

UNCONFESSED

by **Mary Hastings Bradley**

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CHAPTER VIII—Continued

I decided to wait for the results of Anson's search, and I was so sleepy, after the wakeful night and the walk in the open air that I curled up in my rose cushioned chair for ten minutes and slept for forty. I woke to find Harriiden in my room, sitting stolidly there confronting me with an air of grim scrutiny.

I sat up quickly, pulling down my rumpled gray frock and brushing my hair out of my eyes, staring at him with something very much like fright. Behind him the door was closed.

"You needn't try to run," he told me, and I flung back, "Why should I run? What do you want, Mr. Harriiden?"

"I want to know what you know about all this," he growled at me. "You're in with Deck. I want to know what all that row was about—that row with Elkins—"

His voice fumbled so at the words that I felt a pang of pity for him in spite of all my other feeling.

"I never saw Alan Deck until I came here," I said and spoke as quietly and gently as I could. "I don't know anything about his affairs."

"That's your story, and you can stick to it before the others. But I want the facts, and I'm prepared to pay for them. And I'll let you off—I'll let you off whatever trouble those stones have got you in for, if you'll tell me everything you know."

"I know nothing."

"You know why you went up to my wife's room last night. You had some reason—even if you saw her slapping you wouldn't go in like that—"

His eyes, grimly skeptical, looked me through and through.

"You can't pull any wool over my eyes. You were meeting Deck before dinner. I want to know what he and what he was threatening my wife about. He wanted money from her—wasn't that it? If you never met him before, as you say, he's interested enough in you now to tell you. Your own safety and a good substantial sum of money ought to make you see the light."

"I'll give you five thousand—five thousand for a few words. Only no faking. I want the truth."

"You are utterly mistaken in me, Mr. Harriiden," I said steadily. "I couldn't sell information if I had it. . . . I know nothing at all of Alan Deck and his secrets."

Some one knocked. I called, "Come in," and the door opened. There stood Alan Deck.

At sight of Harriiden he stiffened, then, with assumed naturalness to me, "About those pictures—"

Harriiden got to his feet; his eyes flickered from Deck back to me with a malevolent sort of satisfaction.

"Well—is it yes?" he said harshly, his look holding mine.

"It's no, Mr. Harriiden."

Without another word to me, without a glance toward Deck, he marched past him, out the door.

I burst out, "Oh, why did you come?" to Deck.

His gaze that had followed Harriiden to the door flashed back to me.

"What was Dan doing here?"

"Trying to buy me," I said. "Offering me five thousand dollars to find out

about—I want to hold you in my arms, to soft music, you understand—"

And then he dropped into a chair—the deep cushioned chair beside the little white one I was sitting in—and said coaxingly, "Talk to me, Lella. Tell me about your picture puzzles and the fakes and the millionaires you rescue. The pre-depression millionaires. Tell me all the stories of your young art life."

Nothing that we said mattered; it was all about paintings and artists and people and plays.

The telephone broke in on it. Monty Mitchell's voice told me to come down at once.

We both went down, I expecting heaven-knows-what of revelation but finding only that Mitchell wanted my report on the hair ornament.

I murmured that he had said I was barking up the wrong tree, but I scurried back upstairs, and this time I got the crescent with no delay for Miss Van Alstyne was in her room and produced the gewgaw from her jewel box.

"Is there something special about it?" she murmured, and I said lamely enough that I wanted to study the stones. I might as well have studied Plymouth Rock, for there was no blood to be found on them. If there ever had been any, she'd had all the time in the world to wash it off. . . . I gave it back to her and went downstairs again, finding Mitchell and Deck deep in talk.

"I found it. Nothing," I reported shortly to Mitchell.

He merely nodded, then said earnestly, "I am telling Deck this 'I don't remember' stuff won't wash with a coroner's jury."

Deck's eyes, brilliant and haggard, played with him. "What do you suggest I say?"

Monty was ready. As I dropped down on the end of the couch beside him, he offered, low-toned, "Suppose Nora was jealous of Dan and Letty and threatened to raise the roof about them, and you warned her not to. What?"

"Got a cigarette?" said Deck. "Mine are all gone." He put the case he had taken out back in his pocket rather slowly. Casually he mentioned, "What about the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"

The lawyer did not bat an eyelash. "Isn't that the truth—now that your head has cleared?"

"Why drag in Letty?"

"Why not? You'll have to explain those threats, and that does it—with no discredit to yourself."

Deck grinned. "You're a swell lawyer, Monty."

"And you need one."

Deck rose with a vague word or two. Silently we sat there and watched his tall figure sauntering away. Monty Mitchell's lips were creased in a taut line; he knew, and I knew, with heart-catching anxiety, that whatever Deck had done or not done, whatever had been between him and that dead woman, whatever danger menaced him now, he was going on in his own high-handed way, to play his lone, defiant game. And I was terribly afraid for him.

CHAPTER IX

Nothing happened that night. I gathered in a stout, dignified gray cat that I found promenading the hall and fed it morsels from my squab and tried to pretend that I was not lonely. It seemed a thousand years since I had first entered that room, since I had looked down to those two dark silhouettes in that front window.

I tried again to reconstruct those silhouettes, hoping that some trick of memory would bring to life a forgotten detail, but I was so tired that their shapes wavered fantastically before me.

Nothing was going to interest that jury, I thought, except the finding of those diamonds inside my dress and the report of Deck's violent threats to Nora Harriiden. And his absence from the table.

I needed all the rest I could get to face that tomorrow, so I took a hot bath and went to bed.

At first I slept, then as my weariness wore off, my worrying thoughts kept coming to the surface, rousing me, and at last, in the early morning dark I lay wide awake, my mind racing like an engine. I thought of the questions they were likely to ask me and a sudden quail assailed me. I had taken it absolutely for granted that I would tell the same story which I had told Donahay about my reasons for going up to Mrs. Harriiden's room, and that Deck would tell his same story, but now—

This was different, this testimony before a coroner and a jury. This was under oath.

Suppose Deck wanted me to tell "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth"—to show that since he had asked me to go up he believed that Nora Harriiden was still alive?

I had to find out, I thought, stricken with belated panic, before I went into that jury room. I would phone him for an interview the very moment it was light enough to make my call possible.

Then my mind turned to that handkerchief with the rust marks. Some time on Friday night that handkerchief had been drying on a radiator.

Now a thought came to me. I didn't know all that Donahay had asked, but I knew that in front of me no one had asked if such a handkerchief had been seen.

I made up my mind to see every maid on that floor in the morning. It was Anson my thoughts circled

about. I remembered that Anson had not volunteered anything about the open window, though its being open must have seemed a trifle unusual. She had not volunteered anything. She had given me a distinct impression of diffident reticence.

Elkins, too, had not come forward with his statements until he had been questioned, and then he had had a bad struggle between his duty to his employers and his conscience and love of importance. I began to think it quite possible that some one had seen something that only direct questioning would bring out.

Day was a desperate laggard. Very slowly the pale oblongs of my window lightened.

Seven o'clock. Could I telephone then? No, that was far too early—I forced myself to wait till seven-thirty. Then there was no answer. The instrument was dead.

I decided to dress and go downstairs. Dressing took time. I combed my stuff of hair into decorum and put on a subdued lipstick. Then, just as I was ready to leave, came a knock at my door and the breakfast tray.

I asked my maid what rooms she looked after. "Why yours, miss, and the next when it is occupied."

"Then you aren't very busy now?" I suggested.

"I assist with the linen. The mending, I mean," she explained.

Mending and the third-floor rooms—and mine was the only one occupied on the third floor. No use going into the questions about the handkerchief, now, though I decided to ask Mitchell to see that the question was asked at the inquest of every one. I hurried through my breakfast to get downstairs.

I took the staircase to the left. One flight down I saw Anson standing in talk with the maid who did my room, and I quickened my steps toward her.

Her arms were piled with fresh towels and the feminine in me could not resist paying attention to those towels, they were so lovely.

Anson's pretty face was troubled as she turned it to me. I said, "Oh, Anson, there's something I want to ask you," and the other maid slipped away.

Anson said, "Just a minute please. I'll be right out," and turned into the door of Prince Rancini, with a quick, preliminary knock.

I didn't want to stand there waiting so I walked on down the hall, past the closed door where Nora Harriiden was lying, then turned and sauntered slowly along.

Ahead of me I saw Anson come hurriedly out of Rancini's door her hands to her disordered hair, and behind her the prince made a Jack-in-the-Box appearance, popping back as he caught sight of me but not before I had glimpsed his flashing, amused smile.

Anson was breathing quickly. "Those foreknights!" she threw out, frowning in the loosened edges of her starched white frill. "He can keep his hands off!" she added, resentment stirring her out of her reticence.

"Why don't you complain to the princess?" I suggested wickedly.

That startled Anson more than Rancini had done. She looked at me out of shocked eyes. "Oh, the maid is always wrong," she said with cynical succinctness. "If you'll excuse me, miss, I'll be going back for my towels."

And she cast a look, troubled for all her recovered composure, at the closed door of the room.

"Just a moment, Anson. I was waiting to see you. I want to ask you something."

She kept her face away from me. "I'll be telling all I know at the inquest this morning."

"I know, but I want to speak to you first. You know you said to the inspector that you could not say that Mr. Deck had been in Mrs. Harriiden's room—when you saw him in the hall—you remember you said that, don't you?"

"I remember," she said almost reluctantly. "I didn't like to say anything else and make the gentleman trouble—I didn't know what words he had been using to the poor lady then."

Her voice changed to such sternness that I said quickly, "But perhaps Elkins didn't understand—"

"He's not one to misunderstand," she told me firmly. "I'm promised to Elkins, so I might say I know him. He didn't like to say what he had to say, but it was his duty. A man making such threats—"

All sympathy for Deck was gone from her now. I went on anxiously, "And there's another thing. Did you happen to see a handkerchief drying on a radiator in any of the rooms last night?"

I wished I could know what that change in her face meant. Had I hit on something—or was she merely startled at the idea? Her answer seemed slow in coming and when it did it was oblique.

"Will they ask me that, miss?"

"Yes, they will ask you that. But if I could know first—"

"I'll tell everything they ask me downstairs," she said at last. "It's my duty, I know, though I'm sorry enough—any one might have washed out a handkerchief—"

I said more; I urged her eagerly but the girl was immovable. She only repeated that she would tell all she knew later.

It is quite futile to look back now and think, "Oh, if I had only done that differently, if I had only found the right word!" I see her there, in her pretty black and white, that secret knowledge which she was so reluctant to reveal in her troubled eyes, and I think that if only I had been able to induce her to share it, perhaps—

But she moved away determinedly, and I went on upstairs to my room where I wrote a note to Mitchell, asking him to have that question put about the handkerchief, and another to Deck, asking him to come to see me as soon as possible. I rang for the maid and asked her to deliver them. Then I waited, hoping desperately that each moment would bring Deck.

He didn't come. He might be testifying. He might be being kept incommunicado. . . . I mustn't let myself look so worried; I must seem natural and at ease before that jury.

I was in a tense state of nerves when they finally came for me. My heart was beating sickeningly when I entered that dining-room, and for a moment the faces turned to me seemed like blurs in a fog. Then I steadied, and I saw Mitchell and Donahay. The six men of the jury were lined along the dazzling black table and the corner, a tall, thin man with a drooping mustache, was at the end, and a court reporter, writing away, sat beside the vacant chair for the witness, across from the jury.

"Do you solemnly swear that the testimony that you shall give in the

case now on hearing shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help you God?"

I swore it. I told myself to put out of mind any idea of a change of testimony, to hold fast to everything I had already said. I sat down in the witness chair, as I was told, and faced the jury. They were tradespeople from the small, nearby town.

There is no need in going over my testimony. They asked me everything, bit by bit, and I told them all I had told before. About the scene at the window. About meeting Alan Deck in the picture gallery. About being summoned down to dinner. They tried to get me to name the time that Deck had been absent from the table but I said I couldn't say.

When it came to my going up to Mrs. Harriiden's room I could feel the attention tightening about me. I tried to shut out of my mind every fear of Deck's change of testimony; I repeated word for word what I had told Donahay.

The coroner put a question I hadn't foreseen.

"Have you anything in your possession, among your chemicals, that would take blood stains out of a handkerchief?"

"Why yes," I said honestly. "Just peroxide often does it."

My voice was breathless sounding. I was grateful when they went on to the noise I thought I had heard in the night, and why I had not reported it.

"Why you know how it is about noises in the dark," I explained. "The only sounds I could be sure I'd heard were those footsteps into the hall, and I thought those belonged to a guard—the inspector had said the place would be guarded."

"That is all, Miss Seton. . . . Witness is excused."

I was the last. No one else was called; the jury rose and withdrew in the coroner's wake, out to the drawing-room. I looked about uncertainly and Mitchell came up to me.

"You're one of the best witnesses I ever saw. . . . You lie so convincingly," he said.

I could feel the blood receding from heart. "Why—did Deck—?" I caught myself up, but I could not turn my eyes away from his knowing dark ones.

"No, he didn't reveal anything," he told me, and my relief was so poignant it must have looked out all over me.

He added, "But I'd give a plugged nickel to know what he really said to you that night—about taking no steps."

Then he told me kindly, "I was deceiving you, my dear, when I said that you lied well. To the untutored eye you may appear carefree, to one who knows you—But you made a darned good impression."

"But Deck—"

"Not so good. Elkins' story impressed them. Deck was a fool not to produce an explanation. And Deck didn't put through any call to his paper that night. At least the telephone girl has no recollection of being asked for a New York number that night."

I asked him if he'd got my note about the handkerchief and if the question had been asked the maids. He told me that no one reported having seen any handkerchief drying.

I was puzzled. "But Anson—didn't Anson—?"

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STAR DUST Movie • Radio

By VIRGINIA VALE

IF YOU'RE interested in watching a career grow, keep your eye on young Larry Blake, who has been giving character interpretations of Charles Laughton, John Barrymore, Edward Robinson and Clark Gable at the Rainbow Room of Rockefeller Center.

First thing you know he'll be on the air and in the movies; though he is in his early twenties now, he has made a good start.

He went to Brooklyn college, and has appeared in vaudeville and at smart hotels and night clubs here and there about the country; the Congress and the Stevens hotels in Chicago featured him not long ago.

Landing in the Rainbow Room crowns him with success; talent scouts make it one of their first stops in New York, and no visitor wants to leave town till he's been there.

Four members of the Abbey Players of Dublin, one of the most famous theatrical organizations in the world, arrived in the United States recently to appear in RKO's screen version of "The Plough and the Stars," which they've often performed on the stage. One of them, Barry Fitzgerald, was thrilled to death—because he'd met James Cagney.

Barbara Stanwyck will be starred in this new Irish picture, which is being made because all of us liked "The Informer" so well. And it will be made by the producers, director and scenarist who were responsible for "The Informer," so it's going to be good.

Seems there's a rumor around that Major Bowes isn't so popular as he once was; people have heard that performers on his programs don't get paid much, but that he gets plenty. And some of the people who go to the broadcast feel that he isn't dignified enough.

All that may or may not be true—but a high-powered publicity organization has been engaged to change public opinion regarding the genial Major; his new sponsors feel that the public must go on liking him, or else!

Want to know the low-down on how to play bad man on the screen? Noah Beery, brother of Wallace, can give it to you. He's now playing a hired killer in "Strangers on a Honeymoon," at the Gaumont British studios, along with Constance Cummings and Hugh Sinclair—he's been appearing as various kinds of murderers for years and years.

He says that, if a criminal is to seem to be a real man, he must show a streak of human kindness—A screen killer can mow a guy down with a shot-gun, but he's got to stoop and pat a kid on the head on the way out—otherwise he's a madman, not a human being.

Columbia Broadcasting System is going to give a lot of young men a chance this summer. With regular announcers going on vacations, others who have been auditioned in the past and are working here and there on the network will be brought in and given a chance to show what they can do in more important spots on the air.

The most important arm in the movies at present is Margaret Sullavan's. She broke it a while ago, you'll recall. It wasn't healing properly, so she hid her to New York for special treatments. Now she's back again in Hollywood and hopes to go to work soon. But friends have cautioned her to be careful of that arm. Only the other day she was reported as whizzing to a motorcycle with Willie Wyler.

ODDS AND ENDS . . . Kay Francis played the role of a famous nurse in her Florence Nightingale picture, and now she needs one; has two impacted wisdom teeth . . . Seems that that story about Clark Gable's knocking out his sparring partner was just a faked-up publicity yarn . . . Joan Blondell and Dick Powell seem to be getting all set for that long-heralded wedding. Have you joined one of the flourishing Lanny Ross clubs? . . . Shirley Temple is cuter than ever in "Poor Little Rich Girl" . . . You'll want to see "San Francisco" because of the earthquake scenes if for no other reason . . . Though Jeanette MacDonald's singing should be reason enough . . . Carole Lombard's illness is holding up "Spawns of the North" indefinitely.

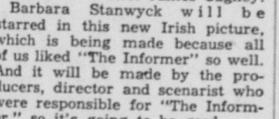
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"You Lie So Convincingly."



Barbara Stanwyck



Margaret Sullavan



EASIER

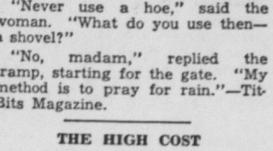
The tramp tapped on the back door and asked for something to eat. The housewife replied that she would give him food if he would earn the meal by clearing out the gutter. The tramp agreed, and when he had eaten his way through several sandwiches she came out with a reliable-looking hoe.

"You needn't have gone to that trouble, madam," said the tramp. "I never use a hoe in clearing out a gutter."

"Never use a hoe," said the woman. "What do you use then—a shovel?"

"No, madam," replied the tramp, starting for the gate. "My method is to pray for rain."—Tit-Bits Magazine.

THE HIGH COST



First Neighbor—Didja ever stop t' figger out what it cost t' raise a cat or dog, Bill?

Second Neighbor—No; but there's a neighbor's cat 'round here what's cost me 'bout a bushel of brick-a-brac, two alarm clocks and a shoe jes in th' past month.

All Right With Him

The irate passenger who had stumbled over another passenger's club bag which stuck out into the aisle, opened the coach window and flung the offending piece of baggage on to the right-of-way. Then he snorted:

"That's the place for things like that," he declared.

"All right with me, Mister," grinned the passenger who was addressed. "That wasn't my bag."

A Few Ideas

He—See that man over there? He's a bombastic mut., a wind-jammer nonentity, a false alarm, a hot air shrimp, a—

Woman—Would you mind writing that down for me?

He—Why?

Woman—He's my husband, and I want to use it on him sometime.

Quite!

"Why has your husband been summoned?"

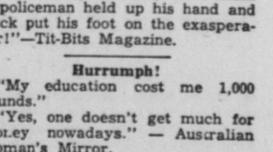
"I'm not quite sure, but I think a policeman held up his hand and Jack put his foot on the exasperator!"—Tit-Bits Magazine.

Hurrumph!

"My education cost me 1,000 pounds."

"Yes, one doesn't get much for money nowadays."—Australasian Woman's Mirror.

TRY POISON BAIT



"How's your garden getting along?"

"It's troubled by two kinds of pests."

"What are they?"

"The pests that eat the plants and the pests that want to know how my garden is getting along."

Silly of Him

Edith—Say, mamma, I want to ask you a question.

Mamma—What is it now, Edith?

Edith—When the first man started to write the word "psalm" with a "p," why didn't he scratch it out and start over again?—Exchange.

Where They Sleep