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BLUE RIBBON FICTION IS FOUND EVERY WEEK IN
THE FEATURE SECTION

The Murder of Mrs. Stroud

Hale Thompson, the Great Detective, Solves Mystery of Strange Love Crime

Louise Stroud Lived with George Harcourt Before She Married. After Edgar Stroud Failed as a Husband, She Returned to George, But Edgar Continued to Visit Her Regularly for a Year. He Was Unable to Throw off the Attraction She Had for Him.

By EDWARD WORTHY

"This is the last night I will allow you to come here to see me, Edgar. You will either take me back and live together as man and wife should, or never come here again, because it isn't fair to George."

Edgar Stroud concealed his anger with an effort. For one year he had been coming to see his own wife in George's home.

His mind flashed back over the past. He had always felt that he had married beneath his standing in life, but his affections for his wife were of a passionate nature. She held a peculiar power over him. He was ashamed of their union, and yet he had not been able to keep away from her even after she had gone to live with another man.

Edgar Stroud had not been a lazy man, but his electrical business had not prospered. His wife had been bitter in her denunciation of his incapacity, and she had left him to live with George Harcourt. His hatred for George Harcourt was as deep in his heart as the passion was for his wife. Though his business was better than it had ever been, he had no intention of taking his wife back. It would only add to the miserableness of his life; the thought of what she had been to George would ever be fresh in his memory, and he knew he could never forgive her.

He always went to George's house

under the cover of the night when George Harcourt was at work at the steel mill, and planned her death, and the fastening of the crime upon George. Little did she reckon that her words had sealed her doom.

A few months previous he had stolen a knife from George Harcourt's dresser that bore George's initials. It was a ferocious looking instrument. In reality it was a dirk. Edgar had not lost much time in speculation on how George came to possess such an instrument. He only knew that it fitted in well with the heinous crime that was taking possession of his thoughts.

He had taken the dirk from his dresser drawer tonight, and wrapped it in a piece of paper he had torn from his newspaper rack. Now he congratulated himself on his foresight, for he must strike tonight or never!

His alibi would be perfect. He had taken care that no one would see him steal to George's home, to see his wife, Louise. Tonight, he had taken greater care than ever.

He lived with his sister and her husband. He had bid them good-night and gone to his room. He had switched on the lights and read for a while, then darkened his room. Apparently he had gone to bed. He had eased the window up and slipped out into the night.

"Then you don't love your husband anymore?" he sneered.

"That is all in the past," she replied.

She was refueling the fire with her face averted. He took the knife from his pocket and let the paper

it was wrapped in flutter to the floor.

He went swiftly over to her. An upward raise of the arm and a swift descent, and the cruel deed was done. There was no outcry as the sharp blade descended to her temple; only a grunt as she toppled to the floor.

Carefully he wiped his finger prints from the handle of the knife with his handkerchief. He had plenty of time, he told himself, as George did not get home till 11:20 o'clock and it was just 10 o'clock.

It had rained earlier in the day, and Edgar Stroud picked his way carefully trying to avoid stepping in the little puddles, back to his room.

George Harcourt would find himself in a terrible predicament when he came home tonight—Edgar gloated. If George left the knife in the wound like he had done, it would make the evidence stronger against him. If he removed the knife, it would not make much difference, because who would believe that George hadn't killed her? He had heard that they had often been heard quarreling.

That had been like her, he reflected; always nagging. He rarely could please her.

He had been passionately in love with her, when he married her. He knew that she had a lurid past, but he had thought his love for her would make him forget. But he hadn't forgotten. She had seemed to get a peculiar delight in keeping it fresh in his mind by constantly referring to the men who had loved her. He had finally come to despise her, and yet the thrill of being near her was intoxicating.

She had lived with George Harcourt as his common-law wife before they were married, and when she left him and went back to George, the desire for revenge on them both had been uppermost in his mind. Thus had been born the plan to kill her and shift the payment of the crime to George Harcourt. George would burn in the electric chair for it! he gloated.

Edgar Stroud felt no regret or remorse concerning his crime; rather, there was a complacency about him as one who has at last solved a problem that has vexed him for some time.

When he got into bed, he slept. He was awakened by someone rapping on his door. Like a flash the thought went through his mind—the police. He had expected them, naturally they would want to check up on his whereabouts of the night, but he wasn't afraid; they couldn't shatter his alibi.

He put on his lounging robe and went over and flung his door open. But it was not the police. George and another slender, immaculately dressed man, stood before the door. His brother-in-law stood to the rear of them with a perplexed expression on his face.

George Harcourt was the first to speak. "This is Hale Thompson, the criminologist of New York," he said. The criminologist extended his hand as his eyes seemed to bore into Edgar's very soul. He felt himself grow weak. He had heard of the noted colored detective.

As he invited them into the room, and closed the door, his mind was seething with questions. What was this detective doing here? Where were the police, and why hadn't George been arrested? But they didn't have anything on him; they couldn't prove that he had been to George's house.

The detective's sharp eyes began to explore the room, and Edgar felt that they missed nothing.

"I have some terrible news, Edgar," George began in that low, monotonous voice which Edgar had always hated.

"Louise is dead—murdered!" "Murdered?" Edgar gasped. "How who did it?" He congratulated



"The cruel deed was done. There was no outcry as the sharp blade descended . . . she toppled to the floor."

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