



"Mind Telling Me About It?"

# The LASH of CIRCUMSTANCE

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### SYNOPSIS.

Abner Halliday, a miserly millionaire, is found gagged, bound and insensible in his room, his safe filled and \$40,000 missing. The thread of the story is taken up by his nephew Tom. Living in the same house are other relatives; reckless Bruce Halliday and pretty Claire Winton. Bruce, who is a bond broker, has been trying to raise \$10,000 to put through a deal and save himself from financial ruin. He has applied to his miserly uncle and to others for the loan but has been refused. Tom sends for William LeDuc, an old-time friend connected with a detective agency. In relating the story Tom reverts to his acquaintance with a Mrs. Dace, a wealthy widow, whose business agent is Richard Mackay, a bolder and political boss. Tom is jealous of Mackay and is deeply in love with Mrs. Dace. Bruce Halliday warns him to shun her as an adventuress. Tom sees Mrs. Dace and Mackay together. He afterwards meets the woman at a horse race, and, happening to mention that Bruce had a tip on the winner, she gives him \$500 to place on the race. The tip goes wrong and she loses her money. Later Tom invests in stocks.

### CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued.)

I had won handsomely, my spirits were effervescent and my old feeling of assurance predominant. I assumed the attitude of a critical man of affairs whose confidence in his own judgment had been verified by his successes in many a jousting bout with the great knights of the financial arena. I leisurely rambled afield amongst the larger topics of the public press as I sat in the easy chair which she had bought for my especial comfort. I referred hazily to my present investments and diagnosed the condition of the business world; the Russian wheat crop; the boll weevil in Mississippi cotton; the machinations of the trusts. She did not seem to be particularly impressed and made few comments. At times I even imagined a smile came flickering about her lips, but I proceeded with careless assurance until the time came when I remarked that I must be departing. She did not press me to stay, in fact, seemed to be thinking about something else; and it was then that I played the card that I had been leading up to throughout the evening.

I opened my pocket-book casually. "By the way, Matie," I remarked half patronizingly. "I put a little down for you the other day on some stock that I thought was a good thing. It went up, as I had expected, and I closed you out a little profit. Here is your share." I tossed a clearing house certificate for \$500 before her. She glanced at it with a quick sidelong flash of her eyes and her hand came stealing over mine. "Why, Tom, I don't know what to say—it was so generous—so thoughtful of you. You don't know how much I appreciate it—not the money, you know, but the consideration that prompted it. Yet, really, I do not feel like accepting it when I took none of the risk. You had better keep it for reinvestment." I laughed lightly as I backed away, telling her that it amounted to nothing and that she should keep it for pin money.

She picked it up, folded it carelessly and tossed it into a drawer of her secretary. "Very well, if you wish it. But I shall not spend it; I shall keep it for luck. You once told me that I was an enchantress. We shall see. I am going to use all my black arts towards the conjuring of your fortune. With this magic check as a basis I shall work wonders." The smile she gave me as she closed the drawer was certainly that of an enchantress. She went on almost without pausing.

"You mustn't have a few mouthfuls with me—nearly but coffee and sandwiches, you know. I was just about to order when you spoke of going to the opera," I murmured perfunctorily, reit-

ing me destructive to a man's financial interests as for him to desert them for a honeymoon. Wedding trips and business are unmixable. If you would not have the one disillusioned and the other destroyed, keep them far apart. Love can wait its hour, but when fortune knocks upon the door we must be there to throw it wide. Perhaps in a year from now—" She paused and averted her cheeks.

"Perhaps in a year from now—what?" I cried eagerly. Her voice became very low.

"Nothing in particular. I was only about to say that if in a year from now you have not changed your mind and your business affairs are so grounded that you can leave them in safety for a period, it might then be proper for you to ask the fortunate lady."

"But a year seems a lifetime to one who loves her as I do. And she might become tired of waiting," I expostulated.

"Then I would not imagine that she had your best interests at heart, or that she would be a particularly desirable person to choose as a life companion. This is, of course, supposing that she understood the reason for the delay. This is my sisterly advice to you, having no idea, of course, who the charmer may be whom you have in mind." The wisdom of her advice seemed unanswerable and I remained mute before it. My hand falling upon hers and clasping it longingly was my only reply.

It was the day following this that I met Bruce in his despair over his lost fortune, and it was the next night that Uncle Abner was robbed. I think everything of importance has now been told up to the time I drew LeDuc through the door after the departure of the police.

### CHAPTER IX.

LeDuc was a medium-sized man, wiry of build and tough as whalebone. His eyes were restless and the faint smile which hung habitually about his lips was offset by a hawkish nose. I had known him ever since we had attended the same school as youths. Later on he had naturally gravitated into the service of one of the big detective agencies; had been successful on important cases with a uniformity that mere good luck could not account for, and having thus acquired a reputation had established an agency of his own. I had seen very little of him in the last ten years, but as boys we had been more or less chummy, the difference in our ages having been neutralized by the physical fact of my being considerably larger for my years than was he. I had admired him in those days for his remarkable agility and strength. As it is quality of brain matter which counts rather than quantity, so it is equally true of muscle. And while Billy was not especially powerfully made as far as appearances went, his muscles were like piano wire and the bulk of his competitor in a physical contest was to him a matter of supreme disregard. Moreover, he was shrewd and pleasant to meet and a decent fellow withal, and our friendship had wended along smoothly until the inevitable separation of our life paths. As he had never called to see me before, it took no rare instinct on my part to divine that this visit was not purely a social one.

Dr. Courtney passed us in the hall on his way back to his office, and with a farewell salutation to him I led my old friend up to my private quarters. He seated himself and I gave him a cigar. No sooner had he got it burning to his satisfaction than he broached the subject of his visit. "I have just heard that you have had a robbery of some consequence," he began. I assented with the remark that it was a beastly affair. LeDuc's eyes had always impressed me as having the alertness of a watching hawk's, and I now noted that they were flicking about the room as though searching for some lost article and apparently overlooking nothing. He continued:

"I don't suppose under the circumstances that it is necessary for me to state the object of my visit, although I presume I may as well do so. When I got wind of this affair it occurred to me that perhaps I might be of assistance to you professionally, and even if that were not the case that I would be glad to see you again on general principles. So I hurried right over. But now that we have shaken hands and looked each other over, I am anxious to know the particulars of this affair—thief catcher's instinct, you know. Mind telling me about it?"

"Not in the least. Glad you came," I returned heartily. Without further ado I briefly outlined the salient facts in the case as they had come under my observation. He then asked me a few questions as to who had possessed the keys, and such like, to which I gave him the same answers that I had the police. He listened quietly and without comment, and then expressed a wish to be introduced to Uncle Abner, whereupon I immediately took him to the adjoining room and made them acquainted. LeDuc settled down to business without delay.

"As you perhaps know, I am a professional detective and cases like this are strictly my specialty. I take it for granted that you wish to apprehend the parties who did this job, and that you would like to recover your money, or as much of it as possible. That being the case I would like to make an arrangement with you. I am in a more favorable position to get you results than are the regular police for a number of reasons. In the first place I am better equipped for it than are the majority of them, both by nature and education. It is a matter of common observation that the smart crook is smarter than the av-

erage crook-catcher, and while I don't wish to sound egotistical, I don't believe that the rule holds good in my case. Furthermore, I can mix with ladies and gentlemen among any surroundings, as well as with professional criminals, without betraying myself to either class, which is in itself a considerable advantage, for the criminal can spot the average city policeman, although he be in plain clothes, as readily as you could should he put on a dress suit and enter your drawing room. In addition to that, I am not bound by rules and regulations or the instructions of superiors who may or may not be competent to direct me, and neither am I always looking forward to the hour when it is time for me to go off duty and take my rest. Your city sleuth is paid a few dollars a day for certain hours of work, expects no reward as a general thing, and therefore more or less mechanically performs his work and then goes to his home the same as any other workman. I do not blame him for it, but it illustrates the weakness of the system. In addition to that, he probably has a dozen other somewhat similar affairs in his mind, and his work is more of a general than a special character. If he is running along the trail of one criminal and strikes that of another which seems a little warmer, he is likely to be diverted since the other evildoer are fish in the other hand, when I receive substantial remuneration in case I succeed, and I do not get diverted by other matters which only indirectly concern me; and neither am I at all particular as to the hour when I shall quit my day's work. These and other facts which I will not take the time to mention, added to my natural fitness for the work, have made me successful many times when the regular police force failed. You have lost \$40,000, and I make this proposition to you: It will be a case of no cure and no pay, as the doctors put it, and therefore an advantageous arrangement for you. If the regular police get your money back I will charge you nothing for what I may have done in the meantime. Neither will I present you any bill for the capture of the guilty party or parties unless I get some or all of your money back as well. But on all funds that I regain for you I will charge you a 25 per cent. commission. I don't see how anything could be any fairer than that."

Uncle Abner, who had remained quiet during LeDuc's utterances now sat up and began to whimper. "Ten per cent. is plenty enough for any one to charge. I have been robbed enough already. Suppose you should go out and get the money back in 24

hours. Would you have the greediness to charge me \$10,000 for a day's work?" LeDuc's lips tightened into a thin smile.

"I certainly should. I am very impudent in some respects, and I should charge you the full price even though the transaction took me only ten minutes. I have tried to emphasize that point as one of the reasons why I will do harder, longer and more intelligent work than will the policeman who only gets his \$3 a day. But on the other hand, and to balance the scales between us, of course the more I get the more you get. I take it for granted that you would rather get \$20,000 back than nothing at all. Also you must remember that there is the contingency that I may fail completely, and in that event I will be out my time, labor and expenses. Then again, I may recover but a small portion of what has been stolen, and in that case my fees will be insignificant and my time practically wasted. I have made you my offer and it is the best I will do. You can take it or you can let it alone if you prefer."

"Too much—altogether too much."

whined the voice from the sheets. Then as LeDuc, with an indifferent shrug of his shoulders, arose as if to depart, the lean hand of Uncle Abner shot from beneath the coverlet and hooked itself to the tails of his coat. "Very well, if you must take advantage of a sick man, I suppose I will have to submit. I'll be lucky if I don't die in the poorhouse after all, the way everybody imposes upon me." That LeDuc was half inclined then and there to throw up the proposition in disgust I could tell by the curl of his lip, but after a second's reflection he turned to me with a little smile which told me that he had given his allowance for the nature of the man with whom he was dealing.

"Very well. Sign this agreement then," he commanded shortly, as he handed the quibbler a paper and a fountain pen. Carefully Uncle Abner ran his colorless eyes over the printed form, inserted the necessary words and figures and affixed his signature. LeDuc thrust it into his pocket, and first having his new client repeat what he had previously told the police, turned his attention to the room without comment upon the statement.

The safe he examined with infinite attention to detail. The hole that had been drilled in the combination occupied his attention for at least ten minutes in itself. He measured it, peered into it as a terrier peers into a rat hole, examined it by the aid of a magnifying glass and actually smelled of it. The shattered pieces of lock he examined slowly, pondering over them for many minutes as he slowly turned them around and around in his hands. As for the room itself, the floor and the walls, he went over them inch by inch, and having at last finished that task asked me to show him the closet in which I had found the old man. In the hallway I saw him suddenly stoop and pick up some small object which he thrust hurriedly into his pocket without showing it to me. Inside and out we went over the house for a full hour, and then at his suggestion returned to my room where we seated ourselves. I asked him if he had discovered anything.

"Yes. The explosion occurred at 22 minutes past three," he replied, as he blew a long cloud of smoke. I depended that he tell me how he knew that."

"Simply because the clock on the mantle stopped at that hour. I gave it a little shake when I noticed that it had stopped and it started up again as merrily as you please, so I guess the concussion is what put it out of business temporarily." He smiled. Simple and obvious as this fact had been I had not noticed it in my survey of the room, and not particularly flattered at my own lack of discernment. I



Examined It by the Aid of a Magnifying Glass.

agreed that his explanation was probably correct. He seemed to be thinking intently for a while after that and I did not disturb him, but presently he turned to me.

"In getting at the roots of a case like this, one way of simplifying it is by the process of elimination—that is to say, by the weeding out of those persons and circumstances which although immediately surrounding the affair could not in the nature of things be connected with it. By doing this you are often able to narrow the field of your search and thereby secure greater concentration. I believe that you can help me considerably in this matter if you will frankly answer all questions I may ask you, feeling perfectly free to volunteer anything that may occur to you as you proceed. First of all, was your uncle in the habit of keeping large sums of money in the safe?" I shook my head.

"It very seldom happened. Perhaps once or twice a year only, and then merely because the cash was received out of banking hours. The rest of the time it would not be worth robbing."

"Who knew of this particular amount being there at this particular time?"

"No one as far as I know except Uncle Abner, of course, my cousin, Bruce Halliday, and myself. Uncle Abner says he did not tell Mrs. Tebbets, she denies all knowledge of it and I am inclined to believe that that settles that."

"It would so seem. And what kind of a man does Bruce happen to be?" I hesitated, endeavoring to choose my words with circumspection before answering a question which embraced so many qualifying and modifying phrases.

"Well, that is a hard question to answer off-hand. He is a complex proposition, you know—a sort of a paradox. You should know him thoroughly before passing judgment. But comprehensively I should say that he is genial, generous, outspoken and inclined to be reckless along certain lines. But I never knew him to even contemplate doing a dishonest thing and I don't believe that he ever did. The only two things that I ever knew him to do that might be criticized from a high moral standpoint are to occasionally take a few highballs or cocktails and to habitually speculate on 'Change. He is a broker, you know, and plays the game himself, like most of the rest of them."

"And his financial condition these days?" pursued my companion contemplatively. I shifted uneasily. It was plain that LeDuc was going to dig deep and ask me questions that would make it necessary for me to put Bruce in an unfavorable light, and it is not a pleasant task for one to be compelled to cast suspicion, even by inference, upon a life-long friend, especially when the friend is of his own blood. Yet a serious crime had been committed against both society at large and another of my kinsmen in particular, and should I conceal any essential fact that I knew and LeDuc discover that I had done so, it would put me in the miserable plight before Uncle Abner as having tried to shield some one and thus acted against him in the recovery of at least a portion of what had been pilfered from him. I did not for an instant believe that Bruce would even contemplate such an act, even though standing blindfold against the wall of financial despair, yet certainly there were things which in justice to everybody concerned he should explain; and while I did not doubt but that he could do so without difficulty, I disliked exceedingly to speak against him.

LeDuc sat quietly throughout my mental colloquy, eyeing me keenly. That my hesitancy in answering was unnoticed I did not for a moment flatter myself, for as well might one expect the fox to miss a movement of the cornered hare. "There seems to be something disagreeable in your mind. Perhaps you had better out with it," he suggested at length. "Remember that I am asking you, as a good citizen, to help me in this matter and am taking you into my confidence. I therefore expect you to assist me to the fullest extent of your powers regardless of whom it may help or hurt; always bearing in mind that no innocent man need be afraid. Furthermore, you may trust me not to give any information you may convey to me any more publicity than the exigencies of the case demand. What is it you are keeping from me now?"

"You have asked me as to my cousin's financial condition, and under my protest and your promise I will say this," I returned slowly. "He was in a miserable fix through losses on the exchange and came to Uncle Abner yesterday for a loan. Uncle Abner only grinned at him, as Bruce should have had sense enough beforehand to know he would. When I saw Bruce afterward he was way down on his luck and fairly desperate. He knew that uncle had the money in the house, because he was the one who called my attention to that fact, saying to me: 'My God, I must get hold of \$10,000 some way.' He then left me. When I saw him again he appeared to have been drinking. I put him in a carriage to get him out of sight and he was driven away, where I don't know, for I have not seen him since. That is all I know about that phase of the matter." My companion was following my every word and action with the intentness of a watching lynx, and when I had finished pounced upon my last and qualifying words instantly.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

### Other Fish to Fry.

Mrs. Tutill has a reputation of prolonging her calls. One Sunday, after an hour's visit at a friend's house on her way from church, she said, playfully, to the eldest child:

"I am going now, Willie, and I want you to go part of the way with me and be my own little boy."

"I cannot," answered serious William. "We are going to have lunch as soon as you leave."—*Metropolitan Magazine.*

### Almost Spoiled It.

"Time has been very kind to you," he said when they met, after the lapse of years.

"It is very good of you to say so," she replied, making no effort to conceal her pleasure.

"Not at all, not at all. One is always justified in straining a point if necessary to spread happiness—I mean I couldn't truthfully say anything else."

### An Illustration.

"Courage is often the result of ignorance."

"How do you make that out?"

"Why do you suppose the mice the other night would have got your hair arrangements on the floor and torn them to pieces if the mink had known they were rats?"