

# SATAN'S HENCHMAN—

By  
**ART NAYLOR**  
Widely-Known Author

A Fast Stepping, Romantic Story Depicting the Operations of an Unscrupulous Crook

## Theodore Ashton Receives A Mysterious Message

INSTALLMENT I

Theodore Ashton, tall, broad shouldered and handsomely bronzed, entered the cozy dining room of his small but elegant apartment. His clothes were immaculate and his stride and bearing were those of the trained athlete and soldier, which attributes had carried him along to the popularity he had long since enjoyed and the commercial success he was daily winning.

With his appearance, a comely, middle aged woman arose from her seat at the snowy table and received the hearty embrace of her handsome son with open arms. "My son," greeted the widowed mother, "you look so well this morning. And yet, I feel that you are working too hard." Her eyes were aglow with a mother's worship, and she reveled in the love he bestowed upon her.

"Why, mother, I never felt so fit in all my life, and never so happy. I have so much to be thankful for. I've got the dearest little mother in all the world, and I'm winning the success necessary for her comfort. You deserve every luxury, and you're going to have it, too."

"But, Theo (he was known to everyone as Theo), I don't want luxury. I have you, and your welfare is all I care for. I fear you will break under the strain, and now that you are engaged to Clarice, you will of course work harder than ever. I want you to be happy, but—somehow, son—I don't believe you love her as you would like to."

The conversation was interrupted by the entry of the maid, bearing the breakfast, and both took their seats at the table. By Theo's plate was his morning mail, consisting of several letters. He opened them casually, one by one, as the chat was resumed.

"You must not allow yourself to become upset as you do, mother dear," replied Theo. "I think Clarice will make a good wife, even though she appears to be—well, a little forward. But times have changed, dear, since you were a girl. However, you must not be jealous, for I will never leave you alone." Theo laughed good-naturedly.

"But I am not jealous, Theo. I don't blame her for wanting my handsome son. But she is so haughty and beautiful, and her father is rich. She is shrewd and wilful, and I am sure, Theo, it was she who asked you to marry her."

Theodore hung his head before he answered, and a shadow of doubt crossed his face. "Yes, mother—she did, but—well," he stammered.

"Yes, son, I understand, and will believe that it will all work out for the best," Mrs. Ashton cheered.

As Theo picked up the last letter and read it, a frown crossed his forehead, and his mother's eyes were quick to perceive his troubled expression. "Now, what is it, Theo?" she asked.

Theo tried to laugh it off, but there was some strange force in the few words he read which would not be repelled. "It's an anonymous letter—but it doesn't mean anything," he remarked, as he reluctantly passed her the missive and listened as she read:

Mr. Theodore Ashton,

Chicago, Illinois,

Dear Sir:

There are sinister influences at work, and it will behoove you to be very alert. Say nothing. It

keep your eyes open, for you will soon face danger, even as I.

A Friend.

"It is a very plain fact that a woman wrote this, Theo, and I am rather inclined to place some cre-

gained quite a reputation for his lavish expenditures and apparent wealth entered the office with a companion, and was immediately granted an interview with President Oliver.

One by one the officials of the company were called into the president's office, and Theo was finally summoned. With more than his usual courtesy, President Oliver introduced Mr. Bolton and his associate, Edward Terry.

"Gentlemen," said the president, "here is one of the pillars of the company, and I am glad to introduce

Back in his own office, Theo was surprised to find Mrs. Ethel Oliver, the president's pretty young wife, who was only twenty-five and just a few years older than Clarice, Oliver's petted daughter by his first wife. It had been rumored that Oliver had selected his second wife from the stage in New York.

"Hello, Big Boy. How is the big moment today?" Ethel greeted crossing her legs in a manner to expose their shapeliness.

"How do you do, Mrs. Oliver," Theo returned respectfully.

The young cashier dropped into his desk chair and mechanically prepared the applications for the requested Bolton policies. Before he had completed the task, Harry Bruce, Theo's friend and the head bookkeeper, slipped into the office and quietly closed the door behind him. His face bore signs of agitation and when he spoke, it was in a low guarded voice.

"Theo, in going over the books I find a discrepancy creeping out, and I thought you'd better know about it. You realize the State Examiners are due here any time now, and this shortage begins to look serious."

Theo galvanized into action at once. His dark eyes glowed with surprise and concern at this revelation. "Harry! You must be terribly mistaken in some way. Such a thing is impossible. The last audit showed the records to be in A-1 condition, and a deficiency is impossible. I have watched the records too closely for that."

"Nevertheless, old man, it is certainly true. I have not been deep enough into the accounts as yet to discover the exact amount, or the cause, or method applied to produce it. But certain and sure, Theo, there is something wrong, and seriously so," Harry insisted.

Theo was dumbfounded. For an instant his overworked brain seemed to cease its operation. "Harry, put all your time and attention on this thing, and don't leave any stone unturned in your endeavor to uncover the facts. Hire a special auditor if necessary, and spare no one. If there is anything wrong, we must know it at once and determine the guilty party. Get busy."

Alone again, it seemed that fate was slowly shaping a course in accordance with the warning of the anonymous letter. Throughout the development and progress of the Negrolian Life Insurance Company, Theo's one great care had been a scrupulous supervision over the financial records. And in this he had always been upheld and praised by President Oliver.

When the policy applications had been returned to Theo, with the approval of the actuary, he took them back to Oliver's office, where he found the three men engaged in rather jubilant conversation.

"Mr. Bolton," Theo interrupted, "here are the approved applications, embodying all the requirements as well as the policy guarantees. If you will have the documents properly attested by your ward and yourself, we will immediately make such investigation as the law requires."

"But, Mr. Ashton, you remember I intimated that I wanted special attention paid to these policies, and if you will leave the matter in my hands, I will look after it. I'll turn over the check for the premium to you just as soon as I decide upon the validity of the applications," the president requested in a firm voice.

"Very well, sir," answered Theo, "still I believe, Mr. Oliver, that these applications should receive the same careful scrutiny that all others do, and an even more rigid investigation adhered to in this case."

"Young man, I wish you to understand that I am doing business with Mr. Oliver, and not with a snipe like you. I am worth enough to buy and sell several like companies, and I don't stand for insults from underdogs like you," Bolton interrupted caustically.

At this period Theo noticed that Clarice Oliver had entered the room, and had evidently heard much of the conversation. She approached her father and smiled at Theo, foregoing her usual greeting to her fiancée.

Then Bolton resumed his speech,

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"How is the Big Moment Today?" . . . .



"Back in his own, Theo was surprised to find Ethel Oliver, the president's pretty young wife, only twenty-five and just a few years older than Clarice, Oliver's pampered daughter by his first wife. It had been rumored that Oliver had selected his second wife from the stage in New York."

dence in it. You see, dear, you are the cashier of a rapidly growing insurance company and engaged to the president's daughter. There might be those who would like to see you out of the way."

"There's nothing to it, mother. Don't let that worry you. I'm big and husky enough to take care of myself," Theo consoled her. "But I must run along now, for we expect a big day at the office. I'll call you and be home for dinner at the usual time." With a caress he left her.

A short time later, Theodore Ashton entered the stately building of the Negrolian Insurance Company. Pride swelled within him as he returned the greetings of the office force, and entered his private office back of his assistant's cage. For much credit was due Theodore Ashton's keen business sense and indefatigable efforts in behalf of the company.

It proved a busy day from the start for Theo. The week's collections were coming in. Several death claims were to be acted upon, and salaries and commissions paid, which claimed most of Theo's supervision. At two o'clock, J. Francis Bolton, a newcomer in the city, who had rapidly

our cashier, Mr. Theodore Ashton. Mr. Ashton, Mr. Bolton is desirous of subscribing for two policies for twenty-five thousand dollars each, one for himself and the other for his ward. I wish you would please rush these applications through, and Theo, eh—you might dispense with some of the regular formalities in this instance. Mr. Bolton is very likely to become a stockholder in the company."

It was with a feeling of misgiving that Theo acknowledged the introductions and withdrew to prepare the applications. Bolton, a large, dark, flashily dressed man, was possessed of a countenance that was at first baffling. His manner was suave and ingratiating. His companion, Edward Terry, was a small, neatly dressed individual, with constantly shifting eyes and of an obviously nervous temperament.

Theo's mind unconsciously drifted back to the anonymous letter he had received that morning, and his mother's fears, but he quickly repressed the uneasy feeling that persisted in spite of himself. The request for fifty thousand of insurance was unusual, as was President Oliver's over-anxious attitude.

"I do wish, Theo, that I could be just plain Ethel to you. I don't see why we can't be very—well, close friends."

"I consider that we are friends, Mrs. Oliver, and certainly you are due all the respect possible as my good employer's wife and stepmother to my fiancée."

"Oh, yeah? Well, if—you marry Clarice—I'll never be a mother to you. But you ought to know that Clarice is very changeable. You deserve someone who would really love you—even though it was without benefit of clergy. I'll run along now. I had hoped to see my daddy, but he's busy. However, I have seen you—which is just as good. Think it over, Big Boy!"

Theodore Ashton stood astounded as he watched Mrs. Oliver vanish around the glass partitions. As a constant visitor at the Oliver residence, he had been thrown a great deal in Mrs. Oliver's company, but their friendship had always been merely consistent with social conventions. Now she had cast aside all reserve and Theo was disgusted as he watched Mrs. Oliver vanish suggestions.

## EUGENE GORDON

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