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The SKELETON-FINGER



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BEGIN HERE TODAY

SIR DUDLEY GLENISTER, English baronet, suspected of the murder of his cousin, George Glenister, to obtain his title and estate, consents to a search of his lands, but—

KATHLEEN GLENISTER, sister of the missing man, and her lover, Norman Slater, fearing Sir Dudley will attempt to further hide the body and foil the searchers, shadow him. In the woods they meet—

STEPHEN COLNE, former British consular minister, who persuades them that their attempt would be fruitless.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

"I cannot expect more of you," replied the baronet. "Wait a minute, Grimes," he added as the velvet-coated figure turned to the door. "You know that the thing dropped by that cursed bird yesterday puts me under a cloud—that people are talking?"

"I don't pay attention to chatter, sir. There are plenty fools in Beechwood village."

"And in Beechwood Grange," sneered Sir Dudley. "See here, Grimes, you must have known my cousin George well. What was the row between him and the old man?"

"I couldn't say, sir. It was kept very close," replied the head keeper stolidly, though a reminiscent gleam in his sombre eyes belied total ignorance.

"George was a bit of a spark with the girls, wasn't he?" pursued Sir Dudley. "Come, man! you can speak freely to me without any fear that your name will be dragged in. It will make a lot of difference if I can get to the bottom of that quarrel. I have always thought that there was a woman at the bottom of it."

"Neither, sir, Phillip nor Mr. George took me into confidence, sir. Was it likely, when even Miss Kathleen was kept in the dark?"

With an impatient gesture Glenister waved his servant away, and his gaze after the receding velvet-backed was as black as thunder.

"It's a lonely furrow I've got to plough," he muttered, as he lighted a cigar and flung himself into a chair.

Presently there came a tap at the door, and Mrs. Coningsby floated in. The pretty lady, hovering ever on the fringe of "society" without being of it, was a relic of Sir Dudley Glenister's stock-broking days. Cuddled from the "Gaiety" chorus and espoused by his former partner, she had soon plunged into the joys of opulent widowhood, spiteful tongues alleging that she had killed her husband by setting him a pace he could not stand.

What her little game was now was a bit of a mystery, but the same spiteful tongues credited her with a desire to share her present host's title.

"Got a head, old boy?" was her elegant greeting. "I am sure I don't wonder. That horrid crowd was a nasty set-back, eh? Pals must stick together when the red light shines."

"You are a good little soul, Ivy, but you are all wrong if you think that I did my cousin in," Sir Dudley looked at his fair guest.

"Oh, I will take your word for that," Mrs. Coningsby laughed her reply. "And there is another pointer I can give you without waiting for developments. It is as well that you should distinguish your enemies from your friends. Your cousin Kathleen and Captain Slater followed you when you left the house last night."

The owner of the Grange shook off his apathy. "I was aware that they had followed me, and I had the satisfaction of locking them out," he said. "You would do me a real service if you could tell me who let them in."

But Mrs. Coningsby shook her head. "I wish I could tell you, but I only marked them down when they reached the landing on their return," she replied. "As to who admitted them to the house I have no idea at all. What about Doctor Melville?"

"No, it wasn't Melville," replied Sir Dudley. "He has discussed the position with me, and he looks upon my fair cousin's attitude towards me with the amusement that might be expected of him. They either bribed one of the servants or they were artful enough to leave open some other means of entry in addition to the gun-room door. Kathleen is as thick as thieves with old Kinkley, the butler, and with several other of the old retainers."

Mrs. Coningsby pursed her red lips in reflection. "It's beyond me."

"Got a head, old boy?" was her elegant greeting.

except that there's underhand work somewhere," she said. "Now I must

run away and be sweet to my fellow guests."

The company at Beechwood Grange needed someone to be "sweet" to them that day, for the social atmosphere was charged with electricity. Young Frank Glenister was the only member of the party who openly enjoyed the situation, but he joined the search at the outset and was not available for cheering-up purposes. After an hour's seclusion in the library, Sir Dudley mastered his indecision and started off to overtake the gang of underkeepers and laborers who were "drawing" the estate with the armpit of a pack of hounds.

Kathleen and Norman played a little tennis and then the girl, finding the suspense intolerable, ordained a walk into the village.

The hours dragged slowly on till the guests assembled for afternoon tea, which was served in the great paneled entrance hall. Lady Marables was babbling to a bored audience about a bazaar she had opened, and Kinkley and the footmen were handing round the trays, when the telephone bell rang sharply.

Kathleen jumped up. Running across the hall, she darted into the telephone closet just inside the front door. In something under two minutes the girl was out again, while as a snowdrift, she announced, "A body has been found in a chalk pit on Bare Acre Down near the high road. It is quite unrecognizable, as there is nothing on it by which it can be identified, but the second finger of the left hand is missing."

CHAPTER IV Detective-Inspector Wragge The Right Honorable Stephen Colne was a bachelor when he played second fiddle to the austere, middle-aged maiden sister whom he had installed as chatelaine.

But though he gave his sister a free hand in the ordering of his household, there was one reservation which she did not dare to transgress. His study was an inner shrine which even the grim spinster was forbidden to invade without invitation.

It was here that Mr. Stephen Colne was sitting on the day after the inquest on the unidentified human remains found in the chalk pit on Bare Acre Down. He was impatiently turning over some papers that had reached him by the morning post, but his glance strayed frequently to one of the windows giving on to the drive. His pale, intellectual face was set rigidly, but a gleam came into his tired eyes as his car rushed up the avenue and stopped under the Georgian portico.

The man who descended and approached the front door wore the black garments and conventional hard felt hat of an Anglican clergyman. A moment later Mr. Colne's butler announced him as "The Reverend Mr. Branson," though Mr. Colne had quite another name for the visitor when the butler had gone his way.

"Well, Inspector Wragge," he said, shaking hands with an air of condescension. "The commissioner made no difficulty about assigning you to the case, I presume?"

"None whatever, sir," was the reply. James Wragge was one of the most formidable detective officers attached to New Scotland Yard. In what likeness his Creator had fashioned him probably no living being but his wife knew, so versatile were his assumptions of

types and characters. It was a popular belief at "The Yard" that Jim Wragge wore some sort of a disguise in the privacy of his room at headquarters.

Mr. Colne allowed the latent dryness in the inspector's reply to pass unheeded.

Mr. Wragge selected a convenient chair and sat down opposite his host.

"You will have gathered the salient features of the case from the London papers," Mr. Colne resumed. "There is no doubt in my mind that Sir Dudley Glenister faked the evidence of his cousin George's death in America, after inveigling him back to England and killing him within a mile or two of his home. That is what you have set out to prove."

The inspector had produced a memorandum book—a dainty thing of russet leather with gilt-edged leaves.

"I have already laid a train, sir," he said, glancing at a nearly blank page. "I have cabled the American police to look up the death of the man buried as George Glenister at Lone Wolf City, Montana, and accepted by our courts as established by the present baronet's right of succession. I only had an hour at my disposal before catching the train, but I ascertained that Sir Dudley was not out of England within a year of Sir Philip Glenister's death. If he procured the faking of the American evidence he must therefore have employed a delegate who proceeded to the spot. In a few days I ought to be able to lay my hands on his emissary."

Mr. Stephen Colne nodded approval. "A judicious start," he said. "Incidentally, Sir Dudley has ordered all his guests but Doctor Melville to leave the Grange."

Inspector Wragge looked up sharply.

(To Be Continued)

LOMITA NOTES

Mr. and Mrs. George Bender of Wilmington were recent guests of Mr. and Mrs. William Taylor of Weston street.

Mrs. Frank Jordan and daughter Francis and Opal Edwards enjoyed "The Gold Rush" at Hollywood Saturday.

Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Synott of 25th street spent Sunday with Mr. and Mrs. John Langford of Lynwood.

Mr. and Mrs. Lynden Lowe and family were entertained Sunday by Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Crawford of Flower street.

Mrs. John Waite and family and Mr. and Mrs. Alex MacPhail enjoyed the organ concert at Roosevelt Memorial Park Sunday.

A guest Sunday at the home of Mrs. A. Pirner of Oak street was Mrs. Elizabeth Homer of Los Angeles.

Mrs. Marie Baker of South Normandie avenue, who has been seriously ill, is reported greatly improved.

Charles H. Clark of Weston street has returned from a two-weeks vacation at San Diego.

Mr. and Mrs. George E. Bryant and daughter Margaret were Sunday dinner guests of Miss Annie M. G. Draper of Long Beach.

Mr. and Mrs. H. B. Gilbert of George street, accompanied by Gar-

dena friends, spent Sunday with Mr. Gilbert's mother and sister at Sierra Madre.

Mr. and Mrs. George Pifford and Mrs. Guy Morgan were San Pedro visitors Sunday.

Dinner guests Friday of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Baker of Weston street were Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Doctor and Mr. and Mrs. Jack Culver, of Los Angeles; Mr. and Mrs. E. W. Brumpton and son, and Mr. and Mrs. Tim Terrell.

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