

The Argyle Case

A Novelization by J. W. McConaughy of the Successful New Play by Harriot Ford, Harvey J. O'Higgins and Detective William J. Burns, in Which Robert Hilliard Is Appearing...

SYNOPSIS

James Argyle, wealthy and eccentric, is found shot dead in the library of his New York home. His only son, Bruce, an artist, and his ward, Miss Mary Mazuret, are suspected. Asche Kayton, a detective of repute, is called in. He is given carte blanche as to expense and told to run down the murderer. The library where Mr. Argyle was shot is opened. Kayton and his assistant, Manning, arrive at the Argyle mansion. They question Finley, the butler, and search for finger prints in the hope of finding a clue. The detectives find a woman's finger prints on the library table. Mrs. Wyatt, Miss Mazuret's companion, tells Kayton that the girl's mother was a Mrs. Nellie Marsh of San Francisco. Kayton learns from the servants that Miss Mazuret was awake and about at the time the crime must have been committed. In the dead man's desk he finds an unusually fine counterfeit \$100 bill. Bruce Argyle comes in. He tells Kayton of the events of the evening before the murder. Reluctantly he admits seeing some one in the upper hall on the fatal night. Miss Mazuret, pale and worn, enters.

CHAPTER VII.

"She heard me come back!" KAYTON leaned forward until his face was less than two feet from hers. "And you thought that Bruce and his father were quarreling?" he declared in a low, tense voice. With a smothered scream the girl sprang to her feet. "No, no!" she gasped, clutching his arm frantically as he, too, rose. Her eyes were wide with horror and terror. "No, no! Afterward, when I saw what had happened, I knew it couldn't have been Bruce! You won't attach any importance to it, will you? You won't! I had no reason to think it was he—no real reason!"

"The detective, or rather the man in the detective, touched her hand with pressure that was gently reassuring. "Of course," he said gravely, "I understand that you concealed this because you were afraid it was Bruce." "No, no!" The denial was an entreaty. "I was afraid some one might think it was Bruce." "You were looking down from the upper hall?" went on Kayton. The girl gasped and gave him a startled, frightened look. "Yes," she whispered. "Why didn't you speak to him?" "I—I didn't want him to see me." She was crushing her handkerchief in

her fingers, and her face was turned away from him until he could barely see the line of the cheek. "Why not?" he demanded instantly. "I—I don't know. It was just instinctive," she stammered. "I thought afterward that I should have spoken to him." "What did you do after he had gone?" "I went back to my room and went to bed." Kayton paused for a moment. "You went right to sleep?" he suggested. "Well, after awhile." "And heard nothing more?" "No," very faintly. Again Kayton was silent for a few seconds. "Why couldn't he stay all night instead of going away in a storm like that?" he asked slowly. "Why," exclaimed the girl, with a start of surprise, "it didn't begin to rain until after midnight."

"Then you heard it rain," declared Kayton quickly. "Oh, yes," she said and then, as she saw the trap, added falteringly, "Y-e-s." Kayton was silent until his gaze had forced the girl to raise her eyes to his. His expression was a mixture of boredom and impatience. "I can't help you unless you trust me," he said, with gentle but none the less intended reproach. "What woke you up?" Miss Mazuret stared at the handkerchief she was twisting in her fingers. "It was a door—I heard a door close," she faltered. "Yes?" said Kayton encouragingly. She moistened her lips, and he could see the white throat working and straining in the effort to control her voice and the emotions that threatened to wreck it. "It—it seemed later than it really was," she went on. Again he touched her hand to let the girl know that he understood and sympathized, and she permitted him to lead her back to her chair. When he was again seated beside her and the girl was once more comparatively calm he resumed the inquiry. "Did you hear any one go out?" "I heard the door," Miss Mazuret replied, with more firmness than heretofore. "But I didn't go down—I was so unhappy!" "And you heard nothing more, so you went to sleep?" "The rain kept me awake for a long time," she replied mournfully. Kayton was silent for a brief space as if meditating new questions, and in the pause Manning returned. "Here are the finger prints, governor," he said. "One moment, Miss Mazuret," said Kayton, rising and going to meet his assistant. "Did you get them all, Joe?" "All but"—Manning nodded toward Miss Mazuret's back. Kayton took the sheets of paper and glanced over them. "Miss Mazuret," he said almost absently, "did you know that you were to be Mr. Argyle's sole heir under the will?" The girl turned and looked directly at him. "Yes," she said. "If this was the answer he had or had not expected the detective's face gave no sign. "Did you speak of it to any one?" he inquired. "Mr. Argyle asked me not to." "They were looking steadily into each other's eyes. "Did you know that he contemplated changing his will the day before his death?" he asked slowly. "Yes," the answer came simply and promptly. "I had been urging him to do it." Manning suppressed an unprofessional start and stared at the girl curiously. Kayton laid out a sheet of paper on the desk and a pad of ink and courteously motioned Miss Mazuret to approach. "We've taken the finger prints of every one in the house except you," he said. "Finger prints?" echoed the girl wonderingly. "What do you mean?" "You understand there are no two alike in all the world," he explained. "They're needed for identification purposes." Miss Mazuret looked at the paper and pad and at Kayton and back again. "What do I do?" she asked. "Just lay your fingers on this ink pad," he replied, showing her the method, "and then make the impression on this paper." The girl imitated him. "I can't hold my hands steady," she said pathetically. "That doesn't matter," he smiled. Mary looked at the print on the white paper and drew back with a little shiver. "What is it?" asked Kayton solicitously, glancing about. "Oh, it's so gruesome!" murmured the girl. Kayton looked at the paper as if he had never seen it in just that light before. Then he smiled and handed it to Manning, after which he went to the door and called Bruce and Mr. Hurley back into the room. He told Manning in a swift aside that he wanted to leave Bruce and Miss Mazuret together. "Mr. Hurley," he said when the gentleman had entered, "will you do me the kindness to show me Mr. Argyle's bedroom?" "Certainly, Mr. Kayton. Bruce?" "I'll show you," began the young man when Miss Mazuret interrupted. "I want to speak to you, Bruce," she said quickly. Hurley bowed to her and, taking Kayton's arm, walked out into the hall. A few seconds later Manning followed unostentatiously, leaving the door slightly ajar. At the foot of the stairs Kayton remembered something important and sent Manning on with the lawyer to inspect the bedroom. He softly approached the crack of the door and listened. "I told the detective," he heard Miss Mazuret say in a low strained voice. "What?" inquired Argyle. "Oh, Bruce," cried the girl tearfully, desperately, "can't you prove that you didn't come back here that night?" "Mary," exclaimed the young man, his voice low, shocked, "I don't know what you mean?" Kayton could hear the girl draw her breath, and he felt extremely sorry for her. "I was awake. I heard your father go to the door," she said brokenly. "Oh, I never meant to tell any one! But he made me. I don't know how. I told him I wasn't sure. Can't you prove that it wasn't you?" The next instant he had seized her roughly by both arms.



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"Mary," he cried harshly, "what are you saying—that you heard father let me in?" "Oh, Bruce," she pleaded piteously, "I thought I heard your voice—I thought I heard you quarreling!" "Fears were streaming down her face, but he hardly saw them. His voice was almost a scream. Kayton had no difficulty in hearing the words. "What have you been thinking—that I came back here and quarreled with my father—and how could you think such a thing?" "Oh, I didn't think it on purpose, Bruce—indeed I didn't! Please!" "What did you think?" he fairly belittled, shaking the girl roughly. "He was always so—so violent when he got angry with you—every word cost the girl an effort—I thought he did something—made an attack on you and you had to defend yourself! Of course—she clung to him piteously—"of course I knew it was an accident, Bruce! Don't look like that! Oh, Bruce!"

There was an instant of dead silence, and then Argyle spoke in tones of barely suppressed grief and rage beyond mere words. "Have you believed all this time that I killed my father?" "I tell you, Bruce," she pleaded, wringing her hands, "I thought it was an accident. I didn't blame you. I—" "An accident!" he broke out fiercely. "Why, if such a thing had happened wouldn't I have called you—routed the house—got help? How can you think such a thing, Mary—Mary? Do you think so now?" "No—no, Bruce!" she choked. "You couldn't have!" "You do!" he cried harshly. Miss Mazuret pressed her face to her hands and swayed in a paroxysm of grief. He stood, hard and accusing, and made no move to soothe her. "Oh—I don't know—I don't know!" she sobbed. "I'm afraid I'm losing my mind! It doesn't seem possible—that your father was killed! But he was—he was!"

Argyle waved his clinched fists wildly above his head. And at that moment Kayton slipped quietly into the room. "Come in, come in, Mr. Kayton," roared the young man in a frenzy. "We've got hold of something at last to give out! She—his finger stabbed at the girl's shrinking form—she heard me come back! That ought to satisfy the public—that ought to clear her! Give that out! I can stand it! I didn't come back!" And he flung himself from the room as Miss Mazuret collapsed in a chair. But as Kayton approached she staggered to her feet and all but fell in his arms. "Help us, help us!" she implored feverishly. "Don't say he came back here! I was wrong—I am sure I was! He says he didn't come! Please don't tell any one! What have I done? What have I done?" Kayton took a firm grip on the slender shoulders with his two strong hands, straightened the girl's clinging form and gazed into her face gravely, but kindly. "I want you to pull yourself together," he ordered in a tone of authority. "I'm going to need you—I'm counting on you. We need—you!" "Oh, I can't, I can't!" moaned the girl. "Yes, you can!" he interrupted grimly. "You're not that sort of a girl. You want to clear him, don't you, as much as he wants to clear you?" "Oh, yes, yes! Oh, I—" "Well, then, that's all right!" he declared heartily, giving the shoulders a rather vigorous pat as he released them. "You go to your room. I'll let you know when I need you."

He turned abruptly away as if to indicate that the matter was closed for the present, and Miss Mazuret dragged herself slowly, uncertainly to the door. Just before she passed out he called her by name, and she turned miserably toward him. He walked up swiftly and again placed his hands on her shoulders. "Before you go," he said gravely, "I want you to promise me that you won't worry any more. I can't say definitely as yet who is responsible for all this, but I can tell you this much—I know that neither you nor Bruce had anything to do with it." It is given to few men to win, with a few mere words, the reward in overflowing joy and gratitude that leaped to the eyes of the miserable girl. "You do," she gasped incredulously. He nodded slowly and smiled. "I do." "Oh, oh!" There was a rush of sobs. "Thank you, Mr. Kayton." And she was gone. When Manning

returned some minutes later he found his chief staring vacantly up the deserted hall. He coughed and gained no attention. "H'm!" he repeated a little more loudly. "Have you got anything yet I can work on, governor?"

Kayton came back to his job with a start. "Wh-what?" he demanded, with a frown. "I say," repeated Manning deliberately, "have you got anything I can work on?"

"Yes," replied Kayton, with a swift change to his wonted alertness. "Call up Wilkie, Joe."

"Chief Wilkie, Washington!" exclaimed Manning in surprise. "Yes," snapped his chief sharply. "Did you think the secret service had moved? 6400 Main."

While Manning was deep in a subdued but heated argument with the long distance operator Kayton busied himself with the finger prints. "Did you get the woman's thumb prints under the edge here, Joe?" he called out.

"Yes, sir," replied the young man, with his hand over the mouthpiece. "The right hand one came out fine—perfect! Is it the girl?" he added as his chief subjected sheet after sheet to a close scrutiny under his powerful pocket lens.

"No," replied Kayton curtly. "Is she in the bunch?" inquired Manning after another minute's wait, in which he swore fluently but guardedly at the telephone company, its works, equipment and operating staff.

Kayton dropped the sheets of paper on the table and looked up with a queer light in his eyes. "Joe," he said, "this woman came from the outside."

Manning whistled into the telephone and hastily clapped his hand over the mouthpiece again. "Gee!" he grunted. "That's a big order. Hello! Is the chief in? Mr. Kayton wants to speak to him. Here he is, governor. Just a minute!"

"Cover the doors, Joe!" ordered Kayton, taking the phone. Manning swiftly and quietly opened both doors, peered about, and then stepped out into the hall.

"Hello, chief!" said Kayton distinctly, but in a somewhat guarded tone. "Oh, hard at work! Have you any record of a counterfeit \$100 gold certificate—E-9-7-3—Don't you get it? I can't very well. A, B, C, D, E! Yes, that's it. Series of 1907. Yes, that's it. You haven't? Well, I've got one here that I thought might be bad. No-o, but it's a little light. If it's counterfeit it's the best one I've seen. No. They must miss

And Kayton's specialty was conserving and concentrating his energies. When he returned from Pittsburgh he did not know who had killed Mr. Argyle. He strongly suspected that Mr. Hurley knew more than he was telling, and his plans had been laid with a view to eliminating the lawyer or fastening guilt upon him. He did not know which would result. He was not guessing. He had not made up his mind that the lawyer was in the mesh of the true crime. So he had to make certain just where this figure stood in the game before he could proceed along new lines with certainty.

He was expected at his office the second morning after his departure for Pittsburgh, and the newspapers confirmed the report of his return. They confirmed it by telling in seven column headlines what he had done in Pittsburgh.

Leischmann, the manager, and Nash, a veteran aid of the great detective, who was allowed all sorts of privileges, were awaiting him in the private office and discussing the news from Pittsburgh when Kayton arrived.

The chief carried a little grip and also some few signs of two successive nights in a sleeping car, but he seemed as calmly energetic as ever. "Hello, boys," he said, with a nod. "Morning, governor," responded his aids. Kayton stripped off overcoat and gloves, hung his hat and turned to his desk, rubbing his hands to get the morning chill out of the fingers. "Is Cortwright out there?" he inquired without further formality. "Yes."

"Send him in."

Leischmann disappeared and there came presently into the office a man of about forty who might have been cashier of a reliable bank. He was well dressed. His face was round and honest. His eyes were bright and his speech and gaze were direct and straightforward.

"Good morning, governor," he said pleasantly, but respectfully. "Good morning, Cortwright," returned his chief, looking up with a cheerful smile. "Tell me about this report on the Argyle case." His hand fell on a mass of typewritten manuscript. "Well, we've run out all the inside servants," said Cortwright, "and the cook and the chauffeur. Nothing wrong there at all. We've found the policeman that was on the beat. He has nothing. We looked up some of the discharged servants—a coachman. Nothing to that."

"All right. That's all," he nodded, and Cortwright withdrew. Kayton picked up the receiver of a desk phone. "Send Joe in here," he ordered, and presently Manning walked in with a broad, red scratch like a birkmark on his cheek. "Hello, Joe. Marked for identification?" Manning slowly raised both hands to his face—one to feel tenderness of the wound on his cheek and the other to carry to his teeth the apple he was eating. "Picked that up trailing Hurley," he mumbled cheerily, his mouth full of fruit. "A fresh cop tried to follow me, and I fell down a fire escape."

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"I'll keep you posted," Kayton assured him, and with a nod Mr. Hurley withdrew. "Ask Mr. Colt to come right in," said Kayton into the phone.

him confidence in me. Are you through here?" he inquired as Kayton picked up his hat and slipped on a light overcoat. "Yes," replied the detective. "Call me up in the morning if I can be of any help to you," offered the lawyer, also making ready to leave. "I'll be in Pittsburgh," said Kayton briefly. "Oh! You are going away?" Mr. Hurley was interested. "Yes, for the day. My operatives have just rounded up a case there, and I've got to see the man and pull him across. Expect to take the night train back."

"I'll see you the day after tomorrow, then," said the lawyer with a nod of farewell as he walked slowly out. "Yes, do," said Kayton. The detective buttoned his overcoat, ran his eye about the room again as if to make sure he had overlooked nothing and then turned to his assistant with a brief command: "Joe, trail Hurley."

Manning was not an easily surprised young man, but now his jaw almost dropped with amazement. "Wh-a-t!" he exclaimed. "Hurley?" Kayton chewed his cigar, and an amused gleam came to the corners of his eyes as he surveyed his assistant. "Haven't you been listening to him?" he asked.

"No, not particularly," Manning admitted. "Well, you should have," commented his chief grimly. "That's your business. His way off from normal. When a man says 'Now I'll tell you about that' it's one safe bet he's lying. Trail him!"

Ten seconds later the lawyer had an ever invisible but ever present shadow. Contrary to the copy book wisdom on the subject, swift action is not a habit. Persons who habitually hurry are merely fussy. They seldom accomplish much beyond an appearance of activity which is deceiving to the unversed, and they also succeed in irritating real workmen nervous and irritated. Such people are worse than useless in a crisis. It is the even tempered man who conserves his energy and never hurries until it is absolutely necessary, who delivers the swift thunderbolts of action that dazzle the world.

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"Well, one of the evening papers played it up yesterday. Their men beat it to Tolworthy's, and when they couldn't find out anything they chucked in some more mystery about a new murder case and a missing heir to the Argyle estate."

Kayton nodded happily. "Well, if she doesn't see the personal that stuff ought to reach her." The desk phone rang, and the attendant at the outer door informed him that Mr. Hurley was asking for Mr. Kayton. The detective's eyes glinted, and he made a gesture to Manning. "Hurley? Send him right in. Here, Joe, take these telegrams"—he handed a number of yellow sheets—"they're all mixed up with a half dozen aliases for each counterfeit. Pick out the information and make me a sort of record of past performances. Sit over there at the desk"—he pointed to one in a corner and added meaningfully—"and keep an ear this way for Hurley."

Manning took off his coat and hat and placed himself as ordered. Kayton took out a box of cigars. It one and leaned back in his chair, puffing contentedly as the massive form of the lawyer pushed through the door. "I just wanted to speak to you for a moment, Mr. Kayton," said the lawyer pleasantly, advancing to the desk and shaking hands. "Glad to see you any time, Mr. Hurley," returned Kayton cordially, offering the box of cigars. "I expect to get a good deal of assistance from you."

"I don't know about that," laughed Mr. Hurley, selecting a cigar and availing himself of the lighted match the detective held out. "But, of course, I'll be glad to do anything I can."

Kayton nodded, and his visitor took a chair, facing him. "By the way," resumed Mr. Hurley, puffing with a smoker's appreciation of a treat, "in line with your theory that it was an old servant who was blackmailing, it occurred to me that they used to have a coachman who may have a grievance because the chauffeur supplanted him."

The detective was impressed. "Do you remember his name?" he inquired, picking up a pencil. "No, but I suppose the family would have it."

"Thanks. I'll look him up."

"I saw the Tolworthy & Mead personal in the morning paper," remarked Hurley, "and I thought it might be a new clew, but they say not. They referred me to you."

"Yes," Kayton nodded frankly. "They consulted me. You see, it appears that in Mr. Argyle's will, drawn up by the old head of the firm, there was a legacy to a Miss Nellie Marsh. There's no knowledge now in that office of Nellie Marsh. The information evidently rested only with old Mr. Tolworthy and Mr. Argyle. The firm asked the how to locate her, thinking there might be some scandal."

"Yes, yes!" chimed in Mr. Hurley, betraying a hasty concealed eagerness. "And for that reason," continued Kayton, apparently without noticing the other's manner, "we used only the initials. Did you ever hear Mr. Argyle refer to a Miss Marsh?" Mr. Hurley stroked his chin. "Well, now, I'll tell you about that," he said reflectively. "When we were discussing the new will we didn't get to the lesser legatees."

"Oh, it's too large a sum to have been simply a bequest to an old servant!" protested Kayton. "It runs well up in the thousands."

"Well, in that case," said Mr. Hurley without interest, "the person will probably be expecting to be remembered by Mr. Argyle and show up."

"Oh, yes," agreed Kayton. "The whole thing may be perfectly innocent, but to avoid anything unpleasant for the family the lawyers thought they had better be on the safe side. By the way, Mr. Hurley, you understand, of course, that this is strictly confidential?" "Oh, of course—of course!" exclaimed the lawyer hastily. The telephone bell rang, and as Kayton turned to the instrument Mr. Hurley rose. "Well, I won't take up any more of your time," he said. "Going so soon? Well, come in again, Mr. Hurley," invited the detective. "Thank you, I will," declared the lawyer. "I shall be interested to hear if there's any new development in the case."

"I'll keep you posted," Kayton assured him, and with a nod Mr. Hurley withdrew. "Ask Mr. Colt to come right in," said Kayton into the phone.

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