

THE RECORD ON THE SCREEN

AN ADVENTURE OF PETER CREWE—"THE MAN WITH THE CAMERA EYES"

By HAROLD CARTER

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The case against Sanford certainly looked black enough. He had been indicted upon the charge of having ordered his wife, and the evidence against him was as follows:

His wife, a vaudeville actress, had left him the preceding spring and had refused to return to him. The principal cause for this separation appeared to have been his inability to support her in comfort, so that she preferred independence, with the certainty of a moderate income through her own efforts, to the tiresome routine of household duties in the home of a man earning a clerk's salary. During the unseasonable months of July and August she had earned a livelihood by posing for moving picture plays. Sanford had repeatedly begged her at her apartment to let her return to him. He had even heard to utter threats in case she remained obdurate. On the occasion of his last visit previous to the tragedy his wife had been heard to tell him out of the house, and she had forbidden him to molest her further.

One week later, at nine o'clock in the morning, the maid who came in daily to clean the apartment found Mrs. Sanford lying dead in a chair with a deep stab wound immediately beneath the right arm. Death had evidently been almost instantaneous, there was no sign of a struggle, and the woman's face was as tranquil though she had flung herself down on the cushions for a brief rest after the labors of the day.

The chief witness against Sanford was the woman who rented the apartment adjacent to Mrs. Sanford's. She testified that she had met Sanford on the stairs on the preceding evening, had seen him enter his wife's apartment, and subsequently heard sounds of a violent altercation, in which Sanford left the house in a condition of intense excitement. Two hours or so later she heard him ring Mrs. Sanford's bell, heard voices raised in altercation in the apartment and heard Sanford leave, but in a stealthy and furtive manner wholly unlike his usual method of departure. She heard creep down the stairs and listen at the wall, but could make out no further sound next door. Doubtless the murder had already been accomplished.

The weapon with which the murder had been committed was found in a dilapidated building lot next day. It was a Malay kris, a knife with an edgily keen edge, which Mrs. Sanford owned, and the murder had been committed with an upward stroke. Upon the right side of the handle, when the blade was held upward, were the blood-prints of gloved fingers.

When called in for the defense I advised Sanford to plead guilty to manslaughter. I told him there was every reason to hope that he would escape a sentence of fifteen or twenty years. In the first place, the fact that he had worn gloves, in the second place, the fact that the weapon had been found in Mrs. Sanford's wall, where it hung, clearly indicated absence of premeditation; while the jury would show every consideration to a man whose wife had deserted him. Sanford obstinately insisted that he was innocent. He admitted that he had called on Mrs. Sanford the evening before the tragedy to induce her to return to him. She had refused, and he had taunted her with the name of a rival for whose sake she had obtained a divorce.

He was only half convinced, in spite of the vehemence of Sanford's denial. I have heard criminals assert their innocence most convincingly, only to confess their guilt after conviction.

"I have you any theory as to who the murderer was?" I asked.

"The man she taunted me about," Sanford. "He had been pestering her for weeks to divorce me and marry him, had threatened her with violence unless she consented. She pretended to me that she intended to comply; but I know in my heart that she always loved me. If I had only had more money she would have come back to me. Do you think I could have hung round her for weeks without some reasonable hope?" she asked that fellow; she tried to play each of us off against the other."

Sanford insisted that this man had been the second visitor on the night of the murder, and had slain Mrs. Sanford in a jealous rage when she refused to marry him. But he never seen him and knew nothing of his identity.

"What was all I had to go upon. The man in the apartment next to Mrs. Sanford's admitted that she had not only seen Sanford return on the night of the murder. She was convinced, however, that the second visitor was he. She had no reason for conviction; but she was all the more certain of it.

Sanford was willing to believe that Sanford had a rival for Mrs. Sanford's affections, and that he had freely visited the woman. Probably he had been holding off both men

until she could decide to which one it would prove more profitable to attach herself. In fact, Mrs. Sanford had had frequent visitors; she was an attractive woman, and it was not hard to believe that some of them must have fallen in love with her. But that any of these had murdered her seemed quite unlikely. The particular rival of whom Sanford spoke was quite unknown to Mrs. Sanford's acquaintances; if such an one existed, his identity had been skillfully concealed. To discover him seemed an impossibility. There was no letter, no shred of evidence, pointing to such a man.

In my perplexity I turned to Crewe. If anyone could help me run down this mysterious suspect I knew this man could. He had solved many a perplexing problem for me through the aid of his wonderful visualizing powers. No image that passed before the camera-like eyes of Peter Crewe was ever forgotten.

"Let us begin by assuming that such a man exists," said Crewe, when he had heard my story attentively. "Are there any photographs of men in Mrs. Sanford's apartment?"

There were dozens of photographs of both men and women. In fact Mrs. Sanford had had a hobby for collecting photographs of all her acquaintances. The apartment had been sealed by the police, but upon obtaining an order from the authorities, we were enabled to enter. We found photographs all round the sitting room.

"If it is one of these," I said, "nobody knows which one."

"That is immaterial, so long as it is one of them," said Crewe, focussing his eyes upon each in turn. He remained thus for several seconds in front of each photograph, as though some time were needed for the action of the light to impress the images indelibly upon the retina.

"Now," said Crewe, "the probabilities are that she met him in the moving picture company for which she posed. Actresses and actors generally form a close corporation, and we may almost take it for granted that they belonged to the same trade. By the way, Langton, the photograph that we are looking for is probably not here."

"Not here?" I ejaculated.

"No," he said, pointing to the velvet mantle cover. "Do you see anything strange there? Surely you must, for it is almost impossible to keep a secret from velvet."

"I see some dust," I said.

"Look here—and here—and here," said Crewe impatiently. "Do you see that faint line along the nap of the velvet? That is where a photograph stood for several weeks, but stands no longer. Observe that there is an edging of dust on either side of it. And here, and here, these photographs beside it once stood, but they were recently moved up about an inch and a half closer. Langton, the murderer undoubtedly took away his photograph and moved up the photographs on either side in order to cover the gap left by the removal. It was ingenious, and would have baffled the police. But velvet tells its own tale, and all the rubbing in the world would not have erased those creases in the nap. We are, then, bent upon the search for a man whose photograph is not here—Mrs. Sanford's only friend whom we have not seen. It simplifies matters enormously!"

"How?" I asked.

"In the first place it bears out your theory as to the existence of such a man, whom we have hitherto only assumed to exist. Secondly, we know all Mrs. Sanford's friends but him. Consequently, when we see him in the moving pictures we know him instantly. But it is essential, in order to verify certain suspicions that I entertain, that we should see the knife."

"That can be done," I said. "It is in the custody of the police, but I have the right of inspection. Let us go round to police headquarters immediately."

No demur was made to our examining the weapon, although a detective remained at hand while we looked at it. It was a formidable affair, and one which had evidently been put to use by its Malay owner before it crossed the seas to become the property of the luckless actress. Its blade curled in a succession of waves, and it was as keen as the finest razor. Upon the right side, when held blade upward, appeared the bloody glove-prints.

"If there was only finger prints, now," said the detective, "we'd know who done it instantly. Fingers is never the same, but gloves baffles us."

"On the contrary," said Crewe, "I think we shall run the murderer to earth with equal facility."

"You've got him, that's why," said the detective, chuckling. "Gents, it's as clean a case against the accused as we've handled this year."

"Not if he knows how to pitch quoits," said Crewe, sharply.

"What's that you say?" asked the detective.

"I said, 'not if he knows how to pitch quoits,'" said Crewe. "Come,

Langton, this is a very important point. We must stop in at a sporting shop and get some quoits. I suppose the prisoner will be allowed to pitch them in the prison yard?"

I was lost in amazement at this new scheme of Crewe's, but I knew that it was useless to ask for an explanation until the unfolding of the plot. We purchased a half dozen quoits and took them to our prisoner, to whom I introduced my companion. Sanford was inclined to be sullen at first, and demurred when requested to pitch the quoits.

"Sanford," I whispered, "there's more in this than you or I know. Don't be obstinate. Mr. Crewe has got men out of worse troubles, and apparently by just such aimless means."

"You can't hand him those things, gentlemen," said the jailer, "without a special order. I'm sorry, but that's the strict rule."

"Well, then," said Crewe, "let me see you pitch them in imagination. Now, here is the board. You have a quoit in your hand. Now heave it."

Sanford complied in a reluctant manner. Though his action was not very graphic, it evidently satisfied Crewe.

"Excellent, Langton," he commented. "I have learned all that it was necessary to know. And now we have to find Mrs. Sanford's friend whose photograph was removed from the mantle."

"And that," I said, "is the beginning of the whole difficulty. We seem to be no nearer that than at the first."

"If we can find the identity of the man," said Crewe, "the rest will be easy. Now the probabilities are strongly in favor of his having acted in the same company with her. In such event we shall find him upon the screen at some moving picture show."

"But," I interpolated, "how will you know it is the man? Will you suspect every actor whose photograph was not among Mrs. Sanford's effects? It seems to me you are stretching your point very far. I confess I do not know what your clue is."

"Patience, Langton," said Crewe, smiling. "If I were to tell you I should cease to be a mystery and become a very ordinary mortal in your eyes. I confess that I enjoy the role of enigma."

The company for which Mrs. Sanford had posed was at this time advertising a new play daily. It controlled some three or four dozen moving picture theaters in town, and as the plays grew stale they were sent out into the country districts. To find the man we were seeking, it would therefore be necessary to make a careful and methodical investigation of all the theaters which this company controlled. We spent nearly a week of nights in our search before we found what we were looking for.

It was at a little cheap theater in a slum that had grown up among a maze of shops that catered to the needs of the residents in a new district of high flats and ostentatious, if overblown, wealth. The play was a typical southern drama. In a cell crouched the negro, arrested upon a charge of murder. Outside collected the mob, infuriated with liquor, thirsting for the prisoner's blood. With ropes and pistols in their hands they demanded that the sheriff bring out his prisoner.

Then the sheriff's daughter came out to persuade the crowd to abandon his intentions. As the girl tripped forward across the screen Crewe and I recognized Mrs. Sanford.

Awed for an instant, the mob quickly regained its courage. It demanded that the sheriff come out in person. Among the leaders of the crowd I recognized several of the originals of Mrs. Sanford's photographs. Evidently Crewe's theory was correct—that she selected her friends from among her own profession.

Suddenly the jail doors flew open and the sheriff came out in person. He strode forward, tall, scowling, menacing. In one hand he held a revolver, and, as he came to a stop, he pointed this at the breast of the mob leader.

"There is our murderer," Crewe whispered to me, in the moment of tense interest and silence that followed the denouncement.

The scene ended and a long-drawn sigh went up from the audience in the little theater. Single-handed, the sheriff had defied the crowd; with his menacing revolver he had driven them from the jail precincts. What next? The interval was long and tantalizing, and every shadowy profile in the audience seemed to disclose a mouth that gaped for some sensational climax.

"That is our man," repeated Crewe with sure conviction.

I was conscious of a sensation of rising anger. It angered me to be made the butt of his fantasies, to sit beside him and hear him calmly announce his conclusions while my mind was striving painfully to pass from one inference to the next.

"Well, I won't dispute your statement," I rejoined. "But even if it is—I see no reason why it should be, but even if it is—how are you going to locate him? His photograph may be doing stunts on the screen while the man in person is well on his way to Alaska or South America, or Timbuctoo."

"They always come back," said Crewe.

"Why, the first instinct of any murderer is flight."

"Not in crimes of jealousy," Crewe answered. "And then there is the thrill of seeing an innocent man arrested and likely to suffer the penalty for the crime. No, no, Langton, our friend is not very far from this city. I should not be surprised to come upon him any day, in the court, the street. Besides, you must remember



Quick as a flash the man's left hand went down toward his hip pocket.

that no photograph of him exists; he thinks he is secure."

"And yet I'm willing to wager," said I, "that, granting your theories are true, which I do not for the moment admit, the original of that sheriff is not within a thousand miles of us at this moment."

A new scene was thrown upon the screen. The gaping mouths opened wider; the audience settled down for its further instalment of thrill. And then—I think my hair verily stood upon end—as if by some magnetic compulsion my eyes turned toward a man seated upon the end bench immediately across the aisle. There was the original of the sheriff in the play, seated with folded arms, but staring as if hypnotized at that phantasm of himself that strode and swore and played the hero by the side of his trembling daughter, while the mob menaced them, yet impotent before the revolver which he held in the crook of his strong right arm.

I turned to Crewe. I caught his arm. "Look! Look!" I whispered, pointing.

For once my companion appeared to lose his self-possession. His eyes shifted alternately from the play-actor upon the screen to the man on the bench and back again.

"Langton," he said, "for once you get the better of me. Fool that I was, I was so absorbed in theorizing that I didn't look. I didn't dare to hope it might be true. Watch him and, when the act ends, we will take seats on either side of him. You sit on his left and keep your eyes on his hand—his left hand."

We took our places accordingly as soon as the moving figures faded from the screen. The man never stirred as we sat down beside him. His gaze was fixed singly upon the screen, and he waited for the final act of the drama. All round us rose the excited hum of voices. Crewe touched our man upon the arm, and he started in his place and leaned toward him nervously.

"Keep quiet," said Crewe in a warning voice. "After this act I want you to come with me and explain about the murder of Mrs. Sanford."

Quick as a flash the man's left hand went down toward his hip pocket. I caught it and compressed it firmly between my own.

"Well done, Langton," said Crewe in a whisper. "Now, sir, will you come quietly?"

A shiver ran through our captive's frame. He turned his eyes from one to another of us. Then he seemed to break down and he collapsed in his seat limply.

"I killed her," he muttered. "Do what you like with me. I meant to give myself up anyway. Every day I have haunted the district, hoping that I might be arrested, intending to confess, but I hadn't the nerve. I am glad it's over."

"Will you come now?" said Crewe. "Let me see the last act," he pleaded. "My God, you don't know what it means to realize that I shall never see her face again in life, except upon that screen. I've come here nightly to look at her. Let me wait till the end."

"On one condition," said Crewe. "Langton, take the pistol out of his left hip pocket."

"What I still fail to understand," I said to Crewe, "is how you came to associate this man with the murder. Even if his photograph were not among Mrs. Sanford's effects, still

there must have been many of her acquaintances who were similarly absent. To me it all seems like a happy guess."

"The only guess," said Crewe, "was in the assumption that the murderer had been an actor in the same company. And that was rather a probability than a fortunate hypothesis."

"But what enabled you to feel so sure that you were able to charge the man directly with the commission of the crime?"

"Let us go back a way," Crewe answered. "The wound, if you remember, was immediately beneath the woman's right arm. The murder had been committed while she lay back in her chair."

"Yes."

"Did it occur to you that the murderer must have stood in a very cramped position to inflict the wound in such a location? And that it would be almost impossible to drive home the steel forcibly enough to cause immediate death?"

"I confess that it did not. The evidence against Sanford seemed so convincing."

"When you saw the knife, did you deduce anything from the fact that the finger-prints were on the right side of the blade?"

"Where else would they be?"

"Take out your pocket-knife. Open

it. Hold it edge upward. So. Now on which side are the finger prints?"

"On the left side," I said, much chagrined.

"Then the inference is—?"

"That the murderer was left-handed."

"Exactly; and this accounts for the position of the wound. If he held the weapon in his left hand the blow would fall most naturally where it did. Many people, Langton, are partly left-handed; that is to say, having been trained to the use of the right hand, they revert to their natural instinct in moments of excitement. Our murderer was doubtless one of this large class; therefore it is not necessary to suppose that he used his left hand habitually, in which event he would have left traces that would have aroused the attention even of the stupid police. Well, then, when I went to the moving picture show I was looking for an unknown man with a left-handed instinct. Did you notice anything in that scene with the mob?"

"He held his pistol in his left hand!" I exclaimed.

"Yes. But you saw it and let it slip through the gates of memory."

"One more question? Why the quoits?"

"Merely to ascertain beyond a doubt that our friend Sanford was not left-handed himself," said Crewe.

WHEN TO ANSWER A LETTER

Considering Them as a Part of a Written Conversation the Present Time is the Best.

When is the best time to answer a letter? Considering a letter as part of a written conversation, the best time to answer it is on the day when it is received. Every one knows that the enthusiasm, sparkle and spontaneity which makes correspondence delightful depend altogether on the mood in which one handles the pen. On the first reading of a letter the writer seems to be almost in the room and the words on the page have the cadence and reality of the spoken voice. Put the letter aside for three or four weeks and the effort of reply is evident. The effervescence is brushed from the draught, and what was originally cordial and tonic is flat and insipid. The best time to answer a letter is the present time, yet I heard a young girl complain not long ago that she could never keep out of debt to her friends. "They always answer by return mail, and I am as badly off as ever," she asserted with a sigh.

Home news never fails to satisfy the child away from home. Father and mother at home watch and wait for letters from the absent children. Home letters and business letters should be answered at the earliest moment. As for those of comparatively slight importance, such as letters that are merely written to keep up an acquaintance, one may use her discretion. Bread and butter letters obligatory after a visit should be sent within a few days of a guest's return home.—Exchange.

Strange Place for Birds' Nest. When a Birmingham to Yarmouth, England, express was examined at Bourne, Lincolnshire, the other day, a blackbird's nest with four young birds was found underneath one of the carriages.

ONE DEFINITION OF LAUGHTER

Explanation of an American Humorist—Many Persons in History Who Never Laughed.

What is laughter? An American humorist has called it "an undignified widening of the human mouth, accompanied by a noise resembling a cough in the effort to avoid swallowing a chestnut."

"Laughter," says Prof. Sir Charles Bell, "is a convulsive action of the diaphragm. In this state the person draws a full breath and throws it out in interrupted, short and audible exhalations. This convulsion of the diaphragm is the principal part of the physical manifestation of laughter."

"But there are several accessories, especially the sharp vocal utterance arising from the violent tension of the larynx and the expression of the features, this being a more intense form of the smile. In extreme cases the eyes are moistened by the effusion from the lachrymal glands."

There are some people who cannot laugh—who are wholly unable to enjoy either the physical or the mental luxury of a laugh. Thus, it was said of William III. that he was utterly at a loss to understand what could be got out of laughter except loss of dignity. There are many persons in history who have been, according to common report, incapable of laughter. Queen Mary I, John Knox, Robespierre and Molke are examples. The great Duke of Wellington himself rarely, if ever, went beyond a grunt.

Served Him Right.

"I have made all sorts of sacrifices for you," complained the husband, driven to the wall at last. "What did you ever give up for me?" "What did I ever give up for you?" repeated the exasperated wife. "Well, I never! Why, you cheap humbug, I gave up three or four of the nicest young men in this city—that's what!"