

# SATAN'S HENCHMAN— *by Art Naylor*

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that the man took one of several letters that belonged here."

"What did he look like, mother?"  
"He was brown skinned, medium height, and very neatly dressed. He wore a light cap and overcoat, and a neatly pressed brown suit."

"That's the man who shadowed me," Theo informed her.

### Theo Talks to Mrs. Oliver

All the next morning Theo sat around the apartment restlessly, watching for the appearance of the man whom his mother had suspected of stealing a letter, but the man did not appear. There was no call from the police station, which augmented the fear that there was no clue as yet.

When the postman had passed on his noon delivery without the appearance of the stranger, Theo conceived the idea of calling on Oliver. He was in hopes he might find an opportunity to converse with Ethel, and his wish was gratified. It was Mrs. Oliver who admitted him, and informed him that her husband was down in the city, and Clarice had just left on a shopping trip.

"I'm glad of this opportunity to speak with you, Mrs. Oliver," Theo told her as he took a seat in the living room. He noticed at once the very poignant change which had come over the young matron. She seemed much older and burdened by some mental strain. There were circles under her eyes, and her attempt to appear flippant was forced.

"It's the first time you ever were," she answered him.

"I'm always glad to be able to do a person a good turn," Theo said.

"Oh, yeah? Could it be possible that I might be a candidate for one of your prize favors? You seemingly value them very highly, and in the past, the very recent past, you scorned me. Have you changed your mind?" She was rather sarcastic, and her whole attitude seemed to smack of resentment.

### Resents His Help

"No. Not in the matter to which you refer," Theo told her bluntly. "But I happen to know that you are one of the helpless victims in the coils of an octopus, and I thought, or at

least hoped, that you might appreciate an opportunity to secure your freedom."

"Just what do you mean?" Ethel asked, uncertain of his words.

"I'll not beat around the bush in this matter, Mrs. Oliver, but I know that J. Francis Bolton has it in his power to force you to comply with his every wish."

"What has given you such an idea as that?" she fenced, yet wavering under the shock of the surprise. "Do you realize what a serious accusation that is, unless you could prove it? You know you couldn't."

"Mrs. Oliver, I came to help you, not to threaten or exact anything. I know that you are, no doubt by fear, Bolton's mistress. I know, too, that you visited at his home and he ordered you to leave the basement door open for the hold-up—and you did it. He plans to take you to Paris with him. And I also know that you would do anything to gain possession of certain letters and photographs he has. Upon your last visit to him, and in his library, don't you remember that just before you left he took certain liberties?"

The young wife fell back in an agony of conviction. The flood-gates of her pent up emotions broke loose, with the release of her mental torture. She wept bitterly and sobbed out an hysterical confession of how Bolton, under a promise of marriage, had tricked her in her youth and had turned up again to defeat her efforts to go straight.

### Bolton Tortures His Victim

Slowly she regained her composure and listened eagerly to Theo's statement and promise. "I can and I will free you from the clutches of this man if you will help me and promise to hereafter be a true wife to your husband. I will restore to you, unopened and unviewed by anyone, even myself, your letters and photographs, and no one shall ever know."

"Oh, Theodore! If you could do that, I'd do anything on earth for you!" She wrung her hands, still doubtful of his ability. "But I don't believe you can do it. You don't know him as I do. He called me just before you arrived and he threatens me with immediate disgrace and torture unless I go to his house to-night. He blames me for the failure of his plans here last night. He seems to be half crazy."

"Well, you have nothing to be afraid of, for I possess the letters and the photographs now. Just remember your testimony will put him behind the bars. He'll have cause now to fear you as much as you have feared him. Furthermore, you are to go to his house to-night, for I want to hear what he has to say to you."

"Oh, I wouldn't dare face him! I have made up my mind to suffer the consequences," she protested.

"But I'll go along and slip into the house and protect you in every way."

"Then I'll do it, Theo, and you can depend upon me."

### Theo Hides in House

A sigh of relief escaped from the nervous woman as she hastily opened the packages and verified the contents. Then she threw them into the grate, struck a match to them, and watched them flame, like one hypnotized.

"You've given me a new lease on

life, and I'll do anything to help you. All I ask is your advice and friendship," she promised, proffering her hand, as he left.

It was again an easy matter for Theo to enter Bolton's darkened house and slip into the familiar secluded crevice. Bolton was not in evidence when he reached his hiding place, but quickly Theo detected voices coming from the floor above. Theo strained his ears, for a woman's sobs were mingled in the conversation. His heart skipped a beat as he associated the incident with the possibility of Marcia's presence. But his urge to venture out was squelched when the sounds of descending footsteps reached him.

As the huge bulk of Bolton reached the bottom of the steps, the bell rang, and he admitted Ethel Oliver. She followed her host back to the library, and he immediately began to berate her, demanding to know the cause and full details of his failure in the plan to secure the money from Oliver.

In a calm, steady voice, Ethel claimed ignorance of the whole affair—that she was in her own room during its occurrence.

"You're a liar!" Bolton hissed at her. "But I'm giving you one more

chance. You go immediately to the office where your husband is holding a conference, and tell him, for me, to send me that ten thousand at once, or I shall expose him in the morning. Also, that I have Clarice here and will show her up for what she is if he fails to do so."

### Clarice Aids Ethel

"I'm not going to do any such thing, and if there's any exposing to be done, you'll be the one to be exposed," Ethel told him.

"What do you mean?" Bolton demanded, taking a step closer to his intended victim.

At that instant a figure appeared in the doorway, a trembling figure, wretched and disheveled. It was Clarice Oliver, clad only in a pink silk step-in. Her hair was disarranged and her pretty face was marred by weeping.

"Ethel!" Clarice exclaimed, "What are you doing here?"

"I came to get you out of the clutches of this demon. What are you doing here?"

"He promised to marry me, but when I got here, he stripped me of my clothes and tried to force me to blackmail father to save myself."

The two women faced the sneering

Bolton, who pulled open the table drawer to discover the package he sought was missing. He became threatening in his bitter rage. "I suppose you are at the bottom of this, too. Well, I'll fix both of you."

But Bolton's contemplated action was interrupted when Terry entered the front door and slammed it shut. Clarice shrank behind a portiere, as Ethel remained in her position, but Terry entered, somewhat excited.

"Well?" snapped Bolton. "What about it?"

"Nothing doing, chief."

"Get back there and wait for the next one. I told you there were two trains in. Hurry, and don't you miss."

"I got three hours yet," muttered Terry, as he left.

"Now I'll fix you, you—," growled Bolton, as he made a lunge at Ethel. But that was all he did, for Theo Ashton promptly floored him. "You tell Clarice where her clothes are, before I signal for the police."

Bolton cringed, but complied, and in a few moments the two victims were on their way out. But as Theo reached the door behind them, a strong pair of arms grasped and bore him to the floor.

(To be continued)

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