

JACK O' JUDGMENT :-: By Edgar Wallace

An Unusual Story of a Blackmailing Gang and a Mysterious Avenger, by the Author of "Green Rust," "The Daffodil Murder," "Clue of the Twisted Candle"

HE WAITED impatiently, chewing his cigar, until the dripping figure of the doorkeeper reappeared with the information that the car was at the end of the passage. He put up his umbrella and walked through the pelting rain to where his limousine stood.

Pinto Silva was angry, and his anger was of the hateful, smoldering type which grows in strength from moment to moment and from hour to hour. How dare she treat him like this? She, who owed her engagement to his influence, and whose fortune and future were in his hands! He would speak to the colonel, and the colonel could speak to her father. He had had enough of this.

He recognized with a start that he was afraid of the girl. It was incredible, but it was true. He had never felt that way about a woman before, but there was something in her eyes, a cold disdain, which cowed even as it maddened him.

The car drew up before a block of buildings in a deserted West End thoroughfare. He flashed on the electric light and saw that the hour was a little after eleven. The last thing in the world he wanted was to take part in a conference that night. But if he wanted anything less, it was to annoy the colonel at this moment of crisis.

He walked through the dark vestibule and entered an automatic elevator, which carried him to the third floor. Here the landing and the corridor were illuminated by one small electric lamp, sufficient to light him to the heavy walnut doors which led to the office of the Spillbury Syndicate. He opened the door with a latekey and found himself in a big lobby, furnished in good style.

A man was sitting before a radiator, a paper pad upon his knees, and he was making notes with a pencil. He looked up, startled, as the other entered and nodded. It was Olaf Hanson, the colonel's clerk—and Olaf, with his hat, expressionless face and his stiff, up-standing hair, always reminded Pinto of a struwwelpeter which had been cropped.

"Hello, Hanson. Is the colonel inside?"

The man nodded.

"They're waiting for you," he said. His voice was hard and unsympathetic, and his thin lips snapped out every syllable.

"Aren't you coming in?" asked Pinto in surprise, his hand upon the door.

The man called Hanson shook his head.

"I've got to go to the colonel's flat," he said. "To get some papers. Besides, they don't want me here."

He smiled quickly and warily. It was a grimace rather than an expression of amusement, and Pinto eyed him narrowly. He had, however, the good sense to ask no further questions. Turning the handle of the door, he walked into the large, ornate apartment.

In the center of the room was a big table, and the chairs at its side were for the most part, filled.

He dropped into a seat on the colonel's right and nodded to the others at the table. Most of the originals were there—Swell, Crews, Jackson, Crosswell, and at the farther end of the table Lollie Marsh, with her baby face and her permanent expression of open-mouthed wonder.

"Where's White?" he asked.

The colonel was reading a letter and did not immediately reply. Presently he took off his pipe-case and put that into his pocket.

"Where's White?" he repeated.

"White isn't here. No, White isn't here," he repeated significantly.

"What's wrong?" asked Pinto quickly.

The colonel scratched his chin and looked up to the ceiling.

"I'm settling up my Spillbury business," he said. "White isn't in it."

"Why not?" asked Silva.

"He never was in it," said the colonel evasively. "It was not the kind of business that White would like to let me get his hands on."

"You're getting tired of that girl's airs and graces, colonel, after what we've done for her?"

"You'll get tired, Pinto," said a voice from the end of the table, and he turned round to meet the laughing eyes of Lollie Marsh.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I've been out taking a look at her today," she said, and the colonel wobbled at her.

"You were out taking a look at something else if I remember right," he said quickly. "I told you to get after Stafford King."

"And I got after him," she said, "and after the time he was in the hospital."

"What do you mean?"

"That's a bit of news for you, isn't it?" She was delighted to drop the bombshell. "You said like Stafford King, without crossing the tracks of Maisie White."

The colonel uttered an exclamation.

"What do you mean?" he asked again.

"Didn't you know they were acquainted? Didn't you know that Stafford King goes down to Horsham to see her, and takes her to dinner twice a week?"

They looked at one another in consternation. Maisie White was the daughter of a man who, next to the colonel, had been the most driving member of the gang, who had organized more coups than any other man except its leader. The news that the daughter of Solomon White was meeting the chief of the criminal intelligence department was incredible and stunning.

"So that's it, is it?" said the colonel, licking his dry lips. "That's why Solomon White's with the life and wants to break away from the stage door. I went back to the theatre and saw her dresser. She is the woman I recommended when Pinto put her on the stage."

"What sort of work is Maisie doing?" asked the saturnine Crews.

"Maisie impersonations," said the girl, "she looks dandy in men's clothes. She's the best male impersonator I've ever seen. Why, when she talks—"

"Never mind about that," interrupted the colonel. "What did you discover?"

"I discovered that Stafford King comes regularly to the theatre, that he takes her to dinner, and that he visits the house at Horsham."

"Silly never told me that—the swine!" exclaimed the colonel. "He's going to double cross us, that fellow."

"I don't believe it."

It was Crews who spoke. Swell Crews, whose boast it was that he had a suit for every day in the year.

"I know Solomon and I've known him for years," he said. "I know him as well as you, colonel. As far as we are concerned, Sol's straight. I'm not detecting the possibility that he wants to break away, but that's only natural. He's a man with a daughter, and he's made his pile, but I'll stake my life that he'll never double cross us."

"He'll cross us," the colonel had recovered his wonted equanimity. "What has he to double cross?" he demanded almost jovially. "We have a straightforward business. I am not aware that any of us are guilty of dishonest actions. Double cross? Bah!"

He brought his big hand down with a thump on the table, and they knew from experience that this was the signal for the chairman that ended all discussions.

"Now, gentlemen," said the colonel, "let us get to business." As if Hanson in his guess he had not the figure. It is the last lot of figures of ours that he'll ever handle," he added.

Sombody went to the door of the afternoon and called the secretary, but there was no reply.

"Gone out?" said the colonel, and bent his brows. "Who told him to go out? Never mind, he'll be back in a minute. Shut the door."

He lifted a dead box from the floor at his feet, placed it on the table, opened it with a key attached to his watch-chain, and removed a bundle of documents.

"We're going to settle the Spillbury business tonight," he said. "It looks as though Spillbury might squint."

"Where is he?" asked Pinto.

"In an imbricated house," said the colonel, grimly. "It seems there are some imbricated houses whose owners are likely to question the legality of the transfers. But I've had the best legal opinion in London, and there is no doubt that our position is safe. The only thing we've got to do tonight is to make absolutely sure that all those fool letters he wrote to Lollie have been destroyed."

"You've got them," said the girl quickly.

"I had them," said the colonel, "and I burned them, all except one, when the transfer was completed. And the question is, gentlemen," he said, "shall we burn the last?"

He took from the bundle before him an envelope and held it up.

"I kept this in case anything unforeseen should happen, but if he's in a booze home, why, he's not going to



"Everybody's hands in the air," said Jack. "For the Jack o' Judgment is among you and life is full of amazing possibilities!"

Intruder held, in spite of the silver plating and the gold inlay along the chased barrel.

"Everybody's hands in the air," said the Jack shrewly, "right up to the beautiful sky! Yours too, Lollie. Stand away from the table, everybody, and back to that wall. For the Jack o' Judgment is among you and life is full of amazing possibilities!"

They backed from the table, peering helplessly at the two unwinking eyes which showed through the holes in the handkerchief.

"Back to the wall, my pretties," chuckled the Thing. "I'm going to make you laugh, and you'll want some support. I'm going to make you rock with joy and merriment!"

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After I've ever seen. Why, when she talks—"

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