Yes, yes! You must!"

There came an interruption which turned the eyes of the three to the archway of the alcove, where a tall figure stood contemplating the group. The woman uttered a faint cry that was rather a moan and shrank away as if in mortal fear, for the tall form, with the face set so sternly, was that of Wainwright. His voice came with a dominant severity:

"What have we here?"

Marshall answered:

"I caught this man monkeying with the safe. Guess I'd better get him out of here." He scowled at the thief.

"Come along, you!"

Creegan returned the scowl.

"I won't go!" he shouted. "I won't trying to crack no safe. I told ye I come here 'cause the lady!"

Marshall fairly throttled the thief for a moment.

"One more peep from you and I'll make you wish you'd never left jail!"

"Who is this fellow?" Wainwright demanded.

"He's a crackman, all right," the detective replied. "I caught him as he was going to work on the safe here. Beyond that, I don't know anything about him, though it's certain he's a professional."

Wainwright put his next question directly to the criminal:

"Who are you?"

But, for the time being, Creegan had become subdued under the buffeting he had just received. So now he did not venture to answer.

"Are you deaf?" the sleuth rasped.

"Well, if you want to know so bad," he replied sullenly, "why, I'll just tell you. My name's Creegan, and I'm from Chicago."

"You seem to have wandered a considerable way from home," Wainwright commented dryly.

"Ah," Creegan said, with an attempt at sardonic, "a guy'll go further than that to please a lady. What?"

Marshall broke in:

"Cut that out!" Then he faced his employer somewhat doubtfully. "You see, sir," he explained, "I caught him

trying to take this money away from Mrs. Wainwright." He drew the banknote from his pocket.

"It's a d—d lie!" Creegan bellowed vociferously. "She give it to me!"

"Shut up!" The detective poised as about to spring on Creegan.

But Wainwright interferred.

"Marshall," he directed shortly, "leave the man alone. Lies don't hurt if they are lies." He put forth a hand and took the money. Briefly his eyes ran over some of the bills, scrutinizing them closely; then he bestowed the pocket in a pocket. For the time he let his gaze go for an instant to his wife, who in frightened

watched his face unremittently.

immediately he gave his full attention again to the criminal.

"Why should my wife give you money?" he inquired.

Creegan wriggled uncomfortably.

"Well, I guess the game's up, gov' nor," he whined. "I guess they ain't nothin' to say, except you got me and the lady dead to rights."

Marshall interposed.

"Ah, say, Mr. Wainwright," he protested, "what's the good listening to this crook's pipe dreams? Come on, you!" He strode to the thief and caught him by the shoulder.

But again the detective was stayed from his purpose by the command of Wainwright:

"Wait!"

Now finally excess of fear goaded Lucene to the bravery of despair. She straightened, held forth her arms imploringly.

"Cortland," she said falteringly, "I beg you not to ask him any more questions. Let him go—please! Oh, for pity's sake! I can't stand it! I—" She broke off, panting.

Her white face was drawn in agony, for Wainwright gave no least heed to her prayer. He contemplated the thief and spoke quietly.

"Who sent you here?"

"Aw, nobody sent me," the man replied flippantly. "I was invited."

"By whom?" Wainwright persisted.

"Ask the lady," Creegan's grin was frozen by the cold fury of the husband's low spoken phrase:

"You lie!"

"I do, do I?" he sneered. "Well, just take it from me. I don't. I knew her a long time before you ever did. Pipe that, mister! Aw, say! Don't kid yourself. What was she doin' downstairs by the safe at 2 o'clock in the mornin'? Eh? Havin' a cup of tea? Huh?"

Wainwright was dead white from the fury of his passion. His hands clinched.

"Take him away!" he ordered.

The wife dared a forlorn hope, crying out her plea wildly:

"Oh, Cortland! Let him go!"

Wainwright repeated his command.

"Take him away!"

Wainwright's face had settled into a mask of coldness as he turned to address his wife. But before he could speak his intention was halted by the surprising change that came over her within an instant. Where she had been shrinking pallid, seeming even near to collapse from the misery that afflicted her, she now suddenly stood alertly upright, and a color burned hotly in her cheeks, and her eyes, flamed

by suffering before, shone in their full violet radiance, unveiled again. Her hands were abruptly reached forth in a gesture of welcoming. Wainwright, following the movement of her arms, took in the figure of Andrew, stand-

motionless just within the doorway of the library. At sight of him there was a harder compression of Wainwright's lips. His voice, as he spoke, was suave.

"Ah, I was expecting you."

Andrew was undaunted.

"Pardon me, sir, but may I ask a question?" he inquired.

"Oh, certainly," Wainwright retorted. "Do you intend sending to prison the man whom Mr. Marshall just captured?"

Before Wainwright could answer the question put by the Master Mind there came an interruption by Lucene. It was despair that found tongue.

"Mr. Andrew, Mr. Andrew, what have you done to me?" she wailed. "Oh, what have you done?" Her voice broke in a storm of sobbing.

If a slight shiver touched the man under the clasp of the girl's hands it was imperceptible, arrested ere it began by the iron sway of his will. He spoke gravely.

"Mrs. Wainwright will excuse me, I know, if I say that I must speak with you alone," he said to Wainwright.

At this saying Lucene lifted her head and stared desperately into the granite face. The assured voice carried conviction to her.

"I am quite sure that she will trust my judgment in the matter." Ostensibly the sentence was spoken to Wainwright. In effect, it was directed to Lucene. She went slowly out of the room.

When she was gone the Master Mind, with a swiftness of movement utterly unlike his usual placidity of behavior, darted to the door and shut it. Then he faced his employer, standing fully erect, a smile of triumph bending his lips, at last. The humility of the trained servant was vanished. In its place was a dominant personality, boldly proclaimed.

Wainwright met the transformation fairly.

"Well, Mr. Allen?" he remarked. His tone as he spoke the name that explained his knowledge of the other's identity was a challenge.

"That is quite correct," Andrew replied, with an enigmatic smile. "Incidentally this is the first time in twenty years that I have been addressed by my own name."

"The full name is Richard Allen, I believe?"

"Precisely."

"Alias, the Master Mind?"

"I believe that name has been given to me by some," Andrew replied, with unconcealed egotism. "I might even say by many."

"It is rather an ostentatious title," Wainwright commented indifferently.

"At least, it is not of my choosing," was the retort. "I merely adopted it after it had been given me by others."

"You had a brother," Wainwright suggested.

A spasm of emotion contracted the features of the other.

"My brother," he said in a hushed voice, "was Henry Allen, whom you sent to the chair. You—your!" The fury of hate vibrated in the voice.

"No," Wainwright declared sternly; "not I, but the law."

Andrew shook his head.

"You!" he repeated, with the emphasis of a supreme wrath.

Wainwright disdained insistence.

"May I ask why you so constantly reminded me of your enmity through-

out all this time since the trial of your brother, which, one might suppose, would have no other effect than to put me on my guard?"

Andrew admitted the implied statement as to Wainwright's freedom from petty cowardice.

"Exactly," he agreed. "I meant it to put you on your guard." Again he revealed his massive egotism. "To one such as I there could be no triumph in victory over a sleeping victim."

"Triumph!" Wainwright repeated the word thoughtfully. To his logical mind the inference was precise. "Then you think that you have triumphed?"

"Yes," came the confidential reply.

"Indeed!" The ejaculation of the word was replete with skepticism.

Andrew responded with fierceness.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Wainwright!" he cried savagely. "It is well that you should understand the truth at once. This night you are delivered into my hands, bound and helpless—into my hands!"

"Very well," Wainwright returned calmly. "In that case suppose you give me the details." There was to him a considerable relief in the arrival of this hour when there must be explicit evil, something real and tangible, in the stead of vague, imaginary horror, of the sort that had striven to haunt him since the receipt of the first white card.

Andrew grinned malevolently.

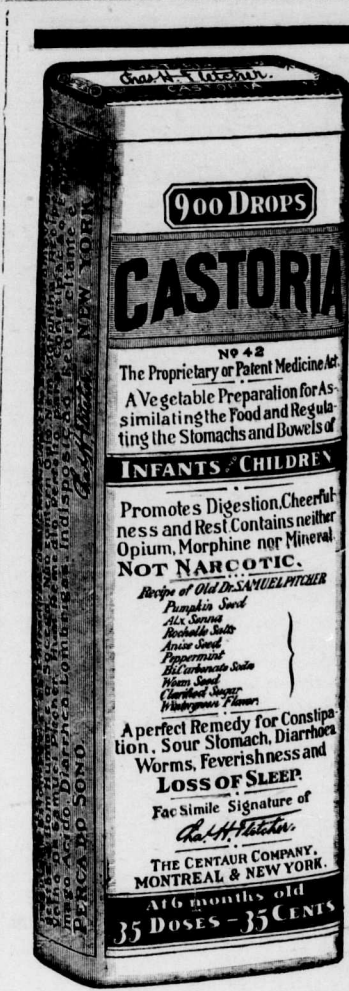
"With pleasure," he declared. There could be no doubt as to the sincerity of joy with which he pronounced the trite phrase. It summed the culmination of weary years through which he had toiled for hate's sake to this end. Yet he hesitated still for a little before he began the elucidation of his scheming to compass the ruin of the man before him. "For every human action worthy of the name, Mr. Wainwright," he said at last, speaking with a new formality, "there is a motive. Mine, as you must already understand, was to avenge the death of my brother at your hands."

Again Wainwright interposed.

"At the hands of the law," he said quietly, yet determinedly.

"We'll not quibble over terms," Andrew said arrogantly. "It may seem odd to you, but I loved him. He was only a boy—a boy whose heart was broken—because he had loved one unworthy. He was the only thing that I cherished, the only creature life had given me to care for with all my affection, with all my soul. When he, for no fault, was condemned to die—I—well, I—suffered!" Presently he continued, in a colorless voice of repression. "I swore then to make you suffer as he had—as I had. You presented to me a very difficult case."

Andrew continued. "You were rich, honest, intelligent. You did not speculate. Your relations with women, even, were beyond reproach of the most scrupulous. For a time, I confess, I almost despaired of you—despaired of finding your weakness, your vulnerable point. Yet, not quite! You went abroad. It was a simple thing for me with my resources to gain access to your apartment. I went there and made it my dwelling place until I had gained all that I needed. I searched your private papers. One day I noticed in your study a portrait—the face of a young girl. It was done rather crudely, perhaps, but it was done with sincerity and with a certain effectiveness. I found also some entries in an old journal which explained that face. Then I began to hope. We searched, you and I, for the same girl, and I found her. I found that the circumstances of this girl, who was the original of the portrait and of the entries in the journal, were ideal for my purposes. The essential thing is this: I desired you to marry her. In order to bring that to pass certainly it was necessary to prepare her, by education and experience of the world, to be your fitting mate. That was done. In fine, sir, you married her precisely as I had planned that you should."



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"Yes," Wainwright agreed heavily. "I married her. I understand. Go on, please."

"And now," he went on, with a drawing contentment in his utterance, "you have just surprised her here in the act of leaving the house with her—well, let us say with the young friend of her earlier days—Creegan."

The voice of Wainwright came roughly.

"What do you mean?"

Andrew's smile was taunting. "It's clear enough, isn't it?" he jeered.

"You!" In a gust of rage Wainwright remembered the revolver offered to him by Marshall that same evening and accepted. His hand went swiftly to his hip pocket. There was no responsive contact with the weapon. As he stood astonished Andrew's voice sounded again with a vast entertainment derived from the circumstance.

"Your servant, Parker—my servant, Parker—is really very capable. You did not observe when he thoughtfully removed the weapon Mr. Marshall had provided." Then abruptly the mocking tones were filled with virulent hatred.

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