

Who is Number One? A Mystery Serial

BY ANNA KATHARINE GREEN.

EPISODE NO. 11.

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TOMMY HALE awoke on the morning after his inexplicable loss of the papers his father had given into his care without, as he opened his eyes, any recollection of what had happened. All his thoughts were of Almee Villon and her surrender to his wooing. And then, darkening every thought, came the memory of his loss. He had failed the first time that real confidence had been reposed in him—because of his carelessness, his neglect of his duty in his wooing of Almee, the papers which were so important in his father's eyes were gone. What was worse, they had been stolen by The Twisted Thread, the sinister organization which was seeking to hound Graham Hale, Tommy's father, into madness.

For a moment after he had come to a full realization of disaster, Tommy sat his head in his hands. Then he braced up and rose, squaring his shoulders, a grim look in his eyes. Since he had failed there was nothing for it but to admit his failure and take his medicine. So, even before he finished dressing, he went to his father and made his confession.

"It was all my fault," he said. "I haven't any excuse, Dad. I was thinking of Almee after I started to go to bed. She and I had been—well, we'd been talking in the garden, earlier. And I went down there—"

Graham Hale was a sick man. But his eyes lighted up then, and he smiled, with a quick, warm sympathy.

"I know, Tommy," he said. "You mustn't blame yourself so bitterly. Few things could make me happier than to see you and Almee—"

"It only makes me feel worse to have you take it like this, Dad," said Tommy, wretchedly. "But I might have known you'd do it!"

"You missed the papers later—after you came back from the garden?"

"Yes, you see, Almee was restless, too, and she went down, just as I did. We didn't stay long. And when I got back to my room I found they were gone—when I took off my coat. I rushed downstairs in my shirt sleeves, and tried to look for them—in the garden, and in the house, where I'd been. I couldn't find them. And then, when I went back to my room, I found this note on my pillow—"

He held out a thread, twisted into the sign of the mysterious Twisted Thread—

"Make a still more careful search—by daylight," said Graham Hale. "I'm sorry, Tommy—but I don't consider, as you do, that you are so greatly to be blamed. We know how dangerous The Twisted Thread is. And—well, I'm sure, myself, that they did not hurt you in getting the papers. And—well, it's just possible that they may still turn up. You tell me—I don't see how even The Twisted Thread had an opportunity to steal them!"

His father's reception of the news did, in a certain sense, cheer Tommy up. He dressed quickly and went out to the garden to renew his search. There he found Almee waiting for him. He let her greet him with a kiss. But he grew serious again as he told her what had happened.

"But—that's impossible, Tommy," she cried. "You were with me all the time—one of us must have seen anyone who could have taken them!"

"There's just one thing I've thought of. Suppose someone had been hiding in the rose bush? He might have snatched them from me as I came out. You see, I was just thinking of anything but you last night, dear!"

"Don't," she said, sharply. "If you know how I blame myself for letting you forget your duty, Tommy—"

"You mustn't do that," he said. "It's up to me, and to no one else. And I've told Dad all about it. Let's look again—shall we?"

"I think they must be somewhere in your room," she said, a little later. "Simply can't believe that they've really been taken!"

"I'll look again, of course," she said. "Two can do better than one!"

"They went to Tommy's room. But there was no sign of the precious papers until Almee exclaimed suddenly: 'There's something here—under my foot!'"

"She cried. She bent down, turned back a rug—and showed the packet, exactly as Tommy had last seen it, lying where the rug had hidden it. He pounced upon it with a cry of joy."

"It's all right!" he cried. "Almee—you're my good angel!"

"You'd have found it yourself, of course," she said, dismissing his praise, but flushing with pleasure, just the same. "It was just luck that I happened to be the one to find it for you. But I'm glad I did. Tommy!"

"They went in together to break the good news to Mr. Hale, and found that he had a visitor, early though it still was—Thornton Rayne, his oldest friend."

"I'm glad to see your father looking so much better," said Rayne to Tommy. "I'll admit I put in a bad night. But he's improving fast. I should say."

"I think so, too," said Tommy. "Did you hear of our father about those papers?"

"That's not the only thing that's happened, either," said Graham Hale. "Almee, there, saved me from a serious shock. If O'Connor's right about the danger of a sudden noise—"

"How was that?" asked Rayne. "And so he heard of the mysterious man who had called Graham Hale's private number and fired a pistol point-blank into the transmitter—with the idea that the sudden roar in his ear would produce serious, if not fatal, results."

"Good God!" said Rayne. "What a diabolical scheme!"

"It's one of the most alarming things that The Twisted Thread has attempted," said Tommy. "It shows that we are being spied upon by some one in the house. You see, our father could have known of my father's condition—of Dr. Conner's warning concerning noise, and the private telephone number. Still—we're going to get that chap!"

"How?"

"He was shadowed—that is how we know about the pistol shot. And I ordered the detective who reported to stay on his trail. I expect a report at any moment. You see—it was a murderous attempt! If Almee hadn't had the quick idea of tearing down the wires when she heard the bell ring up here—I, well, anything might have happened!"

"So that was how the scheme was foiled? She's a young lady of brains, evidently!"

Almee flushed, and looked nervous under his steady gaze.

"I'm going to get these papers out of the way," said Tommy. "I've ordered our private car to be attached to the afternoon train for Reddington, and I'll take them over there. If we can divide these people up we'll have more chance to beat them."

"I think I'll go with you, Tommy," said Almee. "It's not such a very long trip, is it? And there are some friends of my father's at Reddington who have been anxious for me to look them up."

"Splendid!" said Tommy. "I hate traveling alone."

Thornton Rayne did not linger. He explained that he had only dropped in for reassurance concerning Mr. Hale's condition. Almee went off to prepare for her journey, and Tommy was busy the rest of the morning and early afternoon in making certain notes for his father to be sent to Mr. Hale's office since Dr. O'Connor had sternly forbidden him even to think of getting back into harness for several weeks.

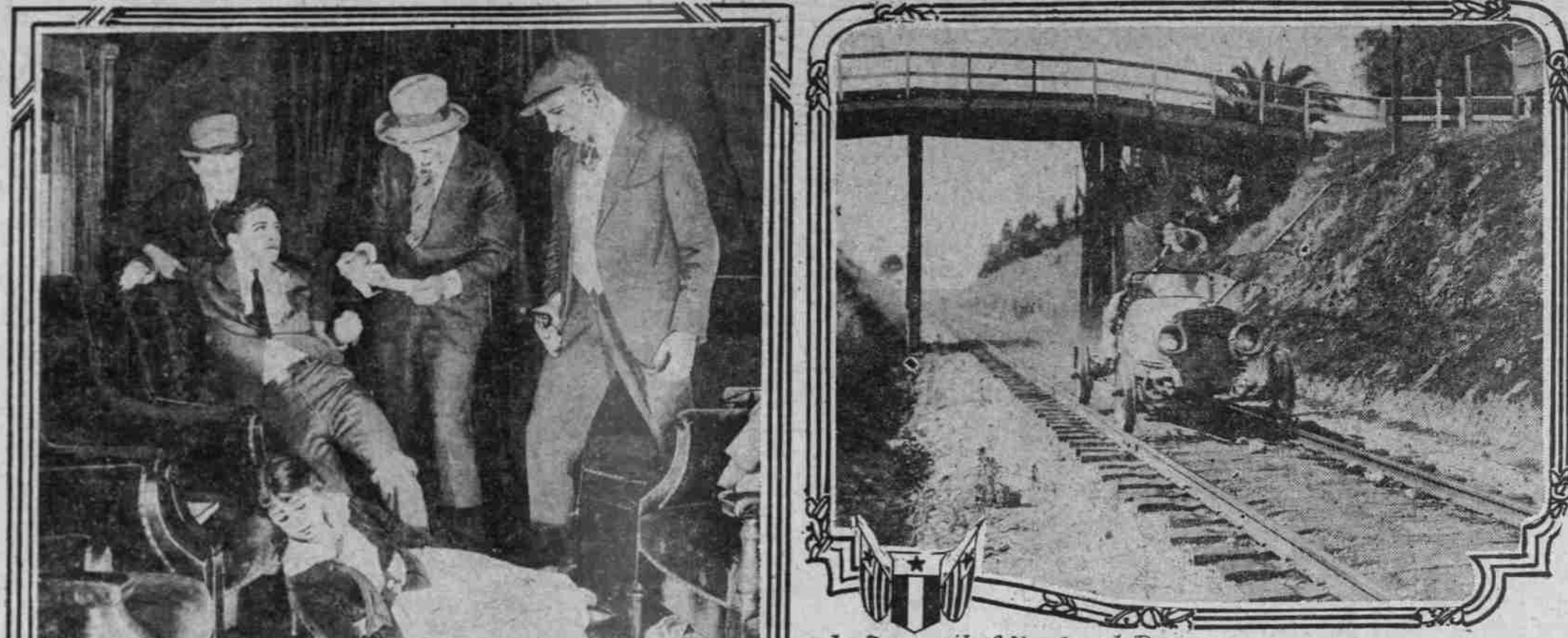
They went out to the observation platform for a little while, but soon returned to the lounge-room. It was rather cold outside, and the scenery, said Tommy, who knew the road well, was not good enough to make it worth while to brave the chill in the air.

"What would you like for dinner?" he asked Almee, when they were comfortably settled again. "Sam Jackson's best cook I know and he'll want to spread himself the first time he's had you in the car."

"Well, that's a mighty serious question," said Almee. "What's he got? Then I can choose better."

"Let's choose, if he hasn't got it he'll get it from the regular dining car or get it at our first stop," said Tommy. "Sam Jackson's a great man. He doesn't know what it is to say you can't have anything you order."

So half an hour passed pleasantly. Sam Jackson was called in, and beamed all over his good-natured black face at Almee, who evidently pleased him mightily, pondered, in all seriousness, the question of what she wanted to eat for dinner.



Agents of the Twisted Thread Get the Secret Papers.

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"Ya'm!" he said, at last. "Yo, sho' kin have all them things yo' done ordered. I'm a gwine right up in front to the diner now and pick up a few things I see out."

So Tommy and Almee were left alone in the car—for a few minutes—or so they believed. But no sooner had Sam gone than the curtains stirred. Tommy, leaning forward, entirely at his ease and unsuspecting, was struck down as he rose from his chair to get a book he had been speaking of. Almee, seeing three masked figures emerge from the car entrance as Tommy went down, shrieked and fainted. She retained consciousness just long enough to see one of the men search Tommy's pockets and seize upon the all-important papers.

"And so she knew that Tommy's boast of security from the Twisted Thread had been a vain and empty one. Almee came to her senses in a few minutes. Tommy lay still, bleeding from a scalp wound. She cried out at the sight of the blood and drew her arms about him. He stirred and moaned. Swiftly she found water and bathed his forehead, then staunching the flow of blood. She saw that the wound was not a serious one. Then, frantically,

"Will you lead us to the place then?" smiled Katherine.

The bumble-bee blew his nose before he spoke. "Suppose I carry you," he suggested pleasantly. He seemed like a real fatherly old bee.

"Did the fairy blithely, and did a little dance," said Katherine in dismay.

"Oh, yes, he can! I'll give you a shrinking powder," volunteered the fairy, and whisked from the folds of her rose petal robe something that looked like a tiny speck of fairy fire. "It's very powerful," said the fairy. "I think I'd better give you just half."

It was perfectly delicious, and Katherine was going to ask her when the bumble-bee, who had been sitting on the fairy's nose, began to climb on the bee's back and calling to Katherine to hurry.

Katherine, behind the fairy's foot, your bonnet, little girl! said the bumble-bee to Katherine, and away they went.

Katherine was quite breathless with that swing ride as they drew up to the bive of the musical bee, and sure enough there he was on duty guarding the entrance to the hive.

"Musical honey-bee," said the fairy called to him, as she and Katherine scrambled off their courser's back, after thanking him, "where is my key?"

"Yo, knee! he had to come on duty soon. Why didn't you come back for your key earlier?" said the musical honey-bee brusquely.

"I was very busy. What did you do with my key?" demanded the fairy.

"If you'd used your eyes you'd have seen it. I hung it in plain sight on a rose thorn, right near the place where you first saw me," the musical bee informed her, disgustedly.

"Oh, dear," said the fairy to Katherine. "We'll have to go all the way back. Thank you," she said to the musical bee a little coolly.

So the fairy and Katherine began the long walk back, and Katherine found that she couldn't begin to cover so much ground in a few minutes as she had supposed she'd taken the shrinking powder. But it seemed much more so, because she was nearer the fairy's size.

They grew so hungry on the way that they both tackled a late raspberry, and when they had eaten it they felt quite full. They went on a little faster after that, and at last they spied the key hung on a rose thorn. It didn't look like a key at all, but like the word 'happiness' written out in tiny letters of light that dazzled and flashed so that they almost blinded Katherine as she looked at it. The fairy ran to it eagerly and snatched it from the rose thorn.

"My, but I'll have to rush now!" she said. "The Happy Fairy has asked me to watch her mascot for the evening."

"Well, don't leave me like this—so little! I'll never be able to get home at all if you do!" cried Katherine in sudden panic.

"Oh, yes! Here's the other half of the shrinking powder. It won't shrink her eyes. I've lost the key to Fairyland! How can I get in to ask them?" Katherine was just as puzzled as she could be. Something must be done! But what? She tried to think very hard, and just then she saw a bumble-bee.

"There!" shouted the inspired Katherine with sudden joy, and waved her hat at the bee. "Let's ask him! And they both rushed up to the busy little fellow.

"Please," began the fairy politely. "do you know where the musical honey-bee lives?"

The newcomer regarded them both quizzically from his tiny perch on the edge of a Shasta daisy. "Why, yes, I think I do!" he answered after a moment, and scratched his head with one of his legs.

"Oh, where is his home?" queried Katherine eagerly.

"I can't tell you. I'm not good at directing people," confessed the friendly bumble-bee.

In Pursuit of the Lost Papers.

she pressed the bell that should have summoned Sam Jackson. But—there was no answer. And a quick slowing down of the train disturbed her. Suddenly she guessed the truth and ran to the platform. She saw the train drawing away, and on its rear platform one of the thugs who had robbed Tommy, waving the papers at her derisively.

She saw something more, too—the sudden appearance of the train conductor on the platform and the swift struggle that ensued as he reached for his signal cord. And then she hid her eyes in sudden horror, for the conductor, fighting as well as he could, single-handed, was overpowered and ruthlessly hurled from the train. She saw his body hurtling down the steep embankment—and, as the private car, moving slowly, but still at a fair rate, rolled past the spot, she saw the figure of the conductor lying, ominously huddled up, in the ditch.

For a moment she was on the verge of fainting again. But then she realized that something must be done. She went to the platform and tried to set the brakes. Gradually, as if for his "grandmother," she effort and at last, by a crossing, it stopped completely. Luck was with her here. A motorcar was approaching, and to its passengers she told her story.

"The infernal villain!" cried the man who had been driving. "Miss Villon—my hat's off to you! I happen to be a vice-president of this road—my name's Carter. I've known Tommy since he was a knee pants. Bill—get aboard there and look after young Hale. Miss Villon—if you're game—let's take a long

chance, we may be able to do something about this business yet!"

"I'll take any chance to get those papers back!" cried Almee.

"Then watch!" said Carter. He went to work with incredible speed, stripping the tires from his car. When he had done he called his friend and together they got the car on the railway tracks—the bare rims gripping them, as did regular car or engine wheels.

"Now—we'll make better time than any train—and do it safely!" cried Carter. "In with you, Miss Villon—we'll watch that train if it's humanly possible to do it."

Never had Almee dreamed of such a flight as now begun. On the road now automobile could have made such speed as Carter coasted from his machine. It fairly flew along—did so, at certain moments, literally, when all four wheels left the tracks, only to find them again a moment later.

The limited had a long start and they were pursuing it on a stretch of road wherein no stops were scheduled. But Carter knew the train's schedule, and he was utterly confident as they sped along.

"There's a tow-rope behind you, Miss Villon," he said. "Better get it ready in case we need it."

She obeyed, but it was beyond her to guess what purpose he expected it to serve.

"We'll catch the train!" said Carter. "But—what'll we do with it when we have caught it. That's where the rope comes in—or will come in, I think. You see, we can establish some sort of connection with the train, tie up to it."

chief is wrapped around the outer edge of the flange to form the cap. Johnnie explained how the man in the real show had a little lace cap with a ruffle around it for his "grandmother," but then that was a real show. "Now," said Johnnie, "we will

make the old lady talk." He turned his own head aside and spoke in a piping voice and moved grumpy's lower jaw (his thumb) and the old face looked quite life-like.

Johnnie made his "grandmother" sing funny songs and recite up-to-date verses and the "head-hand" was the hit of the evening.

afraid of the Petreses at first. American audiences remember me only in pathetic roles, though I sang one excellent comedy role soon after I came here. Nanette in Verdi's 'Falstaff.' Then I turned to more serious things, and there I seem to have stayed. Had it not been for my concert work, in which I could sing a bright little song now and then, life would have been very dull, musically speaking.

"Perhaps the heroines who die are those who live the longest in memory, but after 16 years I think I am entitled to one cheerful role."

A Lonesome Kid. I'm glad 'at school don't last all day—Not cause I has to go—For all I do is run an' play. I'm too small yet, you know.

But 'round the street 'at I live on There ain't no kids like me. An' when the rest of school have gone I'm lonesome as can be.

An' I jus' stay aside our door An' rait my hoop or ball, Or do an errand to the store Or anything at all.

Till long 'bout, maybe, four o'clock, When I hear bruvver shout, An' see him tearin' down the block, Then I know school is out.

An' all our crowd of girls an' boys Come out to play again. An' everywhere is fun and noise An' I ain't lonesome then.

"MRS. A. S. BALDWIN."

YOU AMERICAN BOY OR GIRL! Don't you want to help the country you love? Each time you save your ice cream money or your pennies for candy you are helping to save some child who is sick or hungry or unhappy—over on the other side.

This is the message sent to the children of the country by Mrs. A. S. Baldwin, of San Francisco, who has recently visited Washington on the invitation of the Secretary of the Treasury to serve on the National Women's Liberty Loan Committee.

"Each War Certificate you buy," says Mrs. Baldwin, "is making life easier for French and Belgian children. When you are asked to save your pennies and to buy Thrift Stamps with them, remember that saving means denying yourselves some small pleasures in a way that you have never done before. Each time you stay at home from a picture show to save five or ten cents, and every time you refrain from buying an ice cream cone, so that you may save that much money towards the purchase of a Thrift Stamp, remember that you are performing a real act of patriotism for your country. It takes very few denials to save the price of Thrift Stamps, and when one stamp is gained then you want more, and when you have saved sixteen Thrift Stamps, a few cents added buys a War Savings Certificate."

"MRS. A. S. BALDWIN."

we'll be all right, no matter how fast we're both going. My idea is to get pretty close—then I'll shoot the train! That's not as wild as it sounds, either—I mean just to throw a loop of rope over one of the stations on the rear platform. Then I'll shut off my engine and the train will be pulling us along—see? We can get as close as we like by shortening the rope—and I can climb over the hood and get aboard—"

"Yes, I see," said Almee. "That's a splendid idea, Mr. Carter."

But one thing Almee did not see was Almee Villon letting any man like Mr. Carter do anything which she considered it her duty to do herself. However, she reserved thought and talk of that—the first thing to be done was to overhaul the train that was still flying ahead of them.

They were catching up—there was no doubt of that. As they rounded curves, now, they could see the train, still far ahead, but growing nearer each time they caught a glimpse of it. Carter swore under his breath.

"Even if they got old-Hawkins, the conductor," he said, "there ought to be some one on that train with gumption enough to handle that gang! I can't understand that!"

Almee was too thrilled by the chase to answer him. The dizzy speed did not frighten her; she had been half afraid at first that it would. But now it was exhilarating, no more. Almee had had no illusion as to the danger she and her companion were in. The slightest irregularity of the track—a stone, an obstruction of any sort—and nothing could save them from instant death.