

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 and other crimes. The principal clue to the criminal 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, who is charged at the determined effort which Elaine and Craig Kennedy are making to put an end to his crimes. The Clutching Hand, as this strange criminal is known, resorts to all sorts of the most diabolical schemes to put them out of the way. Each chapter of the story tells of a new plot against their lives and of the way the great detective uses all his skill to save this pretty girl and himself from death.

ELEVENTH EPISODE

THE HOUR OF THREE.

With the ominous forefinger of his Clutching Hand extended, the Master Criminal emphasized his instructions to his minions.

"Perry Bennett, her lawyer, is in favor again with Elaine Dodge," he was saying. "She and Kennedy are on the outs even yet. But they may become reconciled. Then she'll have that fellow on our trail again. Before that happens we must get her—see?"

It was in the latest headquarters to which Craig had chased the criminal, in one of the toughest parts of New York's great river front section. "Now," went on the Clutching Hand. "I want you, Slim, to follow them. See what they do—where they go. It's her birthday. Something's bound to occur that will give you a lead. All you've got to do is to use your head. Get me?"

It was, as Clutching Hand had said, Elaine's birthday. She had received many callers and congratulations, innumerable costly and beautiful tokens of remembrance from her countless friends and admirers. In the conservatory of the Dodge house Elaine, Aunt Josephine and Susie Martin were sitting discussing not only the happy occasion, but more, the many strange events of the past few weeks. "Well," said a familiar voice behind them, "what would a certain blonde young lady accept as a birthday present from her family lawyer?"

All three turned in surprise. "Oh, Mr. Bennett," cried Elaine. "How you startled us!" Elaine hesitated. She was thinking not so much of his words as of Kennedy. To them all, however, it seemed that she was unable to make up her mind what, in the wealth of her luxury, what she would like.

Susie Martin had been wondering whether, now that Bennett was here, she was not de trop, as she looked, at her wrist watch mechanically. As she did so, an idea occurred to her. "Why not one of these?" she cried impulsively, indicating the watch. "Father has some beauties at the shop."

"Oh, good," exclaimed Elaine, "how sweet!" "Then let's all go to the shop," said Bennett. "Miss Martin will personally conduct the tour, and we shall have our pick of the finest stock."

It was too gay a party to notice a sinister figure following them in a cab. Chatting with the watch counter, while the crook, with a determination not to risk missing anything, entered the shop door, too.

"Mr. Thomas," asked Susie as her father's clerk bowed to them, "please show Miss Dodge the wrist watches father was telling about."

Unobserved, the crook walked over near enough to hear what was going on. At last, with much banter and yet care, Elaine selected one that was indeed a beauty and was about to snap it on her dainty wrist when the clerk interrupted.

"I beg your pardon," he suggested, "but I'd advise you to leave it to be regulated, if you please."

Reluctantly Elaine handed it over to the clerk. A moment later they went out and entered the car again. As they did so, Slim, who had been looking over various things in the next case as if undecided, came up to the watch counter.

"I'm making a present," he remarked confidentially to the clerk. "How about those bracelet watches?" The clerk pulled out some of the cheaper ones. "No," he said thoughtfully, pointing out a tray in the showcase, "something like those."

He ended by picking out one identically like that which Elaine had selected, and started to pay for it. "Better have it regulated," repeated the clerk.

half as high. In the box I could see, besides other apparatus, two good sized spools of fine wire.

"What's all that?" I asked inquisitively. "Another of the new instruments that scientific detectives use," he responded, scarcely looking up, "a little magnetic wizard, the telegraphone."

"Which is?" I prompted. "Something we detectives might use to take down and can telephone conversations and other such conversations. When it is attached properly to a telephone, it records everything that is said over the wire. The record is not made mechanically on a cylinder, but electro-magnetically on this wire."

Craig continued to tinker tantalizingly with the machine which had been invented by a Dane, Valdemar Poulsen.

He had scarcely finished testing the telegraphone when the laboratory door opened and a clean-cut young man entered.

Kennedy, I knew, had found that the routine work of the Clutching Hand case was beyond his limited time, and had retained this young man, Raymond Chase, to attend to that.

Just now what worried Craig was the situation with Elaine, and I fancied that he had given Chase some commission in connection with that. "I've got it, Mr. Kennedy," greeted Chase with quiet modesty.

"Good," responded Craig heartily. "I knew you would."

"Got what?" I asked a moment later. Kennedy nodded for Chase to answer.

"I've located the new residence of Flirty Florrie," he replied. "I saw what Kennedy was after at once. Flirty Florrie and Dan the Dude had caused the quarrel between himself and Elaine. Dan the Dude was dead. But Flirty Florrie might be forced to explain it."

"That's fine," he added, exultingly. "Now I'll clear that thing up."

He took a hasty step to the telephone, put his hand on the receiver and was about to take it off the hook. Then he paused, and I saw his face working.

Finally his pride, for Kennedy's was a highly sensitive nature, got the better of him.

"No," he said, half to himself, "not—yet."

Elaine had returned home. Alone, her thoughts naturally went back to what had happened recently to interrupt a friendship which had been the sweetest in her life.

"There must be some mistake," she murmured pensively to herself, thinking of the photograph Flirty had given her. "Oh, why did I send him away? Why didn't I believe him?"

Mechanically, she put out her hand to the telephone.

She was about to take off the receiver, when something seemed to stay her hand. She wanted him to come to her.

Craig's eye fell on the telegraphone, and an idea seemed to occur to him. "Walter, you and Chase bring that thing along," he said a moment later.

At last we came to the apartment house at which Chase had located the woman.

"Now, Chase," he directed, "you needn't go in with us. Walter and I can manage this now. But don't get out of touch with me. I shall need you any moment—certainly, tomorrow."

Kennedy slipped on a badge inscribed: "Telephone inspector."

"Walter," he smiled, "you're elected my helper."

We entered the apartment house hall and found a negro boy in charge of the switchboard.

"You look over the switchboard, Kelly," he winked at me, "while I test out the connections back here. There must be something wrong with the wires or there wouldn't be so many complaints."

He had gone back to the switchboard while the negro, still unsuspecting, watched without understanding what it was all about.

"I don't know," Craig muttered finally for the benefit of the boy, "but I think I'll have to leave that tester, after all. Say, if I put it here, you'll have to be careful not to let anyone meddle with it. If you do, there'll be the deuce to pay. See?"

Kennedy had already started to fasten the telegraphone to the wires he had selected from the tangle.

At last he finished and stood up. "Don't disturb it and don't let anyone else touch it," he ordered. "Better not tell anyone—that's the best way. I'll be back for it tomorrow, probably."

"Yes, sah," nodded the boy, with a bow, as he went out.

Back in the new hang-out, the Clutching Hand was laying down the law to his lieutenants and henchmen, when Slim at last entered.

"Hi!" growled the master criminal, conveying the fact that he was considerably relieved to see him at

last. "Where have you been? I've been off on a little job myself, and got back."

Slim apologized profusely. "Yes, sir," he replied hastily, "well, I went over to the Dodge house, and I saw them finally. I followed them into a jewelry shop. That lawyer bought a wrist watch. So I bought one just like it. I thought perhaps we could—"

"Give it to me," growled Clutching Hand, seizing the moment Slim displayed it. "And don't butt in—see?"

From the capacious desk the master criminal pulled a set of small drills, vises, and other jeweler's tools and placed them on the table.

"All right," he relented. "Now, do you see what I have just thought of—no? This is just the chance. Look at me."

Carefully he piled his hands to the job, regardless of time.

"There," he exclaimed at last, holding the watch where they could all see it. "See!"

He pulled out the stem to set the hands and slowly twisted it between his thumb and finger. He turned the hands until they were almost at the point of three o'clock.

Then he held the watch out where all could see.

As the minute hand touched three, from the back of the case, as if from the chasing itself, a little needle, perhaps a quarter of an inch, jumped out. It seemed to come from what looked like merely a small insect in the decoration.

"You see what will happen at the hour of three?" he asked.

No one said a word, as he held up a vial which he had drawn from his pocket. On it they could read the label, "Ricinus."

"One of the most powerful poisons in the world," he exclaimed. "Enough to kill a regiment!"

They fairly gasped and looked at it with horror, exchanging glances.

Opening the vial carefully, he dipped in a thin piece of glass and placed a tiny drop in a receptacle back of the needle and on the needle itself.

"I've set my invention to go off at three o'clock," he concluded. "Tomorrow forenoon, it will have to be delivered early—and I don't believe we shall be troubled any longer by Miss Elaine Dodge," he added, venomously.

Calmly he wrapped up the apparently innocent engine of destruction and handed it to Slim.

"See that she gets it in time," he said merely.

"I will, sir," answered Slim, taking it gingerly.

Flirty Florrie had returned that afternoon, late, from some expedition on which she had been sent.

Ranking in her heart yet was the death of her lover, Dan the Dude.

Thus, when she arrived home, she went to the telephone to report and called a number, 494 Greenwich.

"Hello, chief," she repeated. "This is Flirty. Have you done anything

by Flirty, recovered the telegraphone. Together we carried it to the laboratory.

There he set up a little instrument that looked like a wedge sitting up on end, in the face of which was a dial. Through it he began to run the wire from the spools, and, taking an ear-piece, put another on my head over my ears.

He turned a switch and we listened eagerly.

First came several calls from people with bills, and she put them off most adroitly.

Then we heard a call that caused Kennedy to look at me quickly, stop the machine and start at that point over again.

"That's what I wanted," he said, as we listened in:

"Give me 494 Greenwich."

"Hello, chief. This is Flirty. Have you done anything yet in the little matter we talked about?"

"Say—be careful of names—over the wire."

"You know—what I mean."

"Yes, the trick will be pulled off at three o'clock."

"Good! Good-by, and thank you!"

"Good-by."

Craig paused and considered a minute, then moved to the telephone.

"There's only one thing to do, and that's to follow out my original scheme," he said energetically. "Information, please."

"Where is Greenwich 494?" he asked a moment later.

The minutes passed. "Thank you, sir," he cried, writing down on a pad an address on the West side, near the river front. Then turning to me, he exclaimed, "Walter, we've got him at last!"

Craig rose and put on his hat and coat thrusting a pair of opera glasses into his pocket, in case we should want to observe the place at a distance. I followed him excitedly. The trail was hot.

Kennedy and I came at last to the place on the West side where the crooked streets curved off.

Instead of keeping on until he came to the place we sought, he turned off and quickly slipped behind the shelter of a fence. There was a broken board in the fence and he bent down, gazing through with the opera glasses.

Across the lot was the new hang-out, a somewhat dilapidated, old-fashioned brick house of several generations back. Through the glass we could see an evil-countenance crook sinking along. He mounted the steps and rang the bell, turning as he waited.

From a small aperture in the doorway looked out another face, equally evil. Under cover, the crook made the sign of the Clutching Hand twice and was admitted.

"That's the place, all right," whispered Kennedy with satisfaction. He hurried to a telephone booth, where he called several numbers. Then we returned to the laboratory.

From the table he picked up a

retu... with two wires. Attach them to the bell which I will leave here. When it rings, raid the house. Jameson will lead you to it. Come, Walter," he added, picking up the bags.

Ten minutes later, outside the new headquarters, a crouched-up figure, carrying a small package, his face hidden under his soft hat and up-turned collar, could have been seen slinking along until he came to the steps.

He went up and peered through the aperture of the doorway. Then he rang the bell. Twice he raised his hand and clenched it in the now familiar clutch.

A crook inside saw it through the aperture and opened the door. The figure entered and almost before the door was shut tied the masking handkerchief over his face, which hid his identity from even the most trusted lieutenants. The crook bowed to the chief, who, with a growl as though of recognition, moved down the hall.

As he came to the room from which Slim had been sent on his mission, the same group was seated in the thick tobacco smoke.

"You fellows clear out," he growled. "I want to be alone."

"The old man is peeved," muttered one, outside, as they left.

The weird figure gazed about the room to be sure that he was alone.

When Craig and I left the police he had given me most minute instructions which I was now following out to the letter.

"I want you to hide there," he said, indicating a barrel back of the house next to the hangout. "When you see a wire come down from the headquarters, take it and carry it across the lot to the old house. Attach it to the bell; then wait. When it rings, raid the Clutching Hand joint."

I waited what seemed to be an interminable time back of the barrel. Finally, however, I saw a coil of fine wire drop rapidly to the ground from a window somewhere above. I made a dash for it, as though I were trying to rush the trenches, seized my prize and, without looking back to see where it came from, beat a hasty retreat.

Around the lot I skirted, until at last I reached the place where the police were waiting. Quickly we fastened the wire to the bell.

We waited.

Not a sound from the bell.

Up in the room in the joint the hunched-up figure stood by the table. He had taken his hat off and placed it carefully on the table and was now waiting.

Suddenly a noise at the door startled him. He listened. Then he backed away from the door and drew a revolver.

As the door slowly opened there entered another figure, hat over his eyes, collar up, a handkerchief over his face, the exact counterpart of the first!

For a moment each glared at the other.

"Hands up!" shouted the first figure, hoarsely, moving the gun and closing the door with his foot.

The newcomer slowly raised his crooked hand over his head, as the blue steel revolver gaped menacingly.

With a quick movement of the other hand the first sinister figure removed the handkerchief from his face and straightened up.

It was Kennedy!

"Come over to the center of the room," ordered Kennedy.

Clutching Hand obeyed, eyeing his captor closely.

"Now lay your weapons on the table."

He tossed down a revolver. The two still faced each other.

"Take off that handkerchief!" It was a tense moment. Slowly Clutching Hand started to obey. Then he stopped. Kennedy was just about to thunder, "Go on," when the criminal calmly remarked, "You've got ME all right, Kennedy, but in twenty minutes Elaine Dodge will be dead!"

He said it with a nonchalance that might have deceived anyone less astute than Kennedy. Suddenly there flashed over Craig the words: "THE TRICK WILL BE PULLED OFF AT THREE O'CLOCK!"

There was no fake about that. Kennedy frowned menacingly. If he killed Clutching Hand, Elaine would die. If he fought he must either kill or be killed. If he handed Clutching Hand over Elaine was lost. He looked at his watch. It was twenty-five minutes of three.

"What do you mean—tell me?" demanded Kennedy with forced calm.

"Yesterday Mr. Bennett bought a wrist watch for Elaine," the Clutching Hand said quietly. "They left it to be regulated. One of my men bought one just like it. Mine was delivered to her today."

"A likely story!" doubted Kennedy.

For answer the Clutching Hand merely pointed to the telephone.

Kennedy reached for it.

"One thing," interrupted the Clutching Hand. "You are a man of honor."

"Yes—yes. Go on."

"If I tell you what to do, you must promise to give me a fighting chance."

"Yes, yes."

"Call up Aunt Josephine, then. Do just as I say."

Covering Clutching Hand, Kennedy called a number. "This is Mr. Kennedy, Mrs. Dodge. Did Elaine receive a present of a wrist watch from Mr. Bennett?"

"Yes," she replied, "for her birthday. It came this forenoon."

Kennedy hung up the receiver and faced the Clutching Hand, puzzled as the latter said: "Call up Martin, the jeweler."

"Has the watch purchased for Miss Elaine Dodge been delivered?" he asked the clerk.

"No," came back the reply, "the watch Mr. Bennett bought is still here being regulated."

Kennedy hung up the receiver. He was stunned.

"The watch will cause her death at three o'clock," said the Clutching Hand. "Swear to leave here without discovering my identity and I will tell you how. You can save her! In that watch," he hissed, "I have set a poisoned needle in a spring that will be released and will plunge it into her arm at exactly three o'clock. On the needle is ricinus!"

Craig advanced, furious. As he did so Clutching Hand pointed calmly to the clock. It was twenty minutes of three!

With a mental struggle Kennedy controlled his loathing of the creature before him.

"All right—but you'll hear from me—sooner than you suspect," he shouted, starting for the door.

Then he came back and lifted his hat, hiding as much as possible the selenium cell, letting the light fall on it.

"Only Elaine's life has saved you." With a last threat he dashed out. He hailed a cab, returning from some steamship wharves not far away.

"Quick!" he ordered, giving the Dodge address on Fifth avenue. Minute after minute the police and I waited. Was anything wrong? Where was Craig?

Just then a tremor grew into a tinkle, then came the strong burr of the bell. Kennedy needed us.

With a shout of encouragement to the men I dashed out and over to the old house.

Meanwhile Clutching Hand himself had approached the table to recover his weapon and had noticed the queer little selenium cell.

"The deuce!" he cried. "He's planned to get me anyhow!"

Clutching Hand rushed to the door—then stopped short. Outside he could hear the police and myself.

Clutching Hand slammed shut his door and pulled down over it a heavy wooden bar.

At the desk he paused and took out a piece of cardboard. Then, with a heavy black-marking pencil, he calmly printed on it, while he battered at the barricaded door, a few short feet away, indicating the desk.

Just as the swaying and bulging door gave way, Clutching Hand gave the desk a pull. It opened up—his get-away.

He closed it with a sardonic smile in our direction, just as the door crashed in.

We looked about. There was not a soul in the room, nothing but the selenium cell, the chairs, the desk.

"Look!" I cried, catching sight of the index finger, and going over to the desk.

We rolled back the top. There on the flat top was a sign:

Dear Blockheads: Kennedy and I couldn't wait. Then came that mysterious sign of the Clutching Hand.

We hunted over the rooms, but could find nothing that showed a clue. Where was Clutching Hand? Where was Kennedy?

In the next house Clutching Hand had literally come out of an upright piano into the room corresponding to that he had left. Hastily he threw off his handkerchief, slouch hat, old coat and trousers. A neat striped pair of trousers replaced the old, frayed and baggy pair. A new shirt, then a sporty vest and a frock coat followed.

As he put the finishing touches on he looked for all the world like a bewhiskered foreigner.

At the door of the new headquarters, a few seconds later, I stood with the police.

"Not a sign of him anywhere," growled one of the officers.

Elaine was sitting in the library reading when Aunt Josephine turned to her.

"What time is it, dear?" she asked. Elaine glanced at her pretty new trinket.

"Nearly three, Auntie—just a couple of minutes," she said.

Just then there came the sound of feet running madly down the hallway. They jumped up, startled.

Kennedy, his coat flying and hat jammed over his eyes, had almost bowled over poor Jennings in his mad race down the hall.

"Well," demanded Elaine haughtily, "what's—"

Before she knew what was going on Craig hurried up to her and literally ripped the watch off her wrist, breaking the beautiful bracelet.

He held it up, gingerly. Elaine was speechless. Was this Kennedy? Was he possessed by such an inordinate jealousy of Bennett?

As he held the watch up, the second hand ticked around and the minute hand passed the meridian of the hour.

A vicious sharp needle gleamed out—then sprang back into the filigree work again.

"Well," she gasped again, "what's the meaning of this?"

Craig gazed at Elaine in silence. Should he defend his rudeness, if she did not understand? She stamped her foot, and repeated the question a third time.

"What do you mean, sir, by such conduct?"

Slowly he bowed. "I just don't like the kind of birthday presents you receive," he said, turning on his heel. "Good afternoon!"



Craig Kennedy Seized Elaine's Arm, Broke the Beautiful Bracelet and Ripped the Watch Off Her Wrist.

yet in the little matter we talked about?"

"Say—be careful of names—over the wire," he said a moment later.

"You know—what I mean."

"Yes, the trick will be pulled off at three o'clock."

"Good!" she exclaimed. "Good-by and thank you."

With his well-known caution Clutching Hand did not even betray names over the telephone if he could help it.

Flirty hung up the receiver with satisfaction. The manes of the departed Dan might soon rest in peace!

The next day, early in the forenoon, a young man with a small package carefully done up came to the Dodge house.

"From Martin's, the jeweler's, for Miss Dodge," he said to Jennings at the door.

Elaine and Aunt Josephine were sitting in the library when Jennings announced him.

"Oh, it's my watch," cried Elaine. "Show him in."

Elaine put the watch on her wrist and admired it.

"Is it all right?" asked Slim. "Yes, yes," answered Elaine. "You may go."

small coil over which I had seen him working and attached it to the bell and some batteries. He replaced it on the table, while I watched curiously.

"A selenium cell," he explained. "Only when light falls on it does it become a good conductor of electricity. Then the bell will ring."

Just before making the connection he placed his