A Secret OF THE HEART

By HOWARD FIELDING.

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SYNOPSIS.

Mr. Willard Davis is the head of the surface lines of New York, and his office is in the rear of the company's rooms on the third floor of the Ann Street bank building. Associated with him in various schemes for the absorption of small street car lines is George Stalbridge. Stalbridge is much disliked by Willard Davis' nephew, young Davis, who believes that Stalbridge is leading his uncle into dangerous and corrupt schemes with the object of finally securing control of the great property himself, and of gaining the hand of Willard Davis' daughter, now engaged to Walter Norman. The morning after a transaction, by which a small line in which Norman is interested is swallowed up by the large company, young Davis goes down to remonstrate with his uncle. He meets Stalbridge in front of the bank building, and rebukes him. As he mentions Norman's name young Davis notes that Stalbridge glances upward in a startled way toward the elevated railroad. Young Davis goes to his uncle's office, followed by Stalbridge. The door is locked. There is a key inside the lock. A moan is heard and then a crash. Young Davis pushes the key out with Stalbridge's key, and unlocks the door. He sees his uncle on his knees, the latter tries to speak and falls to the floor, dead. As young Davis entered the room, a door opposite closed with a snap. He bursts it in, but finds the room beyond vacant, with an open window looking on the stone court. It is found that Willard Davis' body has two wounds, one on the head made by a heavy instrument, and one a stab in the breast with a small pointed weapon. A detective is summoned, who finds Willard Davis' keys on the floor near the entrance door. A towel is hung on a looking-glass high above the washstand. Blood stains are found on the door and on the edges of the wash basin. Stalbridge suggests that Norman is a very tall man. Meanwhile among the crowd that gathered at the scene young Davis had noticed a tall Italian, who excitedly proclaims the murder a just deed.

PART III.

MR. STALBRIDGE IS AMUSED, AND STARTLED.

"Your friend, Mr. Stalbridge, is a wonderful man."

So said Detective Johnson to me on the evening of the day of the murder.

I was too deeply interested in learning what Stalbridge had done to think of protesting against his being called my friend. After leaving the scene of the crime for the purpose of conveying the dreadful news to my aunt and my cousin, I had known scarcely anything of the progress of the case. The detective had promised to report to me at my uncle's house, and I had been impatiently awaiting his coming. It was about eight o'clock when he was shown into the drawing-room and he responded to my eager question with praise of Stalbridge.

"What has he done?" I demanded. "Has he found the murderer?"

"Not yet," replied the detective, "but he is working down to him rapidly. That man has more than the instinct of a bloodhound. The hound must hunt for the trail, but Mr. Stalbridge knows where the trail is without hunting for it."

"I should view such knowledge with suspicion," said I.

"Oh, come now," retorted Johnson, good-naturedly, "you are doing your friend an injustice. To say nothing of his character, it is impossible to suspect him of any participation in this crime. Certainly nobody could suffer more than he does by the death of Mr. Davis."

"You should see Mr. Davis' daughter," I said, bitterly.

"Is she taking it hard?"

"I never saw such grief. It is heart-rending. She was scarcely in her right mind when I saw her last."

"Mr. Norman is here, I suppose?"

"No; he is not here. We have been unable to find him."

"I had the same luck," said Johnson, some slight token of interest appearing in his mechanically expressionless voice. "I called at his rooms twice."

"What for?" I demanded.

"I hardly know what for, the first time," he replied; "but the second time I was after this."

He showed me a stiletto with a jeweled handle. I knew it well, having seen it often in Norman's rooms, where there was a rubbishy lot of quaint weapons with a few that were interesting and valuable.

"Johnson," said I, "if you let Stalbridge induce you to drag Norman into this case, you'll make an awful mistake."

"Mr. Stalbridge doesn't urge it," he replied. "I think he suspects somebody else. But I can't overlook Norman altogether. You see this railroad business brings him into the case, and if I don't hunt him up the newspapers will jump on me. That's what we're all afraid of, you know—the newspapers. Now, if you think I am likely to get jumped on worse for arresting Norman than for letting him alone, why I'll act accordingly. I haven't any feeling in the matter; and as for knowing who killed Mr. Davis or having any suspicion of it, my mind is as empty as a box full of nothing."

"Hasn't anything been done expect this foolish business about Norman?" I asked, impatiently.

"Oh, yes; there's the examination by the coroner's physician. I haven't the written report, but I can give you the substance of it. Your opinion regarding the stab wound was correct. It pierced the heart. Death must have been almost instantaneous. That proves my theory that the fatal blow was struck while you stood outside the door. Ah, good evening, Mr. Stalbridge."

I turned just as the gaunt, high-shouldered figure stalked into the room.

Stalbridge, usually so excessively courteous, gave no greeting to either of us. He looked like a man with one idea—vengence.

"Have you done anything with the fragments of that document?" he demanded of the detective.

"Mrs. Johnson has them, sir," he replied. "She is far cleverer than any man at that sort of work."

"What is this document?" I asked.

"I was just going to tell you about it when Mr. Stalbridge came in," said Johnson. "You know my theory of the crime. Mr. Davis was struck down, and then the murderer removed a paper from the desk. The blood stains on the remaining papers prove this conclusively, to my mind. I confess that I had little hope of ever finding that document; but I now believe that we have it in hand."

"Where did you find it?"

"Wait a moment. Not so fast. You know how the murderer escaped. By a desperate exercise of agility, aided evidently by the natural advantage of height, he climbed from a window of your uncle's rear room into an unoccupied suite which also had a rear window on the court.

"Naturally, I suggested an examination of those apartments to see whether he had left any clew behind him. Mr. Stalbridge joined me in the search. It was fruitless at first, except that we

"YOU LIE, STALBRIDGE; I AM HERE TO DEFEND MYSELF."

found all the doors unlocked, showing that the murderer could have had unimpeded passage through the rooms.

"After a careful examination, I was on the point of abandoning that field; but Mr. Stalbridge insisted that there must be something to reward our endeavors. And so there was, for, on the final search, I found ten thousand tiny bits of paper in a cupboard under a set-bowl in one of the rooms.

"I might not have recognized the importance of this discovery but for Mr. Stalbridge. Said he: 'The murderer did this. It was to be expected. We ought to have known for a certainty that these scraps of paper were here. He had committed murder to secure that document. He dared not go out upon the street with it in his pocket for fear of arrest. If he had been taken with this upon him, what could have saved him?'

"I was inclined to be skeptical, but an examination of the bits of paper showed me that they once formed part of a legal document. Besides, it was easy to see that they had not been many hours in that place. Moreover, care had been taken to tear the paper into fragments of nearly equal size, so as to prevent any person from putting them together properly."

"It can be done," said Stalbridge; "and I will stake my life that the document proves to be the contract which delivered the Twenty-seventh street road into our hands. Moreover, Mr. Davis," he continued, addressing me directly, "I have to inform you that your friend Norman has disappeared."

"You lie, Stalbridge," said a deep, intense voice. "I am here to defend myself."

Norman strode into the room. He was almost a giant in stature, and the strength of his official outline matched the tremendous energy of his form. His cheeks and even his forehead were flushed with anger. I knew that he had heard of the suspicion that had been directed toward him; the attempts to find him and the search of his apartments, and that he attributed the injury, rightly, to Stalbridge.

Knowing Norman's high temper, I was afraid that he might do an act of violence which he would regret all his life. I hastily placed myself between them; and just then Johnson said, in his mose lifeless tone:

"Mr. Norman, I had the pleasure of calling upon you this afternoon when you were not at home, and I took several things out of your room."

The giant uttered a sound like the growling of a tiger, and instantly turned upon the detective. I expected to see Johnson annihilated, but he skillfully retreated from the peril which he had so recklessly invoked. He backed through a doorway into the music room, and Norman followed.

What happened in that room afterwards, I am unable to state, but there was no violence. Probably Norman found it impossible to be angry with such an automaton as Johnson.

There was a great deal in my mind, in that moment when I found myself alone with Stalbridge. I saw in him the most dangerous persecutor of my

DETECTIVE BACKED THROUGH A DOORWAY INTO THE MAIN ROOM.

friend, and for that alone I would have opposed him in every possible manner. But I hated him, besides, and to fight against him was a pleasure.

"Stalbridge," said I, "you know Norman to be innocent."

"I know nothing of the kind," he retorted angrily. "You don't know what you are talking about."

"Wait a bit," I rejoined. "Let me tell you what I mean. When we were walking down Vesey street this morning, you mentioned Norman's name, and at that moment you chanced to look up. You started. I turned toward you, and noticed a peculiar expression in your face. I was then too deeply intent upon another matter, to understand your look, but a comprehension of its meaning has been growing on me ever since. Stalbridge, you saw Walter Norman in that train which passed us at that moment, and it was the coincidence of seeing him just as his name was on your lips which startled you."

Stalbridge glanced toward the music room. Johnson had closed the door.

A look of amusement overspread my adversary's countenance. Such a look may run around the circle of the fiends when the red light strikes into a new face.

"This is really humorous," he said in a low tone. "You expect to prove an alibi for Walter Norman by my testimony."

"You do not deny what I assert."

"My dear fellow, is it necessary? Can you expect my conduct to be affected by the circumstance of my seeing or not seeing Mr. Norman at the time you mention? If you had seen him, that would have been a different matter."

"Do you mean to tell me," I demanded, horror stricken, "that you will let him be condemned for this crime when a word from you can save him?"

"I'm not so sure that he could be saved in the way you suggest," he rejoined. "Suppose that he was on that train; he might have gotten off at Park Place and have reached the Ann Street building ahead of us."

"You stultify yourself," I cried. "Remember that there was a blow struck before the fatal thrust with the dagger; that the criminal locked the door, that he washed his hands; that he stole a paper from the desk. Could all this have been done in the time that Norman would have had, by your supposition?"

"Perhaps not," said Stalbridge, grinning.

"I can see that we are wasting words," said I. "Whatever may be the value of the evidence you could give in his favor, you will not give it."

"Your intellect is unusually clear this evening," he said. "Still there is a possibility that some one else in the train may have recognized him."

"There is a much greater possibility the other way," I rejoined. "But I am going to remove this matter out of the region of possibilities."

"How, may I ask?"

"By compelling you to tell the truth—a thing that I never hoped to see."

"Compel is a very forcible word. What is your backing for it?"

"Let me meet that question with another: Where were you when my uncle was murdered?"

Stalbridge smiled.

"I was enjoying the charm of your society—a pleasure that is too often denied me," he said.

"How are you going to prove it?" I demanded.

My question struck him as if it had been a clenched fist. He started back. Then his brow darkened. He suddenly drew himself up, and his lean hands became like claws. He was about to utter a threat, but somehow it seemed to stick in his throat.

(To be continued.)

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"Now multiply by 100."

"Eighteen hundred."

"Very good. Hold on to that. How many graces were there?"

"Three."

"Precisely. Multiply that by itself."

"Nine."

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