

# THE MASTER MIND

Novelized by Marvin Dana, Author of "Within the Law," From the Successful Play by Daniel D. Carter

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The day of doom, then, was near at hand. It took all the lover's strength of will to hide from his bride the shock he had sustained, but somehow he car-



Lovers They Were.

ried the effort through to success, and Lucene had no suspicion that all was not well with the man she so worshipped. But, at once on his return from the wedding journey, Wainwright summoned Marshall, the Pinkerton agent, and directed the detective to discover the mysterious foe.

Nevertheless he was happy in his life, happy beyond what he had ever conceived as possible, for the love between him and his wife was a perfect love. The vengeance that threatened him was not one to make a brave man weaken, for it was undesired. He had no sin on his conscience. He could hold fast to his happiness undisturbed.

It was otherwise with Lucene. The burden of guilt dashed her forces. She had pleaded with Andrew in vain for the privilege of open confession, of the whole truth concerning her past life, to her husband. Such candor had been the instinct of her innocence, and that instinct was never slain, though choked to slumber by the specious sophistry of the Master Mind. He succeeded, however, in convincing her superficially that perfect frankness to her husband would repel, would drive the lover from her arms.

If Wainwright was the one most happy in wholesome wise it was the Master Mind himself who found an unholy happiness in the bizarre situation that he had contrived so cunningly for the ultimate accomplishment of his revenge. Thus far in truth his success had been unequivocal. There had been no failure anywhere in the processes he had evolved for the consummation of his revenge against the man he hated.

In the drawing room of the Wainwright mansion Blount was pacing to and fro somewhat nervously, brooding over many things and wondering mightily as to when he should be permitted to return to the tranquil pleasures of Laramie, Wyo., where he knew not fear and where he was respected of all men. Mrs. Blount and Lucene sat near each other by the windows, looking out over the fast darkening landscape. But presently Mrs. Blount turned to her husband.

"My goodness, John!" she exclaimed reproachfully. "I do wish son-in-law would hurry up. Why, I'm so horribly hungry I'm fading away to a shadow."

Blount halted.

"You're really hungry, mother?" he demanded.

"Hungry, mother?" she cried. "Well, I guess yes! Why, I ain't had a mouthful since din'-lunch. And I didn't think much of that if you ask me—so there! Quiser old soup!"

"You had some fresh steaks besides the soup," the husband reminded her.

Lucene, also, turned toward the two and smiled demurely.

"And you had three lamb chops, breaded."

Lucene nodded assent.

"Yes, and some fruit salad."

"And three pieces of pumpkin pie," quoth the husband.

"And a pot of chocolate," declared the mistress of the house, laughing outright.

"Dearie me!" Mrs. Blount said laughingly, facing the young wife. "To hear you talk anybody'd think you've grudging me enough food to keep body and skirt together."

Parker, whom Andrew had brought on to the new establishment, appeared with the announcement that dinner was served.

Mrs. Blount bolted in the direction of the dining room. But the westerner turned courteously to his hostess.

"Come on, Lucene," he said kindly. The distressed girl, however, refused with a shake of the head.

"You go, please," she directed. "I prefer to wait for Cortland. He's in the library talking politics with his campaign secretary, but he must come soon."

"With Mr. Marshall, eh? And does he think he's going to be elected?" Lucene forgot her trouble for a moment in her interest over the political fortunes of the man she loved, as Blount had hoped she might.

"He's not sure," she replied animatedly.

"Mistress of the executive mansion at Albany?" Blount said, half banteringly. "Him! Pretty soft for you if he pulls it off, eh, daughter?"

Lucene laughed happily.

"Go to dinner," she repeated. "I think I'll go and hurry Cortland up."

Blount went his way obediently since he saw that such was her preference. The dilatory husband made his appearance to be greeted with an exclamation of pleasure by his wife.

"I was waiting for you, Cortland," she said fondly. "I couldn't bear the idea of going in without you, for I was worried. You must not work so hard. You'll get sick."

"Nonsense!" he answered gayly. "I'm as strong as an ox." He stooped and raised her to his side, drew her close and the lips of the two met in a tender caress.

"But even oxen get sick sometimes, I suppose," Lucene said, with a pout. "Anyhow, we must go to dinner. You must have food for work, like the beasts of the field, you dear, big, silly man!" the wife said, with a huge content in her voice.

"Oh, you adorable, lovely little woman!" he said affectionately.

Of a sudden he released her, put her from him, to her hurt surprise. "That poem," he muttered, and picked up a book from the nearby table, with which he returned to Lucene. "Do you know, I've found some verses here that might have been written for you and me. Somehow it seems that one takes to poetry naturally when in love. Listen, dearest, to this stanza:

"I have led her home, my love,  
My only friend;  
There is none like her—none!"

A kiss made sweet caress in the rhythm of the verse.

Then he read on:

"And never so warmly ran my blood,  
And sweetly on an on—  
Calming itself—"

The soft palm of the girl on his lips brought the reading to an end.

"Oh, please, please—you mustn't—you mustn't!" The low voice was pleading.

"Why not?" Wainwright demanded, greatly surprised by this insistence, a little grieved.

"Oh, if you only knew! If you only knew!" The words came walling. As she uttered them, Lucene sprang from him and turned her face aside.

"See here, dearest," Wainwright explained, in much distress over her sudden dejection. "You're not—not worrying over anything, are you?"

"There's nothing the matter—nothing whatever. Only sometimes I—I'm so happy that I just know it can't possibly last."

Wainwright smiled gently.

"You mean you're so happy that you're troubled?"

"Yes," she said, but she did not yet lift her eyes to his.

"And that's all?"

"Yes, that's all." Still the eyes remained downcast.

## CHAPTER IX.

### The Advent of Creegan.

WALTER sought the library immediately after dinner, to smoke and to brood over various personal concerns of his own. He found, indeed, that his moods were fickle to such an extent that he hardly knew from hour to hour whether he were glad or wretched. Always, at the back of his thought, there was the haunting dread of the detective that sought his trail.

On account of them he was grateful for this refuge. But, on the other hand, he experienced a growing alarm over this intimate relation with Wainwright, the renowned foe of criminals such as he. There was something mysterious to Walter in the fact that he, the thief, was being posed openly, if not boldly, as the brother-in-law of the most effective district attorney New York had ever possessed, whose popularity thus secured made fair now to make the man the chief executive of the state. This association with Wainwright kept the youth in a constant tremor of apprehension lest the worst befall. He expostulated in vain with Andrew, who treated him and his arguments with a galling contempt. His offer to the disdain of the Master Jay in the patent admiration accorded him by Helen Wainwright, the great man's sister, who, to be sure, was merely a schoolgirl of sixteen, on her vacation, yet the happiness to a tidy fortune and remarkably pretty, if not especially burdened with brains. With something of her brother's power of idealization, though with a less worthy subject, she was able to see in Walter excellence enough to make him the hero of her first foolish maidenly dreaming.

On his part, Walter, drawn by her

dutiful face and demure manner, was inclined to think that he might make himself a safe position in the world and secure a satisfactory living without work by marrying this broad and butter miss. Unfortunately, however, he soon found that the carrying out of his design was beset with difficulties, for somehow latterly it seemed that he was never to see Helen for a moment alone, much less given opportunity for an elopement even were the preliminary arrangements made.

As he meditated now, it was clear to him that he must appeal directly to Lucene for aid in the execution of his purpose. Under this necessity he was irritated by the fact that already, under Andrew's compulsion, he had set himself before his putative sister in a remarkably bad light. He had been forced to pretend financial distress to her and beg her to help him in saving him from exposure and disgrace. Naturally, to save the possibility of having the whole hateful truth to her husband, Mrs. Wainwright had yielded to his demands and supplied him repeatedly with money without her husband's knowledge. The fact increased her self contempt. But Walter's sole concern in the matter was dissatisfaction over the effect these transactions must have in making her hostile to himself and so an obstacle, not a help, in his plan to possess Helen.

Walter scowled as he reflected on the fact that this financial intruding with Lucene was altogether an annoyance to him since even the money involved did not remain with him, but was invariably turned over to Andrew by that taskmaster's orders. "Devilish poor pickings, I call it!" was the thief's unspoken comment, with a sneer. Anyhow, he decided he must make the effort to enlist Lucene's assistance in his wooing of Helen. With this resolve he looked up to behold Parker in the doorway.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," was the announcement.

Walter was astonished and alarmed, for he knew of no acquaintance likely to be within miles of this neighborhood and certainly none aware of his identity as Walter Blount. But before he could determine an answer to the waiting servant Andrew himself appeared.

"Pardon me, sir," he said in tones of the utmost respect; "but perhaps you had better leave the matter to me. I think I know the man's business. It is really not of the least importance, sir." He gave a low order to Parker.

"Oh, all right, if you say so," Walter returned, grumpily, conceding the relief he felt in learning that this was probably another of his tyrant's contrivances rather than a pursuer on his own trail. "Who is the guy?" he asked, as Parker disappeared after the low spoken command from his employer.

Andrew regarded the young man with watery eyes, through narrow lids.

"That," he said gently, but with an infection that was convincing, "is one question too many." Then, he turned slowly, and went out of the room, untroubled of the scowling thief, who cried helplessly under his domination.

Andrew, after leaving the library, ascended directly to his own room at the top of the house and there found the caller whom Parker had just guided thither.

"My eye!" the somewhat rough appearing individual remarked amiably, as the Master Mind entered. "This is some swell joint, boy?"

"Mr. Wainwright will be pleased with your commendation, sir." Andrew answered, with a manner of habitual servility.

"Say, don't you get fresh, old geezer!" the visitor exclaimed angrily. "And, anyhow, why am I tucked up here in the attic. What's the game, eh? He stood for a moment, blink long thoughtfully at the butler of the household, and a sudden recollection assailed him. "Wainwright's just got married—what?"

"Yes, sir," Andrew replied, still in his assumed character. "Can you see my lady's ditty over a skirt?"

Andrew then said:

"And, if you should be caught, for a further defense you might perhaps say that robbery was not your intent, but that instead you were here for a meeting with the lady—at her request."

Once again Creegan gaped sheer amazement. Then, swiftly, the light of

understanding twinkled in his little eyes.

"I'm wise, 'bo—I'm wise!" he chuckled, with a villainous smirk. "Now, where do they keep the sparklers?"

Fortwith Andrew entered into a detailed explanation concerning the plan of the house, with particular reference to the library, in an alcove of which the safe was set.

"And now," he concluded, "as to the time tonight when you should start operations, I have only to make a suggestion. This room of mine, as you perceive, is situated in the cupola of the house, with windows on each side. In its way it's a sort of beacon at night. The lodgekeeper says that when I put out my light he is sure that every one else in the house is sleeping."

"I got ye, Steve—I got ye!" Creegan declared. Then, in another moment, he spoke with a half-shamed eagerness: "Say, she didn't send for me, did she?"

"That is a leading question," was the answer, with a noncommittal smile.

"What's that to you?" the fellow snarled, his small eyes lowering.

Andrew wasted not time.

"Your name is Creegan," he said coldly. "You were sent here by Mr. Wainwright."

"Well, now, Mr. Know-it-all," was the insolent retort, "maybe I was, and maybe I wasn't. What's the answer?"

"You were to inquire for Walter Blount, but another person was to give you a sign." Andrew set the fingers of his right hand to the familiar symbol of protection against the evil eye.

The heavy face of the visitor relaxed instantly, and he breathed a sigh of relief.

"So you're the guy!" he growled.

"I'm the man, yes," Andrew corrected.

Creegan went close and spoke in a whisper, his face lighted now with a glow of avarice.

"Listen!" he said rapidly. "The boss said this was a pipe, that there'd be ten thousand in the haul for me, and even if I was plucked they wouldn't do anything to me. That gets my nanny. Say, is it on the level?"

"It is."

"Just the same," Creegan insisted violently, "you got to show me. I tell you I ain't a bit stuck on it. Yep, you got to show me. If it's such a pipe why did you send all the way to Chicago for me when New York's full of smooth propositions just askin' for the chance?"

Andrew made no answer in words, but went to his bureau, from which he took out a japanned tin box, which he unlocked with a key from his ring. He brought forth a photograph, which he passed to the curious Creegan.

A single glance sufficed the man. He stared at Andrew in stark amazement.

"Well, I'll be—!" he gasped.

"Maggie—Maggie Flint!" He regarded the photograph again, astounded.

"Say," he demanded curiously, looking up again, "how did that come here?"

Andrew put forth his hand, possessed himself of the photograph and restored it to the box, which he carefully locked and replaced in the drawer before answering; then at last he turned to the impatiently waiting Creegan, whose thick lips were twitching from nervous excitement.

"Now suppose," he said evenly, "for example, that you planned to steal some valuable jewels you have heard spoken of."

Creegan's eyes grew furtive.

"Like the Wainwright sparklers, hey?"

"And let us suppose further," Andrew continued imperturbably, "that you were apprehended in the act."

The supposition appeared to disconcert Creegan, if one might judge by the thick furrows in his forehead and the savage tightening of his lips.

"Say, you," he grunted. "Just you parade the kind of talk I know. Get that?"

"Suppose you get pinched, collared," Andrew amended tranquilly. "And, furthermore, let us suppose that the owner of the jewels was of an old and honorable family and at this particular time a nominee for high office. Now, do you think he would risk scandal by presenting you if it so chanced that you recognized in his wife some one you had known in very different circumstances, some one named, let us say, Maggie Flint?"

A silence fell, in which Andrew stood immobile, impassive, regarding his new tool with a calm yet piercing scrutiny, and Creegan rested aghape, his widened eyes fast on the other, striving dumbly to digest the bewildering fact that the girl with whom he had wandered fondly in the streets of Chicago years before was become in very truth the mistress of this mansion. At last he shook his head incredulously.

"No," he muttered. "It can't be Maggie—the wife of that swell guy, Wainwright."

"But it is!" Andrew retorted sharply, and the words carried conviction.

"Gee! Maggie!" he mumbled confusedly. "Well, I'm a son of a gun!"

"I am to understand, then," the Master Mind suggested suavely, "that you know the lady?"

Creegan's dull face lightened instantly. Something of the bestiality bred out of evil years fell from him.

"Do I? Why, I know her from 'way back. Guess she come from pretty good stock, though her old man was down and out when I knew 'em. She had darn poor pickles, Maggie had. Any other skirt with her looks would have gone to the bad hockety split; but not her! Worked in factories and then got a job after her father died as nurse girl. I got foothold over that kid myself. I'd just about made up my mind to marry her when she was caught with the goods and sent to state. Never could see why she did it. It wasn't like her to steal. I tried to find her when she come out, but there wasn't nothin' doin'. And I was dippy over her, Gee!" he concluded sheepishly. "Can you see my lady's ditty over a skirt?"

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