

THE BLUE BUCKLE

A BAFFLING MYSTERY AND BREATHLESS TALE OF ADVENTURE

By WILLIAM HAMILTON OSBORNE

Author of "The Red Mouse," "The Running Fight," "Catpaw," Etc.

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SYNOPSIS

On board a transatlantic liner, returning from Europe, Rutherford falls in love with a woman, Mrs. Talcott, who is being pursued by a man who is a member of the underworld. Rutherford, who is a detective, is attracted to her. He follows her to New York, where he discovers that she is being pursued by a man who is a member of the underworld. Rutherford, who is a detective, is attracted to her. He follows her to New York, where he discovers that she is being pursued by a man who is a member of the underworld. Rutherford, who is a detective, is attracted to her. He follows her to New York, where he discovers that she is being pursued by a man who is a member of the underworld.

CHAPTER XVII (Continued)

The words were uttered almost in the time of quiet command. Miss Ballantyne sprang to her feet, her hands clasped against her breast. "Pardon me, sit down please, and hear me out." He had not risen, and the girl almost against her will, sat down again. "I am a man, as you know, of wide influence, and some success in the world of business. I have made my money by never deviating from the path of duty. I have been straight ahead, turning neither to the right nor to the left, until I have obtained what I sought. I tell this not to boast, but in order that you may know with what sort of man you have to deal."

CHAPTER XVIII

SHOWING THE USEFULNESS OF AN ALIBI

When Rutherford again opened his eyes to a dull, insistent sense of suffering, it was broad daylight. Some one was still kneading his tortured frame persistently. "Helderman, you devil, stop!" he commanded, hoarsely. "Keep still!" said a voice of authority. Craig tried to turn, to see who it was that spoke, and a tearing pain like the twisting of a three-cornered knife in the middle of his back nearly threw him again into unconsciousness. In spite of it, he vainly tried to rise, to leap at this man's throat and end it all. Anything better than to submit to being played with, like a mouse in the clutches of a hungry cat.

CHAPTER XIX

The man who read you a wireless message right off the reel." Rutherford nodded. He noticed the other man hitch his chair nearer the bed. Crowder evidently was keen upon the secret of his head. "The banker told you that this message was for the secret service man on board?" Crowder continued. "That's what he said." "Well, Sims here was a special detail on board the Gothie, though I didn't know it at the time." Sims shook his head. "I never got the message or any message like it—and if there was one there ought to have been more about this necklace—and never heard about such a message until I got to headquarters."

CHAPTER XX

"You're crazy!" exclaimed Crowder, losing his customary calm. "I guess I ought to know! I have reason enough to remember!" "Why, man, what was it?" "You couldn't have seen a clock—"

CHAPTER XXI

The real Helderman did me the honor to pay me a visit, at that particular time." Crowder drew his chair up close, and glanced around the doorways. Then he said, in a low voice: "Mr. Rutherford, it wouldn't surprise me if what you say is true. Two or three times, of late, I have had conflicting stories about this man's actions, but we have been able to prove anything on him as yet. For several months he has been suspected of being at the head of the biggest syndicate of diamond smugglers in the world. Your necklace gave us a valuable clue. Now, how do you figure you came by it?"

"You're pretty well done up," the surgeon observed, as he looked at the patient, after a series of investigations which seemed to the victim like an infliction. "It's in the old place," muttered Craig—then he added savagely, "but I will get well—I will walk!" "Good for you! I like your spunk!" said the doctor. Craig breathed heavily, then he inhaled deeply and turned his eyes toward the practitioner.

"You using chloroform on me?" "No—some one beat me to it, and has split all the bottles on your man here." "Goody!" exclaimed the sufferer anxiously. "Hello, Mike!" For answer, Mike lifted up a sick-looking countenance, then struggled to his feet, saluted, and collapsed back into his chair. "Whoever it was, he made a thorough job of it," observed Pritchard. Craig nodded weakly.

"I'm glad to be here, sir, but sorry you are laid up," the detective responded. "This is Mr. Sims. He knows you, although you don't know him." Craig nodded and looked more closely at the other man. He acknowledged that he did not remember to have seen him before. "He's one of us," commented Crowder. "Another one?" roared Craig. "Another fellow to trail you around and hide behind lamp-posts and hit you on the back of the head! Oh, Lord!" He was just ill enough to be garrulous.

"It does seem queer and inconsistent. But I don't accuse Helderman of burglary in the common sense of the term. I think he's after something he thinks is his—but he didn't get it!" "He entered secretly?" "Yes. He chloroformed my man, and probably took his key." "Your man?" Crowder leaned over to whisper his question. "Mike's as true as steel," Rutherford asserted. "What time was this?" "At 2 o'clock in the morning," answered Craig. "At 2 o'clock, night before last?" repeated the Secret Service man, in undisguised contempt. "Yes, 2 o'clock exactly."

"I believe you," was the only reply the Secret Service man vouchsafed. Then he turned and asked, unexpectedly, "Who did you see, Mr. Rutherford?" "Helderman." "It was Crowder's turn to jump. He looked at Rutherford quickly, to see if this undue excitement were going to his head. But the sick man looked sane enough, and very much in earnest. "You don't mean that," said Crowder, quietly. "I just do," Craig affirmed. "You fly off, on a minute, because you suspect Helderman of a big smuggling game—and in the next breath you accuse him of common, low-down burglary—for that's what the clerk downstairs said it was. How do you make that out, Mr. Rutherford?"

"That's the way it is sometimes. Other times they are loose, and it would take more courage than I've got to go into the yard. They are always out when Helderman's in; and the gates are locked then. You'd think he was afraid of the public. Then, other times, the gates are unlocked; the dogs are fastened up; and the whole world could run over the lawn unchallenged. But that is never when he's at home. It's mighty strange, I tell you!" "It is," assented Craig, more than ever convinced that Helderman was a past-master in the art of keeping himself secluded and prominent at the same time. "All the same, fellows, I won't give in that Helderman was not here, night before last."

"I crave your pardon for speaking of the practical side, first," he said, in low earnest tones, bending toward her. "We men of affairs are apt to forget that we love to make the world go round. Will you give me credit for sincerity when I say that ever since I first saw you, on the Gothie, I have hoped and worked and longed for the moment when I could pour out my heart to you! My desire to serve you is but a part of this expression. I love you, as I never loved girl or woman before. I believed it possible to love any woman!" "Stop, Mr. Helderman! Do you think it is quite honorable to make a business engagement the pretext for any such conduct as this?"

"What do you want to know about Helderman?" Craig evaded. "Mr. Rutherford, you once told me, in the presence of Mr. Brookfield at the Bar-risters' Club, that Mr. Helderman was..." "Oh, no!" the doctor replied, going to the left wrist of his patient. "He didn't know anything about it."

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CHAPTER XXII (Continued)

CHAPTER XXIII

CHAPTER XXIV

CHAPTER XXV

CHAPTER XXVI

CHAPTER XXVII

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(The next advertisement will appear Saturday, March 27th)

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