

# WITH THE MASER MIND

Being the Chronicles of Carlton Clarke, Telebatho-Deductive Solver of Criminal Mysteries.

BY FRANK LOVELL NELSON.

## The Bride of the Yellowstone

THE man was English; that was evident at first glance. Moreover he was of that ubiquitous type of sneering, fault-finding Britisher whose favorite tipple has won him, in the far East, the appropos title of "lime-juicer." The woman—well, we had more difficulty in classifying her. The accent and the clothes were English beyond the possibility of the most charitable error. But the pleasant, and face, the soulful brown eyes, the cheeks of dark but wholesome and even color, the full red lips, the small and delicately moulded features, these were legacies perhaps of French ancestors, more likely tokens of that conglomerate strain now called the American type. But English was the woman who first and more greatly interested Carlton Clarke and myself when we encountered her, on the first morning of our vacation, on the observation platform of the Los Angeles limited. The interest was pardonable for, although on this long-pleasured vacation to Uncle Sam's amusement park, the Yellowstone, we had promised ourselves to forget absolutely all mysteries and deductive or otherwise, we could not refrain from indulging in a little harmless speculation concerning the only person who seemed to possess any possible degree of human interest.

Acquaintanceships are not so necessary nor so easily formed on transatlantic liners, and so we made no effort to penetrate the reserve which "Lord and Lady Snelvy" the title their luggage suggested to us, chose to surround themselves. Nor was their reserve more impenetrable than our own.

True, had we so wished we might have broken the ice with my lord concerning a certain prisoner in the hold, and I am inclined to believe the woman had we not been sufficient unto ourselves I would have been loath to dispel the aura of mystery with which had invested the lady in the pliant face and the dreamy eyes.

"They're from London. They came by the Cunard line. That much is clear from their luggage." remarked Clarke. "Moreover they make a hurried trip from New York to Liverpool and back again, according to the labels, and I am inclined to believe the woman had we not been sufficient unto ourselves I would have been loath to dispel the aura of mystery with which had invested the lady in the pliant face and the dreamy eyes.

"We passed thus many times during the first day of the journey and only once was the usual order reversed. Then the husband was so far in advance that the wife could hardly have been to make his object too apparent. Or else he forgot his vigilance for the moment and passed us looking straight ahead, not even acknowledging our presence by so much as a "thank you."

"The wife followed her eyes to the floor. She came opposite my elbow as she raised her head and gave me a look full in the eyes, a look so full of helpless appeal that it startled me. I could do no more than slightly bow my head when the man glanced suspiciously around. The eyes immediately fell to the floor again and the incident was as if it had not happened."

"The English couple were just coming from the dinner. We were on our way from there in response to the last call for dinner. We had the dinner practically to ourselves and I lost no time in telling Clarke of the incident in the passageway. "There's something wrong there, Clarke. I'm sure of it."

"There's certainly a woman a pretty girl gives a handsome fellow like you a banterful glance in a dark passageway," remarked my lord, "and I'm sure of it."

with difficulty, lay on the floor at our feet. "Our pretty liaison progresses," whispered Clarke. "There is a billet doux for you."

I hastily seized the envelope and emptied its contents on the reading table. And then Clarke and I stared and gaped in helpless amazement. Before us lay bonds of the United Zinc Corporation to the value of \$750,000.

"With them was a small sheet of note paper on which the words 'Yellowstone' were limited at the top. Clarke and I read it silently.

"To Mr. Carlton Clarke: I am taking what I believe to be the shortest course to save these papers and my life. By the time we reach Old Faithful Inn I hope to devise some disposition to ask you to make of them. Until then guard them well. I know I can trust you. Destroy this note at once. Lady Ethelbert Snively.

"Now, what do you think of that?" I gasped in a whisper. "What is the use of thinking?" answered Clarke. "We will wait. Lady Snively, you are a brilliant woman. This is a rare taking an awful chance, but you have put your trust in the right man. We will be true to it and see this thing through to the end. And Clarke took off his traveling cap and gravely bowed toward the door that separated us from the mystery beyond.

"An hour, Sexton," he continued, "there is but one course for me to pursue and that is to act as if nothing has happened. It is safe to say the husband will not suspect us unless we give him cause to do so. Nothing is likely to happen on this train, and the next act of the drama is laid at Old Faithful as we might as well possess our souls in patience."

When we met the English couple, or Lord and Lady Snively as we now felt privileged to call them, on the observation platform the next morning we could discern absolutely nothing different in their manner toward each other towards us than in previous meetings. The husband seemed, as usual, utterly wrapped up in his own selfish self and oblivious to his wife and to the other passengers on the platform. Once Clarke caught the woman's eye and a quick exchange of telepathic glances passed between them. Again his eyes looking into mine when her husband's head was turned and I tried with all the power of my soul to make my eyes stay on her as long as possible.

No further incident occurred during the railroad journey and the state of armed neutrality continued. At Ogden we watched with interest to be assured that the couple of mystery transferred to the Yellowstone, as would have complicated matters and been embarrassing if they had gone one way, while we, with the bonds, went another. Our routes were the same, he and when we boarded the Short Line sleeper we found them in the opposite section, the staterooms having already been occupied by a party of German tourists.

After breakfast at Yellowstone station the next morning our entire party, numbering about twenty, were loaded to the big M-Y stages for the 32-mile drive to the Upper Geyser basin and Old Faithful Inn. Clarke and I had a survey made of the regular route to the big M-Y stages for the 32-mile drive to the Upper Geyser basin and Old Faithful Inn. Clarke and I had a survey made of the regular route to the big M-Y stages for the 32-mile drive to the Upper Geyser basin and Old Faithful Inn.

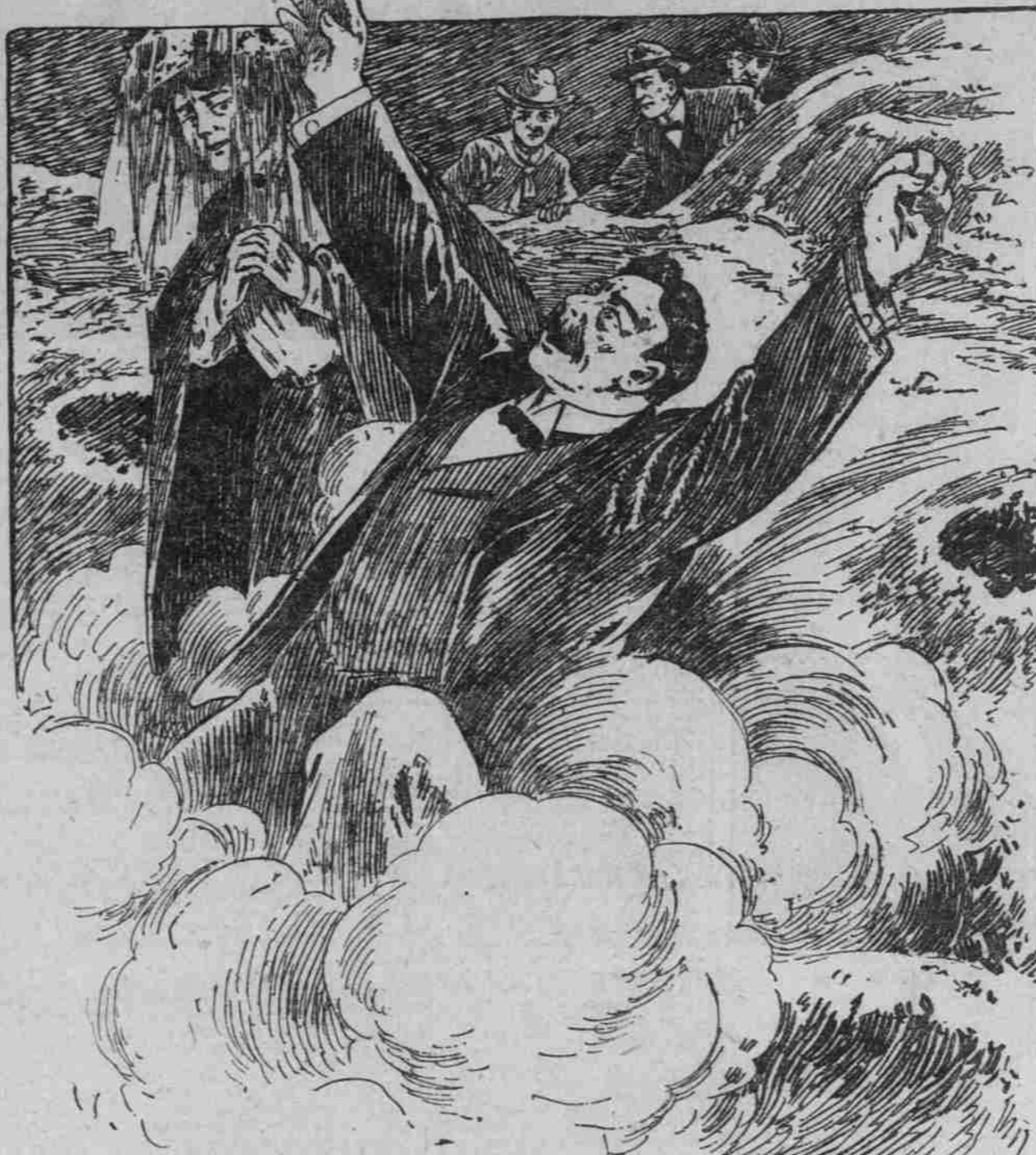
"I am not sure," I said to Hughes, as we clambered up and down the mounds of calcareous deposit, between bottomless pools of boiling water, peering down into the growling, sulphurous depths of the "Lion and the Cub," "threading the treacherous and precipitous sides of the 'Grotto,' and feeling beneath our feet the hollow crunch of the crust that seemed but a thin partition between the beautiful world above and the regions of the inferno beneath."

"You're mighty right," answered Hughes. "I never knowed of but one man that ever come over here at night and he wandered out o' the hotel, drunk as crazy or something, and never showed up no more. No, sir; I reckon there's a devil a-waitin' at the bottom of every one of these here holes with a hook. Why, even the swastika that the soldiers, you know, what's detailed out here, like that fellow over there, to see that the tourists don't carry off none of the formation, they couldn't no more be dragged out here at night than you could get a cow-puncher to herd sheep."

"Then we went over to see 'Old Faithful' go through its four-minute act, and it was time to in and dress for dinner. Supposing Clarke was already at his toilet I went directly to my room and had begun the operation of shaving when I heard a gentle tap at the door. It was Clarke, and his face had a serious look.

"Hurry through with your dressing," he said. "The English folks have gone in to dinner, and I want to make our hours agree with theirs. Sexton, I've got the whole story, or nearly the whole of it, and it's bad. Very bad. I've no time to tell it all now, but it may be murder if we do not work fast and carefully. The worst of it is that we can do nothing but wait and watch. A man can say a good deal to his wife before the law may interfere, and we are not even that. By the way, the architect who built that hotel had a great eye to the picturesque but very little idea of privacy. See those cracks between the logs. The acoustic properties of the walls are perfect. But hurry with your dressing and I will go in and keep an eye on our friends. We must not let them get out of our sight a minute."

It was all innocent enough at dinner. My lady at the table next to ours chatted as innocently and my lord found fault and sneered as naturally as if their lives were a printed page. When the dinner was over they went directly to their room and Clarke and I dispersed the importunities of the guide to go out and see "Old Faithful" under the searchlight, and quietly let ourselves into Clarke's room. It was gone but a few minutes when the figure of a man followed. I drew Bo



THE MAN THREW UP HIS HANDS, AND DISAPPEARED AS IF THE EARTH HAD SWALLOWED HIM.

so I met Bo Hughes on his way from stabilizing his team and together we proceeded over the wonderful formation of the Upper Geyser Basin before going down to see Old Faithful, which was scheduled to play at 5:30 o'clock the dial in front of the hotel.

"This would be a dangerous place to travel about on at night, Bo," I said to Hughes, as we clambered up and down the mounds of calcareous deposit, between bottomless pools of boiling water, peering down into the growling, sulphurous depths of the "Lion and the Cub," "threading the treacherous and precipitous sides of the 'Grotto,' and feeling beneath our feet the hollow crunch of the crust that seemed but a thin partition between the beautiful world above and the regions of the inferno beneath."

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not spoken too highly of the acoustics of the walls. It was disgracefully like eavesdropping on an ordinary family row, but we knew that there was something back of all that possessed a vital interest for us.

"It isn't any use urging me any further, Lord Snively," we heard the woman say. "You will never get them if I can help it. I only thank God that I found you out in time, though I don't see why it was not before I married you."

"But my dear," drawled the husband, "you surely cannot believe all that beastly rot. Can't a fellow have a beastly clipping in his bag without being a blooming crook? Haven't I brought you out to this beastly hole and given you everything you wanted?"

"Yes, with my own money," interrupted the wife. "And didn't I take you to London, continued my lord, unmindful of the interruption, "when it was deuced inconvenient for me to go, and now you won't give me as much as a bob to save me?"

"Yes, and why did you leave London so suddenly before we even saw this castle that I am to take out of pawn?"

"You know I couldn't stay in London another day with the beastly hair fever coming on. Allice, now, what have you done with those papers?"

back into the shadow that he might not see us. It was Lord Snively. I was tiptoeing down the corridor to apprise Clarke when his figure loomed out of the shadow, and, motioning Bo and me to follow, he slipped out the door in the rear of the mysterious couple.

No moon was shining, but the night was clear and the light from the stars was equal to that of the moon in a lesser altitude or in an atmosphere less clear. We saw the figure of the woman walking briskly. About a hundred yards behind her came the man. An equal distance behind him we closed up the rear.

At the right "Old Faithful" was shooting its water, and the moon shone fifty feet into the air. Behind us towered the gigantic outlines of the inn, a light here and there along its rugged facade.

"Great guns, she's making for the formation! It's suicide," I whispered. We reached the edge of the treacherous sea of alternate limestones and boiling water. There, already far out upon it, was the woman dashing blindly and heedlessly along with instant and awful death on either side of her. Behind her the man picked his way carefully and cautiously.

"Would we dare to follow? For one shuddered at the thought of being out in the quiet of these awful hours of nature in the darkness where one false step meant a plunge into boiling water that would strip the bones of their marrow in a twinkling."

"Come on, gents, follow me," whispered Bob. "I ain't been 'round this here park nine years for nothing. I know every inch of this here formation just like one of my caysuses knows the trail to the M-Y barn."

one knee and drew a careful bead on the advancing man. Bo Hughes did the same for me. I was too fascinated for action.

Suddenly there was a scream of agonized fear. The man threw up his hands and disappeared as if the earth had swallowed him up. Veritably it had, for when we rushed to the spot where we had last seen him we found only the boiling, swirling waters of "The Devil Within."

"She's got a down current that goes right to the middle of the earth, I guess. He won't never show up no more. 'Friend your own not, I hope," commented Bo Hughes.

The form of the woman lay outstretched on the formation a few feet away.

"She's only fainted, I think," said Clarke, as we gently lifted her up. A small jeweled revolver fell from her grasp.

In truth she had only fainted, for she regained consciousness with the handling and looked wildly about her. "You are free from him forever, Lady Snively," said Clarke.

"Thank God!" she exclaimed. "I fear it is wicked to feel so, but it is better than suicide for me or hanging for someone."

The absence of Lord Snively would be a difficult thing to explain at the hotel and none of us relished the idea of an inquest with its consequent delay. I saw nothing of the incriminating colors with which suspicious minds might invest the events of the night. But manifestly there was nothing to do but to tell the truth and so Clarke and I took Lady Snively between us, and piloted by Hughes, we picked our way carefully back over the quarter of a mile of treacherous formation. When we set foot on solid and safe ground again "Old Faithful" was just beginning to play. He had played just as we started out on our way to his schedule, maintained throughout the centuries, we had been on the formation just 50 minutes. It had not seemed more than a few minutes.

When we reached the hotel we found two very potent agencies at work in our favor. Clarke's reputation, which had been established even in the Yellowstone, and Bo Hughes, whose straight story admitted of no doubt. Without the knowledge of a single one of our fellow-passengers it was quietly arranged that we should all proceed in the morning to a special stage in charge of Hughes to Mammoth station at the northern end of the park, there to make report to the cavalry colonel in command. This plan admitted of a few hours' sleep, of which we hastened to take advantage.

And now, Lady Snively, began Clarke when we were comfortably stowed away in the stage the next morning, "perhaps you can tell us your story and we can advise you as to the future. 'Please do not call me Lady Snively,'" answered the brave little woman. "That name was my undoing and henceforth I am content to be plain. Alice Hathaway. He was one of the organizers of the United States Zinc Corporation, but before his death he had converted all of his stock into bonds. I was an only child and suddenly found myself in possession of the bonds which you have now. That was two years ago. I was young and foolish and my ideas of life had been gained from reading fiction, not from the real world. I was innocent enough to believe I was making a great match."

"We went first to London. The world and the future looked lovely for a time, but the dream was soon dispelled. I began to grow upon my happiness when, instead of proceeding at once to his ancestral castle in Surrey as he had promised, we suddenly packed in a box and made a hurried return to the United States. On the passage home I found in my luggage a newspaper clipping that set me thinking all the harder. It was the story of a man named in England who, under various names, was suspected of marrying a number of women, securing possession of their wealth and then murdering them."

"J. Frederick Bannister, was it not?" interrupted Clarke. "Do you know, Sexton, I rather suspected from the first that was him. He was one of those Johann Hoch and went under a number of aliases."

"Yes, Bannister was one of the names used, and the descriptions in the paper fitted him so perfectly that, struggle as I might against the awful thought, I could not get it out of my mind. He knew of my wealth and knew how safe a deposit company with which it was kept. I determined to draw it out secretly and place it elsewhere. I had secured the papers when, with suddenness, he told me we were going to the Yellowstone. I had no opportunity to place the bonds anywhere, so closely did he watch me. I am now convinced that he had been on my person, for our journey was a constant series of quarrels over the question of my placing all my fortune in his hands, which he refused to do. I had no opportunity to place the bonds anywhere, so closely did he watch me. I am now convinced that he had been on my person, for our journey was a constant series of quarrels over the question of my placing all my fortune in his hands, which he refused to do. 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