The Yellow Letter

by William Johnston

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SYNOPSIS.

Harding Kent calls on Louise Farrish to propose marriage and finds the house in great excitement over the attempted suicide of her sister Katharine. Kent starts an investigation and finds that Hugh Crandall, suitor for Katherine, who had been forbidden the house by General Farrish, had talked with Katharine over the telephone just before she shot herself. A torn piece of yellow paper is found, at sight of which General Farrish is stricken with paralysis. Kent discovers that Crandall has left town hurriedly. Andrew Elser, an aged banker, commits suicide about the same time as Katharine attempted her life. A yellow envelope is found in Elser's room. Post Office Inspector Davis, Kent's friend, takes up the case. Kent is convinced that Crandall is at the bottom of the mystery. Katharine's strange outcry puzzles the detectives. Kent and Davis search Crandall's room and find an address, Lock Box 17, Ardway, N. J. Kent goes to Ardway to investigate and becomes suspicious of a "Henry Cook." A woman commits suicide at the Ardway Hotel. A yellow letter also figures in this case. Kent calls Louise on the long distance telephone and finds that she had just been called by Crandall from the same booth. "Cook" disappears. The Ardway postmaster is missing. Inspector Davis arrives at Ardway and takes up the investigation. He discovers that the dead woman is Sarah Sacket of Bridgeport. Louise telephones Kent imploring him to drop the investigation. Kent returns to New York to get an explanation from Louise. He finds the body of a woman in Central Park and more yellow letters. He sees Crandall, whom he recognizes as "Cook," enter the Farrish home. Louise again implores Kent to drop the investigation and refuses to give any explanation. Later Kent sees Crandall and Louise in an automobile. Kent returns to Ardway. Davis announces that he has planned to arrest the missing postmaster and also the master criminal.

CHAPTER XII—(Continued).

"Wait a minute," said Davis, and the constable checked the horse.

Jumping out quickly the inspector seized the lantern and dropping back a few paces began making what appeared to be a minute examination of the road.

"Taint much of a road," the constable whispered to me while we waited. "It's only used for logging, though when we come up here this afternoon there was automobile tracks both going and coming."

"Any idea who made them?" I asked.

"Nope, but I guess he knows," with a gesture in the direction of the lantern light.

Just then Davis rejoined us, hanging the lantern over the dashboard again. Instead of resuming his seat, he knelt on the floor of the buckboard, peering down at the road as it was dimly revealed by the lantern.

"Go ahead slowly," he ordered.

As Dodds clucked to the horse I leaned down beside Davis and asked:

"What did you find?"

"Just what I expected. The automobile is somewhere ahead of us."

"Whose is it?"

"I don't know yet."

My curiosity would be denied no longer. Hitherto I had kept silent, hoping that Davis would confide in me the object of our strange journey.

"Whom are we coming out here after?" I asked.

"The postmaster and his accomplice, of course."

"Who is his accomplice?"

"I'm afraid I misstated the case," said Davis with a grim chuckle. "The postmaster is the accomplice. The other is the master criminal."

"Who is the other?" I persisted. "Is it Hugh Crandall?"

He was silent for a moment before answering. I attributed it to hesitation in admitting that he had been wrong and I right, and it was with considerable satisfaction that I finally heard him answer: "I should not be surprised if we found Crandall somewhere in the vicinity."

He continued to peer down into the road as the horse struggled up the hill till we came to a comparatively level plateau.

"Stop here," he called out authoritatively.

"The deserted cottage is at least a mile farther on," volunteered the constable.

"We'll walk it," said Davis. "We cannot take any chances of the wheels being heard."

Dodds pulled off the road and fastened the horse to a tree. Again taking the lantern Davis made a search of the road, finally returning the lantern to its place, after carefully extinguishing it.

"Come on this way, as quietly as you can," he directed.

"I've got this," I said, showing him the little pocket electric light with which I had explored the post office. "Do you want it?"

"Keep it in your pocket. We may need it, but it is better not to show a light if we can avoid it."

I put it back in my pocket and took the precaution of placing the revolver Davis had given me in the side-pocket of my coat where it would be more easily available. Davis moved off soundlessly through the clearing with the constable, I close at his heels.

"This ain't the direction of the cottage," whispered Dodds.

"I know. I want to find something else first," Davis explained, keeping straight on through the darkness, like a hound on a fresh scent.

He moved rapidly forward for a hundred and fifty yards and then brought us up short with a sharp "Hist." As we strained our eyes into blackness we made out the shape of an automobile just ahead. Its lights had been extinguished and its engine was dead.

"Wait here," Davis again commanded as he crept silently toward it to make sure that the tonneau was unoccupied. He was back with us in a minute.

"Let me have that lamp of yours, Kent," he whispered, at the same time lighting a cigarette.

"Is that safe?" I exclaimed in surprise, amazed that he would dare to smoke when he had been taking such precautions against our being discovered.

"Sure," he replied laconically. "Whoever was in that automobile is at least half a mile away by now." The glass on the front lamps is nearly cold. I want to see the number, though. We may find it useful."

Taking my little electric lamp he advanced toward the machine again, flashing the light for a second on the number, and then peering by its light into the tonneau, exclaiming as he straightened up: "I thought so."

If it was safe for him to smoke, the constable and I felt that it was safe for us, too, to relax our precautions, and together we had advanced until we were beside him.

"What did you find?" I asked, wondering at his exclamation.

"What I expected," he replied enigmatically.

The manner of his answer provoked me and I determined then and there to have it out with him.

"Look here, Davis," I said; "I brought you into this case and I do not like the way you have acted about it. I have freely told you everything I have discovered and have aided you in every way I can. Before I go a step farther on this trip I want to know more about it."

"What is it you wish to know?" he asked. The constable edged nearer for fear he might miss something of our conversation.

"First, where are we going?"

"To what is known as the deserted cottage, about a half mile farther on, at the edge of this clearing, a shack that was built for a shelter for lumbermen or quarrymen—which was it, Dodds?"

"Built for one and used by t'other," the constable replied, "but 'tain't been used by either, so far as I know, for a dozen years."

"How do you know the missing postmaster is there?"

"Traced him."

"How?"

"Bicycle tracks," he answered with a chuckle. "You were not the only person who discovered that Rouser, when he disappeared, went on bicycle. In fact, Kent, you are a little slow as a detective. By the time you had ascertained that much, I ascertained where the bicycle tracks led to and had even gone so far as to have Dodds get warrants for Rouser and his accomplice."

"I still do not see how you got evidence enough to get a warrant for Crandall. Did you find him out here with the missing postmaster?"

"I didn't say I had a warrant for Crandall," replied the inspector sharply. "Did you ever hear of a John Doe warrant?"

"How do you know they are out here now?" I asked.

"We'll soon find out. Come on," he answered, starting across the clearing almost at a dog-trot.

There were many more questions I wanted to put to him, but there was no opportunity, and, besides, I doubted much if he would have answered them. At first he made little effort to move quietly, but after we had gone a quarter of a mile or more he called back in a whisper, "Quietly now."

We had come to a path which led us through a short thick growth of underbrush. As noiselessly as Indians following a trail we felt our way along, the silence broken now and then by the sound of a bough bent back, or a rustling leaf. Soon the path brought us out on some rising ground. Not fifty yards ahead of us appeared the deserted cottage.

"That's it," whispered Dodds.

"Sah!" answered Davis. "Wait here!"

We stopped there just at the edge of the underbrush, peering into the darkness, straining our eyes to see and our ears to hear. From the one window in the side of the one-story log hut a dim light shone, proving that the place was either occupied or had been very recently. As we became more and more accustomed to the darkness I could see that there were apparently two paths, the one on which we were standing and another leading off at about right angle.

As we looked and listened I heard a sharp crack, like the breaking of a twig that had been stepped on.

The sound, so far as I could judge, came from the other path, apparently a hundred feet away from the cottage. I turned toward Davis and saw that he, too, had heard it. He was standing with his whole body tense, his head bent forward a little as if ready to spring at any instant.

As we listened, another sound came to our ears. At first indistinct, it quickly took the rhythm of footsteps hurrying along the path, a man walking rapidly, I decided. The hurrying footsteps came nearer and nearer. Davis now was crouching like a runner about to make a hundred-yard dash.

It was only a minute of suspense and yet the effect on my nerves was indescribable. I wanted to scream like a hysterical girl; I wanted to run, forward or back, it made no difference; I wanted to do something, anything—anything but stand there and wait in the darkness.

All of a sudden the form of a man hurrying along the other path became visible. He seemed to be carrying something. Davis took two or three noiseless steps forward and stopped abruptly. From the shadows, from nowhere it seemed, the figure of another man appeared directly in the path of the oncomer.

"Hold on here!" it said, or something like that.

With a curse the first man dropped whatever he was carrying and started to run. The second man started after him. With not more than ten paces between them the pursued man suddenly wheeled. A revolver flashed and the pursuer with a muttered curse fell headlong in the path. The hunted man turned and, with headlong speed, plunged down the path.

At the revolver shot Davis had leaped forward, and, needless to say, Dodds and I were not far behind him. Fast as the fugitive was vanishing Davis was even faster. With the movement of a trained runner he, the wiry inspector, quickly outdistanced Dodds and myself and was close on the heels of his man.

As I ran breathless behind him, hoping to arrive in time to help him in his capture, I saw the man ahead halt and turn. Instinctively I knew he was about to shoot again, and, raising the revolver I had been carrying all the while, without even trying to aim, I fired in his direction just as I saw the flash from his revolver.

There was hardly a second between the two reports and then—

A woman shrieked.

I turned sick with horror. There could be no mistaking it.

It was the voice of Louise Farrish.

With overwhelming dismay it came to me that I had shot the woman I loved. Too stunned to move I stood there. My whole body seemed turned to stone. My arms hung helpless at my sides. My legs refused to move. My mouth was feverdry and my tongue lay lifeless. Yet my vision, I recall, seemed clear and strong, penetrating the darkness as if it had been broad day. I seemed to see, as if the sight belonged to some one else, some one outside myself. I saw the inspector and constable, both apparently unhurt by the shots, dash on in pursuit. I saw a man's figure rise up from the path. I seemed to hear him call out: "Louise, Louise, where are you? Are you hurt?"

There was no answer. Almost I had persuaded myself that the strain on my nerves, the horror of the night and the shock of the shooting had given me a hallucination, that the woman's shriek I had heard was but a phantasm of a fevered brain, when the figure I had seen rise from the path dashed into the thicket, repeating its agonized cry of "Louise, Louise, where are you?"

At the sound, life came again into me. I dashed my revolver to the ground and sprang after him. I found him bending over an unconscious form on the ground. Just as I reached the spot he had lighted a match. He lifted it to see my face, and as he did so I saw that the woman lying there apparently lifeless was indeed my Louise.

Overwhelmed with anguish and remorse, I flung myself beside her, entreating her forgiveness. The other man shoved me roughly aside.

"A Flesh Wound, Not at All Dangerous," Crandall Answered.

"Don't be a fool," he exclaimed. "She has only fainted."

"She's shot! She's killed!" I cried. "I shot her!"

"I tell you she has only fainted," he cried angrily. "Help me carry her over there by the window."

Together we lifted her and bore her gently to the side of the cottage, where we laid her on the ground. Joy surged in my heart as I saw and heard that she was still breathing, joy that was not even abated when I saw by the window light that my companion was none other than Hugh Crandall.

But just then all other thoughts were driven out of my head by the sight of a thin stream of blood trickling down the sleeve of Louise's automobile coat.

"I tell you she is shot. See," I cried, all my anguish coming back anew.

With trembling hands I helped Crandall cut away her sleeve, dreading all the time to see and know the worst.

"It's only a scratch," said Crandall, with a sigh of relief.

Across her rounded arm was a reddening gash where the bullet had cut its way through the tender flesh. While my head told me that Crandall was right, that it was only a flesh wound and not in the least dangerous, in my heart I still felt little better than a murderer. Three inches to the right, and the bullet from my revolver would have stilled her heart for ever.

She opened her eyes and stared at us in a puzzled way.

"Why, Harding, dear," she said in feeble surprise, "are you here—here with Mr. Crandall?"

For answer I bent and kissed her. What mattered it if Hugh Crandall was the criminal? What mattered it if the chain of mystery was still unsolved? What mattered it if the author of the yellow letters had escaped from the inspector? Louise lived! She loved me!

Davis and the constable came running up the path, panting from their chase, but empty-handed.

"Is she hurt?" asked Davis as he saw the three of us grouped under the window.

"A flesh wound, not at all dangerous," Crandall answered, while I knelt there caressing Louise's hair and whispering softly to her.

"How about you?" asked Davis.

"He didn't hit me," Crandall answered with a short laugh. "I tumbled over the bucket of milk he was carrying and dropped when he saw me. Didn't you get him?"

"He's safe," answered the inspector. "He ran plump over the edge of a precipice in the dark. We heard the thud of his body on the rocks below. He must have been instantly killed. We'll get the body in the morning. He must have fallen two hundred feet."

"A good two hundred," the constable added as Davis turned to peer in the window of the hut.

"And inside there," said the inspector after a minute's survey of the interior, "is the other one, the master criminal—safe enough for the present."

"Why," said the constable, who had followed the inspector's example in looking through the window, "why, that's Aleck Young."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Sleds Used in the Yukon

Not Constructed Along Lines of Beauty, but for Hard Work They Are Perfection.

The Yukon sled, while not a thing of beauty, is built to stand all kinds of hard wear, or, as the Irishman said, "It will last forever, and after that can be used for firewood." The sled is about eight feet long, is made of any kind of hard wood, lies close to the ground, costs from $10 to $14, and makes a trail sixteen inches in width. Another pattern is known as the basket sleigh and it is to the Yukon sleigh what a three-masted schooner is to a coal barge. In length it is from eight to fifteen feet, is made of birch, oak or hickory, cuts a trail twenty-two inches in width, costs from $40 to $200, is raised a foot or more from the runners, and, in the best examples, is lashed together with rawhide. The basket sleigh, as its name implies, is fitted with a basket, into which the load is placed, and from the back of the basket a pair of handles project, to be used in guiding the sled on the trail. It often happens that a Yukon sled will be fitted with a home-made basket, in imitation of its more aristocratic brother. In very cold weather wooden runners are best, but in ordinary circumstances steel or brass runners are used.—Wide World Magazine.

Named for General Wadsworth.

Fort Wadsworth in New York harbor is not named for Capt. Joseph Wadsworth, but for Gen. James Samuel Wadsworth of Geneseo, N. Y. General Wadsworth raised a regiment when the Civil war broke out, served with distinction, and was killed in the battle of the Wilderness. In his memory the name of Fort Tompkins was changed to Fort Wadsworth.

Left Him Out.

"George," she said sweetly, "I'm almost through housecleaning. But I'm up against a terrible problem now."

"What's the matter?"

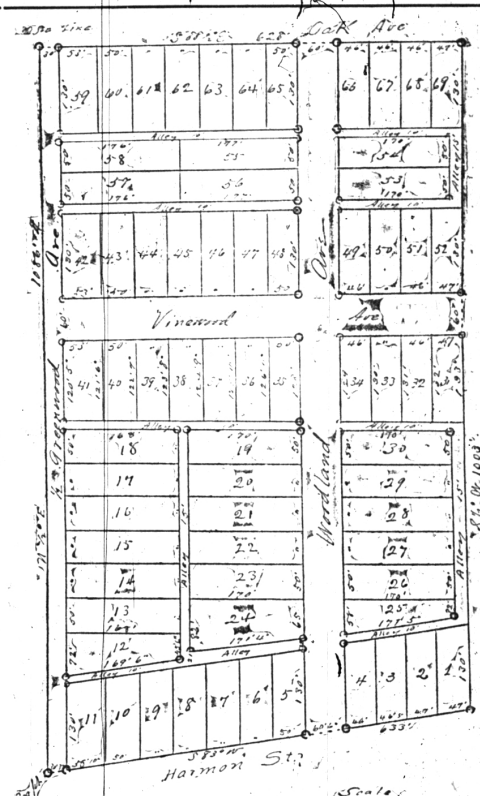
"I can't find any place to hang your clothes."

The Top o' the Mornin'

Always, from

Bir'gham Heights

Cement Walks, Shade Trees and Public Sewers



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Advantages of Birmingham for Home Dwellers

Population nearly 2,000. Taxes light. Finest climate, and healthiest-located village near Detroit, being 300 feet above Detroit River, with the best class of people on earth to associate with. One of the finest schools in Michigan, averages even up and better with 10 cities in Michigan that have each a population of 4,000. Our graduates enter the U. of M. on their diplomas. Six Churches, and only 12 miles from city limits of Detroit. Cars run conveniently both to and from Detroit. We have the best Water-Works System in Michigan. We are healthy—no case of diphtheria or malignant scarlet fever has originated here for over 30 years.

See A. Whitehead or George H. Mitchell for Particulars