

THE MAN WITH THE MASTERMIND.

Being the Chronicles of Carlton Clarke, Telepatho-Deductive Solver of Criminal Mysteries. BY FRANK LOVELL NELSON.

Brothers of the Left-Hand Path



BEFORE THE ASTONISHED GAZE OF THE FANATIC SPRANG A PERFECT INCARNATION OF THE DEVIL.

(This story is filled with surprising revelations and is based on an attempt to establish a scientific practice of the Black Art in a modern city. A professor of languages, his daughter, and an addicted millionaire are the chief characters. The last two figures in the love incident, Carlton Clarke, with his keen mind and broad knowledge of men and things, succeeds in solving the mystery that arises.)

THE events recorded in this narrative are so recent, the actors so highly placed, and the interests involved so delicate that I may be pardoned in departing from the usual custom of these records in withholding even the approximate date. It is needless to say that the names of the principals are disguised and the localities inaccurately, but otherwise the narrative is a record of the facts as they came under the observation of Clarke and myself.

Our introduction to the mystery was prosaic. I had enticed Clarke into a game of billiards at the Athletic Club one evening. This was something I was seldom able to do, although he played a remarkable game, and was giving me two strings in three and beating me without effort.

"I say, have any of you fellows seen Richard King in the last week?"

"None of the crowd which had gathered to watch Clarke's play was able to answer in the affirmative."

"Well, he's evidently disappeared," continued Melvane. "He hasn't been home for a week. His folks just telephoned to see if he was here. I told them to call up the Press Club. They said they had done so, and he hasn't been there. And say, here's the funny part of it: You fellows may not know it yet, but he was to have been married next month. The cards were coming out in about a week."

"Oh, that explains it, then," drawled Shapley, of the round face and the flaxen hair. "Every fellow feels like taking to the woods just before he gets married. Felt the same way myself five years ago. Haven't quite got over it yet. King's simply gone and done it."

"This brought a laugh. Shapley's absent devotion to his family was pretty well known."

"What sort of a fellow is King?" I asked. "I don't believe I know him."

"Quiet chap," answered Shapley. "Didn't mix much; lived down in Kenwood; all sorts of money. Father in some sort of mine somewhere in Russia. Died there and left King and his sister, two millions apiece. Dick lived over there till he came here to college. Graduated at Princeton and then traveled in India and all such places as that. Got some sort of a fat about occultism and all that sort of thing. Studious sort of chap; always sitting around somewhere with a book. Don't see him, he wanted to belong to this club for."

"I suppose the police have been notified," said Clarke, who had joined our group.

"I'd make a book they haven't. Old lady proud as a queen. She's a Russian. Some sort of princess or something over there. Not the kind that likes their names in the papers much."

The sensation, which seemed commonplace enough to Clarke and myself, was an epoch in the lives of these idle, rich young men, and the discussion of King's unwonted absence raged fiercely for a time, although he was known personally to but few of the members. The general consensus of opinion was that Shapley had assigned the true cause and King was just keeping out of sight and would bob up serenely in time for the wedding.

But Richard King did not turn up. The days dragged into weeks and still there was no word of him. Short hints of the affair got into the papers, and one sensational story which "printed a glaring and garbled account" but no word of it was given to the police, and the proud mother and King's one beautiful sister shut themselves up in their Kenwood home, denied themselves to all interviewers and stoutly refused to admit that there was any mystery in the young man's absence.

One afternoon, about a month after the opening of this story, Clarke and I were tiding in our Oak-street apartments. My companion had brought all his affairs to successful issues and I could see that time was hanging rather heavily. Suddenly Clarke stopped his reckless walk.

"What do you suppose ever became of your clubmate, Richard King?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," I replied. "I read the announcement of the postponement of his wedding some days ago. The girl's name was Rosalie Watrous, a daughter of Dr. Watrous, professor of Semitic languages at the university. She is very learned and beautiful. I have seen her, but I know her only slightly."

"Yes, I have looked her up. Sexton, I sometimes hesitate to try even your faith with my impressions, but some presence tells me that we shall be drawn into the King case and that shortly. I should almost venture to say this afternoon."

Just then there was a quick ring at the doorbell. I answered it and admitted a tall gentleman with a drooping black mustache and dark, intelligent eyes that shone through glasses of a very high power.

"You are not Mr. Carlton Clarke?"

Well, please tell him that Dr. Watrous would like to see him. Cards are forgotten. I don't carry them. Why, I only learned your name this afternoon. Perhaps you can also tell me the object of my visit."

"Most assuredly," answered Clarke. "You have come to tell me of some rather extraordinary occurrences which have taken place in your family recently. Am I not right?"

opus on the Hebrew roots is being sadly neglected. My poor wife, too, is in a wretched state of mind. I hope, Mr. Clarke, that you will bring your talents to bear on our trouble and lead us to the light."

"I can form my conclusions more accurately, perhaps, if you will set out in detail your trouble. Oh, yes, you may speak with perfect freedom before Mr. Sexton. He is my invaluable assistant in most of my cases."

During the following recital Dr. Watrous' thin hands alternately entwined and nervously clasped the arms of his chair.

"You doubtless have heard rumors of the disappearance of Richard King and that he was engaged to be married to my daughter, Rosalie, who is our only child," he began.

Clarke nodded in assent.

"Well, his strange action in dropping out of sight only a month before the wedding day naturally would be enough to upset us had it not been followed by events even more inexplicable. My daughter is a young woman of considerable erudition. I have been able to guide her studies, which I am glad to say have taken the direction of languages. Mr. King is also a man of considerable learning, but his knowledge was acquired, I fear, through travel rather than by serious effort and application."

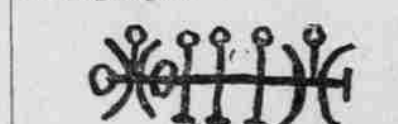
"As the wedding day approached and his absence was continued, my daughter's perturbation naturally increased; but she comes of a proud stock and was able to conceal her anxiety under the mask of indifference. Upon the wedding day, however, and after it had become necessary for us to make some excuse for the postponement of the ceremonies, she was in a pitiable state of distress."

"During the morning of the wedding day the postman brought, among other mail, a letter addressed to my daughter in a hand with which I was unfamiliar. She took it eagerly and went to her room to read it. In a few minutes she came down a changed person. She was as gay and light-hearted as a girl of 15. She evaded our inquiries, however, and would give no reason for the remarkable change."

"The next day my wife, while performing some household duties in my daughter's room, found the letter which she had received. We both feel that it is not strictly honorable to take advantage of evidence thus acquired, but in the light of subsequent events I believe that my daughter's happiness is at stake, and without her knowledge I have taken the letter and similar ones which she has received, from the hiding place where she keeps them and will show them to you in their proper order."

"Here is the first. You see, the envelope contains nothing except a card upon which are crudely drawn some strange hieroglyphics, the nature of which is a mystery I am in hopes you may be able to explain."

Dr. Watrous took the card from the envelope and laid it before us. We saw there was upon it the following diagram:



Clarke snatched up the card and studied it intently, while an expression of absolute amazement spread over his dark countenance.

"Ah, Mr. Clarke, it tells you something."

"Perhaps, but go on with the story. You say your daughter has received other letters."

"She has," answered the doctor, reaching into his cavernous pocket. "Here is one which I judge from the postmark arrived two days subsequent to the first."

"By the way, the addresses of these letters," interrupted Clarke, "the hand is evidently disguised, but does it resemble that of King?"

into a rage when we speak to her. I fear, Mr. Clarke, that unless you are able to aid us, we shall have to place the poor girl in an asylum."

"No, no, doctor; you must take no rash steps with her. Simply let her alone, but watch her carefully and by no means let her go out of the house unattended."

"My heavens, Mr. Clarke, is she in danger? What is the meaning of it all?"

"She is in no danger in her own home. Don't let her go out. I wish you would leave me all these cards that I may study them at my leisure. Until I have done so I do not care to pass an opinion on the case. Say nothing about the matter to anyone, especially to your daughter. Now, doctor, you will pardon me if I ask you to let me get to work immediately and after my own methods."

Dr. Watrous left, and from where I sat I could see him jerking his way in the direction of the carriage, still twisting his fingers and cracking his bony joints.

"A most remarkable case, Sexton. The most remarkable case I ever have met," mused Clarke. "I trust it will prove an example of the value of varied reading in the detection of crime. What would these pot-hooks mean to a Central Station detective? It is surprising the professor does not see it. It shows that his training has been along one line and is superficial in others. Did you ever hear of the 'Brothers of the Left Hand Path'?"

"No, then you are in the class with the Central detective and the professor, as far as this case is concerned."

"Here I was forced to break my rule and ask Clarke directly what it all meant."

"It means," he replied, "that we have fallen upon unmistakable evidence that the art of black magic is practiced still in this most enlightened age and country. I have heard rumors of it here in Chicago, and this accounts for my surprise on seeing these symbols, which are very ancient."

according to the 'Grand Grimoire,' and Clarke took a large volume from the shelf.

"The first is the seal of Agares. His office is to bring back runaways. This seal says to Miss Watrous, who must be quite a learned young woman to carry on a correspondence in this fashion, I will soon be back. The second is the seal of Salome. He promotes love between the sexes. This, evidently, is a simple love message. But the third is a darker import, and I do not wonder it terrified her. It is the seal of the dread spirit Glasyalabolos, who appears in the form of a dog winged like a griffin, who incites to bloodshed and is the animating spirit of murder. King evidently fears violence."

"But can't we do something to save him?" I cried.

"Ah, that's the question. These theories of mine, which astonish you, are simple beside the task of finding in this great city a man or band of men, whose training for generations has been in the arts of sorcery."

"Why did you warn Dr. Watrous to keep his daughter at home?"

"Because I am not sure but that these messages were sent under compulsion and that the purpose is to entice her to come to him."

Here Clarke gave a start, pale as death, and seemed to be listening intently. My long companionship with him told me that his sensitive brain had recorded an impression from without and that he awaited a crisis. Just then the telephone bell jangled on the silence. Clarke sprang to the receiver and I knew the message he was hearing was of great importance.

"No! No! Not the police for her sake. Your daughter's lost if you do."

"Yes, yes," Clarke continued, "I'll do all in my power. Stay at home and console your wife and leave it all to me. I'm sure I'm on the right track. Yes. Good-bye."

who had just entered the room. "Zingaro, here, thinks he can lead up to the place. We should start at once to arrive on time."

Our course took us deep into that part of the great west side which carries the name of "Ghetto," although Greeks, Poles, Italians, Lithuanians, and in fact almost every nationality under the sun finds lodgment there, as well as the orthodox Jew. When we left the car the little dark man, Zingaro, took the lead. We followed down devious and uninviting streets, turning now to the right and now to the left until our guide stopped before a dark, four-story building of frame. Clarke held a whispered conversation with him.

"He says this is the building inspector. The east half of it is all vacant, and from the fourth floor Zingaro thinks we can see into the top floor of the west half," said Clarke.

"Are you sure it isn't a plant, Mr. Clarke?" queried the police officer.

"Not a soul was stirring on the street. We were not disturbed while we forced the lock and ascended the rickety stairs. At the top we entered a small bare room. Into this place the light streamed from a window opposite which was so close that its broken panes might be touched with the hand. On our knees we crept to the window and peered into the room from which the light came. The sight we saw froze my blood with horror."

On a board supported by two chairs lay the body of a beautiful girl. Clad in spotless white, the pallor of her countenance matched in paleness her flowing draperies. She lay on her back, her arms folded across her breast and her black hair falling in great waves to the floor. The room was bare except for two cheap chairs. The walls were hung with charts bearing cabalistic designs.

"Was she dead?" I glanced at Clarke and the inspector but their eyes, riveted on the scene across the narrow court, gave no answer. In the background Zingaro stood silent with folded arms. We dared not speak, even in whispers, but instinctively I knew it was Miss Watrous.

Suddenly, while we watched, a door opened and a figure stole silently into the room. It was that of an old man, tall, gaunt, and with flowing beard and hair of white. His eyes were black and deep-set. He was clad in a robe of black velvet, brodered with gold and adorned with fantastic designs; triangles, circles, half moons and other figures which have been for centuries the property of the occult.

The figure of the old man advanced toward the outstretched form of the girl. Then, with a quick motion of his hand, and while my heart stopped its beating, he drew from the folds of his robe a glittering scimitar.

but a restraining movement of Clarke's hand stopped the fire.

The old man laid the sword gently across the breast of the girl and began a weird invocation. Mumbled in his beard at first, the words were lost to us, but as his inflexion rose with the heat of his fervor, they floated through the broken window. I give the words as Clarke afterward wrote them out for me.

"I immolate this victim to thee, O Lucifer, master and prince of rebellious spirits. I adjure thee to leave thine abode, in whatsoever quarter of the world it may be situated, and come hither to communicate with me. Command and I now conjure thee to appear without noise and without any evil smell, to respond in a clear and intelligible voice, point by point, to that which I shall ask thee. Venite! Venite! Submittit Lucifer, or eternal torment shall overwhelm thee, by the power that is given unto me."

Immediately after the beginning of this wild invocation I missed Clarke. The inspector still stood guard with his revolver. Zingaro, with folded arms, had not changed his position. He knelt at the window sill, but Clarke was nowhere to be seen.

When the fanatic finished he again lifted his scimitar, glowing with magic, seeming to await some terrible crisis. Then a most astonishing thing happened. I know my heart stopped for all five seconds. The inspector acknowledged afterward that though he expected the denouement he would have fired had not his forefinger been nerveless.

Into the room, and before the astonished gaze of the fanatic, sprang at a bound as near a perfect incarnation of the devil as I care to see either in this world or the next. From head to foot in glittering reptilian scales, his arms extended into gauzy wings, his mustache and beard of inky black, curling defiantly his head-dress nodding, his eyes blazing, he stood with outstretched finger outstretched before the now cowering old man, whose scimitar dropped impotently to his side. He was gradually sinking into a crouching heap before the awful glare of the apparition's eyes.

The tableau was complete. In my soul I knew it was Clarke. But how he got there, how he had executed such a lightning change and what it all meant, I was at a loss toathom.

As the form of the fanatic settled to the floor the apparition changed his steady pointing to rapid passes. After a few seconds he laid his hand on the highly trained mentality had triumphed over fanaticism. Then Lucifer, in his own proper person, came to the window and Clarke's cheery voice came: "Come on, men. Through the window you can make it."

We scrambled into the room, and I had rather the surprise of seeing Clarke, Clarke, smooth shaven as usual, clad in his immaculate Chesterfield and without a suspicion of the Satanic or of the bouffant, working to revive Miss Watrous, whose sleep proved not to be that of death.

The inspector had slipped the handcuffs and the still insatiable fanatic, who Clarke had so far succeeded in arousing Miss Watrous that she breathed normally, when our attention was attracted by a peculiar noise. At first I thought it was a few seconds he had been in the room. He was looking at the wall of the ancient structure. Clarke's sharp eyes, however, detected two small holes in the wall, each about three feet from the floor. He pointed to them with his finger, and I saw that he was favorably to work at the joints of the wainscoting with the point of the scimitar, which he had picked from the floor. Finally he succeeded in prying up a board sufficiently to admit the fingers of myself and the inspector. With a quick pull the boards came off one after another.

There crouched in a niche concealed in the wall, bound so that the slightest movement was impossible, gagged and with his head held by a rude clamp so that his eyes must look through the two holes, was Richard King.

"Terrible must have been the wrong, I thought, to merit such a revenge, to be so ably and so bravely avenged. Before his eyes, and then to be left to die a lingering, torturing death with the picture in his brain."

"My compliments to you," said King when his bonds were removed. Then with a cry he dropped on his knees at the side of the still insatiable Miss Watrous, who he kissed and covered with his kisses. Then, overwhelmed by the terrible ordeal, he fell into a passionate flood of weeping. My sympathy for him returned. He had both survived while the danger lasted and feeling when it was past.

No time was lost in getting Miss Watrous to the hospital for which Clarke pronounced her in no danger, he feared a reaction when she regained consciousness. The fanatic, now apathetic, was bundled into a patrol wagon with the inspector and Zingaro as guards. Clarke, King and myself were seated in another, and between our knees the girl was made as comfortable as possible on the street. When the wagon started, roused by the jolting, she opened her eyes and gazed around at us in astonishment through the half-closed shutters of the window. King bent down and kissing her whispered:

"Why did you come, darling? You risked your life for mine. I'll do it all for you. What do you want for these men? Why did you do it?"

"I got your message, Dick, dear, and I sent you no word to come."

Here Clarke interposed and declared that in the absence of a regular physician he advised that Miss Watrous should be absolutely quiet, the closed her eyes and the swaying of the vehicle soon threw her into a natural sleep.

"Now, Mr. King," said Clarke, "I think we can talk without disturbing Miss Watrous, and I suggest that you relieve the tedium of the ride by telling us who this fanatic is and how you happened to fall into his power."

infected with the dangerous bacilli of black magic, which still flourishes to a large extent in Southern Russia. As the ruling principles of the black art are greed for power and wealth, lust for revenge, it was but a step to nihilism. Stephanovitch gathered together a formidable band of like-minded magicians of old, they called themselves 'The Brothers of the Left Hand Path' and they were bound by the most horrible oaths to encompass by any means, natural or supernatural, the end of existing authority.

"Nihilism has used the dagger and the bomb," but Stephanovitch added to these the poisons of the Borgias and the capacity for leadership which nihilism has lacked.

"My father, millions invested in the mines of Southern Russia. He was also deeply interested as a student in anything which savored of the occult. Hearing rumors of a peculiar sect in his neighborhood, he investigated quietly and in the end, partly through the information of traitors to the band, and partly through assuming risks, penetrated all their secrets. Then he did what was his clear duty and gave them up to the government. That is the story."

"But how did you fall into his power?" queried Clarke.

"After my father's death we removed to this country. About a year ago I learned from Russia that Stephanovitch had escaped and had come to this country. Soon after I began to receive threatening letters from him, and I feared him, but after he had called on me several times and as his attitude seemed to be that merely of a cringing flatterer, I set him at naught. He was, disappointed fanatic. I then lost track of him."

"I suppose I inherited from my father a love of the occult, as it has been my favorite study since youth. When I saw an advertisement in the paper that a genuine worker of black magic, as laid down in the Lemnegoton, had located in Chicago, and offered his services to whoever required them, I lost no time in looking him up. I did not altogether like the locality the address took me to, but I've been in many a worse one in Calcutta looking up a faker who was said to perform the mango trick better than any of his fellows."

"I found a typical magician's den on the top floor of an otherwise vacant building. At first I did not recognize Stephanovitch, in the person of the magician. There were several persons in the room and he dismissed them in turn and left me until the last. Then I saw who it was and that the last I remember very clearly up to the time you gentlemen rescued me. I must have been hypnotized or drugged or some thing, and I suppose have been a prisoner in that house ever since."

"Twice I was permitted to send messages to Miss Watrous, but by Stephanovitch's orders they were limited to the seals of the spirits. I used two which I was pretty sure Miss Watrous would know, as we had studied black magic together, but without her father's knowledge. Besides, she had a Grimoire and could look them up."

"About two days ago Stephanovitch came to me and said: 'You will now send to the young woman who is called Miss Watrous the seal of the dread spirit Glasyalabolos, that she may know that she is the sun rising on the third day from now you will be dead.' I did so and I remember no more until I awoke bound, looking into his eyes which were peering at me through the holes in the wall. The rest you know."

"But how, Mr. Clarke, do you account for the other part of the story? Stephanovitch received telling her to come to me?"

"You have cleared that up for me, Mr. King, as well as several other points which bothered me. Stephanovitch's sole reason, probably, in permitting you to write was to obtain her address, so that he might at the proper time send her a daisy letter. But I do not understand why he should have delayed his revenge for a month when he had you in his power and had the means to find you."

"I think I can explain it," said King. "What date is this?"

"We told him."

"Ah, I suspected so. It is 20 years ago today that 'The Brothers of the Left Hand Path' were broken up. But Mr. Clarke, I am interested to know how you found me and how you appeared just at the right time."

"That is simple enough," answered Clarke. "The clew to the case plainly lay in the scales of the sun rising on me on the right track. When I found it was black magic, I went at once to the one man in Chicago who would know every worker of black magic who might be in the city. This man is Ramon Zingaro. He is a gypsy and is an adept at the art himself. I have a Grimoire which he is beholden to me for many favors. He was one of the persons who also answered the advertisement and was in the room when you came."

"But your disguise?" I exclaimed.

"That, I am afraid, was a bit of harmless vanity on my part, but I am now convinced that it was fortunate, for nothing else would have been as safe or as effective. It was only this. Black Magic for something like a thousand years has been a great evil in the world. It is safe to say that never before tonight has an invocation been answered. I was a little curious to know just what effect would be created should his Satanic Majesty appear in his own proper person."

"But the costume?" I persisted.

"Oh, that was a simple attempt. A Chesterfield coat covers a multitude of sartorial sins. Beards and mustaches are easily carried in the pocket and a little chewing gum does the rest."

"Without putting you gentlemen under the pledge of absolute secrecy, I ask that nothing of this be given to the papers and that no names be divulged. My reason for this is that my mother is of the most noble birth in Russia and is intensely proud."

"But," said the inspector, "you will have to appear against this man."

"Cannot that be avoided?"

"Well," said the inspector, thoughtfully, "if I had a matter of great importance, you we can book him on a vagrancy charge. That will hold him for a year."

"That will do nicely. Long before the time is up, Miss Watrous and I will have been married and will be away on my ocean yacht. Then I will defy Stephanovitch to find us. Now, Mr. Clarke, I know there is no great return I can make to you, but is there anything I can do?"

"Mr. King," said Clarke drawing a small book from his pocket, "if I may be allowed to keep this I shall be more than repaid. No; do not think I am foolishly generous. This book is priceless. It is an original edition of the Grimoire of Honorius printed in the 17th century. I found it in the magician's quarters."

"I know no one more entitled to it than you," said King, extending his hands to Clarke and myself. "It seems a small payment for two lives but my debt is a friendly one and gratitude to both of you goes with it."