

UNCONFESSSED

By MARY HASTINGS BRADLEY

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CHAPTER I

If I hadn't been so angry, through and through, with the blood so hot in my face that I flung open a window to cool off in the sharp autumn air, I would never have seen that blow. And I would never have—

It was ridiculous, my anger. Ridiculous to feel that anything these people might do could hurt me. But to be treated like a piano tuner, like a plumber, like one sent for to do some menial job about the house! I, Leila Seton, better born and better bred than they—not good enough for their house-party. Given a tray in my bedroom!

It was silly to let that get me. I ought to have laughed it off; but somehow I had been childishly eager about this week-end and all it seemed to promise, and I had spent more than I could afford for the dinner-gown I was so sure I would need—and, then the sight of all those people downstairs, standing about with the cocktails that were the fag end of the tea-hour, laughing and talking, had set me tingling with anticipation as I followed the man with my bags up the stairs.

I already knew who some of them were. I knew—from the papers—that Alan Deck, the critic, was to be there. I loved his dry, biting sentences. I had hoped for him beside me at dinner—literature and art might be paired together; and I'd had little dreams of his finding me understanding and merry—and likable. In my new blue satin!

And the Harridens were to be there—that amazing couple whose sensational accusations and reconciliation New York still rolled under its tongue. There had been an English polo player whom Harriden had turned out of doors, and a suit that he had begun one morning and withdrawn another—the explanation being prohibition liquor and misunderstanding. And then the Harridens had gone for an idyllic cruise in their yacht, and Nora Harriden's lovely eyes had smiled out of every paper I picked up. However my New England blood might register disapproval of the goings-on of this spoiled super-gilded set, my unregenerate soul had been thrilled at the thought of meeting Nora Harriden, the enchantress.

I had wondered, passing through the great hall, whether that slight creature in gold pajamas, rather apart from the others, were she or not. She had turned to look at me, and her dark eyes were literally startling.

I had said, as the man put down a suitcase on the little folding stand: "You will tell Mrs. Keller I am here?" "Naturally I had thought it odd he hadn't announced me when I arrived."

"Oh, yes, Madame, she will be informed," he said perfunctorily.

"And what time is dinner?" I wanted to know.

The man had looked vague. "Oh—the usual hour, I expect. At eight. But you can have your tray sent you at any time you wish. A little earlier?"

I was afraid I stared. I gave away my astonishment, and was furious at myself for it.

As quickly as I could, I said, "No—at eight, then," and my voice was not successful, either, in cloaking what I felt.

For the sake of saying something indifferent-sounding, I asked quickly, "Just where is the art gallery here?" and he told me that it was around the corner from my room, on the same floor, across the front of the house.

Then he shut the door with professional quiet, and I pretended to be busy about the room, putting my coat and hat away in the huge closet, un packing my suitcase, trying to admire the spacious comfort, the cream corded silk of the walls, the black lacquer of the Chinese furniture, the note of lovely rose in the deep-cushioned chair. But I was just getting more angry inside. A warm bath didn't soothe me, nor donning the red frock I had brought for "five o'clock."

My cheeks were flaming. I found myself dwelling on the noble origins of my ancestry, and the presumably ignominious, money-grubbing strains in these upstarts—absurd, the intensity of childish emotion I wasted on that experience!

Of course my disappointment was making itself felt, for it was not only a blow to my pride, but to the little vague, excited hopes I had been cherishing ever since I had been given the commission to go over the Keller collection, and the Keller secretary—through whom the arrangements had been made—had asked me to come down Friday afternoon. Why Friday afternoon, if I was not to be part of the house-party that the papers said the Kellers were assembling? Monday morning would have been a proper time for mere workaday arrival.

Why, I was an artist! Not a painter—I only painted to please myself—

but an authority on old masters. In studying abroad I had worked under Berensen, fascinated by his science of detecting imposture, and had given myself to study of the past. I knew canvas, threads, pigment. I might have known them, unrecognised, for long years; but by luck my discovery of the Lorenzo substitution, just as the Detroit millionaire was completing the purchase, flashed me into publicity. And when I backed myself against two experts from Paris in the matter of the Da Vinci, basing my belief on the evidence of the analysis of the pigment of the five blue stars in the saint's robe, and won—and the alleged finder confessed—why, then I was an authority in my own narrow but far-reaching field.

I had been sent for now, to go through the famous Keller collection and offer my judgment on the masterpieces that the great-grandfather of the present owner had believed he bought. For four generations, now, that collection—that result of the heterogeneous buying of an old coal-merchant turned cultural—had been first the automatic admiration and gradually the slyly incredulous wonder of the public; and the present owner had suddenly decided to have the lot gone over, and either credited or discredited.

I flung open the long window and offered myself to the night. It had been six when I arrived—it was about seven-thirty now. It was October, and already dusk; the landscaped ground below me was in shadow, the Sound, far below, a lighter stretch of gray. I hadn't really seen the place in driving in; I had had only an impression of high walls and inclosed acres, and a great tall house among trees. Now I took a more careful note of the house. The entrance opened into a long hall that ran across the front of the building, with a drawing-room at one end, and what I had presumed to be the dining-room at the other. Both the drawing-room and the dining-room jutted forward. I was in the third story, two flights over the drawing-room. Because of the forward-jutting position of the wing, my window looked directly across to the other wing, and gave a slant view of the facade of the house.

Lights were gleaming in the cracks between drawn curtains in some of the windows; and behind them I could imagine people dressing for dinner. In the front of the house, down on the second story, one wide window was uncurtained, and a man's figure was silhouetted blackly against the yellow oblong of his light.

I watched him with no sense of watching; it was just a figure in a window, standing at one side. Quite suddenly a woman's figure came into the picture.

She seemed to whirl in, to come up to the man with a sort of rush, to stand before him a moment. I could see no faces, no movement of the outline of her face; but I had an impression, somehow, that she was talking rapidly. And then he struck her.

I saw his arm go out, in an unmistakable blow. Not a thrust, but a savage smack. And then they were both out of sight. I watched wholeheartedly now, but their figures did not reappear, and my angle of view was so sharp that I could see only the space by the window.

I was still staring out when the curtains were suddenly drawn. And then I grinned to myself. I told myself that I was quite as well off up here as dining with such guests; for evidently their cocktails had removed whatever veneer any training had put upon them.

I was feeling much better by then. I thought about the pictures and ran over in my mind the list of alleged masterpieces that had been old Hiram Keller's vault.

The man had said the gallery was on the same floor, across the front of the house, so I went out into the hall. I passed the head of the stairs—the main staircase rising from the first floor branched right and left to gain the second floor, and a stair rose then to the third—and turned to the door at the left. The knob was so stiff that for a second I thought it might be locked, as galleries often are in European homes; but almost immediately it turned, and I pushed the door open.

The light from the hall behind me fell a little way into a blackness I felt as vast; the place was dark as

a tomb, the curtains drawn, I surmised, against any sun, so that not even the pale oblongs of evening were discernible. I fumbled for a switch, stepping into the shadow of the wall to find one.

Out of the darkness a voice spoke so suddenly that I jumped. I thought for a moment, still obsessed by my European experience, that it was some watchman of the gallery, and I said, quickly: "It's all right."

I heard somebody walking toward me. Then my fingers found the switch, and the lights sprang on. And before me the face of a man in evening dress seemed to spring out at me with the lights, it was so white, so startling. It was a beautiful face, narrow, high-bred, challenging, like some of the portraits of gay young aristocrats in old English canvases. But the expression was queerly desperate. It was the most bitter and tormented face I had ever seen.

A little breathlessly I said: "Oh! I thought it was the watchman. I just wanted to see the pictures."

I was so busy explaining myself that I did not think of the oddity of his own position there in the darkness of the great gallery; but his words



I Saw His Arm Go Out, in an Unmistakable Blow.

recalled it and pricked me with embarrassment at having blundered on some rendezvous.

"I was just—waiting," he said a little vaguely. "You—we haven't met before—have we?"

"No—oh, no," I stammered. "I—I just came to see the pictures." And I turned to be gone, before that girl for whom he was waiting should arrive.

"You can't see the pictures if you go," he reminded me with a sort of negligent amusement. "They stay on the walls."

"I mean—I just came to the house to see the pictures—to examine them," I explained. "I'm not part of the house-party." I tried proudly to sound aloof, as if I were superior to such gatherings as house-parties. "I'll see them better by daylight."

And as he said nothing to that, I went. Back in my room, I told myself that I had been silly to rush away like a school-girl, for if there was any part of the house to which I did have a right of entry, it was the gallery. It was ridiculous to be so confused, so excited.

I wondered about his rendezvous and its strange secrecy. Surely, in a house like this, with all its opportunities for meeting, there must be something desperately intimate between two people, to draw them to an unfrequented gallery for a few minutes together. . . . And his face had been so queer. It did not look as if it were rapture he was awaiting.

Perhaps she was not coming. Perhaps he despaired of her—that was the haggardness in his eyes.

I was beginning to think about my tray, for I had a healthy appetite, for all my indignation, when the houseman appeared suddenly at my door with a message.

"Mrs. Keller would be pleased, Madame, if you come down at dinner."

My first impulse, beyond the sudden surprise, was to refuse. Mrs. Keller hadn't wanted me once—my pride

was as high as hers. It was a little after eight. I was not dressed for dinner—why should I trouble myself because some guest had failed and upset her table, and she had taken the whim to send for me?

"I'm not dressed—" I began doubtfully.

"She said to come down as soon as you could."

But I did want to go. I wanted terribly to see what was happening downstairs, what lay behind that invitation. I reminded myself that since I was here, I might as well see it through and get all I could out of it. And I told myself that it was more dignified, more impervious to any feeling of slightedness, to go down, as if it were a matter of indifference.

"You can tell her I'll be down," I said casually. When he was out of the room, I fairly flew.

The blue satin now. The new chiffon stockings. The blue-and-silver slippers. The crystal chain and bracelet. A stroke at my hair with a comb.

Late as I was, I passed for a last feminine peep at the girl in the glass. She was surely doing her best for me; she might have been twenty instead of twenty-six, with her fresh clear color,—only a hint reinforced,—her bright, light yellow hair, and the eyes that looked like deeper shadows of that frock.

I was quiet poetic about myself as I hurried down the stairs. The sound of voices came from the open doors of the dining room beyond.

It was a large white room with a black floor; there were about a dozen people about a long black table with the glitter of green glass on it. At one end a woman in green, with hair that was either white or platinum, looked up and called to me.

"Oh, Miss Seton—so nice! There is your place."

It was the only vacancy between the black shoulders of the men. A butler drew back my chair; and as I seated myself, the hostess called down: "That is Mr. Mitchell—and Mr. Deck."

The man at my left pushed a place card toward me. "I'm Mitchell," he said with a quick smile. He had bright little black eyes, a pin-nex with a black ribbon, and a bald forehead. The other man was the young man of the gallery. So that was Alan Deck! And I was beside him, after all.

"Monty Mitchell is my intimate," said the one at the left. "And I can see that we are going to be intimate. . . ."

Mr. Mitchell took on the duties of host. "And this is Miss Van Alstyne, Miss Seton," he said of the young woman at his left, who gave me an instant's view of a vague smile and clear, shallow light-brown eyes, then turned back to the man at her left.

"And who is beside her?" I wanted to know.

"That's Harriden—don't you know him?" said the young man; and while I murmured that I didn't know a soul there, I was staring at the big, hard-boned face of the famous Harriden. I wondered where Mrs. Harriden was; then I saw the place-card before me with her name on it. So I was filling in for Nora Harriden!

There was a queer amusement in it. I had even the wonder if she was the woman whose face had been smacked, and so was staying away from dinner to hide the mark. . . . It seemed preposterous to think of Nora Harriden with a smacked face, but some woman in the group had certainly been slapped, and it was really no more preposterous to think it of her than of any of those elegantly goaded, suave, smiling creatures.

They were all like facades, and only an occasional flitted window could reveal what went on inside. Then I thought that the men were facades too, only the man at my right was a less impenetrable one, for if I knew agony of spirit, it was agony that had looked out of his tormented eyes up in that gallery.

He made not the slightest effort to talk to me, but sat silent, as far as I could gather, while Mr. Mitchell claimed my attention. He wanted to know who I was, and what sort of artistic work I did; and I was trying to put it into social words that would not reveal my too real enthusiasm when Mr. Harriden created an abrupt diversion by pushing back his chair and leaving the table.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

TALL TALES

As Told to:

FRANK E. HAGAN and ELMO SCOTT WATSON

Steel Drivin' Man

HOEL S. BISHOP, who knows the history of the Chesapeake and Ohio railroad backward as well as forward, and vice versa, has often heard the old-timers tell about the difficulties they had in driving a tunnel through Cruze mountain. Among the negro laborers they hired was a young fellow named John Henry, a likely lad only seven or eight feet tall.

Right away they discovered that John Henry was a mighty good hammer man, even though he hadn't got his growth yet. He was so fast with his 12-pound hammer that he wore out its handle every nine minutes. He always had to have a boy standing by with a pail of ice water so he could keep the hammer from melting.

The result of this was that the C. and O. had to hire a gang of Tony Beaver's lumberjacks to log off the whole state of West Virginia in order to provide John Henry with enough hammer handles to keep him busy. Also they had to make the Potomac river run backwards so there'd be enough water on hand to keep his hammer cool.

Just about the time John Henry began to wear out a handle every six and three-quarter minutes, a fellow showed up with a steam-driven drill and challenged John Henry to a drilling contest. "Boss man, how many days' stait you-all want so's I won't ketch up with yu' too soon?" asked John Henry. The steam drill man said they'd start at the same time, so at it they went. And, as everybody in the South knows, John Henry beat that steam drill down.

Rock was high, po' John was low. Well, he laid down his hammah an' he died.

Laid down his hammah an' he died. It was too bad that the contest resulted fatally for the victor. If John Henry had ever grown up to be a full-size man, he might have hung up some real records as a steel drivin' man.

The Good Ship "Wobble"

THE first stories about the good ship "Wobble" were written by Frank Ward O'Malley and printed in the New York Sun, but other newspaper men have added details to its history. It was "O'Malley of the Sun," however, who first interviewed its master, Capt. Heinle Hasenpfeffer, and discovered that he wasn't quite sane.

Captain Heinle had been a second story man in New York. When he sought new fields for his talents in Africa and found that the houses there were only one story high, the disappointment unbalanced his mind.

For that matter, his ship was a bit unbalanced also. It had only one paddle-wheel and that was mounted on the starboard side. So when the "Wobble" started out on a voyage with its cargo of subways and artesian wells, it just steamed around and around in a circle and never got anywhere.

To correct this defect Captain Heinle junked the engine and paddle-wheel, installed masts and sails and set out across the Atlantic. Four and a half days out, the ship ran into what seemed to be a dense black cloud. But the captain soon found that it was a flock of mosquitoes. By the time the "Wobble" had passed through them, the insects had eaten off every scrap of sail and tarred rope from the ship.

For a month the ship drifted with the idea. Off the coast of South America it again ran into a cloud of mosquitoes. By a queer coincidence it was the very same flock that had stripped the ship. Captain Heinle knew they were the same because every mosquito wore a pair of canvas overalls, made from his sails, held up by tarred rope suspenders!

A Shout for Bellow

AROUND Horse Cave, Kentucky, the natives will tell you somewhat pridefully that you'll never be able to get the best of Herman Bellow.

Herman's knowledge came from a study of nature in the numerous caverns of his neighborhood.

Once an Englishman visited Horse Cave, so the story goes, and engaged in argument with Herman. The result was a bet, the loser to be the man who couldn't answer his own question.

Said Herman: "Why is it a wood-chuck leaves no dirt when he digs a hole?"

"That's your question," retorted the Englishman.

"Because he starts to dig the hole at the bottom instead of at the top," replied Herman proudly.

"But how does he get to the bottom?" the Briton wanted to know.

"That's your question!" cracked Herman Bellow.

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The "Bad Lands"

"Bad Lands" is the name given in the western part of the United States to certain sterile regions. They are characterized by an almost entire absence of vegetation, and by the labyrinth of fantastic forms into which the soft strata of clays, sands and gravels have been carved through the action of wind and water. The best examples are found east of the Black Hills in South Dakota, though similar formations occur in Wyoming, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

THE CHEERFUL CHERUB

All life is like a poem
Of love and work
and fighting.
We're living quite
an epic
Just at the present
writing.



**Move to Name Unchristened
14,000-Foot Peak Constitution**

Standing near Mount Whitney, highest peak in the continental United States, is an unnamed peak only about 500 feet less in height than Whitney itself which towers 14,496 feet in the air. A formal proposal has been submitted to Washington by the Sierra Club of California that the mountain be christened Mount Constitution in 1937, the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of that document. —Patfinder Magazine.

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Read the offer made by the Postum Company in another part of this paper. They will send a full week's supply of health giving Postum free to anyone who writes for it.—Adv.

Man Measures All Things

Man is the meter of all things, the hand is the instrument of instruments and the mind is the form of forms.—Aristotle.

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and Clear
with
MURINE
for your
EYES
ASK YOUR DRUGGIST

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Best spent part of life is the time devoted to finding out what it is for.

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A Chilling Mystery—A Poignant Romance
Begins Today With This Opening Installment of

UNCONFESSSED

BY MARY HASTINGS BRADLEY

Author of "Murder in Room 700"—"Caravans and Cannibals"—
"Favor of Kings"—"On the Gorilla Trail"—"Road of Desperation"

"Mixing a love-story and a murder, the first as romantic as the second is baffling, Mrs. Bradley has produced an entertaining novel," the Boston Transcript says of this new serial novel.

The week-end houseparty was proceeding gaily. Guests mingled smoothly, unrestrainedly. It was the absence of the alluringly beautiful New Yorker, Nora Harriden, from the dinner and the spectacle of her empty room that first announced something was wrong. She was found lying dead in the shrubbery below her window. A murderer, impelled by some obscure motive, molded a chain of malignant false clues that drew Leila Seton, youthful but clever art critic, into an insidious web of guilt. How Leila broke that chain and made her heart's choice between two men provides a modern mystery-romance at once baffling and charming.

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