THE BLACK PIGEON

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THIS HAS HAPPENED

RUTH LESTER, beautiful secretary to "HANDSOME HARRY" ...DEN, suspects her employer of ...y stock dealings and would resign but for a romance that springs ...between her and JACK HAY...RD, whose office is just across ...arrow airshaft from Borden's. ...Saturday morning in January ...informs BENNY SMITH, office ...of her engagement to Jack.

...Borden comes in, Ruth ...him an orchid-tinted envelope ...be impatiently thrusts into ...pocket and greets with an oath ...information that the "woman ...the beautiful contralto voice" ...him. Ruth gets $500 from the ...and two tickets with drawing-...for Winter Haven for Borden. ...TA DUBOIS, night club dancer, ...to accompany Borden to the .... calls during the morning. ...other caller is MRS. BORDEN, ...promoter's wife and mother of ...two children. Borden forces her ...him for her monthly alimony ...certain date. Learning Borden ...the wife agrees to return ...1:30, but before she leaves ...glimpses a pistol in Ruth's desk. ...Rita leaves Borden waves ...with the torn half of a bank ...reminding her of a certain .... While Ruth is taking Bor...'s dictation he makes a playful ...at her and she screams. Jack ...opposite office hears her and ...violently angry at Borden. ...meets Jack for luncheon but ...her bank book and rushes ...to the office where she bruises ...lip. She has a difficult time ...Jack that Borden did not ...her. While they are lunching, ...discovers he has left the the...tickets on his desk and he re...to get them.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER VI

...CK made an impatient gesture ...ward the waiter who had bur...to the table, order pad in hand, ...dessert. But you can bring the ...rt. . . . What do you mean—...len?" he demanded of Ruth, in ...odd, constrained voice, as the ...er was removing Ruth's dish of ...ted ice cream.

"Too—you look so queer that I ...ught you might have had a quar...with Borden," Ruth quivered, ob...ous of the waiter's presence. "Oh, ...k, what is the matter? Did you ...him?"

...ack frowned, then poured himself ...cup of coffee with a hand that ...bled slightly. "Why should I ...him? Watching Borden isn't ...favorite indoor sport!"

...He must have realized then how ...dent his voice was, for he soft...ed it suddenly. "There's nothing ...matter, honey. I—just thought ...gather up some work to do over ...week-end," and he pointed to the ...-filled brief case he had propped ...ainst the wall.

..."You're—going to work tomor...?" Ruth asked slowly.

...Jack smiled at her, with oddly ...e, taut lips. "Just during the day. ...'ll have our evening together. ...ry to have kept you waiting, ...sweetheart."

...She tried gallantly to play up, ...ough her heart felt like a stone in ...r breast. "Poor Letty! She's like ...host, isn't she, dear? A drab, ...old ghost, haunting a scrub ...and a mop. But I'll never for...Letty. You know, darling, it was ...sweetness to old Letty that ...me first realize that I loved ...."

...His smile became more natural, ...ver. "Yes? I thought you said ...t night you'd loved me since the ...st time you saw me, when you ...re feeding the pigeons."

..."Of course!" she nodded, almost ...ppy again. "But I didn't realize ...til the other day—Tuesday, wasn't ...? How long ago it seems now!—...en you were showing me your ...fices so proudly. Remember? ...d sent Miss Hester out for a ...art of hot chocolate, and you ...de poor old Letty have some, ..."

. . .

..."Oh, Letty and I are pals," Jack ...laughed. "Ever since her first ...y in the building, when I noticed ...at she was new, and told her I ...as glad to meet her, she's thought ...our precious Jack a 'really re...arkable fellow.'"

..."And he is!" Ruth cried, com...etely happy again. "Oh, Jack!" ...e caught her breath sharply on ...r beloved name. Then she ...ughed softly, her blue eyes limpid ...ith love. "Darling, Ill never forget ...w comical you looked last night ...en I came back into the room ...thout my spectacles, with my ...ir all tumbled loose and that awful ...ckwish powder scrubbed off my ...."

..."That was a mean trick to play ...n a man," Jack chided her tenderly. ...Let him get himself engaged to one ...irl and then find himself saddled ...ith an entirely different one!"

..."Are you sorry, darling?" she ...ked, the dimple tugging at the ...rner of her beautiful little mouth. ..."I suppose I'll have to make the ...st of you," Jack retorted. Then, ...o the waiter. "The check? Oh, ..."

...Ruth, watching his face because ...e loved it so, saw a frown pass ...ickly over it as his eyes scanned ...e check. And again joy fled from ...er heart. . . . She tried to grasp ...e flying wings: "Oh, no! Jack ...ust stay! Why, he's the soul of ...enerosity. I've seen him tip Letty ...d the elevator boys—"

...She turned away her eyes, lest ...e see that the tip was small. . . . ...e could not have borne that—not ...day!

..."Your brief case, sir!" the waiter ...lled to Jack as he and Ruth were ...aving.

...Jack accepted the heavy bag with ...ttered thanks and Ruth thought ...e looked at it with distaste—dis...ke even. "The poor dear doesn't ...ant to work, but feels that he has ...ow that he's an engaged man, ...oing to get married!" she de...ded, trying to recapture joy. "Of ...urse! That's why the bill dis...ayed him. He wants to save for ...r home—now."

...At the theater Jack refused the ...oorman's offer. "Check your hat and ...at and bag, sir. Check your hat ...ere?" with a curt "No!" And he ...ried the heavy bag on his knees ...ring the entire performance of ...e play.

...The show they had chosen so hap...ly the night before, when making ...eir plans, proved a disappoint...ent. It was a murder mystery, ...th the action taking place in a ...urtroom. Ruth had wanted to see ...e because of her familiarity with the ...w and with trial procedure, but un...timately the district attorney ...ded something like her father, ...o had lost his life in a courtroom. ...During the second act she burst ...to tears and cried so hard that ...e startled them looked at her ...th impatient disapproval.

..."I think we'd better duck the rest ...this," Jack urged, his mouth tight ...d grim. "I never realized—I'm ...t exploring it any better than you ...re, darling. I've already guessed ...o the murderer is anyway—pretty ...obvious, and it's rather a sordid way to spend our big afternoon."

..."No, let's stay," Ruth choked. "I ...—I want you to get your money's ...worth."

When she had said it she could have bitten out her tongue. Her only excuse was that by this time she was so nervous and ill—she must be taking a dreadful cold!—that she hardly knew what she was saying.

. . .

THEY sat through the third act, their hands touching only once. And she had dreamed all morning of that glorious opportunity for holding hands!

..."Let's go to the savings bank first, then on to my apartment for dinner," Ruth suggested, almost timidly, when they left the theater. "I want to cook for you—to get into practice."

..."That's the spirit!" Jack applauded, but the smile on his lips scarcely touched his eyes. What—oh, what, had happened? Ruth wondered desperately.

But in the bank, open Saturday afternoons for savings bank depositors, he seemed more himself again, teasing her about her thriftiness, and gallantly relieving her of her handbag while she made out her deposit slip and endorsed her salary check.

..."Peeking to see what kind of lipstick I use?" she laughed at him, when she left the teller's window.

Jack closed her little brown leather handbag and flushed as if he had been caught in the act of stealing. "Just curious to see what a girl stuffs into a handbag," he grinned at her. "I never saw one that didn't look ready to burst. I noticed that the little inside mirror broke when you dropped your bag in the hotel dining room. Are you superstitious?"

Ruth shivered. "Seven years bad luck, you mean? Pooh! You can't scare me! I've just entered on seven years divine luck—and seven more and seven more—and seven more—" she chanted.

Jack's mobile, sensitive face went grave again, almost shadowed. "Please God you're right, dear."

And do what she would that evening and the next, Ruth Lester could not long keep the shadow of trouble, even fear, out of her lover's eyes. True, he ate the dinner that she cooked for him, and praised her culinary art extravagantly. But after the dishes were washed and restored to the tiny cupboard in the miniature kitchenet, he slumped into gloom again, forgetting to kiss her for as long as half an hour at a time. She spent most of Sunday in bed, but contrary to her fears, an actual cold did not develop. There was just that odd shiver that ran along her nerves at the most unexpected moment.

. . .

SUNDAY evening they ate dinner in the little restaurant to which Ruth had taken Jack the first time they had ever eaten together, in obedience to his whimsical request that she show him where she got such potent crumbs that the black pigeon would eat out of her hand.

"Oh, Jack, the poor pigeons!" Ruth remembered the birds contritely. "I was so happy yesterday that I forgot to buy peanuts to feed them before I left for the week-end. I meant to do it when I was out getting Mr. Borden's money and tickets. Poor Satan! Do you think he'll starve to death before Monday? I'll take a lot of crumbs with me in the morning—"

"I don't like that black pigeon!" Jack surprised Ruth by saying the absurd words grimly. "He looks too much like his namesake, 'Handsome Harry.'"

"Darling!" Ruth laughed. "I do believe you're jealous of the black pigeon! He's a greedy scamp. But have you noticed how the little white pigeon adores him? She's never far fro mhis side, although she's too timid to eat out of my hand yet. I wonder if most of the pigeons aren't ladies who are in love with Black Satan. He struts about as if he were the lord of creation. . . . I wonder, too," she mused, "how Rita Dubois is enjoying the week-end. I know she doesn't really care for Harry Borden—"

"Let's not talk about that man again!" Jack interrupted vehemently. Then, as Ruth's delicate little face flushed and quivered: "Sorry, darling! I'm all on edge. . . . Keyed up, I suppose, to my new responsibilities. Shall we go out to Grandbury with Cowan next Sunday and look at the lots? Oh, Ruth! I do love you so! Forgive me for being so difficult last night and tonight. I—lots on my mind. Got to plan a future for Mr. and Mrs. John Carrington Hayward. Love me? Say it, Ruth!"

It was not until she was dressing to go to the office Monday morning that Ruth realized Jack had not reminded her of her promise to resign her position as Harry Borden's secretary. "But—why should he remind me?" she reasoned. "He knows I'll keep my promise, and I can understand his not wanting to talk about it."

She arrived at the office at 9:15, though Borden never required her presence until half past. And his train was not due from Winter Haven until 12:10. There was a great pile of letters on the floor, beneath the slot in the door, but there was something Ruth had to do before she opened, read and sorted the mail. She had not forgotten the pigeons this time. Benny Smith had not arrived, although he was supposed to open the offices at nine o'clock sharp. Of course he was taking advantage of Borden's absence.

Ruth took the dried sponge out of the little glass dish on her desk, then emptied into it an envelope of peanuts and a larger package of crumbs. Satan and his harem should have a feast and not have to wait until noon for it, either!

Smiling, she opened the door between her office and Borden's private office, and, with the glass dish in her hand, stepped across the threshold.

The ghastly spectacle that met her eyes robbed her of all power of motion for the moment, and the pigeons of their meal. The glass dish fell to the floor, the peanuts and crumbs scattering upon the thick velvet rug. . . . But Ruth did not see them, for her eyes were fixed in a trance of horror upon the thing that lay near the window on the floor.

(To be Continued)

A murder in Harry Borden's office. And the victim—but read the next chapter.

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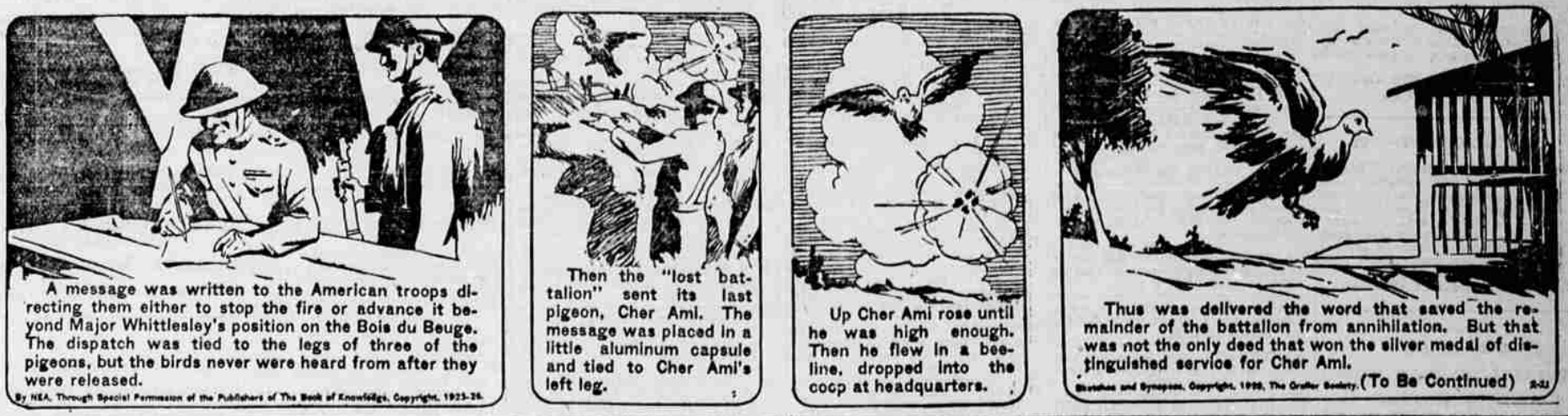
THE BOOK OF KNOWLEDGE — Sketches by Knetz; Synopsis by Brancher — GRIZEL HUME



A message was written to the American troops directing them either to stop the fire or advance it beyond Major Whittlesley's position on the Bois du Beuge. The dispatch was tied to the legs of three of the pigeons, but the birds never were heard from after they were released.

Then the "lost battalion" sent its last pigeon, Cher Ami. The message was placed in a little aluminum capsule and tied to Cher Ami's left leg.

Up Cher Ami rose until he was high enough. Then he flew in a beeline, dropped into the coop at headquarters.

Thus was delivered the word that saved the remainder of the battalion from annihilation. But that was not the only deed that won the silver medal of distinguished service for Cher Ami.

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(To Be Continued) 2-21

OUR BOARDING HOUSE — By AHERN

THE TINYMITES — By KNICK

THE Tinies hung on to the rope and Scouty cried. "At last there's hope. All we need do is work toward shore, and drop down on the sand. The Sea Man's helped us once again. He's very handy, now and then. Come on, now, follow me and we'll move fast, hand over hand."

Along the rope they worked their way, and Mister Sea Man yelled "Hurray! Your troubles seem all over, 'cause you'll shortly be on shore." Then, as they dropped down on the sand, each Tiny shook their good friend's hand. "Run up and down the beach," said he, 'and dry your clothes once more."

The Tinymites replied, "All right." And with the old sun shining bright, it wasn't long till they were dry and feeling very good. The Sea Man then said, "I must go, and I just want you all to know, I'd like to take you all along. I only wish I could."

Into the stream he quickly ran. "Well, well, there goes the old Sea Man," said Scouty. Now let's try and find those Trouble Tot's real quick. We'll catch them, and then spank them good, just as, no doubt, they know we should. 'Twill teach them all they shouldn't play another funny trick."

They scampered up a nearby hill. Then Coppy whispered, "Wait! Be still. I see the Tots all standing in the valley down below. Let's sneak up quick. Don't make a noise. We'll sure surprise those naughty boys." But, as the Tinies draw up near the Tots all shouted, "Oh!"

And then they ran up to a bird. The next thing that the Tinies heard was merry shouts of laughter, as the Tots 'rose toward the sky. Their quick escape was very neat. They merely grabbed the big bird's feet, and as the bird winged out of sight the Tots all galled, "Good-bye."

(Read the story, then color the picture)

(The Tinymites return to their regular size in the next story).

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