



# The LEADING LADY

by GERALDINE BONNER

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## CHAPTER VIII

—11—

The night search of the island had given up nothing and a daylight exploration was set for the morning. Before this, however, Rawson wanted to go through Miss Saunders' room, which by his orders had been locked and left untouched.

Steeped in the morning sun, warm and still, it extended its welcome as if waiting for her entrance. The signs of feminine occupation caught the eyes of the men and held them chilled on the threshold. A delicate perfume filled the air, the fragrance of her passing habitation still lingering in ghostlike sweetness after the living presence had gone.

Rawson moved first, shaking off the spell. He looked into the open wardrobe trunk, completely packed but for the last hanger. "Going to put her costume there," he said, touching it with his index finger. He pulled out the drawers and ran his eye over their contents. A gray crepe dress lay across the foot of the bed, beside it a cloak and a black hat with a water-lily garnishing the brim. "These," he said, "were the clothes left out to wear."

Bassett nodded. He could see Sybil in the gray dress with her hair a golden fluff below the edge of the black hat. She had worn them on the way up and been pleased when he had admired her costume.

The dressing table was the only place in the room that her neat arranging hand had not touched. It was covered with a litter of toilet articles, cold cream jars, rouge boxes, powders and scents, a silver hand mirror, a pair of long white gloves. Williams picked up a bead bag and opened it. It contained a wisp of handkerchief, a bunch of keys, a lipstick and a gold change purse. In the central compartment were three five-dollar bills and in the gold purse one dollar and thirty-five cents in coins.

"This couldn't have been all the money she had," he queried.

"Why not?" said Bassett. "I guess some of us haven't that much. She didn't need any. All our expenses were paid and she was going straight home. One of those bills was probably intended for Miss Pinkney."

Nothing more came to light. The closets were empty, the bathroom contained a few toilet articles and a nightgown and negligee hanging on the door. Obviously a place swept clean for a coming departure by one who had no premonition that that departure would be final.

They passed out and along the hall, Rawson wanting to see the disposition of the passages and stairs. At the door next to Miss Saunders' he stopped, asking who occupied that room. It was vacant now but had been Joe Tracy's. He opened the door and looked in upon another chintz-lung chamber, all signs of recent habitation removed that morning by Miss Pinkney's energetic hand. A steamer trunk in the corner caught his attention and Bassett explained it was young Tracy's trunk, which his sister was to take back to New York with her.

To be that the hall ran into the gallery passing under an arch of carved wood. They traversed it, looking down into the richly colored expanse of the room below, and fared on under a companion arch into the last stretch of the hall. At the stair-head Rawson halted:

"Only two flights connecting with this floor, the one in the front by the library and this. Now the top story—how do you get to that?"

Bassett showed them a staircase at the end of the hall. He had never been up there himself, but someone, Mrs. Cornell, he thought, had. It was the servants' quarters and had not been occupied during their stay. Miss Pinkney and her helper having had rooms on the gallery.

Later on they would take a look up there, the island was their business now. According to Williams, all this searching was merely a formality, and they descended the stairs conferring together. It was their purpose to keep Stokes and his wife from any possibility of private communication. Shine had been delegated to stay beside one or the other of them, and so far, they had made no attempts to get together. Their amenability added to Williams' suspicion and it was his suggestion that they should bring Stokes with them on their hunt. When that was finished they planned taking Mrs. Stokes to the place of the murder and snaking her rehearse just what she had seen.

Starting from the Point they explored the island foot by foot, scouting across the open expanses where a rabbit could hardly have hidden and prying into the hollows and rifts of the boulders on the shore. The path that followed the bluff's edge, making a detour round the ravines, yielded neither voice nor sign. The little

amphitheater, sunk in its green cup, lay open to their eyes as they stood on its brink. They walked among the stone-seats, seamed with a velvet padding of moss, and gathered up a few programs, a pair of woman's gloves and a necklace of blue beads.

That brought them to the end. The house had no outbuildings; garages, barns and sheds were in the village across the channel. There was no one in hiding on the island.

They found Flora, Shine and Mrs. Cornell on the balcony. As they came up Flora looked at them and then averted her glance as if in proud determination to show no curiosity. Rouge had been applied to her cheeks and her dry lips were a vivid rose color. The high tints showed ghastly on her withered skin but her dark eyes were scintillant with an avid burning vitality. It was like a face still holding the colors and hot warmth of youth suddenly stricken by untimely age.

Williams, halting at the foot of the steps, told her what they wanted—her position and Miss Saunders' at the time of the shooting, going over the ground and making it clear to them. She rose alertly with a quick understanding nod—she would be glad to.



Bassett Showed Them a Staircase at the End of the Hall.

It was her earnest desire to be of help to them in any way she could. Rawson noticed that she did not look at her husband but kept her eyes on Williams with an intent frowning concentration, moving her head in agreement with his instructions.

At the shore she was eager to explain everything, took her place on the path where she had been when she saw Sybil appear on the other side of the hollow. Her rendering of the scene was graphic and given with much careful detail. The men, grouped about, followed her indicating hand, stopping her now and then with a question. Stokes stood back watching, his face in the searching daylight smoothly yellow like a face of wax.

Williams' questions were many and pointed, and it soon became evident to Bassett what he had in his mind—that her explanation of her actions did not account for the length of time she had been on the shore. Whether she saw it or not he could not tell; checked in her story she would answer patiently, reiterating her first statement that her stunned condition had robbed her of the power of thought or motion. But he was sure Stokes had grasped the trend of the query; he drew nearer, his flexible lips working, the hand hanging at his side clenching and unclenching. Once he assayed to speak, a hoarse sound throated in escape. It pierced the strained attention she was giving her questioners, and, for the first time, she hesitated and fumbled for her words.

## Might Have Changed History of America

The first congress of the American colonies was convened in New York city about one hundred sixty-one years ago. The purpose of the convention was to consider the stamp act, Greenville's obnoxious scheme of taxation. Tim Ruggles of Massachusetts was chairman of the congress, where delegates from nine states met.

In its two weeks' session the congress adopted a "Declaration of Rights," written by John Cruger; a "Petition to the King" by Bob Livingston, and a "Memorial to Both Houses of Parliament," from the pen of James Otis.

Had the powers that misruled England at this time paid more attention to the words of these earnest men his-

When it was over and they returned to the house, Stokes dropped to her side and drew her hand through his arm. She drooped against him; her narrow body looked nerveless, as if but for his support it would have crumpled and sunk. But he planted his feet with a hard defiance, each step drew a ringing echo from the rocks and he held his head high. Bassett, following them, noted his rigid carriage, and when he turned his profile, the wide nostril spread like that of a winded horse.

When lunch was over Williams and Rawson took up the trail again. They were now going to direct their attention to the Point, especially the summer house, from which a path led to the summit of the bluff whence Sybil had fallen. Bassett, who had hoped to get a word with Anne, was bidden to join them, and the three left the house step by step tracing the passage of the dead girl.

They began with the pine grove. Needles carpeted the ground, slippery smooth, a beaten trail winding between the tree trunks. Beyond it the path ascended the bare slope to the summer house, a small, six-sided building, covered by a thick growth of Virginia creeper that swathed its rustic shape. In four of its walls the vines, matted into a mantle of green, had been cut away to form windows. The other two sides held the entrances, one giving on the path that descended to the pine grove, one to its continuation to the Point. A circular seat ran round the walls and a table in the same bark-covered wood was the only movable piece of furniture. This was drawn up against the seat at one side. Rawson moved it out as the other two ran exploring eyes over the walls, the door-sills and the floor of wooden planking upon which a few leaves were scattered.

"Here," he cried suddenly. "What's this?" and drew from a crevice where the legs crossed, some scraps of a coarse gold material.

He held them up against the light of the opening—three short strands of what might have been the gilt string used to tie Christmas packages.

"What do you know about this?" he said, offering them to Bassett's gaze. Bassett looked, and Williams with craned neck and lifted brows looked too. They were exactly of a length, broken filaments of thread attached to the end of each.

"They've been torn off something," Rawson indicated the threads, "caught in that joint of the table legs and pulled off. Did she have anything like this on her dress anywhere, a trimming or—"

"Fringe," Bassett interrupted, "the fringe on her sash."

"Ah!" Rawson could not hide his exultation. "Now we've got something we can get our teeth into."

"Yes," Bassett took the pieces and studied them in the light. "That's what it is. She wore a wide sash round her waist with ends that hung down edged with gold fringe. This is a bit of it."

"Well," said Williams, "that's a starter anyhow. She was in here."

Rawson sat on the bench and drew the table into its former position:

"It not only proves she was in here, but it proves a good deal more. This is the way she was, with the table as we found it close in front of her. The ends of her sash would have been in contact with the table legs. Now she jumped up quickly—do you get that? If she'd gone slow or had time to think she'd have felt the pull and unloosed the sash—but she sprang up, didn't notice." He looked from one to the other, his lean face alight.

"Frightened," said Bassett. "So frightened she didn't feel it, and moved with such force she tore the fringe off. That scare took her up from the seat and sent her flying through the doorway for the Point."

"Hold on, now," said Williams. "If she was as scared as that, why didn't she go for the house, where there were people?"

"Because she was too scared to think. Some one with a pistol was on the other side of the table." He rose and went to the entrance facing the Point. "And the person with the pistol shot at her from here—winged her as she ran." He turned to Bassett. "That's why you saw no one when you looked out after you first heard the shot. The murderer was in here lying low."

"Yes," Bassett thought back over the moment when he had stood in the living-room doorway. "That's the only place he could have been or I'd have seen him. But they wouldn't have been any time together—couldn't have had a quarrel or a scene. According to Mrs. Cornell it was only six or seven minutes after she saw Sybil go out that she heard the shot. That would give them only two or three minutes in here."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

tory might have taken a different turn, but the figurehead on the English throne and the self-inflated ministers and coxcombs, who served him, were deaf to the distant thunder of discontent—and "lost a world."—Chicago Journal.

## Two Witty Remarks

There is that glorious epicurean paradox uttered by my friend the historian, in one of his flashing moments: "Give us the luxuries of life and we dispense with its necessities." To this must certainly be added that other saying of one of the wisest of men: "Good Americans when they die go to Paris."—Holmes.

## Menace to Journalism in Commercialism of the Press of the Nation

By DON C. SEITZ, Outlook Editorial Staff.

STRIKING the popular chord has become one of the menaces in journalism. Big interests buy up groups of papers, and they are run according to a formula. Commercialism has come into play by which newspapers are captured and submerged. No woman will buy anything now unless she sees it widely advertised in the papers. This condition does not dominate the paper in morals, but it puts upon its physical side such a load that the intellectual side becomes smaller. The submergence of the daily press and the equal leanness of the cultural press mark a different path.

The press has no means of reaching the vacant mind, unless you make it feel that there is something higher than the baseball score to read, and that the age you live in is always the golden age.

The only real criticism that prevails in America today is that we are too slow. Every precaution has been taken to reduce thinking to its lowest. We have become a nation of button pushers, and we forget that under all this convenience is a vast servitude. The public relies upon the clergyman, the teacher and the editor to do the thinking it won't do. The editor has the most difficult tasks in some respects. He has to coax subscribers, entertain them by all kinds of things, and he does this frequently in the dark. The cultural publication has to reach a public widely scattered, but it is the saving grace in the making of American journalism.

## Too Many Seem to Have Lost Sense of Their Relationship to God

By REV. RALPH W. SOCKMAN, Methodist Episcopal.

Too many persons are spiritual orphans. Our sense of relationship to God is like that of a lad whose parents had died before the boy was old enough to know them. The orphan knows from pictures on his wall and the accounts which he has heard that his parents had lived, but he has not the joy of their companionship.

Likewise, many people believe that there was a God who created the universe and that there was a Jesus who lived in Galilee, but they have no feeling of personal relationship.

To such persons Christmas is a second-hand affair, like the impersonal festivity arranged for orphan children by some institution.

The spontaneous joy and personal devotion which characterized apostolic religion are missing in so many of our churches today. Just as the adult goes through the same motions, but not the same emotions as does the child at the appearance of that bewhiskered gentleman called Santa Claus, so the modern churchman goes through the same motions, but not the same emotions as did the First-century follower of Christ.

Formalized and organized religion has lost so much of its lilt and thrill. It is as if we had kept the words of the Hallelujah chorus without the music.

## First Five Years of Life Really Determine Mental Condition of the Adult

By PROF. ARNOLD GESELL, Director Yale Psycho-Clinic.

The first five years of a child's life have more weight in determining the mental condition of the adult than any equal length of time from the age of five to twenty-four.

By making extensive studies of a number of children from the age of one month to five years, and discovering what most children are able to do at a given age, it will be possible to lay down rules as to what a normal child's reaction is.

When we have established these rules, we will be able, by testing children in the light of them, to discover whether or not a child is normal, subnormal or above normal.

It is our hope to gather a great deal of knowledge of child life and to apply it in remedying the children who need special training during the very early years of their lives. It is then that they are more plastic. We do not believe that all the mental weaknesses of later life are predestined. We believe that they are, to some extent at least, plastic; that it is largely a matter of proper regulation and habit formation in the pre-school period.

## Nation Must Have Better Parents Before It Can Have Better Children

By L. A. PECHSTEIN, Dean of University of Cincinnati.

We shall have better children when we are better parents. Human nature changes not and all education is as water passing through a sieve so far as nature's biological mandate is concerned.

The tangible things of our evolving civilization, such as industry, custom, literature, law, home, invention, et al, change, and in adjusting to these, youth seems different.

Society's major institutions for shaping character have been first, the home, second, that of work. Formerly tied together, now hopelessly separated, a void is created which literally cannot be filled.

If a home is always a place where the companions of one's children are welcome; if it exists for their wholesome enjoyment; if parents can enter into the group sports and activities with a pleasure believing their years; if they seek ways of keeping their children unsophisticated as long as possible so that all the thrills of life may not become exhausted while the juvenile still exists, then energies, which will out, become directed into channels worthy of approval.

## Apathy of Public Opinion Over Crime Conditions Must Be Overcome

By NEWTON D. BAKER, Ex-Secretary of War.

Less maudlin sympathy by the public for criminals and more sympathy with law enforcement are needed to control crime conditions. Today, instead of making the world safe for democracy, we must make our cities safe to live in. To do this we must organize public opinion to overcome apathy for crime conditions and the maudlin sympathy displayed for the criminal.

There must be more sympathy for the victim of the criminal, for the police, the prosecutor and the judge who bend their efforts to bring him to justice.

Crime in this country can be curbed only when there is adequate legislation by all states and the federal government to regulate the sale and distribution of all firearms.

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