

UNCONFESSED

By MARY HASTINGS BRADLEY

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SYNOPSIS

Lella Seton, young and beautiful and an expert on paintings, is commissioned to go over the collection of paintings in the home of the wealthy Kellers in New York, where a party is in progress. From her window she witnesses a man in another room strike a woman. Shortly after Mrs. Keller sends a word, asking her to join the party at dinner. Lella hastily dresses and goes down. She is seated between Mr. Deck, a critic, and Monty Mitchell, a noted lawyer. Introductions follow. There are Mr. Harriden, Miss Letty Van Alstyne, Mrs. Crane, Mrs. Watkins and Prince and Princess Rancini, guests. Lella finds she is taking the place of Nora Harriden. Dan Harriden leaves the table, and Mitchell explains he has gone up to see how his wife's headache is. He returns shortly. Deck, saying he must put in a call, leaves. Upon his return, he begs Lella to secretly take a message to Nora "to take no steps until I see you." Lella consents. Lella finds the Harriden rooms empty and so informs Deck. Coming out she passes Letty. Harriden asks Princess Rancini to run up and see his wife. The princess reports the absence of Nora. Search is fruitless. Harriden admits that he had a row, and believes she is spitefully hiding. Anson, a maid, reports seeing Deck near Nora's room. Letty tells of seeing Lella come from the room. Lella accuses Harriden of having struck his wife.

CHAPTER II—Continued

I could only stand and stare, gripped in a horrible uncertainty. I could not swear that the figure in the window had been his. But it was in her room, and if not he—

Very stiffly I said: "I certainly saw a man's figure in that room, and saw him strike a woman. The curtains were not drawn, and he was standing in the window."

An odd shiver ran across Harriden's face. It was like a tremor through ice, I thought; and then the hardness and the stiffness reformed. He said, through lips that seemed to be enunciating with painfulness: "I have no means of knowing who was in my wife's room before I came up."

There was a perfectly ghastly silence. I didn't dare look at Alan Deck, though I know I was asking myself if it had been he in that room, he who had slapped that woman, then plunged off to the gallery later, to bitter, reproachful brooding.

I could understand his eyes, then. I could understand his agony of eagerness to see her again, at once—his message he had tried to send by me: To take no steps.

It was all a mystery to me, but I wished I had bitten my tongue out before I had blurted out my angry words.

Keller came suddenly to my rescue. "All this is getting us nowhere; petty rows don't matter. The question is, where has Nora gone to? Since she hasn't changed her clothes, she's probably somewhere about, and I suggest we go out and help the men who are looking."

The men trooped off for coats against the chill of the October night, and we women were left together. I had a feeling that I was in disgrace, a dangerous interloper who might explode at any moment with more shattering bombs of revelation.

Suddenly Mrs. Crane said, in her practical voice: "A bandit couldn't possibly have got in here, could he, Carrie—in the window and carried her off?"

"It sounds fantastic," said Mrs. Keller.

"Well, it's been done."

"I don't think that's possible. Look and see for yourself," said her sister; and they came to the window. I hastened to help undo the bolts, and opened the wide casement. We all looked out in turn, the crisp air striking sharply on our bare shoulders and arms. I liked the shiver of it; it seemed to speak of clarity and reality, after all this pother of domestic brawls and a vanished woman. One by one we three craned our heads over the edge, examining the scanty stone sill.

"It doesn't look possible," Mrs. Crane admitted. "He might have used a ladder though—those thugs manage anything."

"That's too fantastic," said Mrs. Keller again. She added dryly: "You'll find Nora is safe in New York, enjoying the powwow. . . . I shall never forgive her—treating me like this."

Down below us, we could hear the voices of some of the men returning. "They haven't found her," said Mrs. Crane, drawing in her head. "I expect I'll get a cold in my nose for this."

I took one more look out, down at that group of men; and so it was I who saw first what there was to see—down in the checker of shade in the shrubbery directly beneath the window. Something half hidden—a faint, lightish blur.

I said excitedly: "Mrs. Keller— isn't there something there? And I drew back for her to look."

She called sharply down to the men: "Look there—in the shrubbery—under the window. There is something—"

It was invisible from where they were, for the shrubbery was thick and high, and the front part unbroken. Nearer the house the branches had bent in under the burden that they found there, the still slight body of a woman in gold pajamas: the lifeless form of Nora Harriden.

CHAPTER III

It couldn't be real, I felt. It was like some scene in a dreadful play. These couldn't be real people; this wasn't a real death. . . . It didn't seem possible that Nora Harriden could be dead; my impression of her vitality, of her exultant aliveness, was so intense that I could not bring myself to believe in her death. Not till I had looked on her face.

I saw the thin, sharp curve of the reddened lips, like little knife-blades, and thought—in spite of my pity for the dead—that it was a hard, cruel, triumphant little mouth, made for exultation.

They were kneeling all about her, feeling her pulse, her body.

She lay in those incongruous gold pajamas, one slim silken foot bare of its shining slipper, on a sofa in the hall, until the doctor came.

No bones were broken, he reported; the bushes had eased her fall. But over her ear was a ghastly wound with the blood dried about it, and dark stains on her temple.

"Struck on something hard," he said sapiently. "Penetrated—death must have been almost immediate."

His voice, as he phrased that, slid into a consolatory cadence. He was looking up at the husband, who stood motionless beside him, his head slightly bent. I could not see his face; his hands were clenched at the sides. I felt suddenly a queer pity for those hands—I wondered if one of them had indeed struck out at that adored woman who had infuriated him so much. . . .

And then I thought again that it might have been Alan Deck. Surely the husband would rather have the onus of that blow upon himself than admit that another man was lounging in his wife's room—though perhaps these people thought little of casual intimacies.

A conference was going on. I heard Harriden's voice saying, in his grim, unshaken tones: "She probably wanted more air—tried to open the window wider, and was dizzy—she'd taken headache stuff—and fell."

"Oh, an accident, undoubtedly," said Keller in his convincing, everyday voice.

I heard the doctor assenting. I had a feeling that he would assent politely to anything these plutocratic clients dictated—with his own secret reservations.

"She was there on the bed when you came up, wasn't she, Dan?" Mrs. Keller asked.

The husband hesitated. "I couldn't be sure. The room was dark, and I assumed she was still on the bed sleeping, so didn't speak." He added, with positiveness now: "She was there when I went down. When I came in to see her after I had dressed—that was at eight, or a little after—she said her head ached, and she wanted nothing sent up. I rang for the maid and told her not to come in to do anything in the room—that Mrs. Harriden wanted complete rest. I don't remember whether Mrs. Harriden said anything further to you or not, Anson. Did she?"

"Why no, sir," said Anson. "It was just you, sir, at the door."

"But you saw her there on the bed?"

"Why, yes, sir," said Anson, a little surprisedly. "I could see through the door. You sort of whispered to me. You said she was asleep."

"Did it?" said Harriden wearily. "I forget—I think she'd turned over and wanted to sleep. And I don't remember whether the window was open or not. I suppose it was a little way."

"Anson," said Mrs. Keller, "was the window open when you came up?"

"Why, yes, ma'am, it was," said Anson promptly. "I remember the room felt chilly, so I closed and locked it."

Whether Nora Harriden had gone out that window before her husband looked in, or just afterward, it had all happened while we were sitting down there about that dinner-table, eating and drinking and uttering our banalities.

There was more talk, I remember; and then Nora Harriden was carried upstairs. Her husband carried her, her bare arms drooping over his big shoulders, her blood-stained head like a child's asleep on him, and took her to the bed I had seen waiting.

Then Mrs. Keller, practical in all stress, said abruptly: "Look here, Dan—I want you to take charge of her things." She went to the closet. "If her pearls are in there, I don't want the responsibility. Take them in your room," she said, and stepped quickly inside.

The next instant she gave a queer, muffled cry and came stumbling out.

"Quick—somebody—come!" she said incoherently.

And then, in a thin voice of horror: "It's blood! I stepped in it!"

Mrs. Crane caught hold of her and we all stood about, staring down at the jade green slipper she lifted, at the wet, dark stain on the sole. The princess gave a little cry, and Keller and the doctor hurried into the closet. Harriden stood rigid by his wife's bed.

Then both men came backing out, and Keller was holding up a forefinger, dark-stained and sticky.

"It's blood all right," he said.

The doctor, looking down at his own finger, nodded affirmatively. Every one stood staring at them a moment then flattered forward to that open closet door and I went with them. The light was on in it. On the floor, just under a sweep of orchid silk, lay a dark

heavy pool, its edges blurred where feet had stepped into it. It must have been there, dark, unregarded, when Harriden had stepped in, to glance about for his wife's gold pajamas.

Harriden marched to the closet door, and I shrank aside, trembling in my excitement and pity. He seemed to stay there quite a time, and when he came out his face was more than ever like granite.

"Yes, it's blood," he said, as if no else's word could be accepted.

I glanced about for Alan Deck. He was not in the room; he had not followed when we had trooped like sheep after Harriden and his dead wife. Perhaps the sight of Nora in Harriden's arms. . . . I was grateful that he was spared the sight of Nora Harriden's blood on her closet floor.

"This puts a new complexion on it," said Keller. His words seemed incongruous, but his tone did full justice to the terrible gravity of the situation. He turned directly to Harriden.

"That blood in the closet—that came before she went out the window. This doesn't look an accident, Dan. Some one got in here. Some thug—His eyes turned to the window. "I suppose that way is possible," he said grudgingly, "though how any one could get in the grounds—I suppose he was after her jewelry. He got in, thinking the room empty, went to her closet to rummage, and she jumped off the bed after him—she had plenty of pluck."

He paused, and the assenting undertone of murmur about him confirmed Nora Harriden's pluck. "Then," said Keller, "he struck her and flung her out."

Keller's next question, so eminent-ly that of the practical man, seemed



"It's Blood!"

to me shocking in its immediate concern for material things.

"Better see if anything's missing," he advised briskly. "See if he got away with anything."

Harriden did not stir.

"What the devil does it matter?" he growled. He looked half savage with pain, at bay against the world.

The doctor spoke up persuasively. "But you want to have the man apprehended, Mr. Harriden. The man who has done this—Glancing toward the still figure on the bed he hesitated. Even in the presence of death the word murder had an incredible quality in that house."

"Every moment is of value," he urged. "Any jewel taken would be a clue. If—if you can bring yourself to it, Mr. Harriden—"

Harriden gave him a glance of cold contempt, as if for the imputation of weakness, and like a man suddenly waking moved forward: "I know where she put the box," he said, as Keller made to anticipate him, to save him the sight of that dark pool, and he went into the closet.

Harriden's bulk filled the doorway when he moved forward, gingerly, stopped and fumbled. I remember Mrs. Crane's saying in a low tone to Keller: "Hadin't you better telephone the lodge—have them keep a sharp look-out?" and his telling her to do it. She was just moving away from the phone when Harriden came out of the closet, bearing a morocco-covered box. "It's locked, all right," he reported.

"Well, if it's locked there can't be anything missing—the thief wouldn't lock it up again," Mrs. Keller murmured.

"We might open it, anyway, to make sure," said Keller. "Do you know where the key is?"

"She kept it somewhere in her dressing case."

Harriden went to a small green dressing case whose opening lid showed fittings of green enamel set in gold, lovely, luxurious fittings that any woman's heart would envy, and began fumbling about in it. I don't know why I watched his strong, blunt fingers so closely. They seemed to fascinate me, I felt so deadly sorry for them, in the work they had to do. Once he paused and his face had a queer, arrested look; I remember thinking that some especially intimate possession of his wife's had touched some chord of deep and bitter remembrance. He swept his fingers back and forth over the silk for a moment as if he had forgotten what he was after, then suddenly his hand lowered and he drew out a small key.

"Well, the man would never lock the case and put the key back there again," Mrs. Keller murmured with a sort of petty triumph.

"He might—just to put people off," Mrs. Watkins declared with the same sort of obstinacy.

"He might have had a pass-key," said the princess thoughtfully.

Harriden unlocked the case; he opened the lid and made such slow business of examining it, starting down into each tray of bright, glistening things that I wondered if he were thinking that those lovely baubles would never go about her throat and wrists again. He must be thinking it.

Then his voice came, with that sharp, almost grumbling irritation in it. "The pearls are here—and the emeralds. And a lot of other junk. But the diamond chain isn't here."

"The diamond chain—her yellow diamonds?" Mrs. Keller caught up quickly. "Why, she was wearing them!"

Harriden stood a moment as if remembering. His eyebrows kept twitching but that was the only sign of emotion in that rigid face.

"Yes, she was wearing the chain," he said. "She had it on."

Some one said, "Hasn't she it on now?" and Harriden turned quickly to the bed. He bent over her, then straightened and came back to us.

"It's gone," he said.

"That's a clue, then," the doctor declared. "You must lose no time, Mr. Keller, in notifying the police."

"The police!" said Keller. All his repugnance toward the sensational publicity was in his tone but he moved at once to the room phone, his wife murmuring to him in agitated undertones. The doctor went on, "And nothing more here must be touched. We must set a guard here."

"Do we have to go through all this?" demanded Harriden. "Let the damn diamonds go."

"I'm afraid we must," Dr. Olliphant told him. "It's the only way to get the—man."

"They'll never get him," growled Harriden, in grating contempt. His bleak eyes seemed to say, "And if they do, what's that to me—now?" I knew how he must be flinching at having his wife's name dragged through the publicity of a murder case.

"I'll guard," I heard him say gruffly, and the doctor murmured that he would stay with him. I suspected he had his idea that Harriden might do something desperate to himself if left alone just then.

We were all trooping downstairs, I rather on the outskirts, when Monty Mitchell dropped back beside me. His small, bright eyes were glittering behind his glasses.

"Why would Nora run into that closet after a thief?" he put directly to me. "She had pluck, but she wasn't a fool. She'd have run to the door and screamed."

"He may have caught her and dragged her in," I said, and then, "She was excited—no one of us knows what he'll do when suddenly flung off balance."

"I know damned well what I wouldn't do," the young man retorted. He had lost his chatty, bantering air; he looked extremely competent.

"Anyway he shoved her in that closet before she was dead," he went on. "She must have been there some little time for all that blood to form. Then he thought again and decided to give it the look of an accident so he put her out the window. . . . A strong fellow."

I thought of how easily Harriden had carried his wife up the stairs and murmured, "She doesn't look heavy."

"About a hundred and fifteen," said Mitchell practically. He paused at the foot of the stairs and stood beside me, frowning intently as he tried to piece out the situation. He said, thinking aloud, "Dan did not see the blood when he went in to look for those gold pajamas—but then Dan was glancing along the level of his eye. . . . This fellow might have seen it when he came back—I'd say he did, and that was the reason he locked the door and took the key away. Presumably the key was in the lock, up to then. . . . And I'd say that he got out the window. He had the diamonds and didn't dare wait for more loot."

"And I'd say," I spoke up, somewhat spiritedly, "that every one of you is thinking about how it was done and what was taken and not about how awful it is."

Mitchell gave me a quick look.

"You seem a simple-hearted young creature," he told me. "You never knew her—yet you rushed to her room to help her cover her slapped cheek."

He gave a short laugh. "You may be glad she wasn't there—she'd have skinned you. She wouldn't have dreamed you'd come in anything but malice."

"You don't make her sound very pleasant."

"I never liked her," he said bluntly. "Come and have a drink. We need it."

The others had set the example and as we entered the white dining-room for the second time that evening I saw it was already filled and that a group was about Deck, who was standing straight and tall beside the buffet. I saw him put an empty glass down very slowly and carefully, and it came over me that it was only then that he had heard of the grim discovery in the closet. It was tragic enough, I thought, to know the woman you loved was dead, but to have to learn that she had been done to death, brutally, violently, to have to hear it and give no sign. . . .

The police had come, four or five local authorities, with a head official named Donahy whose eyes were as cynical as Harriden's own, and the house became a bustle of confusion. Fingerprint men and cameramen trooped upstairs to work, policemen tramped through all the rooms, searchlights flashed outside the windows in the shrubbery. Again I had that sense of grotesque unreality, as if this were a scene from some morbid play.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

BRISBANE

THIS WEEK

160,000 Horses
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Must We Have War?

The well advertised Queen Mary, looking very big moving up to her New York dock, represented in reality the quintessence of compressed power. On the way over she developed one hundred and sixty thousand horse power.

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It is a comfort for those that have money and want no risk to invest even at low interest rates, free of income tax payments.

Such an investment is much simpler than running the risk of a business enterprise with pay rolls and jobs attached.

To tax heavily the man who uses his money and brains to give work to others, and free from taxation those that buy bonds and take their ease, is a brand-new kind of democracy.

Men of middle age and older may learn from Civil war veterans in the Memorial day parade, some ninety and some ninety-three; one, who led New York city's G. A. R. procession, past ninety-six years of age.

All the old soldiers are very thin men, averaging in weight less than 140 pounds. Had they been fat they would be in the grave, not in any parade.

General Pershing cut a big birthday cake with a general's sword, Mrs. Roosevelt looking on, and on Memorial day he warned America against another war.

To believe that this country can be dragged into a war without a repetition of our big war folly is not complimentary to those in charge. No foreign nation would force war on the United States, and thus put United States resources, and any fighting qualities that Americans may possess, on the side of that foreign nation's enemies.

The unfortunate congressman, Zioncheck, from the Northwest, is locked up in Washington, his sanity to be investigated, after he visited the White House with a present of empty beer bottles for the President.

The unfortunate congressman's antics are not important in themselves, but you wonder what qualities were seen in him by the voters.

The United States Supreme court declared unconstitutional a New York state law that would permit New York to fix a minimum wage for women and children.

Chief Justice Hughes, who did not agree with the majority opinion, wrote: "I find nothing in the federal Constitution which denies to the state the power to protect women from being exploited by over-reaching employers."

Alfred P. Sloan, Jr., who ought to know about American industry, says enormous building operations are needed in the United States to replace out-of-date equipment, and that the door is wide open for "plenty of jobs and then more jobs."

American cotton growers fighting the boll weevil will sympathize with Argentine growers, attacked by vast swarms of devouring locusts, far worse than any weevil. The Argentine ministry of agriculture announces 10,000 tons of cotton devoured, 60,000 acres invaded.

Farmers fight the locusts by erecting walls of sheet iron or digging ditches, into which the locusts swarm, to be sprayed with gasoline and burned. Tons of the pests are thus destroyed.

Mayors of Arab cities in Palestine warn the British that they must stop Jewish immigration and the sale of land to Jews in Palestine. The British answer to the warning will probably not be satisfactory to the Arabs. It is reported also that the central committee for Palestine of the "Communist party" is distributing literature urging British soldiers in Palestine to mutiny.

The national Socialist convention in Cleveland, formulating "immediate demands," denounces the New Deal, demands a revision of the Constitution and an end of what is called the "usurped power" of the Supreme court. In all these matters, others were ahead of the Socialists.

President Lewis, of Lafayette college, thinks wars would end if monarchs who voted for it were put in front line trenches. That might prevent some wars, not all.

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THE CHEERFUL CHERUB

I feel so sorry for a Flag Alone upon a building tall That twists itself around its pole And never gets to wave at all.



First Coins Dated 700 B. C.; Gold, Silver Mixture Used

The world's first coins came into existence in Lydia, Asia Minor, about 700 B. C., when a metal called electrum, a natural mixture of gold and silver, was used.

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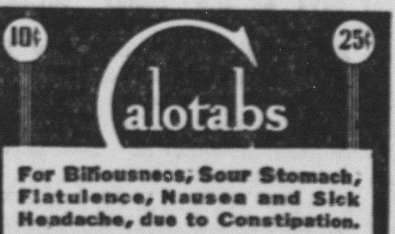
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