

THE BAT

CHAPTER X

The Hidden Room

A few moments later Jack Bailey, seeing a thin glow of candle-light from the attic above, and hearing Lizzie's protesting voice, made his way up there. He found them in the trunk-room, a dusty, dingy apartment lined with dust closets along the walls—the floor littered with an incongruous assortment of attic objects—two battered trunks, a clothes hamper, an old sewing machine, a broken-backed kitchen chair, a pair of dilapidated dress-suitcases and a shabby settee that might once have been a woman's dressing-case—in one corner a grimy fireplace in which, obviously, no fire had been lighted for years.

But he also found Miss Cornelia holding her candle to the floor and staring at something there.

"Candle-grease!" she said, sharply, staring at a line of white spots by the window. She stooped and touched the spots with an exploratory finger.

"Fresh candle-grease! Now who do you suppose did that? It leads straight to the fireplace!" she murmured in tones of Sherlockian gravity. Bailey repressed an involuntary smile. But her next words gave him genuine food for thought.

"It's been going through my mind for the last few minutes that no chimney fire runs up this side of the house!" she said.

Bailey stared. "Then why the fireplace?"

"That's what I'm going to find out!" said the spinster grimly. She started to rap the mantel, testing it for secret springs.

"Jack! Jack!" It was Dale's voice, low and cautious, coming from the landing of the stairs.

Bailey stepped to the door of the trunk room.

"Come in," he called in reply. "And lock the door behind you."

Dale entered, turning the key in the lock behind her.

"Where are the others?"

"They're still searching the house. There's no sign of anybody."

"They haven't found—Mr. Anderson?"

Dale shook her head. "Not yet."

She turned toward her aunt. Miss Cornelia had begun to enjoy herself once more.

Rapping on the mantelpiece, poking and pressing various corners and sections of the mantel itself, she remembered all the detective stories she had ever read and thought, with a sniff of scorn, that she could better them. She rapped on the wall above the mantel—exactly—there was the hollow echo she wanted.

"Hollow as Lizzie's head!" she said triumphantly. The fireplace was obviously not what it seemed—there must be a space behind it unaccounted for in the building plans. Now what was the next step detectives always took. Oh, yes—they looked for panels; panels that moved. And when one showed them away there was a button or something. She pushed and pressed and finally something did move.

It was the mantelpiece itself, false grate and all, which began to swing out into the room, revealing behind a dark, hollow cubbyhole, some six feet by six—the hidden room at last!

"Oh, Jack, be careful!" breathed Dale, as her lover took Miss Cornelia's candle and moved toward the dark hiding place. But her eyes had already caught the outlines of a tall iron safe in the goom, and in spite of her fears, her lips formed a wordless cry of victory.

But Jack Bailey said nothing at all. One glance had shown him that the safe was empty.

The tragic collapse of all their hopes was almost more than they could bear. Coming on top of the nerve-racking events of the night, it left them dazed and directionless. It was, of course, Miss Cornelia who recovered first.

"Even without the money," she said, "the mere presence of this safe here, hidden away, tells the story. The fact that some one else knew and got here first cannot alter that."

But she could not cheer them. It was Lizzie who created a diversion. Lizzie who had bolted into the hall at the first motion of the mantelpiece outwards, and who now with equal precipitation came bolting back. She rushed into the room, slamming the door behind her, and collapsed into a heap of moaning terror at her mistress' feet. At first she was completely inarticulate, but after a time she muttered that she had seen "him" and then fell to moaning again.

The same thought was in all their minds, that in some corner of the upper floor she had come across the body of Anderson. But when Miss Cornelia finally quieted her and asked this, she shook her head.

"It was the Bat I saw," was her astounding statement. "He dropped through the skylight out there and ran along the hall. I saw him, I tell you. He went right by me!"

"Nonsense," said Miss Cornelia, briskly. "How can you say such a thing?"

But Bailey pushed forward and took Lizzie by the shoulder.

"What did he look like?"

"He hadn't any face. He was all black where his face ought to be."

"Do you mean he wore a mask?"

"Maybe. I don't know."

She collapsed again, but when Bailey, followed by Miss Cornelia,

A Novel From the Play

By Mary Roberts Rinehart and Avery Hopwood

WNU Service

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made a move toward the door, she broke into frantic wailing.

"Don't go out there!" she shrieked. "He's here, I tell you. I'm not crazy. If you open that door, he'll shoot."

But the door was already open and no shot came. With the departure of Bailey and Miss Cornelia, and the resulting darkness due to their taking the candle, Lizzie and Dale were left alone. The girl was faint with disappointment and strain; she sat huddled on a trunk, saying nothing, and after a moment or so Lizzie roused to her condition.

"Not feeling sick, are you?" she asked.

"I feel a little queer."

"Who wouldn't, in the dark here, with that monster loose somewhere near by?" But she stirred herself and got up. "I'd better get the smelling salts," she said heavily. "God knows I hate to move, but if there's one place safer in this house than another, I've got to find it."

She went out, leaving Dale alone. The trunk room was dark, save that now and then as the candle appeared and reappeared the doorway was faintly outlined. On this outline she kept her eyes fixed, by way of comfort, and thus passed the next few moments. She felt weak and dizzy and entirely despairing.

Then—the outline was not so clear. She had heard nothing, but there was something in the doorway. It stood there, formless, diabolical, and then she saw what was happening. It was closing the door. Afterward she was

carefully not to remember what came next; the figure was perhaps intent on what was going on outside, or her own movements may have been as silent as its own. That she got into the mantel room and even partially closed it behind her is certain, and that her description of what followed is fairly accurate is borne out by the facts as known.

The Bat was working rapidly. She heard his quick, nervous movements; apparently he had come back for something and secured it, for now he moved again toward the door. But he was too late; they were returning that way. She heard him mutter something and quickly turn the key in the lock. Then he seemed to run toward the window, and for some reason to recoil from it.

The next instant she realized that he was coming toward the mantel room, that he intended to hide in it. There was no doubt in her mind as to his identity. It was the Bat, and in a moment more he would be shut in there with her.

She tried to scream and could not, and the next instant she was in a dead faint on the floor.

Bailey meanwhile had crawled out on the roof and was carefully searching it. But other things were happening also. A disinterested observer could have seen very soon why the Bat had abandoned the window as a means of egress.

Almost before the mantel had swung to behind the arch-criminal, the top of a tall prancing ladder had appeared at the window, and by its quivering showed that some one was climbing up, rung by rung. Unsuspectingly enough he came on, pausing at the top to flash a light into the room, and then cautiously swinging a leg over the sill. It was the doctor. He gave a low whistle, but there was no reply, save that, had he seen it, the mantel swung out an inch or two. Perhaps he was never so near death as at that moment, but that instant of irresolution on his part saved him, for by coming into the room he had taken himself out of range.

Even then he was very close to destruction, for after a brief pause and a second rather puzzled survey of the room, he started toward the mantel itself. Only the rattle of the door-knob stopped him, and a call from outside.

"Dale!" called Bailey's voice from the corridor. "Dale!"

"Dale! Dale! The door's locked!" cried Miss Cornelia.

The doctor hesitated. The call came again.

"Dale! Dale!" and Bailey pounded on the door as if he meant to break it down.

The doctor made up his mind.

"Wait a moment!" he called. He stepped to the door and unlocked it. Bailey hurried himself into the room, followed by Miss Cornelia with her candle. Lizzie stood in the doorway, timidly, ready to leap for safety at a moment's notice.

"Why did you lock that door?" said Bailey, angrily, threatening the doctor.

"But I didn't," said the latter, truthfully enough. Bailey made a movement of irritation. Then a glance about the room informed him of the amazing, the incredible fact. Dale was not there! She had disappeared!

"You—you," he stammered at the doctor. "Where's Miss Ogden? What have you done with her?"

The doctor was equally baffled.

"Done with her?" he said indignantly. "I don't know what you're talking about—I haven't seen her!"

"Then you didn't lock that door?" Bailey menaced him.

The doctor's denial was firm.

"Absolutely not. I was coming through the window when I heard your voice at the door!"

Bailey's eyes leapt to the window—yes—a ladder was there—the doctor might be speaking the truth after all. But if so, how and why had Dale disappeared?

The doctor's admission of his manner of entrance did not make Lizzie any the happier.

"In at the window—just like a bat!" she muttered in shaking tones. She would not have stayed in the doorway if she had not been afraid to move anywhere else.

"I saw lights up here from outside," continued the doctor easily. "And I thought—"

Miss Cornelia interrupted him. She had laid down her candle and revolver on the top of the clothes hamper and now stood gazing at the mantel fireplace.

"The mantel's closed!" she said. "The doctor stared. So the secret of the hidden room was a secret no longer."



"Dale!" Called Bailey's Voice From the Corridor.

longer. He saw ruin gaping before him—a bottomless abyss. "Damnation!" he cursed, impatiently, under his breath.

Bailey turned on him savagely. "Did you shut that mantel?"

"No!"

"I'll see whether you shut it or not!" Bailey leapt toward the fireplace. "Dale! Dale!" he called desperately, leaning against the mantel. His fingers groped for the knob that worked the mechanism of the hidden entrance.

The doctor picked up the single lighted candle from the hamper, as if to throw more light on Bailey's task. Bailey's fingers found the knob. He turned it. The mantel began to swing out into the room.

As it did so the doctor deliberately snuffed out the light of the candle he held, leaving the room in abrupt and obliterating darkness.

"Doctor, why did you put out that candle?"

Miss Cornelia's voice cut the blackness like a knife.

"I didn't—I—"

"You did—I saw you do it."

The brief exchange of accusation and denial took but an instant of time, as the mantel swung wide open. The

next instant there was a rush of feet across the floor, from the fireplace—the shock of a collision between two bodies—the sound of a heavy fall.

"What was that?" queried Bailey, dazedly, with a feeling as if some great winged creature had brushed at him and passed.

Lizzie answered from the doorway. "Oh, oh!" she groaned, in stricken accents. "Somebody knocked me down and trampled on me!"

"Matches, quick!" commanded Miss Cornelia. "Where's the candle?"

The doctor was still trying to explain his curious action of a moment before.

"Aterfully sorry, I assure you—it dropped out of the holder—ah, here it is!"

He held it up triumphantly. Bailey struck a match and lighted it. The wavering little flame showed Lizzie prostrate but vocal, in the doorway—and Dale, lying on the floor of the hidden room, her eyes shut, and her face as drained of color as the face of a marble statue. For one horrible instant Bailey thought she must be dead.

He rushed to her wildly and picked her up in his arms. No—still breathing—thank God! He carried her tenderly to the only chair in the room.

"Doctor!"

"Please close that awful door," she said in a tremulous voice. "I don't want to see it again."

The detective went silently to close the iron doors.

"What happened to you? Can't you remember?" faltered Bailey, on his knees at her side.

The shadow of an old terror lay on the girl's face.

"I was in here alone, in the dark," she began slowly—"Then, as I looked at the doorway there, I saw there was somebody there. He came in and closed the door. I didn't know what to do, so I slipped in—there, and after a while I knew he was coming in, too, for he couldn't get out. Then I must have fainted."

"There was nothing about the figure that you recognized?"

"No. Nothing."

"But we know it was the Bat," put in Miss Cornelia.

The detective laughed sardonically. The old duel of opposing theories between the two seemed about to recommence.

"Still harping on the Bat!" he said, with a little sneer.

Miss Cornelia stuck to her guns. "I have every reason to believe that the Bat is in this house," she said.

The detective gave another jarring, mirthless laugh.

"And that he took the Union bank money out of that safe, I suppose?" he jeered. "No, Miss Van Gorder, this?"

He wheeled on the doctor now.

"Ask the doctor who took the Union bank money out of that safe?" he thundered. "Ask the doctor who attacked me downstairs in the drawing room, knocked me senseless and locked me in the billiard room!"

There was an astounded silence. The detective added a parting shot to his indictment of the doctor.

"The next time you put handcuffs on a man, be sure to take the key out of his vest pocket," he said biting off the words.

Rage and consternation mingled on the doctor's countenance—on the faces of the others astonishment was followed by a growing certainty. Only Miss Cornelia clung stubbornly to her original theory.

"Perhaps I'm an obstinate old woman," she said, in tones which obviously showed that if so she was rather proud of it, "but the doctor and all the rest of us were locked in the living room, not ten minutes ago!"

"By the Bat, I suppose!" mocked Anderson.

"By the Bat!" insisted Miss Cornelia inflexibly. "Who else would have fastened a dead bat to the door downstairs? Who else would call the bravado to do that? Or what you call the imagination?"

In spite of himself Anderson seemed to be impressed.

"The Bat, eh?" he muttered, then, changing his tone, "you knew about this hidden room, Wells?" he shot at the doctor.

"Yes." The doctor bowed his head. "And you knew the money was in the room?"

"Well, I was wrong, wasn't I?" parried the doctor. "You can look for yourself. That safe is empty."

The detective brushed his evasive answer aside.

"You were up in this room, earlier tonight," he said in tones of apparent certainty.

"No, I couldn't get up!" the doctor still insisted, with strange violence for a man who had already admitted such damning knowledge.

The detective's face was a study in disbelief.

"You know where that money is, Wells, and I'm going to find it!"

This last taunt seemed to goad the doctor beyond endurance.

"Good God!" he shouted recklessly. "Do you suppose if I knew where it is, I'd be here? I've had plenty of chances to get away! No, you can't pin anything on me, Anderson! I ain't criminal to have known that room is here."

"Oh, don't be so d-d virtuous!" said the detective brutally. "Maybe you haven't been upstairs—but, unless I miss my guess, you know who was!" The doctor's face glowed a little.

He gestured at the hidden room. "Ask those people here."

Miss Cornelia caught him up at once.

"The fact remains, Doctor," she said, her voice cold with anger, "that we left her here alone. When we came back, you were here. The corridor door was locked, and she was in that room—unconscious!"

She moved forward to throw the light of her candle on the hidden room as the detective passed into it. She gave it a swift professional glance, and stepped out again. But she had not finished her story by any means.

"As we opened that door," she continued to the detective, tapping the false mantel, "the doctor deliberately extinguished our only candle!"

"Do you know who was in that room?" queried the detective, fiercely, wheeling on the doctor.

But the latter had evidently made up his mind to cling stubbornly to a policy of complete denial.

"No," he said sullenly. "I didn't put out the candle. It fell. And I didn't lock that door into the hall. I found it locked!"

A sigh of relief from Bailey now centered everyone's attention on himself and Dale. At last the girl was recovering from the shock of her terrible experience and regaining consciousness. Her eyelids fluttered—closed again—opened once more. She tried to sit up, weakly, clinging to Bailey's shoulder. The color returned to her cheeks—the stupor left her eyes. She gave the hidden room a hunted little glance and then shut her eyes.

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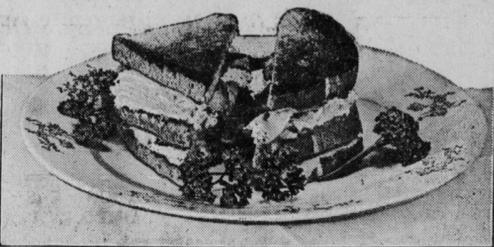
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CLUB SANDWICHES EASILY MADE AT HOME



Club Sandwiches With Cottage or Cream Cheese Filling.

(Prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture.)

All sorts of good combinations of flavors are possible in club sandwiches, which might well be used more often for an easily prepared Sunday night supper or for other lunches.

When you order a club sandwich in a restaurant you usually expect to be served a three-layered sandwich made of toast, with two filled sections, usually containing some lettuce, a slice of chicken, a slice of tomato, a little ham or bacon, and mayonnaise dressing to moisten. Both sections of the sandwich may be alike, or the ingredients may be distributed as you please, provided that the total combination is a palatable blend.

It is not necessary to use chicken every time you make club sandwiches. Veal, lamb, pork, or other cold meats may be used, or cottage or cream cheese. The last makes an excellent filling because it can be combined with various other flavors in an appetizing way. For example, cottage cheese with nut meats and slices of tart tender apple, in addition to the dressed lettuce, sliced Spanish onion and to-

mato also go well with the cottage cheese, and cucumber may be used during its season.

The bureau of home economics says that the secret of making and serving any club sandwiches successfully is to have all the ingredients assembled conveniently for rapid work. Do not undertake to make these sandwiches for a large group of people unless you are sure of being able to fill and serve them before the toast cools.

Suppose you are ready to make the sandwich illustrated. Your cottage cheese mixed with chopped green pepper, lettuce, mayonnaise, and sliced tomato are before you on the kitchen work table. While you are toasting the bread, fry the bacon. On a slice of toast spread the cheese generously, lay on a leaf of lettuce, add mayonnaise, slices of tomato, and strips of bacon. Cover with another slice of toast, add more filling, and top with a third slice of toast. Cut the sandwich diagonally with a very sharp knife, garnish with a small pickle or olives or radishes, and serve immediately. Sandwiches of this type are intended to be eaten with a knife and fork.

HELP TO PRODUCER AND THE CONSUMER

Bureau of Home Economics Is of Assistance to Both.

(Prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture.)

From one point of view much of the investigation work of the bureau of home economics might be said to stand between the producers of household commodities and the homemaker-consumers. Its findings often serve as a guide to production or distribution, and at the same time may be used by the consumer as an aid in choice and use of household equipment and materials. The work is of significance to each group in a different sense.

The recently inaugurated household refrigeration studies are a good example of the two-sided function of the bureau of home economics. These studies, aided by the financial co-operation of manufacturers of ice and of mechanical refrigerating units, are aimed at obtaining facts to guide the design and distribution policies of manufacturers, and also to enable the housewife to select and operate her ice box or mechanical refrigerating unit to best advantage.

Again, in the dietary studies, which show what foods are actually being consumed in the group of families surveyed, and how completely these foods meet nutritive needs, information is assembled for the guidance of food producers, and also for use in educational programs directed toward the consumer through radio releases, newspaper articles, bulletins and other agencies carrying information about good nutrition.

Other studies may reveal to the producer the reasons for conditions in his particular field, as in the case of studies of the present use of cotton fabrics for clothing and household articles.

Again, the bureau offers a neutral territory for the meeting of equipment manufacturers and homemakers, as in the permanent exhibits of different makes and types of washing machines, ironing machines and sewing machines.

In the annual report for 1927, Dr. Louise Stanley, chief of the bureau of economics, outlines its three main branches of work—foods and nutrition, economic studies and clothing and textiles—and indicates the investigations now going on in each division. As most of the research work of the bureau consists of long-time projects, the report is chiefly a statement of progress.

In the food and nutrition division the principal lines of work are the vitamin studies, co-operation in the project dealing with palatability of meat, the collection of data on the chemical composition of foods, and the co-operative study of household refrigeration.

Dietary studies have been given especial attention in the economic division, which is continuing its analyses of clothing and other household expenditures, and the studies of the use of the housewife's time in order to determine the most needed household equipment. This section has