

THE MASTER MIND

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

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Farther down the room toward the rear, the alcove, in which was the safe, showed its draperies of portieres along the line of the opposite wall. Facing him, a little further toward the front, was the wide doorway into the hall, through which was to be seen a part of the staircase. The softly burning hall light cast its illumination over the stairs and hall itself, and shone through the doorway into the library, though the radiance here was dimmed so that objects were only barely visible in shadowy wise. From time to time the detective had undertaken a cautious round of the house to make sure that nothing of a nefarious sort was anywhere under way. But as the appointed hour of Andrew's promised burglary approached he held his position immovably in the window seat, where the drawn hangings hid him well while permitting his espionage. Then a faint sound from the stairway caught his ear, and he peered forth in anxious expectancy.

Presently a soft noise near at hand caught the attentive ear of the detective. A gentle creaking sound followed and Marshall was speedily aware, of his professional experience, that the window further down the room was being skillfully opened.

Then, after an interval of silence, a pencil of light, the beam of an electric torch, shone from between the hangings of the rear window. The light moved slowly to and fro, taking its survey of the room with a leisurely thoroughness that again provoked Marshall to appreciation of the marauder's adept methods. Then, at last, the radiance rested for a second time on the alcove, and there continued for an appreciable period. The light vanished. There was no sound, but Marshall knew that the thief was stealing on silent feet through the shadows of the room, that he had come to the safe, that he was ready to—yes, a glow of light became faintly visible within the recess.

The detective prepared for action by pulling a blackback from his pocket. He parted the curtains, and would have issued from his retreat, when again his attention was held by a wisp of sound. He waited, in tense silence, his eyes raving, for he was uncertain as to the direction whence the noise had issued. Then his glance caught sight of a form moving slowly on the stairway. In the first instant he perceived with a start of astonishment, that the new intruder on the scene was a woman, in the next, as the face was lifted so that the feeble light of the hall lamp fell full on it, he recognized Mrs. Wainwright, and his earlier feeling of surprise was lost in total dismay.

For the woman's manner was plain proof of guilt—of what guilt the spying man could hazard no guess, but guilt none the less. Her gait was not merely slow, it was stealthy, with the awkward steadiness of one wholly unaccustomed, and the gaze that darted here and there so hurriedly was furtive, laden with fear of discovery. These evidences were reinforced by the shudder that now and again shook her visibly. Marshall was appalled by this latest development in the mystery that beset the man he sought to solve.

The soft gleam in the alcove became discernible to her. At first glimpses of it she halted, and a smothered gasp of terror broke from her lips. She stood rigid, looking straight before her with dilated eyes. Then, at last, she swayed a little, tensed swiftly and went forward again. When she was come to the alcove she pushed the draperies apart and resolutely stepped within. The portieres closed behind her. Marshall crushed back an oath of amazement.

Yet for a brief season the detective was held inactive by stark bewilderment. Then, to his astonished ears came a hushed sound of whispering from beyond the curtains of the alcove. It was incredible, monstrous, that this should be. Nevertheless, the truth was palpable. There was no outcry, no shriek for help from the woman, no flight by a safety seeking house-breaker. Instead there was only whispering, this secret conference in the dead of night between the thief and the mistress of the mansion. Suddenly another idea flashed in his brain, impelled him to immediate endeavor. Was it necessary, after all, that Wainwright himself should ever know the whole hateful truth? Perhaps, even, there might be some explanation of the wife's guilt that fell short of infamy.

Firm of purpose at last, Marshall crept slowly across the room to the alcove. Now he could hear the two within more plainly, and he listened eagerly, but the words were unintelligible. Convinced that longer effort at eavesdropping would avail naught, the detective, with his weapon ready, put forth a cautious hand and parted the draperies.

Notwithstanding all his palooking, something betrayed his new presence to the keen senses of the burglar. As the portieres moved slowly apart under Marshall's careful fingers there came a

sudden flash of light full in his face. Blindly he sprang forward and found himself in grapple with the thief. A scream came from the woman. The torch fell to the floor, to be crushed a moment later under the feet of the men. The woman shrank in a corner, half swooning. The men writhed and tottered to and fro, scuffling over the thick pile of velvet. The weapon of the detective gave him an advantage. One fierce blow struck the back of Creagan's head, and the man lurched heavily to the floor.

Marshall, after an instant's panting pause, got out his own torch and turned its light on the scene. He saw the woman crouching miserably against the wall. On the floor the thief was moaning faintly. Then the detective's eyes caught sight of another object on the floor. He bent and picked it up—a sheaf of bills of large denomination.

Here was more mystery. But there was no time now to bother with it! He thrust the bills into his coat pocket. Marshall stepped to the main electric switch and flooded the whole room with radiance. Once again Lucene stifled a cry as the brilliant illumination blinded her. The stricken burglar stirred and groaned, and then unclosed his eyes and lay blinking dazedly for a few seconds. But soon he sat up, very clumsily, and put a wavering hand to his head. He brought away the fingers all bloody, and regarded the stains with disgust.

"He'll do well enough now," Marshall stated, as he looked up and met the alarmed gaze of the woman.

Creagan, following the direction of the detective's glance, turned his head weakly and perceived the girl, where she stood against the wall. His coarse face twisted into a grin.

"Hello, Maggie," he mumbled. "Say, the bull near croaked me."

"But you will be able to go in a minute," Lucene urged, wringing her hands in desperation. "Oh, please! You must! Mr. Marshall will give you the money. He picked it up."

"I'll take you along when I go," Creagan snarled.

"What do you mean?" she gasped.

But Marshall interrupted roughly.

"Here, you!" he snapped at Creagan. "You get a hustle on yourself." He seized the burglar by the collar and jerked him to his feet. "Go on and get out of here! Didn't you hear what the lady said?"

"Gimme back that roll she give me!" he commanded surlily.

"You stand a fat chance of getting that," Marshall exclaimed with a sneer. Then, as the thief moved a little, "None of that side stepping, either!"

"Oh, I ain't trying to beat it," Creagan declared. "I don't have to."

Marshall rested wordless, stupefied by the colossal impudence of this criminal, caught in the very act of burglary. Then the woman darted to him:

"Oh, Mr. Marshall, please let him go!" she besought him frantically. "Give him the money and let him go! Oh, you must!"

The detective, however, could no longer accept this way out of the tangle of events. His first instinct of desire to shield the woman for her husband's sake, if not for her own, was overcome by the responsibility involved by such a course.

"It is impossible," he said.

"Oh, if you only knew!" she breathed. Marshall remained unshaken.

"Madam," he said coldly, "I am in your husband's employ."

She twisted his argument in her own favor:

"But it would be doing him the greatest possible kindness to let this man go." She made a despairing gesture.

"Oh, I know just how strange it must seem to you, but it's true—it's true!" Marshall found that it required all his strength of will to withstand her supplication.

"You mean, without your husband's knowledge?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" was the instant answer. "He must never know—never! I can't tell you why—I can't! I can't! If I only could!—But I swear to you, on my honor as a woman, that my hus-

band's happiness, his career, his honor even, everything, depends on your doing as I ask you. Please—oh, please!" Nevertheless Marshall had the courage to deny her prayer.

"It is impossible."

"Why, I'm his wife, and I love him. It's for his sake that I beg of you to let this man go." She made a slight gesture toward Creagan. "He'll go—if you will let him. Yes, he'll go, and never come back again." She glanced for an instant into the brutal face, as she added her question confidently:

"You will go, won't you? Tell him!"

"Sure thing!" was the harsh answer. The thief's small eyes, bloodshot now, were leering. "Sure, I'll go fast enough—if you'll go with me, Maggie."

Lucene seemed not to hear the vile utterance. Certainly she gave it no apparent heed, only persisted in her wild petitioning.

"Don't you see, Mr. Marshall, no one will ever know—not a living soul—ever!"

The voice of Creagan sounded.

"Say," he cried to the detective, "are you such a bonehead you can't see that me and the lady was gone away together?" Marshall made a threatening movement. Creagan spoke again, reckless of the menace. "Aw, cut it out, cull. Just ask the lady."

Marshall looked down into the face of the trembling woman. But the denial for which he longed did not burst from her lips. Instead, she stood in mute abasement.

"Did you hear what the man said?" Marshall asked.

"Yes," came the muffled syllable.

"Of course he lies!"

There was a pause, pregnant of a hateful possibility. And then, at last, there came from the girl the word that was the seal of her degradation:

"No." It was hardly a breath of sound.

CHAPTER XIV.

In the Alcove.

THE spirit of mistaken martyrdom which had driven Lucene to this confession for the sake of the man she loved now again nerved her to struggle in his cause.

"And now," she cried, "you'll let him go! Won't you? Yes, yes! You must!"

There came an interruption which turned the eyes of the three to the archway of the alcove, where a tall figure stood contemplating the group. The woman uttered a faint cry that was rather a moan and shrank away as if in mortal fear, for the tall form, with the face set so sternly, was that of Wainwright. His voice came with a dominant severity:

"What have we here?"

Marshall answered:

"I caught this man monkeying with the safe. Guess I'd better get him out of here." He scowled at the thief.

"Come along, you!"

Creagan returned the scowl. "I wa'n't trying to crack no safe. I told ya I come here 'cause the lady!"

Marshall fairly throttled the thief for a moment.

"One more peep from you and I'll make you wish you'd never left jail!"

"Who is this fellow?" Wainwright demanded.

"He's a crackman, all right," the detective replied. "I caught him as he was going to work on the safe here. Beyond that, I don't know anything about him, though it's certain he's a professional."

Wainwright put his next question directly to the criminal:

"Who are you?"

But, for the time being, Creagan had become subdued under the buffeting he had just received. So now he did not venture to answer.

"Are you deaf?" the sleuth rasped.

"Well, if you want to know as bad," he replied sullenly, "why, I'll just tell you. My name's Creagan, and I'm from Chicago."

"You seem to have wandered a considerable way from home," Wainwright commented dryly.

"Ah, Creagan said, with an attempt at innocence, 'a guy'll go further than that to please a lady. What?'"

Marshall broke in:

"Cut that out!" Then he faced his employer somewhat doubtfully. "You see, sir," he explained, "I caught him

trying to take this money away from Mrs. Wainwright." He drew the banknotes from his pocket.

"It's a d—d lie!" Creagan bellowed ferociously. "She give it to me!"

"Shut up!" The detective poised as if about to spring on Creagan.

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But Wainwright interferred.

"Marshall," he directed shortly, "leave the man alone. Lies don't hurt—if they are lies." He put forth a hand and took the money. Briefly his eyes ran over some of the bills, scrutinizing them closely; then he bestowed the packet in a pocket. For the first time he let his gaze go for an instant to his wife, who in frightened grief watched his face unremittingly. Immediately he gave his full attention again to the criminal.

"Why should my wife give you money?" he inquired.

Creagan wriggled uncomfortably.

"Well, I guess the game's up, governor," he whined. "I guess they ain't nothin' to say, except you got me and the lady dead to rights."

Marshall interposed.

"Ah, say, Mr. Wainwright," he protested, "what's the good listening to this crook's pipe dreams? Come on, you!" He strode to the thief and caught him by the shoulder.

But again the detective was stayed from his purpose by the command of Wainwright:

"Wait!"

Now finally excess of fear goaded Lucene to the bravery of despair. She straightened, held forth her arms imploringly.

"Cortland," she said falteringly, "I beg you not to ask him any more questions. Let him go—please! Oh, for pity's sake! I can't stand it! I—She broke off, panting.

Her white face was drawn in agony, for Wainwright gave no least heed to her prayer. He contemplated the thief and spoke quietly.

"Who sent you here?"

"Aw, nobody sent me," the man replied flippantly. "I was invited."

"By whom?" Wainwright persisted.

"Ask the lady," Creagan's grin was frozen by the cold fury of the husband's low spoken phrase:

"You lie!"

"I do, do I?" he sneered. "Well, just take it from me. I don't. I knew her a long time before you ever did. Pipe that, mister! Aw, say! Don't kid yourself. What was she doin' downstairs by the safe at 2 o'clock in the mornin'? Eh? Havin' a cup of tea? Huh?"

Wainwright was dead white from the fury of his passion. His hands clenched.

"Take him away!" he ordered.

The wife dared a forlorn hope, crying out her plea wildly:

"Oh, Cortland! Let him go!"

Wainwright repeated his command.

"Take him away!"

Wainwright's face had settled into a mask of coldness as he turned to address his wife. But before he could speak his intention was halted by the surprising change that came over her within an instant. Where she had been shrinking, pallid, seeming even near to collapse from the misery that afflicted her, she now suddenly stood alertly upright, and a color burned hotly in her cheeks, and her eyes, dimmed by suffering before, shone in their full violet radiance, unvelled again. Her hands were abruptly reached forth in a gesture of welcoming. Wainwright, following the movement of her arms, took in the figure of Andrew, standing motionless just within the doorway of the library. At sight of him there was a harder compression of Wainwright's lips. His voice, as he spoke, was suave.

"Ah, I was expecting you."

Andrew was undaunted.

"Pardon me, sir, but may I ask a question?" he inquired.

"Oh, certainly," Wainwright retorted.

"Do you intend sending to prison the man whom Mr. Marshall just captured?"

Before Wainwright could answer the question put by the Master Mind there came an interruption by Lucene. It was despair that found tongue.

"Mr. Andrew, Mr. Andrew, what have you done to me?" she wailed.

"Oh, what have you done?" Her voice broke in a storm of sobbing.

If a slight shiver touched the man under the clasp of the girl's hands it was imperceptible, arrested ere it began by the iron sway of his will. He spoke gravely.

"Mrs. Wainwright will excuse me, I know, if I say that I must speak with you alone," he said to Wainwright.

At this saying Lucene lifted her head and stared desperately into the granite face. The assured voice carried conviction to her.

"I am quite sure that she will trust my judgment in the matter." Ostensibly the sentence was spoken to Wainwright. In effect, it was directed to Lucene. She went slowly out of the room.

When she was gone the Master Mind, with a swiftness of movement utterly unlike his usual placidity of behavior, darted to the door and shut it. Then he faced his employer, standing fully erect, a smile of triumph bending his lips, at last. The humility of the trained servant was vanished. In its place was a dominant personality, boldly proclaimed.

Wainwright met the transformation fairly.

"Well, Mr. Allen?" he remarked. His tone as he spoke the name that explained his knowledge of the other's identity was a challenge.

"That is quite correct," Andrew replied, with an enigmatic smile. "Incidentally this is the first time in twenty years that I have been addressed by my own name."

"The full name is Richard Allen, I believe?"

"Precisely."

"Alias, the Master Mind?"

"I believe that name has been given to me by some," Andrew replied, with unrepentant egotism. "I might even say by many."

"It is rather an ostentatious title," Wainwright commented indifferently.

"At least, it is not of my choosing," was the retort. "I merely adopted it

after it had been given me by others."

"You had a brother," Wainwright suggested.

A spasm of emotion contracted the features of the other.

"My brother," he said in a hushed voice, "was Henry Allen, whom you sent to the chair. You—you!" The fury of hate vibrated in the voice.

"No," Wainwright declared sternly; "not I, but the law."

Andrew shook his head.

"You!" he repeated, with the emphasis of a supreme wrath.

Wainwright disdained insistence.

"May I ask why you so constantly reminded me of your enmity through-

out that face. Then I began to hope. We searched, you and I, for the same girl, and I found her. I found that the circumstances of this girl, who was the original of the portrait and of the entries in the journal, were ideal for my purposes. The essential thing is this: I desired you to marry her. In order to bring that to pass certainly it was necessary to prepare her, by education and experience of the world, to be your fitting mate. That was done. In fine, sir, you married her precisely as I had planned that you should."

"Yes," Wainwright agreed heavily. "I—I married her. I understand. Go on, please."

"And now," he went on, with a drawing contentment in his utterance, "you have just surprised her here in the act of leaving the house with her—well, let us say, with the young friend of her earlier days—Creagan."

The voice of Wainwright came roughly.

"What do you mean?"

Andrew's smile was taunting.

"It's clear enough, isn't it?" he jeered.

"You!" In a gust of rage Wainwright remembered the revolver offered to him by Marshall that same evening and accepted. His hand went swiftly to his hip pocket. There was no responsive contact with the weapon. As he stood astonished Andrew's voice sounded again with a vast entertainment derived from the circumstance.

"Your servant, Parker—my servant, Parker—is really very capable. You did not observe when he thoughtfully removed the weapon Mr. Marshall had provided." Then abruptly the mocking tones were filled with virulent hatred.

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CHAPTER XV.

The Martyr.

W E have here a close parallel, Mr. District Attorney" went on Andrew, "to the case of my brother. He killed his man under the influence of a sudden passion—justifiable passion too. Just now you would have killed me under the influence of passion—quite unjustifiable, however—had I not taken the precaution to have the weapon removed from you. But all this is beside the mark. The point of immediate interest is this: First loves are hard to forget, Mr. Wainwright. It is for this reason that Mrs. Wainwright, your wife, has planned to go away with our young friend Creagan."

"It is a lie!" Wainwright's voice was overwrought with quick rage.

"Since you doubt, why, call her!" He went to the door and swung it open.

"Lucene!" he called. This use of her name so familiarly for the first time in the presence of the husband was in itself a revelation. "Come, Lucene," he cried; "come!"

The wife entered almost at once, for she had been waiting in the hall in an agony of despair.

It was the husband who addressed her with a fierce entreaty:

"Lucene, this man—he has been saying"—He choked.

Andrew continued:

"I have been trying to show your husband how useless it would be to attempt to prevent you from going out of his life as you had already planned I have also!"

Wainwright was furious.

"He said—he said that you—you were going away with this man Creagan. Tell him he lies!"

"She will not do that," Andrew declared, "or I am much mistaken."

"Lucene!" The husband's voice rang forth in a loud tenderness.

She spoke in a level voice, apathetic from the burden of a consummate torment.

"There's no use of any more fuss, is there?" she said pitifully. "Oh, I'll go

"Oh, yes, to be sure!" he said smotherly. "All a part of the game! And that—that is—"

Lucene faltered, shrank, could not meet his searching eyes.

"That," she said despairingly—"that is—"

Wainwright went slowly toward his wife. There was something compelling in his aspect, something that beat upon her heart and bent it to his will, despite her struggle against him. Blindly she saw an imperative gesture from Andrew, bidding her go. She gave no heed to it. Her whole soul was absorbed by the man she loved, who came close to her, and looked down on her with eyes that searched within the innermost recesses of her soul.

"Look at me!" he commanded. She made no answer; only stood gazing before him, tremulous, longest, fearfully reluctant. "Look at me! Again the command smote her, moved her strangely to obedience, despite everything."

"Lucene!" Once again, his voice was wholly masterful. "Look at me! Then, at last, she yielded her eyes to his, and the piteous sacrifice in those depths taught him something of the ghastly truth that lay beneath her surface reluctance.

He went to the door leading into the hall and called sharply:

"Marshall, Marshall! There came an indeterminate sound that he translated into an answer. "Bring Creagan here!" was his command.

A moment later the detective appeared with a manacled thief at his side.

"Take off the handcuffs," Wainwright directed briskly.

After one glance at the set face Marshall obeyed the order. The prisoner Wainwright spoke again, to the pleasure:

"Creagan, my wife tells me that she and you had planned to go away together."

"That's right, governor."

Wainwright turned his eyes full on his wife, and spoke easily, almost lazily:

"Well, here she is, Creagan. Take her—and go!"

The thief stared wonderingly.

"Sure