

UNCONFESSED

By MARY HASTINGS BRADLEY

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CHAPTER XV—Continued

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"What I think," Mitchell expounded, "is that she followed Nora up to find out what she could about the row that had been going on—her eyes wouldn't miss that. And I think she went away because Dan came in. I think Letty knew Dan was in it, somehow, all the time. But she sat tight."

"She would," Deck answered.

"When Dan prompted her to ask for the cigarette case and feel of it, and have Clancy feel of it, he probably told her he was sure the diamond was hidden in it. She followed his lead all right, but when she saw how it worked out, when it came home to her just what the consequences were, when she heard him exulting over Deck's fate, then it all rather did for her for a moment. But only for a moment. Do our Letty that justice, Alan."

Deck nodded, unresentingly. "Oh, I could have fried in hell if that would have helped her get Dan."

"Donahay's talking to her now," said Mitchell. "She's pretty well shot to pieces, but I don't think she'll give Dan away."

Mitchell continued: "When Leila, here, brought out what Rancil had been up to with Anson—"

"That must have tickled Dan pink," Deck interjected.

I interrupted by asking Mitchell when he had first suspected Harriden.

His dark eyes twinkled. "Hard to say, now . . . Thought it was you, Alan, at the beginning, but I tried to keep an open mind . . . The radiator marks puzzled me. But I didn't see my way till I saw that play about the cigarette case and examined the cigarettes, and even then I didn't suspect the beginning of it—the andiron, the dummy on the bed. I kept bothering over Anson's testimony."

They spoke of insanity as the defense. Mitchell thought it would end in mistrial. Deck conjectured that with all Harriden's resources it would never come to trial.

"And I'm not so sure it wasn't insanity—the Anson part," said Mitchell. "No sane man would have choked that girl to death and put himself into such jeopardy over the little she had to tell. . . . Well, he may pull himself together and fight it out. You may be the one tried, after all. Don't lose hope, my lad."

We could banter about it. Reaction was strong in us. There comes a time when you are drained of horror, when in sheer self-preservation you revert to what is normal and gay. And in spite of all my pity for that hard, desperate man upstairs, my compassion for poor dead Anson, I was feeling now a very lively sense of relief and self-rejoicing.

We ate all the sandwiches; we drank all the coffee and we smoked innumerable cigarettes. Then Deck went to get himself another drink, and Monty Mitchell and I sat there, still talking.

He told me that he declined to take back a word about my foolishness but

that he forgave it for the sake of my courage. "You stood up there, facing him, and put that scene together as if you were seeing it!"

He had stood there too. Beside me. Perhaps he was thinking of that, for he gave me a quick look and said, "By the way—how about that engagement of ours?"

"You were pretty sweet," I said. "Standing by." I realized that he had been beside me every moment in that house. I tried to say so.

"I'd like to take it on as a life job," he told me. And then, "I think I'm rather desperately in love with you, Leila Seton."

For a moment I just looked at him. His eyes, usually so gay with banter, held a bright, deep warmth.

"Am I too late?" he said, and it was strange to hear his voice sounding like that. "Is it Deck?"

I didn't say anything—I was too busy wondering at myself. For it was not Deck, the Alan Deck of my dreams, the man who had taken such possession of my sympathies. Deck was vivid, exciting, romantic—and he was ready, I felt instinctively, to play at love with me, to yield to a new glamor.

But I didn't want him. I was terribly sorry for him, for all the disillusion he had been through in his bitter passion for Nora Harriden; I was fiercely protective for him against any danger he might be in through her death, I was ready to lie for him, to steal those letters—

But Deck, as a man, had grown unsubstancial. He had simply not been there. He had shielded himself behind my explanations; he had been willing to use my sympathy on his behalf. He hadn't sprung to defend me as Mitchell had done; it hadn't been Deck who had crossed the room, before Harriden's glaring eyes, to put his arm through mine. The comfort of that touch I would never forget.

Oh, Deck had been everything he ought to have been, but Mitchell had been so much more. And there was so much more to Mitchell.

I didn't think I liked handsome men any more, desperate reckless men who ran to you for sympathy. I was cured of them. I liked men with force and character and steadiness, with bantering gaiety and dark, quizzical eyes.

So I shook my head violently about Deck.

"You mean that?" Mitchell's voice leaped out at me, almost incredulously. "He's such a taking devil! Leila—"

He checked himself; he didn't touch me or make any speeches. He just said quietly, "Don't be—grateful—or anything like that. But—if you could manage to—to learn to love me—"

"I do. I do now," I told him as assuredly as if I hadn't just found it out an instant before. I am stupid about words; I couldn't say anything of what I felt to him. I only sat there, breathless, looking at him, fearing my own happiness and his . . .

And then Deck was back; his glass in his hand.

Monty jumped to his feet. "Here's a toast—we'll make it a loving cup," he cried and caught me by the hand, drawing me up beside him.

"To Leila—who loves a lawyer!"

The glass in Deck's hand was motionless. He looked at me.

"No foolin'?"

Deck put the glass to his lips. He took long drink. "Well, I'm glad for you, Monty, old chap, and I'm damn sorry for myself. . . . It's the hell of a world."

It was in the silence following that pronouncement that we heard the shot. The shot that Dan Harriden had fired into his temple as he leaned over his wife's body, the shot that he would rather meet than the courtroom with its publicity and scandal—the shot that was the only confession he ever made.

THE END



CAUGHT IT, TOO

The club bore was relating one of his long-winded stories that everybody knew by heart. He was describing what happened to him when he went on a trip to the Grand Canyon in America during a world tour.

"The soft curtain of night was just falling," he orated. "There I stood, drinking in the scene, with the giant abyss yawning before me."

One of his listeners interrupted at this point.

"I say, old chap," he asked, "was that abyss yawning before you got there?"

BUDDIE KNOWS



Sister—Ben says he'll give you a quarter to go to the movies when he calls this evening.

Jimmy—I'd rather stay home and see real life.

Figures

"The star we have discovered," said the astronomer, "is revealed by light which started 3,000 years ago, traveling at the rate of 186,400 miles per second, which would make . . ."

"Go ahead!" said the political economist. "Make your string of figures as long as you like. But for the love of Heaven, and also of earth, don't put a dollar mark in front of them!"

Take a Couple of Days Off

First Veteran—They've just invented a new type machine gun for the next war.

Second Veteran—How many rounds in a belt?

First Veteran—They load this gun on Sunday and shoot it for the rest of the week!—Foreign Service.

Ah, Wilderness!

Zone Cop—Hey, you! Didn't you hear me say "Pull over there?"

Buckvan—Why, I thought you said, "Good afternoon, Field Marshal!"

Cop (smiling)—Isn't it a warm day today, Field Marshal!—Motor Pool Gas Tank.

Tough Baby

Bill (viciously attacking a piece of chicken)—This must be an incubator chicken.

Joe—Why?

Bill—No chicken with a mother could be so tough.

Continued—Boss of Advertising Office—See what you can do with this breakfast food ad.

Young Aspiring Copy Writer—S'no use—can't write cereal stories.

TIP TO DADDY



"Pa, what a funny word 'whole-some' is."

"What's funny about it?"

"Why, take away the whole of it and you have some left."

A Selfish Constituency
"Are you going to send your congressman back to Washington?"

"No," replied Farmer Contosoff. "We've found out that he's such good company that we've decided to keep him home."

Business as Usual
Abe (who has discovered a burglar in his house)—Hands up or I'll shoot.

Quick-witted Burglar—Twenty dollars for the gun.

Abe—Sold.

Didn't Know It Was Loaded
Judge—You admit you drove over this man with a loaded truck?

Driver—Yes, your honor.

Judge—And what have you to say in your defense?

Driver—I didn't know it was loaded.

Opportunity

Ho—I read that the Treasury at Washington launders old dollar bills.

Bo—I'd sure like to know where they hang 'em out to dry.

The Man Who-O-O

Tales and Traditions from American Political History
by FRANK E. HAGEN and ELMO SCOTT WATSON

THE BIG SHOW COSTS

SOME presidential candidates are wafted into office on a cloud of smoke while the aspirations of others are dashed to oblivion by the same breeze.

All of which is by way of saying that the cigar-making industry is due for a boom, now that a presidential election year is with us. As far back as 1888 when Harrison was elected the astounding number of 100,000,000 more cigars were manufactured than the preceding year. By 1920 and its increased population the boost in cigar making for the presidential year came to the tidy total of \$20,000,000 above that of 1919.

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