

The Exploits of Elaine

A Detective Novel and a Motion Picture Drama

By ARTHUR B. REEVE

The Well-Known Novelist and the Creator of the "Craig Kennedy" Stories

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CONTINUED

"As Craig pointed out the resemblances with a pencil my amazement gradually changed into comprehension and comprehension into conviction. The meaning of it all began to dawn on me."

The writing was identical. There were no differences!

While we were locked in the secretary's office Bennett and Elaine were continuing their chat on various social topics. Suddenly, however, with a glance at the clock, Bennett told Elaine that he had an important letter to dictate and that it must go off at once.

She said that she would excuse him a few minutes, and he pressed a button to call his secretary.

Of course, the secretary did not appear. Bennett left his office, with some annoyance, and went into the adjoining room, the door to which Kennedy had not locked.

He hesitated a moment, then opened the door quietly. To his astonishment he saw Kennedy, the secretary and myself apparently making a close examination of the typewriter.

Gliding, rather than walking back into his own office, he closed the door and locked it. Almost instantly fear and fury at the presence of his hated rival, Kennedy, turned Bennett, as it were, from the Jekyll of a polished lawyer and lover of Elaine into an insanely jealous and revengeful Mr. Hyde. The strain was more than his warped mind could bear.

With a look of intense horror and loathing Elaine watched him slowly change from the composed, calm, intellectual Bennett she knew and respected into a repulsive, mad figure of a man.

His stature even seemed to be altered. He seemed to shrivel up and become deformed. His face was terribly distorted.

And his long, sinewy hand slowly twisted and bent until he became the personal embodiment of the Clutching Hand.

As Elaine, transfixed with terror, watched Bennett's astounding metamorphosis, he ran to the door leading to the outer office and hastily locked that also.

Then, with his eyes gleaming with rage and his hands working in murderous frenzy, he crouched nearer and nearer, toward Elaine.

She shrank back, screaming again and again in terror.

He was the Clutching Hand.

In spite of closed doors we could now plainly hear Elaine's shrieks. Craig, the secretary and myself made a rush for the door to Bennett's private office. Finding it locked, we began to batter it.

By this time, however, Bennett had hurled himself upon Elaine and was slowly choking her.

Kennedy found that it was impossible to batter down the door in time by any ordinary means. Quickly he seized the typewriter and hurled it through the panels. Then he thrust his hand through the opening and turned the catch.

As we flung ourselves into the room Bennett rushed into a closet in a corner, slamming the door behind him. It was composed of sheet iron, and effectively prevented anyone from breaking through. Kennedy and I tried valiantly, however, to pry it open.

While we were thus endeavoring to force an entrance Bennett, in a sort of closet, had put on the coat, hat and mask which he invariably wore in the character of the Clutching Hand. Then he cautiously opened a secret door in the back of the closet and slowly made an exit.

Meanwhile the secretary had been doing his best to revive Elaine, who was on the floor, hysterical and half unconscious from the terrible shock she had experienced.

Intent on discovering Bennett's whereabouts, Kennedy and I examined the wall of the office, thinking there

fear the Chinaman intimated that he had no place in which Bennett could be concealed with any degree of safety.

For a moment Bennett glared savagely at Long Sin.

"I possess hidden plunder worth seven million dollars," he pleaded quickly, "and if by your aid I can make a getaway, a seventh is yours."

The Chinaman's cupidity was clearly excited by Bennett's offer, while the bare mention of the amount at stake was sufficient to overcome all his scruples.

After exchanging a few words he finally agreed to aid the Clutching Hand. Opening a trap door in the floor of the room in which they were standing, he led Bennett down a step-ladder into the subterranean chamber in which Tong Wah had so recently been preparing his mysterious potion.

As Bennett sank into a chair and passed his hands over his brow in utter weariness, Long Sin poured into a cup some of the liquor of death which Tong Wah had mixed. He handed it to Bennett, who drank it eagerly.

"How do you propose to help me to escape?" asked Bennett huskily.

Without a word Long Sin went to the wall, and, grasping one of the stones, pressed it back, opening a large receptacle, in which there were two glass coffins apparently containing two dead Chinamen. Pulling out the coffins, he pushed them before Bennett, who rose to his feet and gazed upon them with wonder.

Long Sin broke the silence: "These men," he said, "are not dead; but they have been in this condition for many months. It is what is called in your language suspended animation."

"Is that what you intend to do with me?" asked Bennett, shrinking back in terror.

The Chinaman nodded in affirmation as he pushed back the coffins.

Overcome by the horror of the idea Bennett, with a groan, sank back into the chair, shaking his head as if to indicate that the plan was far too terrible to carry out.

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