

The Exploits of Elaine

A Detective Novel and a Motion Picture Drama

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SYNOPSIS.

The New York police are mystified by a series of murders of prominent men. The principal clue to the murderer is the warning letter which is sent the victims signed with a "clutching hand." The latest victim of the mysterious assassin is Taylor Dodge, the insurance president. His daughter, Elaine, employs Craig Kennedy, the famous scientific detective, to try to unravel the mystery. What Kennedy accomplishes is told by his friend, Jameson, a newspaper man. Kennedy frustrates a daring attempt to rob a jewelry store and rescues Elaine from a boiler where she had been imprisoned by the thugs.

FOURTH EPISODE

The Frozen Safe.

Kennedy swung open the door of our taxicab as we pulled up, safe at last, before the Dodge mansion, after the rescue of Elaine from the brutal machinations of the Clutching Hand. Bennett was on the step of the cab in a moment, and together, one on each side of Elaine, they assisted her out of the car and up the steps to the house.

Elaine's Aunt Josephine was waiting for us in the drawing-room, very much worried. The dear old lady was quite scandalized as Elaine excitedly told of the thrilling events that had just taken place.

"And to think they—actually—carried you!" she exclaimed, horrified adding, "And I not—"

"But Mr. Kennedy came along and saved me just in time," interrupted Elaine with a smile. "I was well chaperoned!"

Aunt Josephine turned to Craig, gratefully. "How can I ever thank you enough, Mr. Kennedy," she said fervently.

Kennedy was quite embarrassed. With a smile, Elaine perceived his discomfort, not at all displeased by it. "Come into the library!" she cried gayly, taking his arm. "I've something to show you."

Where the old safe, which had been burnt through, had stood, was now a brand-new safe of the very latest construction and design—one of these globular safes that look and are so formidable.

"Here is the new safe," she pointed out brightly. "It is not only proof against explosives, but between the plates is a lining that is proof against thermite and even that oxyacetylene blowpipe by which you rescued me from the old boiler. It has a time clock, too, that will prevent its being opened at night, even if any one should learn the combination."

They stood before the safe a moment, and Kennedy examined it closely with much interest.

"Wonderful!" he admired. "I know you'd approve of it," cried Elaine, much pleased. "Now I have something else to show you."

She paused at the desk, and from a drawer took out a portfolio of large photographs. They were very handsome photographs of herself.

"Much more wonderful than the safe," remarked Craig earnestly. Then, hesitating and a trifle embarrassed, he added, "May I—may I have one?" "If you care for it," she said, dropping her eyes, then glancing up at him quickly.

"Care for it?" he repeated. "It will be one of the greatest treasures—"

She slipped the picture quickly into an envelope. "Come," she interrupted. "Aunt Josephine will be wondering where we are. She—she's a demon chaperon."

Bennett, Aunt Josephine and myself were talking earnestly as Elaine and Craig returned.

That morning I had noticed Kennedy fussing some time at the door of our apartment before we went over to the laboratory. As nearly as I could make out he had placed something under the rug at the door out into the hallway.

"Well," said Bennett, glancing at his watch and rising as he turned to Elaine, "I'm afraid I must go now."

He crossed over to where she stood and shook hands. There was no doubt that Bennett was very much smitten by his fair client.

"Good-by, Mr. Bennett," she murmured, "and I thank you so much for what you have done for me today."

But there was something lifeless about the words. She turned quickly to Craig, who had remained standing. "Must you go too, Mr. Kennedy?" she asked, noticing his position.

"I'm afraid Mr. Jameson and I must get back on the job before this Clutching Hand gets busy again," he replied reluctantly.

"Oh, I hope you—we get them soon!" she exclaimed, and there was nothing lifeless about the way she gave Craig her hand, as Bennett, he and I left a moment later.

When we approached our door, now, Craig paused. By pressing a little concealed button he caused a panel in the wall outside to loosen, disclosing a small, boxlike plate in the wall underneath.

It was about a foot long and perhaps four inches wide. Through it ran a piece of paper which unrolled from one coil and wound up on another, actu-

ated by clockwork. Across the blank white paper ran an ink line traced by a stylographic pen, used as I had seen in mechanical pencils used in offices, hotels, banks and such places. Kennedy examined the thing with interest.

"What is it?" I asked. "A new kinograph," he replied, still gazing carefully at the rolled-up part of the paper. "I have installed it because it registers every footstep on the floor of our apartment. We can't be too careful with this Clutching Hand. I want to know whether we have had any visitors or not in our absence. This straight line indicates that we have not. Wait a moment."

Craig hastily unlocked the door and entered. Inside I could see him pacing up and down our modest quarters. "Do you see anything, Walter?" he called.

I looked at the kinograph. The pen had started to trace its line, no longer even and straight, but zigzag, at different heights across the paper. He came to the door. "What do you think of it?" he inquired.

"Some idea," I answered enthusiastically. "We entered and I fell to work on a special Sunday story that I had been forced to neglect. I was not so busy, however, that I did not notice out of the corner of my eye that Kennedy had taken from its cover Elaine Dodge's picture and was gazing at it ravenously."

I had finished as much of the article as I could do then and was smoking and reading it over. Kennedy was still gazing at the picture Miss Dodge had given him, then moving from place to place about the room, evidently wondering where it would look best. I doubt whether he had done another blessed thing since we returned.

He tried it on the mantel. That wouldn't do. At last he held it up beside a picture of Galton, I think, of finger print and eugenics fame, who hung on the wall directly opposite the fireplace. Hastily he compared the two. Elaine's picture was precisely the same size.

Next he tore out the picture of the scientist and threw it carelessly into the fireplace. Then he placed Elaine's picture in its place and hung it up again, standing off to admire it.

I watched him gleefully. Was this Craig? Evidently I moved my elbow suddenly and pushed a book with a bang on the floor. Kennedy actually jumped, I picked up the book with a muttered apology. No, this was not the same old Craig.

Perhaps half an hour later I was still reading. Kennedy was now pacing up and down the room, apparently unable to concentrate his mind on any but one subject.

He stopped a moment before the photograph, looked at it fixedly. Then he started his methodical walk again, hesitated, and went over to the telephone, calling a number which I recognized.

"She must have been pretty well done up by her experience," he said apologetically, catching my eye. "I was wondering if—hello!—oh, Miss Dodge—I—er—I—er—just called up to see if you were all right."

Craig was very much embarrassed, but also very much in earnest.

A musical laugh rippled over the telephone. "Yes, I'm all right, thank you, Mr. Kennedy—and I put the package you sent me into the safe, but—"

"Package?" frowned Craig. "Why, I sent you no package, Miss Dodge. In the safe?"

"Why, yes, and the safe is all covered with moisture—and so cold."

"Moisture—cold?" he repeated hastily.

"Yes, I have been wondering if it is all right. In fact, I was going to call you up, only I was afraid you'd think I was foolish."

"I shall be right over," he answered hastily, clapping the receiver back on its hook. "Walter," he added, seizing his hat and coat, "come on—hurry!"

A few minutes later we drove up in a taxi before the Dodge house and rang the bell.

Jennings admitted us sleepily.

It could not have been long after we left Miss Dodge, late in the afternoon, that Susie Martin, who had been quite worried over our long absence after the attempt to rob her father, dropped in on Elaine. Wide-eyed, she had listened to Elaine's story of what had happened.

"And you think this Clutching Hand has never recovered the incriminating papers that caused him to murder your father?" asked Susie.

Elaine shook her head. "No. Let me show you the new safe I've bought. Mr. Kennedy thinks it wonderful."

"I should think you'd be proud of it," admired Susie. "I must tell father to get one, too."

At that very moment, if they had known it, the Clutching Hand, with his sinister, masked face, was peering at the two girls from the other side of the portieres.

Susie rose to go and Elaine followed her to the door. No sooner had she gone than the Clutching Hand came out from behind the curtains. He gazed about a moment, then, moving over to the safe about which the two girls had been talking, stealthily examined it.

He must have heard someone coming, for with a gesture of hate at the safe itself, as though he personified it, he slipped back of the curtains again.

Elaine had returned, and as she sat down at the desk to go over some papers which Bennett had left relative to settling up the estate the masked intruder stealthily and silently withdrew.

"A package for you, Miss Dodge," announced Michael later in the evening, as Elaine, in her dainty evening gown, was still engaged in going over the papers. He carried it in his hands rather gingerly.

"Mr. Kennedy sent it, ma'am. He says it contains clues, and will you please put it in the new safe for him."

Elaine took the package eagerly, examined it. Then she pulled open the little round door of the globular safe.

"It must be getting cold out, Michael," she remarked. "This package is as cold as ice."

"It is, ma'am," answered Michael. She closed the safe, and, with a glance at her watch, set the time lock and went upstairs to her room.

No sooner had Elaine disappeared than Michael appeared again, catlike, through the curtains from the drawing-room, and, after a glance about the dimly lighted library, discovering that the coast was clear, motioned to a figure hiding behind the portieres.

A moment and Clutching Hand himself came out.

He moved over to the safe and looked it over. Then he put out his hand and touched it.

"Listen!" cautioned Michael. "Someone was coming, and they hastily slunk behind the protecting portieres. It was Marie, Elaine's maid."

She turned up the lights and went over to the desk for a book for which Elaine had evidently sent her. She paused and appeared to be listening. Then she went to the door.

"Jennings!" she beckoned. "What is it, Marie?" he replied. She said nothing, but as he came up the hall led him to the center of the room.

"Listen! I heard sighs and groans!" Jennings looked at her a moment, puzzled, then laughed. "You girls!" he exclaimed. "I suppose you'll always think the library haunted now."

"But, Jennings, listen," she persisted. Jennings did listen. Sure enough, there were sounds, weird, uncanny. He gazed about the room. It was eerie. Then he took a few steps toward the safe. Marie put out her hand to it and started back.

"Why, that safe is all covered with cold sweat!" she cried with bated breath.

Sure enough, the face of the safe was beaded with dampness. Jennings put his hand on it and quickly drew it away, leaving a mark on the dampness.

"What do you think of that?" he gasped. "I'm going to tell Miss Dodge," cried Marie, genuinely frightened.

A moment later she burst into Elaine's room.

"What is the matter, Marie?" asked Elaine, laying down her book. "You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"Ah, but mademoiselle—it ees just like that. The safe—if mademoiselle

will come down stairs, I will show it you."

Puzzled, but interested, Elaine followed her. In the library Jennings pointed mutely at the new safe, Elaine approached it. As they stood about, new beads of perspiration, as it were, formed on it. Elaine touched it and also quickly withdrew her hand.

"I can't imagine what's the matter," she said. "But—well—Jennings, you may go—and Marie, also."

When the servants had gone she still regarded the safe with the same wondering look, then turning out the light, she followed.

She had scarcely disappeared when, from the portiere doorway near by, the Clutching Hand appeared, and, after gazing out at them, took a quick look at the safe.

"Good!" he muttered. Noiselessly Michael of the sinister

face moved in—and took a position in the center of the room, as if on guard, while Clutching Hand sat before the safe watching it intently.

"Someone at the door—Jennings is answering the bell," Michael whispered hoarsely.

"Confound it!" muttered Clutching Hand, as both moved again behind the heavy velvet curtains.

"I'm so glad to see you, Mr. Kennedy," greeted Elaine unaffectedly as Jennings admitted us.

She had heard the bell and was coming downstairs as we entered. We three moved toward the library and someone switched on the lights.

Craig strode over to the safe. The cold sweat on it had now turned to icicles. Craig's face clouded with thought as he examined it more closely. There was actually a grating sound from within.

"It can't be opened," he said to himself. "The time lock is set for tomorrow morning."

Outside, if we had not been so absorbed in the present mystery, we might have seen Michael and the Clutching Hand listening to us. Clutching Hand looked hastily at his watch.

"The deuce!" he muttered under his breath, stifling his suppressed fury. We stood looking at the safe. Kennedy was deeply interested, Elaine standing close beside him. Suddenly he seemed to make up his mind.

"Quick—Elaine!" he cried, taking her arm. "Stand back!"

We all retreated. The safe door, powerful as it was, had actually begun to warp and bend. The plates were bulging. A moment later, with a loud report and concussion, the door blew off.

A blast of cold air and flakes like snow flew out. Papers were scattered on every side.

We stood gazing, aghast, a second, then ran forward. Kennedy quickly examined the safe. He bent down and from the wreck took up a package, now covered with white.

As quickly he dropped it. "That is the package that was sent," cried Elaine.

Taking it to a table cover, he laid it on the table and opened it. Inside was a peculiar shape flask, open at the top, but like a vacuum bottle.

"A Dewar flask!" ejaculated Craig. "What is it?" asked Elaine, appealing to him.

"Liquid air!" he answered. "As it evaporated, the terrific pressure of expanding air in the safe increased until it blew out the door. That is what caused the cold sweating and the groans."

We watched him, started. On the other side of the portieres Michael and Clutching Hand waited. Then, in the general confusion, Clutching Hand slowly disappeared, followed.

"Where did this package come from?" asked Kennedy of Jennings suspiciously.

Jennings looked blank. "Why," put in Elaine, "Michael brought it to me."

"Get Michael," ordered Kennedy. A moment later he returned. "I found him, going upstairs," reported Jennings, leading Michael in.

"Where did you get this package?" shot out Kennedy. "It was left at the door, sir, by a boy, sir."

Question after question could not shake that simple, stolid sentence. Kennedy frowned.

"You may go," he said finally, as if reserving something for Michael later. A sudden exclamation followed from Elaine as Michael passed down the hall again. She had moved over to the desk, during the questioning, and was leaning against it.

Inadvertently she had touched an envelope. It was addressed, "Craig Kennedy."

Craig tore it open, Elaine bending anxiously over his shoulder, frightened. We read:

"YOU HAVE INTERFERED FOR THE LAST TIME. IT IS THE END." Beneath it stood the fearsome sign of the Clutching Hand.

The warning of the Clutching Hand had no other effect on Kennedy than the redoubling of his precautions for safety. Nothing further happened that night, however, and the next morning found us early at the laboratory.

It was the late forenoon, when after a hurried trip down to the office, I rejoined Kennedy at his scientific workshop.

We walked down the street when a big limousine shot past. Kennedy stopped in the middle of a remark. He had recognized the car, with a sort of instinct.

At the same moment I saw a smiling face at the window of the car. It was Elaine Dodge.

The car stopped in something less than twice its length and then backed toward us.

Kennedy, hat off, was at the window in a moment. There were Aunt Josephine and Susie Martin, also.

"Where are you boys going?" asked Elaine, with interest, then added with a gasp that ill concealed her real anxiety, "I'm so glad to see you—"

"That—er—nothing has happened from the dreadful Clutching Hand."

"Why, we were just going up to our rooms," replied Kennedy.

"Can't we drive you around?" We climbed in and a moment later were off. The ride was only too short for Kennedy. We stepped out in front of our apartment and stood chatting for a moment.

"Some day I want to show you the laboratory," Craig was saying. "It must be so interesting!" exclaimed Elaine very enthusiastically. "Think of all the bad men you must have caught!"

Elaine hesitated. "Would you like

to see it?" she wheedled of Aunt Josephine.

Aunt Josephine nodded acquiescence, and a moment later we all entered the building.

"You—you are very careful since that last warning!" asked Elaine as we approached our door.

"More than ever—now," replied Craig. "I have made up my mind to win."

Kennedy had started to unlock the door, when he stopped short.

"See," he said, "this is a precaution I have just installed. I almost forgot in the excitement."

He pressed a panel and disclosed the boxlike apparatus.

"This is my kinograph, which tells me whether I have had any visitors in my absence. If the pen traces a straight line, it is all right; but if—hello—Walter, the line is wavy."

We exchanged a significant glance. "Would you mind—er—standing down the hall just a bit while I enter?" asked Craig.

"Be careful," cautioned Elaine. He unlocked the door, standing off to one side. Then he extended his hand across the doorway. Still noth-

ing happened. There was not a sound. He looked cautiously into the room. Apparently there was nothing.

It had been about the middle of the morning that an express wagon had pulled up sharply before our apartment.

"Mr. Kennedy live here?" asked one of the expressmen, descending with his helper and approaching our janitor, Jens Jensen, a typical Swede, who was coming up out of the basement.

Jens growled a surly, "Yes—but Mr. Kennedy, he bane out."

"Too bad—we've got this large cabinet he ordered from Grand Rapids. We can't cart it around all day. Can't you let us in so we can leave it?"

Jensen muttered: "Well—I guess it bane all right."

They took the cabinet off the wagon and carried it upstairs. Jensen opened our door, still grumbling, and they placed the heavy cabinet in the living room.

"Sign here."

"You fallers bane a nuisance," protested Jens, signing nevertheless.

Scarcely had the sound of their footsteps died away in the outside hallway when the door of the cabinet slowly opened and a masked face protruded, gazing about the room.

It was the Clutching Hand! From the cabinet he took a large package wrapped in newspapers. As he held it, looking keenly about, his eye rested on Elaine's picture. A moment he looked at it, then quickly at the fireplace opposite.

An idea seemed to occur to him. He took the package to the fireplace, removed the screen and laid the package over the andirons with one end pointing out into the room.

Next he took from the cabinet a couple of storage batteries and a coil of wire. Deftly and quickly he fixed them on the package.

Meanwhile, before an alleyway across the street and further down the long block the express wagon had stopped.

Having completed fixing the batteries and wires, Clutching Hand ran the wires along the molding on the wall overhead, from the fireplace until he was directly over Elaine's picture. Skillfully he managed to fix the wires, using them in place of the picture wires to support the framed photograph until it hung very noticeably askew on the wall.

The last wire joined, he looked about the room, then noiselessly moved to the window and raised the shade.

Quickly he raised his hand and brought the fingers slowly together. It was the sign.

Off in the alley, the express driver and his helper jumped into the wagon and away it rattled.

Jensen was smoking placidly as the wagon pulled up the second time.

"Sorry," said the driver sheepishly, "but we delivered the cabinet to the wrong Mr. Kennedy."

"And to think," she shuddered, "that it was through me that he tried to kill you!"

"Never mind," laughed Craig easily, as they gazed into each other's eyes, drawn together by their mutual peril. "Clutching Hand will have to be cleverer than this to get either of us—Elaine!"

"Just this once," urged the driver, as

he rattled some loose change in his pocket. "Here—there goes a whole day's tips."

He handed Jens a dollar in small change.

Still grumpy, but mollified by the silver, Jens let them go up and opened the door to our rooms again. There stood the cabinet, as outwardly innocent as when it came in.

Lugging and tugging they managed to get the heavy piece of furniture out and downstairs again, loading it on the wagon. They drove off with it, accompanied by a parting volley from Jensen.

In an unfrequented street, perhaps half a mile away, the wagon stopped. With a keen glance around, the driver and his helper made sure that no one was about.

"Such a shaking up as you've given me!" growled a voice as the cabinet door opened. "But I've got him this time!"

It was the Clutching Hand.

Craig gazed into our living room cautiously.

"I can't see anything wrong," he said to me, as I stood just beside him. "Miss Dodge," he added, "will you and the rest excuse me if I ask you to wait just a moment longer?"

Elaine watched him, fascinated. He crossed the room, then went into each of our other rooms. Apparently nothing was wrong and a minute later he reappeared at the doorway.

"I guess it's all right," he said. "Perhaps it was only Jensen, the janitor."

Elaine, Aunt Josephine and Susie Martin entered. Craig placed chairs for them, but still I could see that he was uneasy. From time to time, while they were admiring one of our treasures after another, he glanced about suspiciously.

"What is the trouble, do you think?" asked Elaine wonderingly, noticing his manner.

"I—I can't just say," answered Craig trying to appear easy.

She had risen and with keen interest was looking at the books, the pictures, the queer collection of weapons and odds and ends from the underworld that Craig had amassed in his adventures.

At last her eye wandered across the room. She caught sight of her own picture, occupying a place of honor—but hanging askew.

"Isn't that just like a man!" she exclaimed. "Such housekeepers as you are—such carelessness!"

She had taken a step or two across the room to straighten the picture.

"Miss Dodge!" almost shouted Kennedy, his face fairly blanched. "Stop!"

She turned, her stunning eyes filled with amazement at his suddenness. Nevertheless she moved quickly to one side, as he waved his arms, unable to speak quickly enough.

Kennedy stood quite still, gazing at the picture, askew, with suspicion.

"That wasn't that way when we left, was it, Walter?" he asked.

"It certainly was not," I answered positively. "There was more time spent in getting that picture just right than I ever saw you spend on the room."

Craig frowned.

As for myself I did not know what to make of it.

"I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to step into this back room," said Craig at length to the ladies. "I'm sorry—but we can't be too careful with this intruder, whoever he was."

Elaine, however, stopped at the door. For a moment Kennedy appeared to be considering. Then his eye fell on a fishing rod that stood in a corner. He took it and moved toward the picture.

On his hands and knees, to one side, down as close as he could get to the floor, with the rod extended at arm's length, he motioned to me to do the same, behind him.