

The Vanishing Men

BY RICHARD WASHBURN CHILD.

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(Continued From Last Week)

Brena came down one morning when the rain of a wild March day was beating on the windows. The wind, tearing up the leaves of the autumn that had lain all winter beneath the snow and ice of the mournful, dripping garden, but was now released by a thaw, was slapping wet refuse against the great window panes behind the mounding from bare, it cast rotten vegetation at this house as if it were throwing it into the face of an accused personality.

Parmalee did not answer her call. He was not at the breakfast table. The servants could not find him in his rooms. He was discovered finally by his voice, which came faintly with the sound of the wind. Brena without protection from the driving rain ran out the great front door, down the path which cut a diameter in the circle of the driveway, to the massive iron gate.

Parmalee was there with his little white hands grasping the upright bars swaying backward and forward like a caged animal, starting out with wild, red eyes, at the high shores of the distant river bank seen through the haze, his bare head wet and disheveled.

"Come and get me, d—n your eyes!" he screamed. "You've been waiting long enough. Come and get me. I'm not afraid of you at all."

Brena looked over his shoulder up the road beyond the gate. Water was standing in the shallow ruts and the shrubbery, whipped by the wind, danced like little devils along the crest of the hillside. But no living creature was in sight.

"You better come into the house, Compton," she said with a tone of authority.

She realized afterward that she had leaped rather joyfully toward the conclusion that this moment explained the menace which had hung over them so long and that it promised a definite end of her obligations. She remembered of thinking how like an angry, impotent little dog he was, cowering at heart, but barking behind a gate at an empty road. She believed he had lost his mind.

"Come into the house," she repeated. He looked at her stupidly, his lower jaw limp and hanging, his eyes watery and looking into her face with the troubled expression of one trying to discover the surroundings after a loss of consciousness.

"All right," he said hoarsely; "I'm all right, Brena."

He appeared weak, unable to carry himself erect, and his breath wheezed unpleasantly as he followed her feebly up the walk and the wet granite steps of the frowning house.

"Go upstairs and lie down," she commanded.

He stopped with his hands on the black walnut newel post of the stairs and leaned toward her confidentially.

"Footprints," said he, grinning like a fiend. "Footprints."

Brena, opening the door of his library, walked rapidly toward the telephone on his desk. At last she had been driven to summon the aid, counsel and authority of the world beyond the doors of this damned home. Parmalee was mad. But as she put out her hand toward the telephone instrument it knocked over an empty glass. She raised this glass to her nose. The supports of her heart suddenly crumbled for she knew then that her husband was not mad, not changed permanently from the crafty, secretive, self-isolated and haunted man that he had been, but was only at the end of a long night of trying to drink himself into the freedom of insensibility.

At this moment she wondered why she did not feel a marked increase of the old loathing and disgust that she had been unable to weed out as it had sprung up like some rank growth. At this moment she remembered his first appeal to her, how he had begged her to help him win back the clean spirit of his boyhood, how she had once seen the glint of that treasured something, which men forget to keep, shining dimly in the midst of decay, how, having tasted the bitterness of success, he had built new hope. Now he was a grotesque failure, pounding to pieces upon some unseen rock below the surface of the waters. He was paying the account of a lifetime, perhaps; perhaps the reckoning of one mistake. There surged up to the brim in her heart a great pity.

To Brena the cause of his panic, his terror, his suspicious, his isolation, the hard, cold days he led, the sleepless nights he spent now appeared of less importance than the fact that no man was suffering more than he. But she was unable to help him; his defenses were now impenetrable.

"I do not know what you mean," he said. "We live a clean, wholesome kind of existence, don't we? You never hear complaints from me. I do not go out much, that is true. But I am working. I do not sleep well. Neither do many men. I drink too much once, that is true. But that was thirty or forty days ago. You have not seen me make the mistake again."

"You are forever sending John down for a new bottle," said Brena.

"It calms me. My nerves are not good—there's no denying. But why should you complain, Brena? You have your freedom. You go your own ways. You conduct your own studies. You can have anything you want for the asking. Why complain?"

"I'm sorry, but he hasn't come."

"Or sent you any word?" the telephone asked.

"No word," said Brena.

She shuddered. She wondered if by any chance it could be that the

blow had fallen at last—the final dread conviction; she felt that it had.

Brena was right. Compton Parmalee, in spite of the secret efforts of the police in spite of all that money could do to conduct a search without publicity, had dissolved in completely as a wisp of smoke in the blast of some great wind of heaven.

CHAPTER XI

After Dr. Wolfe drew a long breath, the points of his hands upon the light green of his aqueduct over his forehead, that there Jack his head and shoulders that it rounded a good deal like a ship.

Say It With Printing "Flowers Die" BEAVERTON REVIEW

"I'm not complaining," she had said, shutting her lips into a firm line. "I am inquiring."

"Inquiring?" he said with sudden heat. "Well, by G—d, if you ask once too often—you shall know! I'll tell you something about yourself you'll not want to hear."

"Are you laughing at me?" he exclaimed angrily.

"I was smiling."

"Smile on!" he snapped. "Maybe you can tell where Jim Hennepe is. Maybe in the end you won't smile. Maybe you will learn what it is that has clung to you unseen and unknown."

"I demand to know."

"No—by G—d—you shan't. Not until I know all—myself. Not until I know how I shall pay."

He paused.

"And let that come quickly," he added, throwing his open hands toward the ceiling, as if beseeching heaven gods. "Sudden, swift and sure!"

He rushed out of the room.

Night after night he heard him pacing his study floor beneath her room. He walked twenty paces one way, twenty at right angles, twenty more, twenty more. She had learned the count. He was pacing off a square around his big, paper-laden desk in the center of the room. He went to sleep with that sound of a caged animal in her ears; his awake in the middle of the night when the moon of summer threw the shadows of the plumed branches of the great trees upon her floor, hearing that faithful beat of footsteps she could recall, awaking when the bright sunlight was prying at the shutters on the western windows to hear the measure of his pacing.

Once she had awakened in the night and heard no sound. She had crept downstairs and peered into his study. He was crouching down below the window sill, only his eyes above, like a man in ambush, or like one who expects an attack upon his house, watching the running shadows made by trees, shrubs, wind and moon upon the lawn.

"What are you doing, Compton?" she asked.

He had jumped around and then laughed.

"What are you doing down here? You're catching cold. I was thinking. 'Thinking?' Thinking of what?"

"Of life."

"And what about it?"

"How I love it," he had exclaimed. "A few days later he rode up with Brena to New York. A new spirit had come into him. His eyes were filled with a new light; his voice had grown more firm. He did not converse with his young wife, but his silence had changed from that of fear and brooding to that of one who plans and weighs. On his countenance was a new expression, in his motions something of the former dynamic activity and decisiveness."

When Brena came home that evening she asked if he was there.

"No, ma'am," said the maid. "There's been someone telephoning from New York. His lawyers, ma'am."

"Oh, Mr. Lanfrew."

"Yes, ma'am. Several times, ma'am."

Brena ate dinner alone.

At half-past eight the telephone rang again.

"I will answer it," said Brena.

Again it was Mr. Lanfrew. He wanted to speak to Mr. Parmalee. It was about some legal document that had been drawn that morning.

"But Mr. Parmalee is not here yet," said Brena.

"That's strange," said the telephone instrument. "That's strange. I understood he was going home. I understood you were going on a long journey. Mrs. Parmalee. He had drawn the money to pay tickets. I thought he said that he was going to surprise you. He wanted to hurry home this afternoon."

"I'm sorry, but he hasn't come."

"Or sent you any word?" the telephone asked.

"No word," said Brena.

She shuddered. She wondered if by any chance it could be that the

"Well," said he. "That is not a very pretty story."

The lamp had gone out; the slate gray light of early summer dawn filtered through the chintz curtains of the apartment of Brena Selcova. She was facing this watery light, her beautiful hands folded in her lap, her dark eyes looking into profound space. In her attitude and in her expression Peter saw the suggestion of one condemned, who has awakened upon the day of execution and sits upon the side of a prison cell, thinking.

"No, Peter," Brena said at last. "It is not a pretty story."

"I'm sorry," he said, drawing his chair nearer to hers, and leaning forward he took her hands in his. They were cold as marble. She shivered as one who, having no sleep, feels the dawn as a wet shroud. After a slow, inquiring glance around the little chamber where in a variety of soft colors, in seasoned, suggestive furniture and in the smaller things, something of the rich diversity of herself had been expressed, she at last looked at Peter.

"I know," said he. "I am a shaggy brute. The room is cold—a kind of a still, stagnant cold. I'll light the fire."

She did not protest for the moment her own will appeared inert. She watched him duly as he put the lumps of soft coal into the typical London grate and poked them meditatively just as if he had been born an Englishman and found that a soft-coal fire was an entertainment as well as a utility. She allowed him to lead her to the little upholstered sofa which he had pulled in front of the yellow flames and to put her wrap, laid aside when they had come in, around her shoulders and to put his hand upon her throat and cheek as he stood behind her still thinking.

"That is an ugly story," he said, as if determined that there might be no question as to the premise upon which his comments would be based.

Brena nodded. She said: "You can see now, Peter, why the one moment when your arms were about me and your lips were on mine is the end. If I knew I was free, Peter, I could not see more of you. I could not bear the thought that you, too—"

"Would be rubbed out?" he finished, and laughed.

"But you can't believe—" he began. "D—n it—the thing is too absurd, too picturesque."

He considered it a moment.

"Why, if there were anything in it, Brena, dear one, it would be magnificent."

"You forget that I have lived close to this thing. You might believe, too, if you had heard not my words but the words of life itself."

"You've told me all!"

Brena, sensing the presence of a doubt, rose, and, leaning upon the mantel with her face bent down toward the firelight, waited for several moments before she said, wearily, "Yes, Peter—all."

"And others knew?"

"Only Muriel Benham," she answered. "It was when I was ill. I had fled from America. It was ghastly there and I had the what can I say?—the instinct for flight. I went to France. There was pneumonia, and after that I found my little retreat in Beconshire. Muriel was kind. She attended to my mail. I did not expect a letter from Lanfrew—his lawyer. She read it. There was a reference to both—to both."

"I understand," said Peter. "You explained a little; you had to."

He walked up and down the rug, touching the repetitions of the pattern with the toes of his shoes.

"How long has it been since he went?" he asked.

"Over three years."

"And no word?"

"No word. Like the other—nothing—complete—nothing."

Peter made a very face as if the phrases had made real to him the fact. "There was no publicity?"

"No—almost none—a paragraph or two. Less, perhaps, than there would have been in London or Paris. In New York, we were unattached—just people with a little money—making no acquaintances—nobody."

OTHER PRODUCTS—SUCH AS WOOL, FLAX, SEEDS, AGAR CROPS, FOREST CROPS, HONEY, ETC. \$128,000,000.00

VEGETABLES \$148,000,000.00

DAIRY PRODUCTS \$271,000,000.00

ANIMALS RAISED \$1,735,000,000.00

CEREAL \$450,000,000.00

COTTON \$1,450,000,000.00

FRUITS \$730,000,000.00

HAY & FORAGE \$1,662,000,000.00

TOTAL VALUE OF FARM PRODUCTS BY YEARS

1916 \$1,167,000,000.00 1921 \$3,369,000,000.00

1917 \$2,086,000,000.00 1922 \$5,042,000,000.00

1918 \$2,896,000,000.00 1923 \$6,634,000,000.00

1919 \$4,854,000,000.00 1924 \$7,355,000,000.00

1920 \$9,110,000,000.00 1925 \$7,454,000,000.00

SEARS-ROEBUCK AGRICULTURAL FOUNDATION

Peter nodded, reflecting that, after all, there could be nowhere on earth quite the obscurity of a man with a million or two living on his income in New York.

"What became of his money?" he asked.

"It is there—"

"Untouched?"

"Untouched."

He scowled. He said: "The house?"

"Just as I left it—one October day. Just as it was. Nothing changed, I suppose—insured, and left there. A haunted place, Peter—a place where one expects to find a poor murdered creature lying face upward just beyond every door sill. I fled. I even left the dog. I sent back a telegram to a neighbor—the caretaker—and gave him the beast."

"You didn't speak of a dog."

"I forgot—a horror of a beast, turned loose inside the walls at night when the gate was closed. It was his dog, bought a few months before—a cross between a Great Dane and bloodhound—a thing with white fangs. They had to shoot him, I've heard."

Peter, walking to the table, picked up a small bronze Buddha upon whose face there was a satanic grin and with great seriousness the man gazed back at the heathen thing for several minutes.

"What about this—whatever it was—this symbol, half bird and half snake—Kuk-ul-can? You never found it again?"

"Yes," said Brena.

(To be continued next week.)

FARM REMINDERS

Irrigation of flax at the Oregon experiment station in the last few years has increased the height of the straw from 24 inches to 32 inches. A much better price is obtained for the flax with the longer straw.

Many wet foothill slopes in Oregon are being drained by means of intercepting ditches or underground foothill drains which cut off water feeding through the land, from higher ground like an eave trough, reports the O. A. C. experiment station.

Discing before early spring plowing causes some Oregon soils to become sticky and wet making it difficult to do effective plowing between showers without injuring the condition of the soil. Discing before late spring plowing has been found by the O. A. C. experiment station to aid germination, aid in the destruction of seedlings and to help in the incorporation of organic matter with the soil.

Oregon gooseberry growers control mildew by a lime-sulfur spray, 1-25, as soon as the leaf clusters lengthen about one fourth of an inch. A second spray is applied two weeks later. Lime sulfur is not used after fruit has set, for mildew is controlled by pre-blossom sprays if put on thoroughly at the right time.

Oregon potato growers are treating their seed now to avoid delay during the rush of planting time. Machinery for dipping sacked potatoes has been developed which makes it possible to treat a carload in half a day if the hot formaldehyde treatment is used, according to M. B. McKay, pathologist of the O. A. C. experiment station. The seed is thoroughly dried before being stored again.

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The Beisa Antelope

"You're very handsome," said the Beisa Antelope to the Gemshok Antelope.

"To be quite truthful you are more beautiful than I am. But we look alike."

"We do," said the Gemshok Antelope, "and our family home is in Africa."

"But what I wanted to tell you was this," said the Beisa Antelope, "and then he paused."

"My dear Beisa," said the Gemshok Antelope, "how do I know what you want to tell me if you stop just where you should begin?"

"You started, or you seemed to be starting to tell me, when you stopped."

"That is so, I did," said the Beisa Antelope, "but I was going to finish sooner or later."

"Won't you make it sooner rather than later?" asked the Gemshok Antelope politely.

The Gemshok Antelope was a good-sized antelope with a beautiful coat of black and white and gray.

The Beisa Antelope was almost as handsome but not quite so beautifully marked.

"I was going to say, and now that you are so polite, I will tell you now that I am so glad we have straight horns."

"We have such fine, long, powerful horns."

"When we are free we can look after ourselves so well with these horns, and here in the zoo we can be admired and also we can feel that we always have our means of protection with us."

"It would make me sad indeed to have crooked horns. I would feel as though I were not straightforward and honest."

"Of course crooked horns do not mean dishonesty, but for myself, I like the straight horns."

"You mustn't misunderstand me and think that I think that those with crooked horns have crooked natures."

"I know that is not the case. But just for myself I can't help feeling that I do like my straight horns and that they help to make me live up to my ideals of an honest antelope of my family."

"I couldn't help but feel that there was something about me which wasn't so fine and frank if I had crooked horns."

"Now look here," said the Gemshok Antelope, "you are quite wrong."

"Oh, no, oh no, I am not wrong," said the Beisa Antelope, waving his head.

"I have straight horns. I am not wrong."

"As regards your horns you are right," said the Gemshok Antelope.

"But straight horns never mean straightforwardness and honesty."

"They have nothing to do with it. Nothing whatever. Absolutely and entirely and utterly nothing whatever to do with it."

"To be sure, you said that those with crooked horns were quite honest."

"That is not so. You are honest because you like to be honest and straight or crooked horns never make any difference."

"To be straightforward and honest one must think and act that way, and not just look that way."

"It is as though a child would say she was straightforward and honest because she had straight hair."

"Or that she was helped in being straightforward and honest by her

quite straight hair."

"No, dear Antelope, our horns are all right, but they do not help us. It is up to us to see that we are, too, and the horns by being straight may set you a pictured example of what you want to be, but they do not help."

"I see," said the other antelope. "You really are quite correct."