The Husband Hunter

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CHAPTER XI.

Natalie's lips stiffly framed the inevitable question: "Do what, Alan?"

He answered with a sneer: "Yes, I suppose I may expect you to try and bluff it out."

His laughing brown eyes were now like dark agate, glinting coldly at her.

"I am not bluffing, Alan," she said simply; "you will have to tell me what you mean."

Alan laughed, shortly, contemptuously. "Going to see it through along that line, are you? Innocence accused. Very well, then, let's bring it out in the open and see what comes of it. I mean why did you change the name of the stock in that letter?"

Natalie stared at him uncomprehendingly. Had he been even a little less inflamed with anger, he could have judged her expression with enough accuracy to know she was not simulating it. As it was, he thought she had made up her mind to carry her bluff to the end and he reacted by becoming more infuriated.

"Why don't you deny it?" he demanded fiercely, as her gaze remained upon his face, unchanging, fascinated.

Natalie merely shook her head. She was beginning to be afraid of him.

"What kind of woman are you, anyway?" he raved. "Jealous! Jealous! Jealous! Beastly jealous. And you had to pick on a woman who has never done you a bit of harm. A woman who is sick, the sole support of a kid whose father died to make the country safe for people like you—so you can cheat and rob his widow."

His wild words beat on her ears like blows, and the hollow, bitter, laughter that followed them was like an echo of some far-away sound. His denunciation numbed her with its shocking violence.

Could this be Alan torturing her so? She scarcely could think. Alan's eyes were black—she had never seen them black before. And that red light—oh, perhaps they were bloodshot. He must be ill! Something dreadful was the matter with him.

Letter? Letter? Letter? Why was he talking about a letter? The word, tormenting her brain, escaped from her lips in a weak utterance.

"That's right, Bernadine's letter," Alan thrust at her. "Come on, tell me, why did you do it?"

He advanced toward her, his lips twisting in his passion of temper. Natalie shrank back from him, visibly frightened.

"You deserve it," he snarled. "I ought to choke you, but I've got to save my hands for cleaner work. I've got to work, do you understand, and make up for your mischief."

His bloodshot eyes bored threateningly into her own feverish ones, but his half-raised hands dropped to his sides.

Natalie's face, aside from her burning eyes, seemed dead. It was white and set. Her lips frozen against any words that might have come to them. But there was nothing she wanted to say—and yet a thousand thoughts were on parade in her agonized mind.

"You haven't any defense, have you?" he taunted her. "Not a thing to say. Well, you're wise to keep quiet. God, I couldn't stand to hear you deny it! I've had enough of your saintliness that covers the cheapest kind of soul. But if you think you've a chance to hide under silence, just listen. I know what you did, all right.

"You came into my office when I was out and got hold of Mrs. Lamont's letter. It gave you your chance. You saw what you could do, but here's where you made your big mistake. You thought you would cause her to lose a pretty penny, but you're wrong. It's me you've damned near ruined."

He swept his arms in a circle to indicate the room. "All this," he said savagely. "Background! That's what you call it. But to me it's my earnings. Oh, yes. I could always make more—you knew that—it was never hard for me to make money. But what's become of it? We've saved precious little. And now, now I've got to make good what you tried to steal from Bernadine. You know what that means, don't you?"

Natalie continued to stare strickenly at his ferociously contorted mouth and reddened eyes. Her attitude drove him frantic.

"Why don't you say something? he yelled at her, unmindful of the inconsistency he was showing.

Still she did not speak, though her head moved a little in a pitiful, sidewise motion, and the numbness partially left her bloodless lips.

"So," he raved on, "because you fiendishly substituted a rotten stock for a good one in that letter, I've lost a small fortune." A grim laugh burst from his dry lips. "It wasn't so clever, was it, forgetting that I have a sense of honor even if you haven't? But the work was damned clever, I'll grant you that!"

It seemed now to Natalie that she must speak, must stop him, even though she had to answer blindly. For she only partly understood the nature of the charge he was bringing against her.

"Don't, don't, don't," she cried imploringly. "Oh, Alan, you can't believe that I would touch one of your letters? Surely you can't believe that? Why, I didn't even see a letter!"

"Never mind the high-minded stuff," he snarled at her. "The time for that is past. It only makes what you've done more hideous. Look at you. White and gold, and clean! You ought to be black, black, black! As black as hell. On, no, you wouldn't touch a letter that didn't belong to you. Look at your hands!"

His voice was stingingly sneering. "They're lovely, aren't they, your hands? Who'd ever think they could turn themselves to taking bread and butter out of a baby's mouth? Oh, no, you would not touch a letter. You wouldn't erase the name Bernadine wrote and put in one that's a joke on the market, would you? You did not know that "d fall for it because she got a tip from a man that even you know by his initials, did you? You haven't heard me mention him by them, have you?"

He broke off, breathless and panting.

Natalie's face was regaining its color under the smart to his words. She understood now. But not clearly. Her mind jumped to a false conclusion. Bernadine had done this, she believed. How, she did not know—she would need time to think it out. But Bernadine Lamont had done it. She had used her genius for evil to turn Alan into a blind fool, a mad, blind fool. He was Bernadine's now, heart, mind and soul.

Natalie told herself this with sickening despair. She saw that it was useless to try to convince him of her innocence at the present time. Perhaps—when his anger had abated—the thought held little of hope. A cold chill was creeping into the very core of her heart. Knowing how hateful was the thing Alan accused her of, she was beginning to feel that he could never have loved her to believe, for one minute, that she would be guilty of such a crime.

Her soul seemed dying within her, as though his words lay upon it with crushing weight. She put out a hand and groped for physical support. Oh, no, no, no, she must not show Alan her wounds. They were for her only to know about.

Alan laughed at her tottering progress to a chair. He did not know that her sight had left her, that she was literally blinded with pain.

"Good acting," he applauded. "Too bad to waste it on me alone. But you always were good at everything. Everything, that is, but matrimony. You've made a fine mess of that!"

Natalie reached her chair, and slipped limply into it. She did not see Alan go, but she heard him, dimly, as though the sound came from a world not her own.

Darkness descended upon her, engulfed her. Her body drooped over the arm of her chair. She was very still.

* * *

Alan went directly to Bernadine's house. She was at home. Dr. Wagnall had positively forbidden her to go to the club. She was both relieved and alarmed to see Alan.

"You look like . . . well, never mind," she greeted him.

"I know. Like nobody's business," Alan finished for her. "And this time that's not just slang, Bernadine. Nobody's business is just what I'll get if this keeps up. I can't stand it!"

"No," Bernadine said soothingly. "I know you can't. But don't try to be funny, Alan. This has got into you too deep for that. But come and sit down and let me make you comfortable."

She was, herself, barely able to stand on her feet, but she made the effort for Alan's sake. She did not want to guess that the financial blow she had just suffered had cost her much in physical strength as well.

"Have you any idea who did it?" Alan flung at her when she seated him in her living room.

She looked at him with Oriental inscrutability. "No," she lied, "have you?"

She seemed to know his belief in Natalie's guilt was affecting him as it would affect her if she were to see her son, Bobby, committing some ugly act. She felt deeply sorry for him.

"Well, I have," he declared, breathing heavily. "I know who did it."

Bernadine uttered a little cry. "Oh, Alan, are you sure?" she asked, pleadingly.

"It was Natalie," he answered, his voice as hard as steel.

"Oh, no, there must be some mistake," Bernadine cried. "Natalie is too lovely a woman to do anything like that. I know she is."

She saw at once that her remark was unfortunate. "That's just it," Alan declared. "That's what makes it so unforgivable. If I hadn't always thought her something to be worshiped, I could stand it better. But I'm glad I found her out at last. She'll never fool me again."

Bernadine looked at his hard, set face and trembled for Natalie. She wished she could say something, do something, to palliate his wife's offense, but in her heart she, too, was convinced of Natalie's guilt.

Alan moved, as though he were about to rise.

"Alan," Bernadine cried, fearfully, "what are you going to do?"

(To Be Continued)

PETE BRUDATT PUZZLES POLICE

Where did Pete Brudatt get:
20 cartons of cigarettes
7 old work shirts
6 new ladies silk bloomers
1 pair of new "Bear Brand" sox
1 new Enders No. 110 butcher knife
1 old pairing knife
1 new 4-inch screw driver
1 pair of scissors
1 new "Shapleighs" diamond edge camp axe
2 boxes of 250-3000 Savage "Peters" cartridges
1 new Gillette safety razor?

You see, Pete was arrested by Keith Ambrose, chief of police, under a warehouse with the above articles in a pack-sack. Finding no charge upon which to hold him he was released, only to be picked up in Chiloquin the following day by a deputy sheriff.

He hasn't worked for a year, he told the officers. He had $15 when he was arrested.

And yet, where did he get the articles and what use has he for them?

If anyone can answer that puzzler either Sheriff Lloyd Low or Chief of Police Keith Ambrose would like to talk with them.

For Results Use Herald Class Ads

AT THE KLAMATH THEATRES

AT THE PELICAN

Men who laugh at death and dare everything for love people Paramount's thrilling drama of the war aces, "Young Eagles." Charles (Buddy) Rogers is the star, the same Buddy who provided most of the romance and thrills in the daring war aviation epic, "Wings," and William ("Wings") Wellman directed. "Young Eagles" will be the smash-hit entertainment at the Pelican theatre, for two days, starting Sunday.

While "Wings" was primarily the story of friendship between brother pilots in the American air force, "Young Eagles" immortalizes the spirit of knight errantry which existed between the opposing pilots. These intrepid warriors of the skies battled ferociously and defied death daringly, yet they always insisted on a fair victory in a fair fight. There was a spirit of good-fellowship between the opposing aces, and this spirit "Young Eagles" has captured.

Buddy is the American ace who, in a thrilling air duel, brings down the redoubtable Paul Lukas within the American lines. Buddy assigned to convey Lucas to Paris where the secret service agents believe they can worm military secrets from him. Buddy and Lukas become good friends on the journey. In Paris, Buddy meets and falls in love with Jean Arthur. She dupes him, however; aids Lukas' escape, and leaves with him. Embittered, Buddy returns to the front. Later he meets Lukas in the air and brings his plane down in flames. Lukas tells him that Jean was working under instructions from the American secret service in Paris.

In addition to these three well-known and popular actors, the cast includes Stuart Erwin, who provided such a riot of fun as the dumb "Axel" of "Sweetie." Hundreds of dare-devil pilots stunt and zoom and zip in the air battle sequences, and an array of seasoned troupers play the character roles. Frank Ross, Jack Luden, George Irving and Stanley Blystone are in the cast.

AT THE PINE TREE

Scene from "Evidence" Starring Pauline Frederick - A Warner Bros Production

"Evidence," the Warner Bros. and Vitaphone all talking picture, starring Pauline Frederick, and coming to the Pine Tree theatre, Sunday next, is not the story of the usual domestic triangle. It may be called a quadrangle, with William Courtney, Conway Tearle and Lowell Sherman sharing the four corners of the plot with little Freddie Burke Frederick in the center.

As a stage play "Evidence" was recognized as a powerfully dramatic denunciation of "circumstantial evidence" and it had phenomenal success in both England and America. Miss Frederick is superb as the woman who pays the price of the law's blunder.

Every member of the cast has the training of both stage and screen. Aside from the principals mentioned above the cast includes Alec B. Francis, Lionel Belmore, Ivan Simpson, Myrna Loy, Madeline Seymore, J. Du Rocher, Mac Pherson is author of the play in which "Evidence" is based. J. Grubb Alexander did the scenario. John Adolfi, directed.

AT THE LIBERTY

Although not officially designated, Sunday will start "laugh week" in Klamath Falls. On that date the wisecracking, pugnacious and fundamentally funny Messrs. Cohen and Kelly will arrive here with their wives. After an absence of nearly a year they are returning in another of Universal's perennially, anatomy - splitting comedy series, the title this time being "The Cohens and Kellys in Atlantic City." It will play at the Liberty theatre.

The Cohens and Kellys on past performances have proved to be one of the funniest groups in motion pictures. Originated by Carl Laemmle several years ago, they swept the country, the first Cohen and Kelly picture proving the most successful comedy of the year. Even the astute Mr. Laemmle was surprised. The film is said to have started the popularity of Cohen-Kelly teams with producers and public.

As the title suggests, the new production was filmed mostly in Atlantic City. Director William Craft took advantage of the locale to organize one of the largest bathing beauty parades held there last summer. The parade, called a "Summer Girl Contest," is among the highest lights of the picture, and the winner, a high school girl named Elsie Allen, was afterward given a six-months trial contract at Universal studios.

"The Cohens and Kellys in Atlantic City" is a story of two business partners who can't get along with each other or without each other. This time they are in the knit good business and Craft took full advantage of this in showing behives of blondes and brunette bathing beauties.

George Sidney, Vera Gordon and Kate Price portray the same roles they did in the earlier versions. Mack Swain is the new addition as the Irishman. The four are said to suit their parts to perfection. Nora Lane, a new Hollywood favorite, and Cornelius Keefe, provide the romance. Virginia Sale and Tom Kennedy, a capable funster-duo, are also in the cast.

Craft's strong comedy sense, already shown by his success in directing a number of Glenn Tyron pictures, has added to the humor of the story.

SURE, IT'S A SIN

LONDON—One London barber wants it known that he refuses to cut the curly locks of females. He claims it's a sin. On the wall of his shop he has a sign quoting from Corinthians, "If a woman have long hair it is a glory to her." Despite his lack of woman patronage, he is doing a good business because males flock to his establishment to escape the association with women in other shops.

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