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## SILVER SANDALS

A Detective Story of Mystery, Love and Adventure.

By Clinton H. Stagg.

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"That makes it even again." The blind man smiled slightly as he followed into the main body of the hotel. "Lo, cap!" greeted the thick voice of the loose-jawed, purple-cheeked man who puffed as he wiggled out of his heavy coat. "Devil of a time to break up a man's party. Where's the body?" The cordiality went from the voice as he apparently saw the blind man for the first time. "Lo Colton! In on this, too? Goin' to make another flying-death mystery, and go over our heads?"

Coroner Bierbauer, like Captain McMann, had never forgotten the blind man's solving of the girl violinist's death at the theater, and the sequel murder of the theater manager, Crawford, in the rathskeller, by the same knife thrower. Both had occurred in that precinct, and while they had bent every effort to fasten the guilt on two wholly innocent persons, the blind man had gone over their heads to the chief of the detective bureau, and had forced a confession from the real murderer.

Thornley Colton merely contented himself with a nod of recognition as Captain McMann took the coroner aside. For several minutes the two held a whispered conversation. The talk was official, uninteresting, and Colton did not even attempt to hear, but his super-keen ears, trained to catch each significant sound in the lobby. He knew that there were groups of men on the seats and divans conversing in tremulous whispers. Manager Carl had left them the minute they came out of the office, and Colton knew that he had gone to the door of the diningroom.

The blind man did not need eyes to tell him that the suspicions of the diners in the restaurant, aroused by his action of feeling the wrist of the dead man, had become tangible certainty. With the typical New Yorker's fear of the witness stand and the House of Detention, the diners had scurrying away, with nervous glances at the unmoving man. The brusque entrance of the uniformed captain, known immediately through the whole floor, proved these suspicions. Those remaining in the lobby and diningroom were only the morbidly curious waiting for something to develop.

Captain McMann turned from Bierbauer and nodded to a square-chinned, square-toed man, who puffed a black cigar in a leather wall chair. The man rose and walked over leisurely.

"Cover the doors, Tom," Captain McMann ordered.

"Done, cap."

"Anything?"

"Nope."

"See the book?"

"Every name. Reg'lar hotel bunch."

"New men?"

"No. Been here two days."

"Details?"

"Nope. Not yet."

"Get 'em. Have a couple of uniformed men cover the diningroom doors."

"Yep. Heard talk of the thing. Took a peek. Queer case, cap."

"Uh-huh!" The captain nodded toward the waiting coroner, and started toward the diningroom.

"You didn't lose any time, captain," Colton said, and there was sincere compliment in his tone. The police official had had his men take care of every possible angle from a police viewpoint, except examining the body and scene of the crime. That was the work of the superior.

If the captain understood the com-

pliment, he refused to recognize it. "No grass'll grow under my feet in this case, believe me!" There was a grim emphasis in the remark that did not escape the problemist. McMann had confidence, and more than the usual allotment of police-detective ability.

At the door of the restaurant the captain was met by the two uniformed men in plain-clothes man had summoned, and he placed them at the kitchen and main doors of his fiancée. Then an unnecessary snarl of his fiancée attracted the attention of the handful of diners who were still sitting at the tables waiting for the detective. They were sure would come, and they were sure would come.

"Clear out!" he ordered. "Get! You'll find out all about it in the morning papers, I suppose."

Meekly, disappointedly, they obeyed the blue uniform, and a glance told the waiting diners to find out whether or not they knew enough to make them valuable as witnesses. Then the three men, with Manager Carl almost on the verge of nervous collapse bringing up the rear, started toward the table of death.

The bearded man still sat in his chair; his relaxed hand was still around the stem of the wineglass, in which the bubbles had ceased to rise. His eyes, bright, with none of the fishy dullness that comes to dead eyes, stared straight ahead. The bearded chin was still held high. The arm with the slashed wrist was unmoved. Nothing was changed; yet everything was different. An hour before, there had been a silver-clay reigned supreme in the big diningroom. The waiters, the captains, the leaden-footed and torpid-brained with the demoralization that had sent the diners bustling away, were gathered in small groups, whispering, glancing apprehensively at the single occupant of the big room. Empty, silver-clay glasses were still on the tables, because discipline had gone.

Captain McMann's eyes took in every detail of the picture as he walked to the table. Then he turned over the hand that was palm down and whistled a combination of surprise and professional satisfaction as he saw the three gaping slashes across the wrist artery. Then lines of puzzlement came to his florid brow.

"How long ago did this happen?" he demanded of the nervous manager, who stood back, wringing his hands.

"I don't know," stammered Carl. "Mr. Colton says that he has been dead for hours."

"Right, at that!" The admission came scowlingly from the coroner, who had lifted the glass of dead wine from the relaxed fingers, and was feeling the wrist that was uncut.

"Why didn't you notify us before, then?" asked the policeman sharply.

"Don't you know that there's a jail penalty for concealing crime?"

"You came within three-quarters of an hour after the discovery," put in the blind man quietly.

"How's that?" The man's been dead hours! How'd he get here?"

"Walked," answered Colton shortly.

An exclamation came from the coroner, as he rolled up a sleeve to the elbow and ran his hands up the arm to the shoulder and then down the back. "The body is in a metal brace!" he ejaculated. "Silver, by the Lord Harry!" He exposed the silver, heavily hinged double circlets around the arm above and below the elbow.

"Mr. Colton said it was steel," declared the manager nervously.

"Mistake number one," admitted the problemist candidly; then he spoke to Bierbauer: "Those gaping slashes weren't made after death, were they, coroner?"

Bierbauer darted him a sharp glance before he took the wrist in hand to examine it.

"No!" The negative came with an air of finality, and the explanation that followed was equally definite. "The 'lay' of the slashes was made by the flow of blood from the artery. If the cuts had been made after death, they would be straight and cleanly open. These 'lip' a trifle where the blood has forced them up over the arterial passage."

"Then death was caused by arteriotomy?"

"Yes," nodded Bierbauer. "No doubt of it."

"What's that arter-omy thing?" growled Captain McMann.

"Bleeding to death," Colton put it into simple words. Then he spoke again to the coroner: "Aren't his eyes unusually bright?"

"How'd you know that, if your blindness isn't bunk?" snapped the short-tempered police captain. Thornley Colton had taken the principal part away from him, and he resented it.

"The dullness of dead eyes would have attracted immediate attention," Colton explained frankly.

"Chemical," declared the coroner, a trifle ungraciously. "The captain and he were old friends. But he was going to show the interloper that he knew his business, and knew it well."

"Atropine," he added.

"Uh!" Colton turned away and spoke over his shoulder as he went to the next table. "I thought belladonna merely dilated the eye pupils, to make them lustrous. I had no idea it would act on dead eyes!"

The coroner's face flushed as he realized his mistake, and he muttered something under his breath. But the blind man had apparently forgotten the two men. His back was toward them, and his sensitive finger tips were gingerly brushing a damp spot on the cloth of the next table, moving gently the sharp fragments of a broken wineglass. With a quick motion, he thrust his fingers into his vest pocket; not quickly enough, however, to escape the sharp eyes of McMann.

"What was that?" he demanded, as he strode over. "What was it?"

Thornley Colton reached into his pocket again and held out the thing he had picked up. "Merely a fragment of broken wineglass, captain. There are others there; take all you want."

McMann took the small piece of glass from the outstretched palm with no word of apology. His brows beaded as he looked at it, trying to puzzle out the blind man's object in attempting to conceal it. It was nothing but a broken piece of thin wineglass stem, like half a dozen others on the table next to the one where sat the dead man. But McMann was nothing if not cautious.

"The police are in charge of this case. I'll take care of this."

"Very well," assented Colton. "Good-night, captain!"

Colton's ready acquiescence struck the captain as suspicious.

"What is it?" he asked again, his tone this time one of assumed amusement.

"The race has ceased to be even, that is all."

The problemist nodded a good-night to the coroner, and walked leisurely away, a peculiar smile surving his thin lips. His lightning-moving fingers had picked up two of the glass fragments. The one that the captain had not seen was still safe in his vest pocket.

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[To be continued.]