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The SKELETON FINGER



KATHLEEN GLENISTER, sister of George Glenister, whose mysterious death has stirred the countryside, and—

NORMAN SLATER, her lover, are held in secret prison by Sir Dudley, who wishes to marry Kathleen to allay suspicion that he murdered Glenister, while—

JAMES WRAGGE, Scotland Yard detective, is searching for the lovers. He finds Simon Trickey, a police character, who was supposed to have died suddenly in the recent past, prowling about Sir Dudley's home.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY. Avoiding the gravelled path, Wragge ran along the edge of the turf and dropped his hand lightly but firmly on the prowler's collar. "Just a word with you, Trickey," he breathed into a purple-veined ear. "You've saved a lot of trouble by bobbing up here. Till ten minutes ago I was afraid we shouldn't get you without a pick and shovel and a yard of red tape."

CHAPTER XXI Progress in the Pantry SIMON brightened up wonderfully at the inspector's tactful suggestion that he should be given a drink. He sank into a chair. "My respects," he said, sipping the wine which, with unconcealed disgust, Hinkley handed to him.

"Nothing like good port to loosen a man's tongue, eh, gentlemen?" "It will be the better for you if it helps to loosen yours. If not, I must try some other way," said Wragge. "How is it you are not under six feet of earth in Norwood Cemetery?"

The reprobate chuckled. "I wasn't aware that my untimely demise had become a police matter," he replied. "But as it isn't a crime to recover from a bad illness I don't mind telling you. I squared the worthy young medico of Lipscomb Road to aid the deception. You see, I wasn't so dead as my wife and the slaver thought me. The doctor smuggled me out of my house into his own the night after I ought to have died. Of course the undertaker, who is naturally a pal of the doctor's, was in it."

Wragge nodded comprehension. "It is lucky for the lady in the library that you have recovered or I should have had to arrest her for murdering you," he said. "That clever young medico's stomach pump extracted enough poison from my vitals to have killed a horse. He attributed my survival to what he called alcoholic immunity."

"Why did you conceal this attempt on your life?" "The ex-clerk made a wry face and for a moment seemed to be about to sulk. "My sister—you will have ferreted out that Mrs. Coningsby is my sister—is rich," he said finally. "I thought I could touch her for a good bit after what she'd done to me. Little family matter, sir. Nothing to do with Scotland Yard so far, eh?"

"I am afraid we shall have to travel a good deal farther before we can let you out, Mr. Trickey," Wragge rejoined, more sternly now. "I should wish to hear your views as to your sister's motive for wishing you out of the way."

"Ah, there you have me guessing." "But Scotland Yard doesn't guess," rejoined the inspector. "We know why Mrs. Coningsby tried to kill you. She wanted to step into your shoes as the blackmailer of Sir Dudley Glenister by stealing your diary."

Trickey, you are only small fry in the pan, and if you will help us by turning king's evidence you won't come to much harm. In your diary you mention that Dudley was going to write to his cousin after your first return from Lone Wolf City. Can you throw any light on that letter?"

If a cornered rat smiles when suddenly sees a hole in the corner leading to safety, Mr. Simon Trickey's grin resembled that smile. "My dear sir, it's that bloody letter that I've been living on," he replied joyously. "I took the liberty of opening it before I went to post and I took a press copy. It was an offer by the boss to finance George Glenister's gold mine if he would come over to England and discuss the proposition. The boss made an appointment to meet him at Beechwood on the seventh of June three years ago."



"We know why Mrs. Coningsby tried to kill you." BEGIN HERE TODAY

Wragge's impassive features showed no sign of the triumph he had achieved in obtaining this information. "Humph! You had a pretty powerful lever over the late gentleman," he said. "Can you help us prove that that appointment at Beechwood was kept?"

"Honest, I can't, sir," was the laconic reply. "But having made a note of the date I was at pains to observe that the boss was out of town on it for the weekend. The seventh of June that year was a Saturday."

The butler had listened in silence, but with growing consternation, to the web which the detective was weaving round his master. "Maybe I can supply the blank," the old man interjected. "In Sir Phillip's time I had to keep a record of the guests staying at the Grange and of the rooms they occupied. I continued the practice during the interim, while Miss Kathleen was mistress here, which she was on the date mentioned."

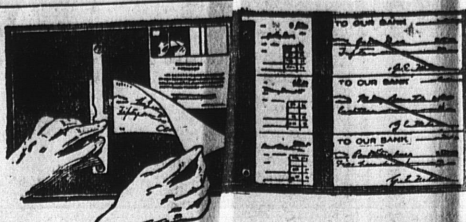
"By all means," said Wragge. A reference to the well-thumbed register which the butler produced settled the point. On Saturday, the seventh of June, in the critical year, Dudley Glenister had arrived at the Grange; he had left on the following Monday. There had been no one else staying at the house but Lady Marrables, who always came down when needed as a chaperon.

"You can't remember the comings and goings of the inmates of the house that weekend?" Wragge inquired. "Not after the lapse of time," replied Hinkley. "My memory isn't what it was; but Miss Kathleen might recall the occasion."

"Unfortunately, for the moment Miss Glenister is not available, though it must be our business to make her so," rejoined Wragge. "What's that mean?" "The sudden question was prompted by the screech of an electric bell under the ceiling. At the first sound of it Hinkley edged toward the pantry door.

"That's for me," he quavered. "To show the lady out, I expect." He added tentatively, as if not sure of the detective's permission. But Wragge made a gesture of assent, and when the old man was gone he turned to Simon Trickey. "Now look here," he admonished. "Sir Dudley Glenister is a sucked orange for future blackmail. Leave him alone and leave him to me. What you do with regard to your sister, unless you charge her with attempting to murder you, doesn't concern the police. You had better clear out and make your peace as best you can with Miss Maud Blair in the Lipscombe Road, Brixton. Here, I am going out, too, and I'll show you the way."

Edward Casal of Redondo boulevard spent Sunday with friends in San Pedro. Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Booth and daughter, of Inglewood, were weekend guests of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Prince of 260th street, left Sunday for their home in Evanston, Wyo. Mr. and Mrs. Elizabeth Gridley of Oak street, Mr. and Mrs. McDougall of...



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