

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. Enraged 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 greatest detective using all his skill to save this pretty girl and himself from death.

THIRTEENTH EPISODE

THE DEVIL WORSHIPPERS.

Elaine was seated in the drawing room with Aunt Josephine one afternoon, when her lawyer, Perry Bennett, dropped in unexpectedly. He had hardly greeted them when the butler, Jennings, in his usual impassive manner announced that Aunt Josephine was wanted on the telephone.

No sooner were Elaine and Bennett alone than Elaine, turning to him, exclaimed:

"Last night I dreamed that father came to me and told me that if I would give up Kennedy and put my trust in you, I would find the Clutching Hand. I don't know what to think of it."

Bennett, who had been listening intently, moved over nearer to Elaine and bent over her.

"Elaine," he said in a low tone, his remarkable eyes looking straight into her own, "you must know that I love you. Then give me the right to protect you. It was your father's dearest wish, I believe, that we should marry. Let me share your dangers and I swear that sooner or later there will be an end to the Clutching Hand. Give me your answer, Elaine," he urged, "and make me the happiest man in all the world."

Elaine listened, and not unsympathetically, as Bennett continued to plead for her answer.

"Wait a little while—until tomorrow," she replied finally.

"Let it be as you wish, then," agreed Bennett quietly.

He took her hand and kissed it passionately.

An instant later Aunt Josephine returned Elaine, unstrung by what had happened, excused herself and went into the library.

Involuntarily, her mind traveled back over the rapid succession of events of the past few weeks and the part that she had thought, at least, Kennedy had come to play in her life.

Then she thought of her recent misunderstanding. Might there not be some simple explanation of it, after all, which she had missed? What should she do?

She solved the problem by taking up the telephone and asking for Kennedy's number.

I was chatting with Craig in his laboratory, and, at the same time, was watching him in his experimental work. Just as a call came on the telephone, he was pouring some nitrohydrochloric acid into a test tube to complete a reaction.

The telephone tinkled and he laid down the bottle of acid on his desk, while he moved a few steps to answer the call.

Whoever the speaker was, Craig seemed deeply interested, and, not knowing who was talking on the wire, I was eager to learn whether it was anyone connected with the case of the Clutching Hand.

"Yes, this is Mr. Kennedy," I heard Craig say.

I moved over toward him and whispered eagerly, "Is there anything new?"

A little impatient at being interrupted, Kennedy waved me off. It occurred to me that he might need a pad and pencil to make a note of some information, and I reached over the desk for them.

As I did so my arm inadvertently struck the bottle of acid, knocking it over on the top of the desk. Its contents streamed out saturating the telephone wires before I could prevent it. In trying to right the bottle my hand came in contact with the acid which burned like liquid fire, and I cried out in pain.

Craig hastily laid down the receiver, seized me and rushed me to the back of the laboratory, where he drenched my hand with a neutralizing liquid.

He bound up the wounds caused by the acid, which proved to be slight, after all, and then returned to the telephone.

To his evident annoyance, he discovered that the acid had burned through the wires and cut off all connection.

At the other end of the line, Elaine was listening impatiently for a response to her first eager words of inquiry. She was astonished to find,

at last, that Kennedy had apparently left the telephone without any explanation or apology.

"Why—he rang off," she exclaimed angrily to herself, as she hung up the receiver and left the room.

In the center of a devious and winding way, quite unknown to all except those who knew the innermost secrets of the Chinese quarter, and even unknown to the police, there was a dingy tenement house, apparently inhabited by hard-working Chinamen, but in reality the headquarters of the notorious devil worshippers, a sect of satanists, banned even in the Celestial empire.

The followers of the cult comprised some of the most dangerous Chinese criminals, thugs and assassins, besides a number of dangerous characters who belonged to various Chinese secret societies. At the head of this formidable organization was Long Sin, the high priest of the devil god, and Long Sin had, as we know, already joined forces with the notorious Clutching Hand.

The room in which the uncanny rites of the devil worshippers were conducted was a large apartment decorated in Chinese style, with highly colored portraits of some of the devil deities and costly silken hangings. Beside a large dais depended a huge Chinese gong. On the dais itself stood, or rather sat, an ugly figure covered with some sort of metallic plating. It almost seemed to be the mummy of a Chinaman covered with gold leaf.

Into this room came Long Sin attired in an elaborate silken robe. He advanced and kotoyed before the dais with its strange figure, and laid down an offering before it.

This performance was witnessed by twenty or thirty Chinamen who knelt in the rear of the room.

At the same time an aged Chinaman carrying a prayer wheel entered the place and, after prostrating himself devoutly, placed the machine on a sort of low stool or tabourette and began turning it slowly, muttering.

A few moments later Long Sin, who had been bowing before the metallic figure in deepest reverence, suddenly sprang to his feet. His glazed eye and excited manner indicated that he had received a message from the lips of the strange god.

The worshippers who had prostrated themselves, in awe at the sight of their high priest in the unholy frenzy, all rose to their feet and crowded forward.

Long Sin struck several blows on the resounding gong and then raised his voice in solemn tones.

"Ksing Chai, the Terrible, demands a consort. She is to be foreign—fair of face and with golden hair."

At the same time, in a room of the adjoining house, the Clutching Hand himself was busily engaged in making the most elaborate preparations for some nefarious scheme which his fertile mind had evolved.

The room had been fitted up as a medium's seance parlor.

Two of the Clutching Hand's most trusted confederates and a hard-faced woman of middle age, dressed in plain black, were putting the finishing touches to this apartment, when their chief entered.

Clutching Hand gazed about the room, now and then giving an order or two to make more effective the setting for the purpose which he had in mind.

Finally he nodded in approval and stepped over to the fireplace where logs were burning brightly in a grate.

Pressing a spring in the mantel-piece, the master criminal effected an instant transformation. The logs in the fireplace, still burning, disappeared immediately through the bottom of the brick tiling and a metal sheet covered them. An aperture opened at the back, as if by magic.

Through this opening Clutching Hand made his way quickly and disappeared.

Emerging from the other side of the peculiar fireplace, Clutching Hand pushed aside a curtain which barred the way and looked into the Chinese temple, taking up a position behind the metallic figure on the dais.

The Chinamen had by this time finished their devotions, if such they might be called, and the last one was leaving, while Long Sin stood alone on the dais.

The noise of the departing satanists had scarcely died away when Clutching Hand stepped out.

"Follow me," he ordered hoarsely, seizing Long Sin by the arm and leading him away.

They passed through the passageway of the fireplace and, having entered the seance room, Clutching Hand began briefly explaining the purpose of the preparations that had been made. Long Sin wagged his head in voluble approval.

Elaine was standing in the library gazing sadly at Kennedy's portrait, thinking over recent events and above all the rebuff over the telephone which she supposed she had received.

Jennings entered with a card on a salver. Elaine took it and saw with surprise the name of her caller: MADAME SAVETSKY, Medium.

Beneath the engraved name were the words written in ink: "I have a message from the spirit of your father."

"Yes, I will see her," cried Elaine eagerly, in response to the butler's inquiry.

She followed Jennings into the adjoining room and there found herself face to face with the hard-featured woman who had only a few moments before left the Clutching Hand.

Elaine looked rather than spoke he, inquiry.

"Your father, my dear," purred the medium, with a great pretence of suppressed excitement, "appeared to me the other night from the spirit world. I was in a trance and he asked me to deliver a message to you."

"What was the message?" asked Elaine breathlessly, now aroused to intense interest. "I must go into a trance again to get it," replied the insinuating Savetsky, "and if you like I can try it at once, provided we can be left alone long enough."

Seated in her chair, the medium muttered wildly for a few moments, rolled her eyes and with some convulsive movements pretended to go into a trance.

Suddenly the curtains were pulled aside and Aunt Josephine and Bennett, who had just come in, entered.

"I can do nothing here," exclaimed Savetsky, starting up and looking about severely. "You must come to my seance chamber where we shall not be interrupted."

"I will," said Elaine, vexed at the intrusion at that moment. "I must have that message—I must."

"What's all this, Elaine?" demanded Aunt Josephine.

Hurriedly, Elaine poured forth to her aunt and Bennett the story of the medium's visit and the promised message from her father in the other world.

Aunt Josephine, who was not object to be imposed on, strongly objected to Elaine's proposal to accompany Savetsky to the seance chamber, but Elaine would not be denied.

"It might be safe for Elaine to go," Bennett finally suggested to Aunt Josephine, "if you and I accompanied her."

A few moments later, in the Dodge car, Elaine, the medium and her two escorts started for the Chinese quarters.

At the house the medium opened the door with her key and ushered in her three visitors.

Entering the room, the medium at once prepared for the seance by pulling down the window shades.

Suddenly an indistinct face was seen to peering through the black curtains. A voice, deep, sepulchral, was heard in slow and solemn tones.

"I am Eko—the spirit of Taylor Dodge. I will give no message until one named Josephine leaves the room."

No sooner had the words been uttered than the medium came writhing out of her trance.

"What happened?" she asked, looking at Elaine.

Elaine reported the spirit's words.

"We can get nothing if your aunt stays here," Savetsky added, insisting



Elaine is Hurried Through the Hidden Passage in the Fireplace.

that Aunt Josephine must go. "Your father cannot speak while she is present."

Aunt Josephine, annoyed by what she had heard, indignantly refused to go and was deaf to all Elaine's pleadings.

"I think it will be all right," finally acquiesced Bennett, seeing L w bent Elaine was on securing the message. "I'll stay and protect her."

Aunt Josephine finally agreed. "Very well, then," she protested, marching out of the room in a high state of indignation.

She had scarcely left the house, however, when she began to suspect that all was not as it ought to be. In fact, the idea had no sooner occurred to her than she decided to call on Kennedy and she ordered the chauffeur to take her as quickly as possible to the laboratory.

Kennedy had not been in the laboratory all the day after my experience with the acid, and I was impatiently awaiting his arrival. At last

there came a knock at the door and I opened it hurriedly. There was a messenger boy who handed me a note. I tore it open. It was from Kennedy and read: "I shall probably be away for two or three days. Call up Elaine and tell her to beware of a certain Madame Savetsky."

I was still puzzling over the note and was just about to call up Elaine when the speaking tube was blown and to my surprise I found that it was Aunt Josephine who had called.

"Where is Mr. Kennedy?" she asked, greatly agitated.

"He has gone away for a few days," I replied blankly. "Is there anything I can do?"

She was very excited and hastily related what had happened at the parlor of the medium.

"What was her name?" I cried anxiously.

"Madame Savetsky," she replied, to my surprise.

ASTONISHED, I picked up Craig's note from the desk and handed it to her without a word. She read it with breathless eagerness.

"Come back there with me, please," she begged, almost frantic with fear now. "Something terrible may have happened."

Aunt Josephine had hardly left Savetsky when the trance was resumed. Suddenly, from the mysterious shadows of the cabinet, there appeared the spirit of Long Sin, whose death Elaine still believed she had cured when Adventuress Mary had lured her to the apartment.

Elaine was trembling with fear at the apparition.

As before, a strange voice sounded in the depths of the cabinet and again a message was heard, in low, solemn tones:

"I am Keke, and I have with me Long Sin. His blood cries for vengeance."

Elaine was overcome with horror at the words.

Then a dim, ghostly figure, apparently that of Long Sin, appeared.

With arms outstretched, the figure glided from the cabinet and approached Elaine. She shrank back farther in fright, too horrified even to scream. At the same moment, the medium drew a vapor pistol from her dress, and, as the ghost of Long Sin leaped at Elaine, Savetsky darted forward and shot a stream of vapor full in Bennett's face.

Bennett dropped unconscious, the lights in the darkened room flashed up, and several of the men of the Clutching Hand rushed in. Quickly the fireplace was turned on its cleverly constructed hinges, revealing the hidden passage.

Before any effective resistance could be made, Elaine and Bennett were hustled through the passage, securely bound, and placed on a divan in a curtained chamber back of the altar of the devil worshippers.

It was at that moment that I, little dreaming of what had been taking place, arrived with Aunt Josephine at the house of the medium.

She answered my ring and admitted us. To our surprise, the seance room was empty.

"Where is the young lady who was here?" I asked.

"Miss Dodge and the gentleman just left a few minutes ago," the medium explained, as we looked about.

I happened to notice a torn handkerchief lying on the floor. It flashed over me that perhaps it might afford a clue.

As I passed it, I purposely dropped my soft hat over it and picked up the hat, securing the handkerchief without attracting Savetsky's attention.

Aunt Josephine was keen now for returning home to find out whether Elaine was there or not. No sooner had she entered the car and driven off, than I examined the handkerchief. It was torn, as if it had been crushed in the hand during a struggle and wrenched away. I looked closer. In the corner was the initial "E."

That was enough. Without losing another precious moment I hurried around to the nearest police station.

The sergeant detailed several roundsmen and a man in plain clothes, and together we returned to the house, laying a careful plan to surround it secretly, while the plainclothes man and I obtained admittance.

Meanwhile, the Chinese devil worshippers had again gathered in their cursed temple and Long Sin, in his priestly robe, appeared on the dais.

The worshippers kotoyed reverently to him, while at the back again stood the aged Chinaman patiently turning his prayer wheel.

Two braziers, or smoke pots, had been placed on the dais, one of which Long Sin touched with a stick, causing it to burst out into dense flames.

Standing before them, he chanted in nasal tones: "The white consort of the great Ksing Chau has been found. It is his will that she now be made his."

As he finished intoning the message, Long Sin signaled to two young Chinamen to go into the anteroom. A moment later they returned with Elaine.

Frightened though she was, Elaine made no attempt to struggle, even when they had cut her bonds.

They carried her up to the dais, and now Long Sin faced her and sternly ordered her to kotoy to the gruesome metallic figure.

She refused, but instantly the Chinamen seized her arm and twisted it, until they had compelled her to fall to her knees.

Having forced her to kotoy, Long Sin turned to the assembled devil dancers. "With magic and rare drugs," he chanted, "she shall be made to pass

beyond and her body encased in precious gold shall be the consort of Ksing Chau—forever and ever."

With callous deviltry, the oriental satanists made every arrangement for embalming and preserving the body of Elaine.

At last all seemed to be in readiness to proceed.

"Hold her," ordered Long Sin in guttural Chinese, to the two attendants, as he approached her.

Long Sin held in his hand a small, profusely decorated pot from which smoke was escaping. As he approached he passed this receptacle under her nose once, twice, three times.

Gradually Elaine fell into unconsciousness.

While Elaine was facing death in the power of the devil worshippers, I had reached the house of Savetsky next door with the police, and the place had been quietly surrounded.

With the plainclothes man, a daring and intelligent fellow, I went to the door and rang the bell.

"What can I do for you?" asked the medium, admitting us.

"My friend here," I parleyed, "is in great business trouble. Can your controlling spirit give him advice?"

Savetsky set to work preparing the room for a seance. As she moved over to the window to pull down the shades



Elaine is Forced to Kotoy to the Gruesome Metallic Figure.

she must have caught sight of one or two of the policemen who had incautiously exposed themselves from the hiding place in which I had disposed them before we entered. At any rate, Savetsky did not lose a jot of her remarkable composure.

"I'm sorry," she remarked merely, "but I'm afraid my control is weak and cannot work today."

She took a step toward the door, motioning us to leave. Neither of us paid any attention to the hint, but remained seated as we had been before.

Almost before I knew what she was doing, she made a dash for something in the corner of the room. It was time for open action, and I seized her quickly.

My detective was on his feet in an instant.

"I'll take care of her," he ground out, seized her wrists in his viselike grasp. "You give the signal."

I rushed to the window, threw up the shade and opened the sash, waving our preconcerted sign and turned again toward the room.

With a sudden accession of desperate strength, Savetsky broke away from the plainclothes man and again attempted to get at something concealed on the wall. I had turned just in time to fling myself between her and whatever object she had in mind.

As the detective took her again and twisted her arm until she cried out in pain, I hastily investigated the wall. She had evidently been attempting to press a button that rang a concealed bell.

What did it mean?

Elaine, now completely unconscious, was being held by the Chinamen, while her arm was smeared with sticky, black material from the cauldron of Long Sin.

Suddenly the aged Chinaman with the prayer wheel stopped his incessant, impious turning, and, rising, held up his hand as if to command attention.

"This is nonsense," he cried in a loud voice. "Why should our great Ksing Chau desire a white devil? I, a great-grandfather, demand to know."

Shaking with rage, Long Sin ordered the intruder off the dais. But the aged devotee refused to go.

"Throw him out," he ordered his attendants.

For answer, as the two young Chinamen approached, the old Chinaman threw them down to the floor with a quick jin-jitsu movement.

Furious now beyond expression, Long Sin stepped forward. He seized the beard and queue of the intruder. To his utter amazement they came off!

It was Kennedy.

With his automatic drawn, before the astonished devil dancers could recover themselves, Craig stood at bay. Long Sin leaped behind the big gong. As the Chinaman rushed forward to seize him, Kennedy shot the

leader of Long Sin's attendants and struck down the other with a blow.

Kennedy seized Elaine's yielding body and, pushing back the curtain to the anteroom, succeeded in gaining it and locking the door into the main temple.

Bennett was still lying on the floor tightly bound. With a few deft cuts with a Chinese knife which he had picked up, Kennedy released him.

At the same time Chinamen were trying to batter down the door, Kennedy's last bulwark. It was swaying under their repeated blows.

While Kennedy was thus besieged by the devil worshippers in the anteroom, several policemen and detectives gathered in the seance room with us, next door, where Savetsky was held a defiant and mute prisoner.

I had discovered the bell and, taking that as a guide, I started to trace the course of a wire which ran alongside the wall.

To the fireplace I traced the bell and, in pulling on the wire, I luckily pressed a secret spring. To my amazement the whole fireplace swung out of sight and disclosed a secret passageway.

I looked through it.

It was almost at that precise instant that the door of the anteroom burst open and the Chinamen swarmed in,

urged on by the insane exhortations of Long Sin.

To my utter amazement, I recognized Kennedy's voice.

In the first onslaught Craig shot one Chinaman dead, then closed with the others, slashing right and left with the Chinese knife he had picked up.

Bennett came to his aid, but was immediately overcome by two Chinamen, who evidently had been detailed for that purpose.

Meanwhile Kennedy and the others were engaged in a terrible life and death struggle.

Finally, Long Sin, seizing a large wall-hanging, leaped upon Kennedy from the back and threw it over his head, almost suffocating him.

It was just as the Chinese was about to overpower him that I led the police and detectives through the passageway of the fireplace.

It was a glorious fight that followed. But Long Sin and his Chinamen were no match for the police and were soon completely routed, the police striking furiously in all directions and clearing the room.

Instantly Kennedy thought of the fair object of all this melee. He rushed to the divan on which he had placed Elaine.

As she opened her eyes for an instant she gazed at Craig, then at Bennett. Still not comprehending just what had happened, she gave her hand to Bennett. Bennett lifted her to her feet and slowly assisted her as she tried to walk away.

Kennedy watched them, more stupefied than if he had been struck over the head by Long Sin.

Police and detectives were now taking the captured Chinaman away, as Bennett, his arm about Elaine, led her gently out.

A young detective had slipped the bracelets over Long Sin's wrist, and I was standing beside him.

Kennedy, in a daze at the sight of Elaine and Bennett, passed us, scarcely noting who we were.

As Craig collected his scattered forces Long Sin motioned to him, as if he had a message to deliver.

Kennedy frowned suspiciously. He was about to turn away when the Chinamen began pleading earnestly for a chance to say a few words.

"Step aside for a moment, you fellows, won't you, please?" he asked. "I will hear what you have to say, Long Sin."

Long Sin looked about craftily. "What is it?" prompted Craig, seeing that at last they were all alone.

Long Sin again looked around. "Swear that I will go free and not suffer," he whispered, "and I will betray the great Clutching Hand."

Kennedy studied the Chinaman keenly for a moment. Then, seemingly satisfied with the scrutiny, he nodded slowly assent.

As Craig did so, I saw Long Sin lean over and whisper into Kennedy's ear. Craig started back in horror and surprise. (TO BE CONTINUED.)