

The Vanishing Men

BY
RICHARD WASHBURN CHILD

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(Continued From Last Week)

The contest between that better part and the other—the well-known Compton Parmalee with his ruthless daring instinct for hazards and his almost frantic interest in self-preservation—was a losing fight for Brenna. She knew as he knew, that her power lay in no words, but only in the threats of understanding, conduct and high aims that she could weave with him into his life. Moments had come when she had even believed that if she had won she might have loved him. The things worth saving in him were so rare! She would have thrown herself into a new labor—the reclamation of his youth. It was not to be. Perhaps he him-

self knew this as he felt slipping from him the power to resist the habits of mind of years of fierce avarice and the passionate love of his own welfare and his own life. He spoke no word of this realization to Brenna. After all, the two were far apart, and the girl only sensed, as one who hears a low murmur of a coming tempest, the menace which hung over them.

"There are times when you look at me as if I were the bearer of some evil," she said.

"It is absurd," he told her, but his face had shown the sudden twist of fear.

"You have some knowledge that I have not," she asserted accusingly.

"None," he answered. For a long

time he moved as he had when Brenna. "Your father was interested in Aztec architecture?"

"Yes." Her eyes had opened in amazement.

"He went to Mexico more than once," said Parmalee. "He considered that the civilization of the Mayas was far more extraordinary than even experts like Thompson and Nightingale have represented it. He believed that they had developed forces quite unknown to modern life."

"How did you know this?" she asked sharply.

Parmalee was quite nonchalant; he said, "You forget that my library is full of documents and books and monographs which your father asked permission to consult. I am sorry I did not meet your father."

"You would have found him a man quite incapable of believing in the supernatural whether it be a thing of today or attributed to an ancient people."

"He thrust a glance at her. 'You speak with some heat,' he said.

"I suppose so," Brenna answered. "It is because I have no patience with unrealities."

"You would say more?" he asked, with his uncanny ability to read her thought.

"Yes. I think that you have some purpose in creating this atmosphere of strange and unreal things."

He started to speak, stopped himself and after a long pause exclaimed sharply, "I agree with you."

They rode on toward Cherbourg without speaking, but now and then glancing up as if each weighed the motives and challenged the other.

"You spoke of a piece of paper given to you in a roll of bills," he said at last, with a marked absence of his usual assurance. "It fluttered out. You saved it—"

Brenna drew back as if the subject were odious. She said, with unwonted sharpness, "I have cause to remember. You are always speaking—"

"I've spoken of it only twice," he said. "This time I—"

He appeared frightened.

"I think you said there was a drawing of an arrow and a lizard."

Brenna, regretting her moment of temper, said, "I said lizard. I don't see what difference it makes. It wasn't exactly a lizard."

With great promptness he thrust toward her an envelope and a pencil.

"Draw it," he said.

"I told you I had almost forgotten," the girl replied. "I lost the scrap—the figures and the words."

"Draw it," he repeated, "the best you can."

Brenna looked out of the car window at the flashes of green and gray of farms and farm buildings as if she were searching in her memory for a photographic impress. Then suddenly, with the quick precision that gave her hand and mind so many undeveloped talents, she outlined a strange figure on paper.

Parmalee snatched it eagerly and stared; he saw a figure, half snake and half bird.

"That?" said he in a voice which sounded muffled. "Well, do you know what it is?"

Brenna raised the arch of her brows. "It is the Kuk-ul-can," said Parmalee.

"The Kuk-ul-can," she said, repeating it.

"The symbol of the Mayan—the Aztec culture. The supreme object of reverence. The fools who go about the Southwest driving their oil wells, and laying their railroad ties and eating their prepared breakfast foods forget that this symbol is to be found among the present-day Zuni and other Pueblo tribes, the degenerate fringes of a civilization which flourished before Rome was suckled by a wolf. They forget that a thousand years ago it was carved on rude adobe walls in memory of a lost grandeur and lost practices, dead these six thousand years."

Brenna possessed two laughs, both quite natural and sincere. And now it was her merry Irish laugh. "What of all this?" said she. "I will blush for their ignorance, but what more than that can I do on a sunny Thursday? I am not interested, old fellow, in that which is dead."

She stopped suddenly, sobered by a recollection.

"The Kuk-ul-can," said Parmalee. "You've never seen that scrap of paper again, have you?"

"This was the last time he ever spoke of it."

CHAPTER IX

Winter had come again when the Parmalees had settled into a quieter life in New York. Brenna had turned the back of her interest upon dining out and the amusement of new acquaintances.

"There is a manner of savoir faire to be acquired in it, Compton," she admitted to her husband. "I have acquired it a little, no doubt—a kind of veneer of ease which is like a glass-covered surface of troubled waters. It makes the pool of personality appear calm down to the bottom."

"Yours is," said he. "Yours has shown me the difference between the old deep streams and the new torrents."

"You know how they say that contact makes breadth," Brenna went on. "They mean that, touching the elbow of a statesman or an artist at dinner provides the glib phrases of foreign relations or allows one to mention casually the newest Spanish painter. But it is all surface. For instance there's Mrs. Balmer-Roseboro in London. Her kind is covered with feathers plucked from every magnificent bird that migrates into England. But her mind is really only cotton-wool stuffing. She is only one stage higher than the persons who draw their intellectual reputation from reading book reviews, or weeklies printed on uncoated paper which appear authoritative because they are without illustrations. It is being a second-hand dealer—in ideas."

Compton nodded. As if suddenly he had been reminded of a duty, he laughed outright with the artificial laugh which had come with long periods of absent-minded loss of sense of environment during times when, as if in a daze, he stared far away.

"You want to cease seeing people?" he asked.

"I want to cease seeing people—some art or profession, and learn it well. I want to tread upon a solid ground," said Brenna.

"Good!" Parmalee said. "I cannot tell you how glad I am to be free from seeing so many people."

There appeared again in his face that weariness from some tensely which would not relax, an expression that increased as the weeks went by and the lives of the two drew more apart.

(To be continued next week)

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NOTICE

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE STATE OF OREGON FOR WASHINGTON COUNTY.

In The Matter Of Oregon Tunnel District Number One.

NOTICE

To Oregon Tunnel District Number One, And All Freeholders, Legal Voters And Assessment Payers Within Said Districts

You and each of you will please take notice that D. A. Pattullo, Charles R. Frazier and Otto Erickson, as the Board of Directors of Oregon Tunnel District Number One, have filed in the Circuit Court of the State of Oregon, for Washing-

ton, a petition for a judicial examination of the regularity and legality of all proceedings had in connection with the organization of said tunnel district and its board of directors and that, upon such examination, enter a decree establishing and confirming the regularity and legality of said proceedings, and further praying that said Court make an order directing the publication of this notice and fixing a time within which all persons interested and desiring to appear and contest the validity of said proceedings shall make an appearance.

That, by order of the Honorable George R. Bagley, a judge of the above entitled court, made and entered on the 2nd day of January, 1926, this notice is published in "The Beaverton Review" a newspaper published at Beaverton, in Washington County, Oregon, for three successive weeks, on the 8th, 15th and 22nd day of January, 1926, and all persons interested and desiring to appear and contest the validity of said proceedings are hereby notified to appear and contest the same on or before the 2nd day of February, 1926.

D. A. Pattullo, Charles R. Frazier, Otto Erickson, Joseph H. H. & Littlefield and John C. Veach, Attorneys, 511 Corbett Building, Portland, Oregon.

Adv p 6-8

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