

SATAN'S HENCHMAN—

By
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Widely-Known Author

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

Theo Sees Marcia, But Fate Turns Against Him and He is Implicated In the Bank Shortage

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE—

Theodore Ashton, tall, handsome, bronze-skinned, and athletic, the idol of his widowed mother, has by hard labor, done much to build the success of the Negroian Life Insurance Company, and holds the responsible position of cashier. Theo is engaged to Clarice, the daughter of James O. Oliver, president of the insurance company. He admits to his mother that she has asked him to marry her.

J. Francis Bolton, a newcomer in the city, and suddenly popular because of his supposed wealth, calls with a friend at the office and applies for two twenty-five-thousand-dollar policies for himself and ward. President Oliver is enthusiastic over Bolton, but Theo wins Bolton's hatred by his insistence that the policies be handled in the regular way, and not be rushed through.

Theo had that morning received an anonymous letter warning him to be careful. Bruce, the bookkeeper, discovers a discrepancy in the records. Ebel, Oliver's second and young wife, hating Clarice, her step-daughter, makes advances to Theo.

At the end of the day, counting up the receipts with thousands of dollars in sight, Theo turns to face a gun in the hands of a bandit, and the command, "Stick 'em up." Theo knocks the bandit down and captures him.

Theo discovers he is being constantly shadowed. Harry Bruce, his friend and the bookkeeper of the Life Insurance Co., informs Theo that a shortage of ten thousand dollars shows on the company's books. Bolton is royally entertained by the Oliver's at dinner and the theatre.

While Theo and Harry visit Foo Chang's "Paradise," a notorious black and tan cabaret, they observe Edward Terry, Bolton's friend, in attendance with the released bandit captured at the attempted holdup of the company. Bolton arrives with Clarice and succeeds in getting Clarice partially intoxicated. The lights go out and Theo rescues Clarice and takes her home. The following day Theo visits Bolton's residence to investigate his applications for fifty thousand dollars insurance, and is preceded by Jenny Gilman, Bolton's housekeeper and mistress.

Theo enters and finds Jenny threatening death to a beautiful girl, but Jenny falls in a stupor from dope. The girl proves to be Marcia Anson, Bolton's ward, who has long admired Theo, and informs him of Bolton's treachery. It is love at first sight. And as Theo is leaving, Edward Terry enters. Marcia seizes Theo in a closet, and Terry insists upon her fleeing with him. When she refuses, he attempts to attack her.

Theo springs out of the closet and knocks Terry out when the man attempts to attack Marcia. He then escapes out of the rear door as Bolton arrives.

Theo, leading the opposition, loses his fight to prevent the issuance of the Bolton policies. He also loses the fight to defeat Bolton's election to the board of directors. Bolton executes a shrewd coup by introducing Marcia, his ward, into society at a magnificent reception. But Theo is worried and puzzled. Jenny, Bolton's former housekeeper, has been replaced. Terry has disappeared and Bolton attains the zenith of power in social and financial circles.

Theo is rejected by Clarice as her escort, but substitutes his mother as a companion at the debut reception, and he is practically ignored by Marcia during the festivities. In a despondent mood, he seeks a secluded balcony but is immediately joined by Ebel, President Oliver's wife, who again proposes a clandestine friendship which Theo rejects. Just as her husband appears and faces them, a heretofore unseen figure steps from the shadows to Theo's side.

The unseen figure proved to be Theo's mother, Mrs. Ashton, whose presence prevents a scene.

Theo is ignored by his fiancée, Clarice, and by Marcia, to whom he had given his heart, during her debut party.

A few days later, Bolton wishes the exchange of some securities after the time safe had been locked and insists upon Theo's holding the new ones until the following day. Working overtime that night and alone, Theo is watched and receives a call that the office is to be robbed. He discovers the wires have been cut, and he pockets an official looking packet and leaves. At the corner he is kidnapped, put in a car and robbed of the packet.

Put out of the bandit car, Theo stumbles upon Terry and Jenny Gilman, Bolton's confederate and his former mistress sitting in the park, and overhears their plot against Marcia. He follows them and discovers the secret entrance to Foo Chang's dive. At the office the next morning Theo, in the presence of Oliver, relates the hold-up to the police.

When Bolton arrives he is informed of the robbery and holds Theo to blame for the theft of the bonds. Theo hands him the bonds that he had received and informs him that the packet of which he was robbed contained only blank envelopes, and that Bolton's bonds were still in his desk and were false documents.

Two detectives enter the office.

INSTALMENT VI

For once Theo Ashton realized he held the trump card. It was a situation fraught with angles which were sure to precipitate serious further complications. Harry Bruce listened with studied interest, while President Oliver plainly showed his agitation. Bolton, suave and crafty as usual, quickly

changed his tactics after his accusation and Theo's retaliation. The detective quietly made notes of the incidents.

The Fake Bonds

"Why, Ashton, can you verify the fact that those bonds are false? If you can, I want to know it, for someone is going to suffer. I made a personal loan and received those documents as collateral. I desired the exchange merely to clip the coupons from the securities I had deposited here against my stock liability."

"Mr. Bolton, when things developed as they did last night, I took the liberty of copying the serial numbers on the bonds, hoping to protect your interest. However, the bandits got a blank package for their trouble. This morning I also took the liberty of investigating the validity of these securities and found they are counterfeit." Theo declared with conviction.

"Let me have them, Ashton, and

"Why—as I remember it now, she said she was driving a party of friends out to the country. Oh, yes, Bolton! She was to drive out to your new home at Edgemont. I don't know what time she returned."

"Yes, I believe there was a party to go out last night," Bolton explained in answer to Oliver's query. "I was too busy to go."

"Well, Mr. Oliver, the bandits used your car last night when they kidnapped Ashton. Can you explain how it was done? The car was not reported stolen."

"Gentlemen—it is beyond me," answered Oliver, his face showing the nervous strain under which he was laboring.

"Mr. Ashton, you'll come with us for a few moments. We won't detain you long," the officer requested.

Theo left three silent figures as he passed out of his office with the detectives. The turn of affairs was more than he could fathom, but as the police car drew up in front of

there was a droop about her carriage.

"What does a call at this unearthly hour mean, Theo?" she greeted protestingly.

"Miss Oliver, these gentlemen wish to ask you a few questions," Theo informed her.

"But you ought to know by this time, if anyone should, Theo, that I don't grant interviews at this time of day."

"We are police officers, lady," one of the detectives told her, "and this gentleman is in no way responsible for this call."

At once there was a noticeable change in Clarice's attitude, and surprise and fear quickly replaced her impatience.

"You drove your father's car last night, Miss Oliver?" the officer asked. "Can you tell us what time you left home, what time you returned, and whether or not you were in possession of the car the entire evening?"

Incriminating Questions

For a moment Clarice pondered

"Who was the party you were with, Miss Oliver, and at whose residence, and the number?"

Sympathy stirred Theo's heart as Clarice turned to him, a weeping, dejected figure. "Must I answer that question, Theo?" she pleaded.

Clarice Confesses

"I'm afraid you must, Clarice. You see, I was the one who was kidnapped," Theo enlightened her.

"I—I—was with—Mr.—Bolton," she sobbed. And it was with difficulty that she controlled herself and uttered the landlady's name and the address of the house.

"That's all," the officers remarked, as they prepared to leave.

"I'm awfully sorry, Clarice," Theo comforted the dejected girl, "but I promise you I'll do everything in my power to have these facts suppressed." He left her weeping on the divan, and followed the officers out of the house and around to the garage. Here they found the family sedan and Clarice's sport roadster.

It was evident to the officers that Clarice had used the sedan to confirm her story to her father and enjoy the privacy which her own car did not afford. In the bottom of the sedan the officers found the discarded package of envelopes, where the disgusted bandits had thrown them, thus completing the evidence in the case as related by Theo.

"You'd better watch your step, Ashton. You know this is the second time you have foiled somebody's game," remarked one of the detectives as they parted.

"Yes, they may get you next time. But you keep in touch with us. We'll soon run down the guilty parties. We know now. Too bad the girl had to be caught in such a jam. We've raided that place several times."

"Keep her out of it if you can," Theo urged.

Not a Word from Marcia

Back at the office Theo became the center of attraction, but avoided any reference to the disclosures which had been made by the investigation. Bolton, ignorant of the fact he had been so poignantly involved, observed a polite indifference and took an early departure. Questioned in private by President Oliver, Theo succeeded in suppressing the incriminating features of Clarice's sordid affair with Bolton, but to Harry Bruce, his confidant, he unfolded every angle of the case. And this, later on, was to prove a wise course.

Wounded in spirit and troubled in mind, Theo moved along in his existence, void of enthusiasm, unable to arouse more than ordinary interest in any of the current events. His brain had grown weary in its effort to fathom the cause of Marcia's defection. The days had lengthened into weeks since her debut, but not a word, not a sign had she vouchsafed in explanation of her actions, and his own pride and vanity precluded the thought of any overture on his part.

But Marcia Anson's popularity grew by leaps and bounds. Her beauty was exploited far and near, and she was heralded as a universal favorite. No social affair was complete without the names of Marcia Anson and Clarice Oliver, but like magic, both had vanished from the horizon of the young insurance official's life.

Theo studiously avoided a meeting with Marcia, and abandoned his former social prestige with noticeable effect. He dreaded that haughty indifference with which she seared his very soul at her coming out reception. His engagement to Clarice had dwindled to a state of mutual revocation, though technically it still endured. But Theo assumed the attitude that Clarice's own duplicity had released him.

The Charity Masquerade

The one event of the season, the company's annual charity masquerade, approached rapidly. Much of its heralded popularity was due to Theo's untiring efforts and superb management of the several previous affairs, and now he found it difficult to avoid

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Her usual sang-froid seemed to desert her, and she looked at Theo with a furtive expression. "I—I think that is a very personal question!" she answered, attempting to repress her confusion.

"That is true, Miss Oliver, and yet I believe it would be to your advantage to help us clear up this situation, rather than to have it done in court."

"Why is it necessary for you to know my actions? I am sure I have committed no crime."

"We don't believe you have, lady," the other officer intervened, "but your car was used by bandits last night, which necessarily involves you. We must trace the car's movements and yours."

Like a deer brought to bay, the haughty society girl wilted as she realized her plight. Fear showed in her eyes and she became nervous and unstrung. Scandal stared her in the face, and her bravado was gone. "I—I—called for a party at his club and we drove to an address on the Parkway. We parked the car there at eight-thirty, and remained inside until—about one o'clock." Tears gleamed in her eyes as she made her confession.

"I'll go immediately and look into the matter," Bolton requested eagerly.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Bolton," put in one of the detectives, "but these bonds bear directly upon this case and we will be forced to turn them over to the state's attorney as an exhibit. A general police order relative to these bonds has been waiting developments for some time. We'll give you a receipt, Mr. Bolton, and I am sure they'll be returned to you shortly."

Bolton realized that the cards were against him, and very graciously acquiesced to the officer's demands. "Certainly, gentlemen. If there's anything wrong with them, I, for one, want all doubt cleared up. I'd be very sorry to have my friend dragged into any illegal transactions, but at the same time, I want the situation cleared up fully."

Oliver's Car Used

The other officer spoke, addressing President Oliver directly. "Mr. Oliver, where was your car last night?"

"What's that," Oliver asked with surprise.

"Where was your car last night?"

"Why—er—my daughter was using it."

"Do you know the time she returned home?" the officer asked, "and where she went?"

the Oliver residence a strange feeling crept over him, and he regretted the incriminating evidence which was being brought out.

"What do you know about this daughter of Oliver's?" asked one of the detectives.

Clarice Suspected

"She's supposedly my fiancée, but I haven't seen her for weeks," Theo admitted.

"I don't want to make it appear worse than it is, Ashton, but this young lady has got some explaining to do. Sorry to drag you into this."

Theo and the officers were admitted by the maid, and subjected to a lengthy wait before the society girl descended to the library where her early visitors were seated.

Clarice was attired in a black satin coolie coat under which gleamed the shimmering folds of a suit of red pajamas. Her splendid legs were bare, and her feet were encased in mules to match her suit. She wore a rather blasé and impatient expression as she made her haughty entrance. Her careful make-up could not hide the dark lines under her eyes, and although she was vitally attractive,