



The Special Agent.

A SERIES OF REMARKABLE DETECTIVE STORIES FOUNDED UPON THE ACTUAL EXPERIENCES OF A WELL KNOWN CRIMINOLOGIST.

By ROBERT NAUGHTON

The Mystery of the Shadow on the Wall

CONFOUND it, Duncan," said Rand, "what do you think that I am, anyway? Take your spook stories somewhere else. What that hysterical family needs is a doctor, not a detective."

"Do listen, Rand," I urged. "When you have heard me out you can refuse the case just as easily as you can now. I'll take only one minute or two of your time."

"Well, get on with it, then. But you know—"

"I know that you haven't a superstitious cell in your brain, and I thought hadn't either, but when I tell you that I saw—"

Rand smiles in that ironical way of his, and I hastily began another sentence.

"You know," I said, "that I knew, in general way who the Danvers were, because my mother lives within a few blocks of their house. However, they have not occupied it for a long time, because Mr. Danvers stayed in Europe for many years, as most of his interests were there. There is a caretaker who has a cottage in the grounds, and all the servants have been retained, so that the place is beautifully kept up. Mr. Danvers died suddenly of some trouble which no one understood and was buried on the other side—in Italy, I believe. The mother and Miss Danvers, who is about twenty, and her brother, who is a year younger, have just returned to America, with the intention of living in the spacious old house where both of the children were born."

"As you know, I went there to call last night. They were evidently glad to renew the acquaintance and tried to make me feel very much at home, and I soon saw that they were all readily nervous. Suddenly there was a choking kind of a scream from the back of the house. Danvers and I rushed out, following the sound. He seemed to know what to expect, for I heard him mutter: 'My God—again!' and he led me to a small hall back of the staircase, meeting, on our way, a maid who gibbered out her terror at us and then ran on."

"You can smile, Rand, all you please, but I tell you what I saw—actually new in that commonplace hall—all would take that smile off of your face. At first, it just seemed to me that there was a very queer arrangement of shadows along the floor and in the walls—and then I saw that those shadows moved, and that they made the figure of a tall, thin man. I couldn't make out what the motion was like, until the shadow seemed suddenly to intensify; both Danvers and I backed out of that hall, and we were cold with fear, Rand—say what you like to me, but I tell you I don't want to see that shadow again, cutting its own throat with a long, ugly looking knife—ugh!"

"Is it always in the same place?"

"Yes."

"How is the hall lighted?"

"With a single gas jet."

"Was the gas lit when you saw the shadow?"

"Yes, but it was turned low."

"Where does the shadow appear—in plain view, in relation to the position of the gas jet?"

"Beyond it as you look in from the front entrance—down the hallway."

"Does it ever appear when the gas is not lit?"

"No, I think not."

"How many servants have the Danvers?"

"Five or six, I think."

"Besides the caretaker?"

"Yes."

"Seven or eight, in all. Quite a retinue for a small family. Did you say all the servants were retained during the years that the family were in Europe?"

"Yes, they were."

"What was the nationality of the Danvers?"

"English or American, I suppose."

"You suppose, eh? Where did you say he died?"

"He is buried in Italy, but I don't know where he died."

"Miss Danvers is a dark, tropical sort of a looking girl, isn't she?"

"Why—yes; but how—"

"It's the sort you always admire, isn't it?"

"Yes, I must say I am rather partial to dark hair, being such a sandy-haired Scotch myself."

"The boy is dark, too?"

"No, he has light hair and pale blue eyes, like his mother, but his skin is warthy. It makes an odd combination."

er's voice was fainter and fainter and terror shook unmistakably in it.

We both turned toward Rand in time to see the pale lady cast one look at him, become paler than before and gently sag down in her chair. I sprang to my feet, but young Danvers had already caught his mother and was holding her up, his face filled with distress.

"Don't be alarmed," Rand said to us, "she will soon revive. Give her a drink of water, Miss Danvers, and loosen her dress a little. Tom," as the big Sioux came softly through the door, "carry Mrs. Danvers to her room and stay with her, please. Miss Danvers, please precede him, make your mother comfortable, and do exactly as Tom tells you."

"You frighten me," the young girl said. "What is all this about? What did you do to frighten my mother?"

"Nothing serious, I assure you, Miss Danvers. I merely showed her that I understood something which she had thought a secret. Please go with her and trust me."

Rand moved easily to the door as they went, and continued to stand in the doorway until we could hear that they had passed into the room above and shut the door. "Well," said he, coming back, "now that the ladies are gone, let us go and visit the hall. You know, I haven't seen the shadow yet." He slowly measured young Danvers with his keen, clear eye, and then quietly drew a pistol from his pocket.

"Duncan and Danvers," he said, in the metallic voice which is his battle cry, "you see that this hall is paneled?"

"Yes," we breathed back. Something in his tone told us that we stood in grave peril.

"You see the gas jet?"

"Yes, yes—"

"Count three panels away from the gas jet—where does that bring you?"

"Within two panels of you."

"Yes. Now, while I attend to something, you, Duncan, cover the door and windows at the other end of the passage; Danvers, turn your back to Duncan and watch the other way. Anyone who is friendly to you will have a uniform on. Shoot anyone else you see! Remember—if anything happens to me—see at once to Mrs. Danvers and—"

"Yes! Yes!" I said.

Danvers, good boy, quietly turned his back to me, and I shifted my hand so that my pistol lay just free of my pocket. Rand nodded with satisfaction, then he turned his head backward and said sharply, "All right!"

Instinctively I knew that it was a signal, but to whom I could not imagine. Then he turned toward the wall again and spoke, to my astonishment, in Italian.

"Allora—Presto—Venni a me!" There was no answer, but I could have sworn that there was a confused movement outside the window. A second there was silence, during which

"Get him alive, if you can, Duncan!" yelled Rand's voice. In blind obedience, I wrestled with an upraised hand which held a knife, and a lowered one, which gripped a pistol, and the last I remember is that young Danvers reached over and knocked the knife away and that something hit me a stinging blow on the shoulder.

When I returned to consciousness Rand and Danvers were bending over me, and a policeman was skillfully bandaging my wound.

"He'll do nicely now, sir, till the surgeon comes," said the policeman.

"That's good," replied Rand heartily. "Well, Duncan, old boy, I'm sorry that brute winged you, but you have all the glory of having captured one of the most desperate criminals alive, besides neatly picking off two others."

Young Danvers, who had left the room for a moment, returned and told Rand that Mrs. Danvers was resting quietly, after her fright of hearing such a disturbance, and that she wished the great detective to know that she was thankful that the whole thing was exposed at last. "What she means by that I don't know, sir," concluded the boy, "but she said that perhaps you would tell me."

Rand gave the little short nod which is his sign of commendation as he lit another cigarette.

"Mr. Danvers," he said, "I will tell all that I know as briefly as possible. Your father called himself by the name which you now use, but it was really Danelli." He nodded assentingly at the exclamation which broke from us both. "Yes, he was an Italian, but his mother was an Englishwoman, and for reasons of his own he never acknowledged his paternity. He married your mother, who was a New England school teacher, under the name of Danvers, and I fancy that until lately she had no suspicion that it was not his right name."

"Your father was the head of a secret society, making its headquarters in Italy, and during the years that you were abroad he used this house as a place of deposit for the most valuable papers and property of the society, of which the servants were all sworn members. The place was a gathering ground for every one of the members who came over here."

"But—how could they—about depositing things here, you know? There isn't a place in the house where anything could be hidden." Young Danvers looked incredulous.

For answer Rand walked across to the fireplace, fumbled about a little, and suddenly swung the whole mantelpiece out toward us. Back of it were rows and rows of drawers, neatly labeled.

We were too astonished to say a word, and Rand walked about the room, touching this and that piece of woodwork or carving, and at each touch revealing the same thing—lines upon lines of drawers quietly reposing there, back of the apparently blank wall.

"You see," he said to us, coming back from this demonstration, "the whole house is like that. We found a complete plan of the place, with all of the hiding places marked, on the body of the man who poses as your butler. Mr. Danvers never intended that you or your mother should return here, I guess, but in such a society a man is never sure of carrying out his plans. Dying as suddenly as he did, he did not know that he had been deposed and that people, inimical to his interests, were put in his place. The whole effort, of course, was to frighten you into leaving the place and selling it. No doubt, you had offers for it before you came over?"

"We did," said Danvers; "a man in Italy said his brother had become wealthy as a contractor over here and wanted it for his home."

"Of course you told him that you also wanted it for the very same thing?"

"Yes, we did."

"And the word was passed on, so that the little entertainment which really shook all our nerves was arranged for us."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Danvers, "I had forgotten all about that shadow. What was—?"

Rand reached out to the table for a little black wooden box which was lying there. On one side of it was a small opening, which he turned toward the opposite wall, and instantly the dread shadow sprang into life there.

"There is your ghost," said Rand. He opened the top of the box and took out a little mannikin. A string hung from its back which, when pulled, made one hand fly up and saw at the throat with the wooden knife it clutched.

"Inside here," continued Rand, "is a tiny, high process dynamo. This little figure was hung on delicately adjusted wires in front of the dynamo; this little lever turned on the power, the camera shutter in front focused the thing—and there you are. All the operator had to do was to pull the string occasionally and produce a first-class spook. The box was operated by a man who lay concealed back of the panel of the hall. He got up there through a place in the laundry which

had evidently been constructed recently for that very purpose. The paneling had been very skillfully cut away just beyond the gas jet, and heavy gauze substituted, strengthened with boards at the back and painted an exact copy of the real wood. Lying there, the man could dimly see into the hall, but owing to the gauze being right back of the gas jet it was impossible for those who passed by to see anything suspicious, unless they were particularly looking for it.

"The man simply lay there and chose his own time for throwing that shadow on the wall. The gauze at one small point was very, very thin, the box was shoved up flat against it, and the shadow appeared on the opposite wall, being light or heavy according to the time of day, and according to whether the gas was on full or not. The man who arranged that little apparatus must have been a genius, in his own way. The idea, of course, was to frighten everyone from the house, and then to buy in the place for the society."

Young Danvers drew a long breath. He had stood motionless during Rand's revelation of his father's criminality, but now he pulled himself together sharply.

"I thank you, sir," he said, "for telling me the truth. If you will excuse me now I will return to my mother and sister." He turned away, but almost immediately came back to ask, with an anxious face: "Do you think it safe for us to continue living here, Mr. Rand?"

"No," replied Rand, "for as long as a member of the society is left alive they will watch this place and try to get revenge for what they will probably regard as an act of treachery on the part of your mother. The house is heavily guarded tonight, but I should advise you to go quietly away in the early morning."

When he had gone I whispered to Rand:

"Camorra?"

"Yes."

"Rand?"

"What?"

"You know what—how did you know?"

"I didn't, but there was just one thing I was sure of when you finished your tale of the shadow and that was that it must be thrown from the other wall, and as there was absolutely nothing to be seen on the opposite wall, it must be that some one was working the thing from behind the wall. Just as a matter of interest I looked up the record of some famous Italian criminals, for I was sure that some Italian blood lay there. If you will remember our conversation, you will see why."

I shook my head.

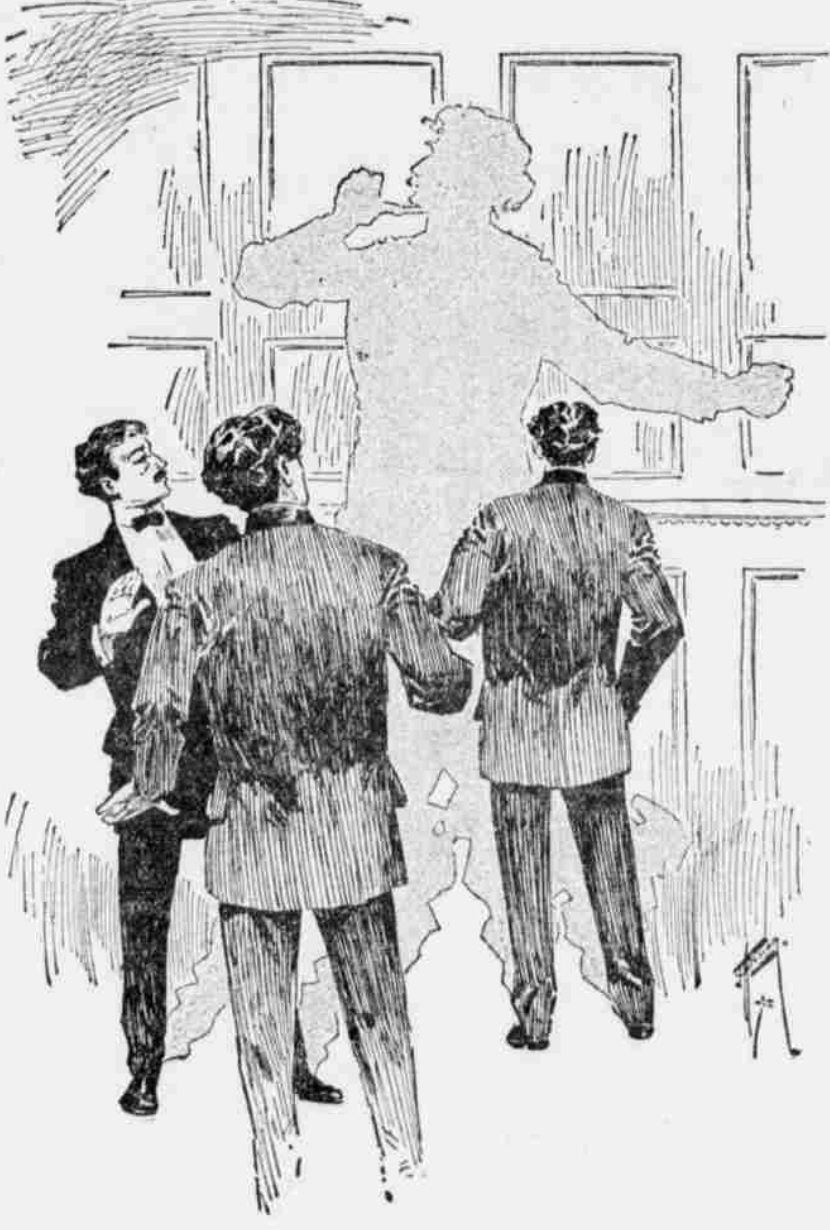
"Well, Miss Danvers' type is the Italian type. I knew that you especially admired Italian girls. How often have I teased you when you have looked after some black-eyed little sweatshop worker? Then, the boy having light eyes and hair and a swarthy skin; you'll hardly find any race but Italians and negroes in which the coloring of the skin persists after hair and eyes have had a northern stamp. Eugenics, you see."

"Now, who is most superstitious among the nations of Europe? The Italians. Who would, most probably, have the imagination to evolve such a piece of devilry as that shadow? Italians. Who manages to kill off obnoxious people suddenly, so that they appear to die natural deaths? Hush!—Yes, I'm afraid so. Well, aren't Sicilians famous for that? And where is the stamping ground of the most inquisitive and formidable secret society? In Sicily. And isn't Italy getting too hot for them? And where would be the best place to transfer their most important documents and possessions? To a new country, whose government is such a fool that it does not rigidly inspect all comers? Eh? Well, there you have the train of reasoning."

"And the candles, Rand? What were they for?"

"Why, don't you see? I had made up my mind that somebody behind the wall was casting that shadow, and I smoked him out. Tom and I lit those candles, after we had discovered the little place in the laundry wall where he got into the wall, and we opened that place, put the candles in and wedged a piece of the furnace poker—a piece of iron as long as your body and two inches thick—across the little space between the walls where the person who had made it came down and out. You get the idea? The man up above could not get down and put out the candles and in a short time he would be suffocated, unless he had the nerve to call out for help. If he had, the whole house would have heard him and his life might have been saved. I was expecting a fight any moment. We gradually got five of our men into the house, secreted in stray corners around the halls, and Tom kept his eyes open. The other fifteen guarded the outside and waited for the sound of a struggle before they rushed in."

"It sounds simple," I said, "but then it always does—afterward."



THERE THE SHADOW WAS, MONSTROUS, DISTINCT.

and gave it to the boy. "I can't stop to explain now," he said, "but there are reasons why I am glad you are so strong a fellow. Perhaps you will trust me when I tell you that my name is Rand."

"Not—Lawrence Rand?"

"That's my name."

"The Lawrence Rand?" Boyish hero worship rang in the excited voice, and Rand turned away, smiling a little. Even he was not proof against that unfeigned admiration and awe.

"Come on, then; all either of you have to do is to follow me and do what I tell you. If by any chance—I should not be with you—see to Mrs. and Miss Danvers."

Somewhere in the upper regions a door opened, very, very softly. I noticed that Rand had his hand in his right hand coat pocket, and I knew what it rested on there. I showed the boy, and he and I did the same. The hint that Rand had given of danger to himself still rang in my ears, and I found that I was looking at the well-known outline before me with a suddenly sick feeling.

At the door to the passage Rand paused, and prepared as I was for it, I could no more help the start I gave than I could help breathing, for the shadow was there, monstrous, distinct, but still, arrested in the very midst of its horrible gesture. Young Danvers smothered an exclamation and gripped my arm, and so we three stood, for as much as twenty seconds, staring at the incredible thing.

Suddenly Rand moved resolutely forward and stood directly opposite it. Then he turned, facing us, and leaned against the opposite wall.

faintly, ever so faintly, a step crept down the front stair. It was good to feel Danvers' strong young body stiffen as he, too, listened. Then Rand did the last thing in the world which I expected; he suddenly drew a very stout knife from his sleeve and drove it into the wall, which gave, with a ripping, tearing noise.

At that everything seemed to happen at once. A sinking, crouching figure flung itself headlong from the door leading to the servants' quarters. It had no uniform, so I shot. It crumpled up and lay twitching. Rand, without even looking over his shoulder, continued to cut and slash the swaying wall, which suddenly debouched upon him the limp body of a man and a stifling odor of sulphur, and through it all the shadow lay upon the wall!

Rand was stooping swiftly over the body which had fallen from the paneling, and at the fateful lower door another figure was creeping out. I recognized it as the butler, suspicious of a weapon in his concealed right hand and fired.

"This way!" shouted Rand, leaping toward the front hall, and I followed him, turning for a last shot at the three figures who clogged the hall.

"What—what?" I implored of him, as we ran, but before he could answer we had pushed out into the thick of a struggling, cursing, screaming, shooting mass that defies description. Tom, the Sioux, standing on the third step of the stair, towered over the fight, steadily firing into the mass below, and I caught a glimpse of several police helmets, and then I grappled with a vicious little dark man who came at me like a charging snake.

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