

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 up 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. This 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. Letty tells of seeing Lella come from the room. Lella accuses Harriden of having struck his wife. This Harriden denies. From the Harridens' window Lella sees what proves to be Nora's lifeless body. A ghastly head wound caused death, Dan says she was lying on her bed when he went to dinner, and when he ran up later the room was dark. Thinking she was asleep, he left without seeking her. Mrs. Keller comes upon a pool of blood in the closet. A diamond chain is missing.

CHAPTER III—Continued

When they went to examine the place where the body had been found, Monty Mitchell threw a coat about me and drew me out with him. Perhaps he wanted my observation, as he said; perhaps he was simply being kind to me, the outsider among those whispering groups.

The police had turned the headlights of their car on the shrubbery and every leaf stood out in brilliant detail. There was not a bit of blood to be found anywhere, nor did they find any object which could have made the wound in her head. The dense bushes had received her body and eased it to the ground. "She was dead before she got here," I heard the inspector say.

The ground had been so trampled by the men who had lifted out Mrs. Harriden's body that all footprints were indecipherable, and there were no marks to be found of any ladder.

"He must have had one, to get up there," Donahay muttered, squinting up at the smooth white stone facade, as the spotlight from a car played over its high austerity.

I heard Keller saying that the gardener reported that all ladders were safely locked in their proper places. "Awkward sort of thing to bring along with him," the inspector mused. "But he might have used it on the walls and then here."

"And lugged it away with him?" said Mitchell. "Somehow I don't see a sneak thief trying to lope along inconspicuously, with a twenty-foot ladder."

Slowly Donahay nodded, still studying the window. "Might have got in somewhere else and used the window for a getaway."

Mitchell debated that. "That's a high drop—he'd have made a heavy landing and smashed the bushes. There isn't a sign of injury to them except where Mrs. Harriden fell."

There is no use in going over those hours, moment by moment, those hours in which we sat waiting or milled around, eddying to each report. There were lonely hours for me, for now Monty Mitchell ceased to concern himself with me and went busily about with the police.

Very thoroughly they went over the place while Donahay interviewed each member of the domestic staff. He interviewed them separately, butlers, maids, cooks, laundresses, chauffeurs, the linen woman, the lodge-keeper, the bathhouse-keeper, and not one of them had a suspicious thing to communicate. All their testimony was to the effect that it would be impossible for any one to enter or leave the house without being seen.

"Well, if it isn't an outside job it's an inside," Donahay retorted dispassionately. "Somebody got in here somehow."

I could see that Donahay was letting it stand for what it was worth at the present. Between the interviews there were constant reports from the men who had been sent out to check up on things and the sum total of those reports was that the lodge-keeper said there had been no attempts to enter and that there was no marks of footprints about the base of the walls or any ladder marks, or any signs of disturbance of the glass cemented on the top of the walls between the spikes. There were no footprints, either, in the sands where the tide walls ended at the sea, and no indications of a boat having been beached. The tide had been going out since seven and the shore was utterly untouched except by water marks.

"Well, that's fine," said Donahay sarcastically. "No way into the grounds and no way into the house. Except by the front door."

CHAPTER IV

It was our turn then. A bizarre scene, I thought, to be taking place in that pale gray drawing room, the heavy inspector in his dark uniform seated formally behind that incongruously fragile inlaid table, the strained

group of men and women in evening dress, and the ring of policemen fringing the borders of the Aubusson carpet.

Donahay's notes and papers were spread out on the table before him and among them was a list of the guests the Kellers must have provided, that he consulted now carefully, checking us off one by one. There were ten of us present now, beside the Kellers, for Deck had reappeared from the seclusion he seemed to have been keeping, and Harriden himself had come down and stood, grim and expressionless, on the other side of that little table.

What Donahay wanted first was an account of the last time Mrs. Harriden had been seen alive. Every one had seen her at late afternoon cocktails, then Harriden reported that they had gone upstairs to dress, a little before seven-thirty, he thought, that later he had gone into his wife's room and she had said she had a headache and would not go down.

"About what time was that?" Harriden considered. "About eight, I'd say. I know it was time to go down. I'd already dressed."

Not a word did he say about any other conversation between them, though earlier in the evening he had blurted out that there had been a row, and that he'd been afraid of what his wife might do, in hysteria or dramatics. Well, I did not blame him for holding that back. He was not called upon to offer up that secret bitterness to the public. . . . He must have felt sure that his friends would be careful not to repeat it; there was a solidarity that knit these people's interests together.

He went on, "The maid saw her at that time, too."

"Anson," mentioned Mrs. Keller, and Donahay's pencil moved.

"I rang for her just as I was leaving the room, and I told her Mrs. Harriden did not want to be disturbed or have any dinner brought up. No one was to come till she rang. I believe Mrs. Harriden told her this. No," he amended, "I remember the maid said Mrs. Harriden did not speak to her. Anson merely saw her."

"What was Mrs. Harriden doing then?"

"Lying on the bed." He added. "The room was darkened, and she said she wanted to go to sleep."

"What happened next?"

"I went down and told Mrs. Keller. She did not want her table unbalanced so she sent for some one in the house."

"During dinner," he stolidly continued, "I went up to see how Mrs. Harriden was. The room was still dark, and I closed the door without speaking, believing her asleep."

"She was still on the bed—?"

Harriden hesitated. "I thought she was—I took it for granted that she was. I can not swear to it since the room was dark."

"At what time would you place your visit?"

"Oh, sometime during dinner," he jerked out, with his first betrayal of impatience at the ordeal. "Early in the meal, I think, for there was time for some one else to leave the table for quite an interval after I returned."

Donahay made a quick note of that.

"Then what happened?"

"Nothing. We finished dinner. Afterwards, before they began on bridge I asked the Princess Rancini to run up and see how my wife was. It was her visit that discovered Mrs. Harriden's absence from the room—though



I Closed the Door Without Speaking.

we have been told that some one else had already discovered it, without mentioning it."

"Who was that?"

Harriden's head jerked towards me. "I think the name is Seton."

My heart began to race as Donahay looked toward me; he could not fail to be struck, I thought, by something purposefully slighting, almost contemptuous, in Harriden's reference, but, though his pencil made a quick, side notation, he did not question me then.

After a moment, Harriden continued, very deliberately, "I sent the princess because I thought Mrs. Harriden might want a little attention from another woman—women always know what to

do for a headache. The princess came down and told me she was not in her room."

I knew then why he had chosen to give his testimony before all of us, refusing privacy. He wanted the Princess Rancini to hear what he had to say and be guided by it.

"And that is all you can tell us, Mr. Harriden?"

"That is all I know."

"What was your surmise when she was first missing?"

"I didn't have any. Thought she might be walking off a headache. We went out to look."

"You didn't see any reason to summon the police—didn't fear she had been kidnapped?"

Harriden growled, "No."

"You've no knowledge of any threatening letters she may have received, or any previous suspicious circumstances?"

Harriden grunted a negative.

"Now what time was it when the Princess went to Mrs. Harriden's room?"

"Just after dinner."

"And what time was that?"

"Couldn't say."

"Oh, a little after nine-thirty," Mr. Keller suggested.

"After nine thirty," he repeated. "And the deceased was last seen alive at eight o'clock—by Mr. Harriden and the maid Anson—possibly alive at eight forty-five. . . . Now one thing more, Harriden. How was the window when you left the room at eight o'clock? Was it open?"

"Couldn't say," Harriden told him. "Probably closed or I'd have felt a draft."

"And when you came up from dinner?"

"Didn't notice any cold air."

"It was the maid who found the window open, Mr. Donahay," Mrs. Keller suddenly interjected, as if she could bear no more of this tedious verifying of what we were all by now familiar with, but Donahay was not to be hurried.

"I'm coming to the maid. . . . First I'd like to hear what the Princess Rancini has to say about the room." He turned directly to the princess who was seated now a little away from the table. "Was the window open when you went in after dinner?"

"I think not," said the princess. "I noticed nothing unusual. The room was simply ready for the night."

"Where's this Miss Seton that was up in the room before you?"

"I'm Miss Seton," I said, my heart knocking.

"When did you go up to the room?" I told him, "Just after dinner. Just before the Princess Rancini went."

"How did you happen to go? Friend of Mrs. Harriden's?"

"I had never met her," I answered. "I am a stranger here, and I went on to tell him why I had come and what my work was."

"How'd you happen to go up?" he asked me.

There was no help for it; I had to go on with the story I had told them before. Aside from my feeling of not betraying Deck—and that was strangely strong—I knew that he would hear my first story, sooner or later, and round upon me for untruth. I thought Mrs. Harriden had a hurt check she wanted to hide and that I could help her cover it up. In my work I had pigments and stains with me.

"How did you know she had a hurt cheek?"

"Because, from my window, before dressing for dinner, I saw some man in her room slap her. I can't be sure it was she," I stumbled on, "but it was in her room, the first big window at the north, on the front of the house, and I saw the figure of a man and a woman there, against the light."

"You mean you saw a man hit her?" Harriden tried to intervene. "Look here, inspector—" but Donahay waved him away, his eyes steadily on me.

"He didn't exactly hit her," I said. "He just slapped her. Then she went away from the window, and he seemed to follow and then one of them came and pulled the curtains across. Anyway I couldn't see any more."

"And what time was that?"

"Some time before dinner. About seven-thirty—a little after."

"Who was the man?"

"I don't know."

"You know what he looked like, don't you? Big or little, tall or short? You say you saw him."

"I saw the outline of a man," was all I could tell him. "There wasn't anything to compare him with until she came into sight and then I was so startled by what he did that I wasn't really attending to what he looked like."

"Well, was he taller than she was or shorter?"

"Why, I'd say taller, but I couldn't be sure," I stammered.

"Oh, you couldn't be sure?" His tone was distinctly ironical. "Seems to me, young lady," he commented, "you haven't got a very good detecting eye."

"A man might be a very good detector of counterfeit notes," I retorted, heartened by my anger at him, "and not be able to describe people glimpsed at a window—in silhouette. They were just shadows against the light."

"H'm. How about this, Mr. Harriden?"

Harriden's look turned towards me, and I could feel the heavy hatred in

it, like a weight upon me. I did not blame him.

"Oh, it's a lie," he said contemptuously. "I think this girl is a publicity seeker—or worse."

Donahay was reshuffling his notes. "You say you and your wife went to your rooms a little before seven thirty?"

"Thereabouts. She went up before I did."

"And you went directly to your room?"

"That's it."

"When did you go to your wife's room?"

"I told you. When I was dressed. To see if she was ready."

"And you didn't hear anybody in the room before that?"

"I did not," said Harriden harshly. Donahay consulted a rough drawing he had already made of the arrangement of the rooms. "Door shut between your rooms?"

Harriden appeared to reflect. "It was," he said firmly.

"And your dressing-room and bath were at the north end of hers, I see. Couldn't you have been there—and so not heard anything?"

"I was all over the place, dressing," said Harriden very positively, "and there wasn't anything to hear."

"We'll," said the inspector, considering, with an attempt at a soothing inflection, "we have to look into it, anyhow, you know."

"You'd better spend your time," exploded Harriden, "in asking Alan Deck what he was doing when he left the dinner-table after I did. The maid saw him outside Mrs. Harriden's room."

"All right," said Donahay. "Where's Mr. Deck?" Alan Deck's tall figure came forward. "When did you go upstairs, Mr. Deck?"

Alan Deck answered slowly, "About nine o'clock or a little before, I'd say. I went to put in a call to my paper. I was outside Mrs. Harriden's door," went on Deck, in a drawing, almost amused voice, "because I went past to the picture gallery on the third floor after a handkerchief I'd left there before dinner."

"And Mrs. Harriden's door was closed?"

"I think so. All the doors along the hall were closed, I'm sure."

"And you didn't go into the room?"

"Mrs. Harriden's room?" said Deck with that same half-amusement which grated so on my tense nerves. "No, Mr. Inspector, I did not go into any room but my own. And the gallery."

"All right. Now let's have in the maid," said the inspector. "She must have gone into the room, since it was all fixed up for the night."

They didn't have to wait long for Anson. In she soon came, the pretty, rosy-cheeked girl I had seen before. Donahay asked her a few preliminary questions, and she repeated what she had already told of her coming to the door at eight o'clock and Mr. Harriden's telling her not to disturb Mrs. Harriden, and of what the room had been like when she came to arrange it later. It was dark, she said, and the bed mussed, as if some one had been on it without taking off the covers, a comforter was disarranged and the window was wide open. She had closed and locked it.

"Any signs of a struggle?" Donahay wanted to know and Anson looked quite shocked. "Oh, no," she said primly.

She could not fix the time of her entry very positively but the room was her last, and she thought it was just before the end of dinner. "There hadn't been any noise yet in the hall," she said innocently.

Then Harriden barked out a sudden question at her. "What made you go in after I'd told you to keep out?"

Anson looked straight ahead, and there were hints of a struggle within her. "Well, it was some time after," she said uncertainly, "and then, seeing the gentleman outside the door I thought he might have been in, and so she was awake, and it would be all right for me—"

"What gentleman did you see?" Donahay slid in very quietly, though we already knew.

As if against her will, her round, defensive eyes slid about and indicated Alan Deck. "Mr. Deck, it was," she said reluctantly.

"Passing—on my way from the gallery," said Deck briefly.

Donahay was picking up a fresh sheet of paper. "That's all—for now," he said, dismissing her with a curt nod. "There's this other thing I want to clear up—that scene at the window before dinner."

"Oh, my God!" said Harriden with savage bitterness.

"I know, I know," Donahay's voice was professionally placatory for an instant. "You think the girl's making it up, but we got to look into it, just the same. . . . She says she saw a man in there about seven-thirty. Now where were all you gentlemen about seven-thirty?"

"The Prince Rancini was in his apartment," said the princess haughtily.

"So was my husband," said Mrs. Watkins.

"Can't the men speak for themselves?" asked Donahay with the first touch of humor I'd seen in him.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Longest City in World

One distinction about Honolulu is that governmentally it is the longest city in the world. The city and the county of Honolulu are continuous, both embracing the 40-mile-long island of Oahu. By legislative act Oahu, for administrative purposes, was made to reach out to Midway Island, 1,500 miles to the northwest, and to Palmyra Island, 900 miles to the south. If its main street extended the full length of the island, it would be 2,500 miles long.

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A tablespoon of lemon juice added to the egg in which fish is dipped before frying gives it a delicious flavor.

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To remove mildew from a leather bag, rub with petroleum ointment and allow it to remain on bag until mildew comes off easily.

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Rhubarb may be diced, put in covered baking pans, sprinkled with sugar and cooked in a moderate oven until done. Cooked in this way its color is retained.

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