

The ADVENTURE HUNTER

THE AFFAIR OF THE ASSISTANT CASHIER

By Hamilton Lang

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In the course of these narratives it has been often remarked that Valentine Stone's unusual adventures came to him in unusual ways. Some minor incident he would, with seeming mystery, choose from a host of major ones, and from it would seem to come, with the ease of some magic tree growing beneath the wave of an Indian's hand, the thrilling adventures with which his name has come to be associated. Indeed this sixth sense, which seemed with such unerring accuracy to sense the potentiality of the smallest circumstance, seemed seldom to fail, and some passing phase which would have passed by all men but the Adventure Hunter found that personage keen and active to the possibilities that hung upon it.

And one of those slightest threads it was that took his attention on the occasion of his visit to his friend, James H. Chillingworth, the vice president of the Continental Surety Bank. The Adventure Hunter had made one of his uncertain visits, during which the vice presidential business had been joyfully thrust aside and the vice presidential mind and heart given to that strange mixture of observation, philosophy and easy humor with which in unprofessional moments the Adventure Hunter's conversation was spiced. Closing time, indeed, only interrupted Valentine Stone's flow of soul, and at its juncture the two friends rose. After a few instructions which Chillingworth found it necessary to leave they slowly strolled through the building toward the entrance.

It was at this juncture that Stone, always observant, looked about him. The great interior of the bank presented that peculiar impression between feverish activity and listlessness which is always apparent immediately after the closing of the doors. The officials, keen to conclude the duties of the day, worked eagerly; the few depositors that had arrived prior to the closing of the doors, stood with the peace of their exact achievement upon them, waiting the ending of their affair. Stone's eyes roved about the great tiled and gilded spaces of the place, the habit of his observation taking in every slight detail of the scene. He noticed the bending officials given to their hasty recording, noticed the fluttering of a paper that a pale depositor had crumpled and cast down. And then, behind the gilded iron grill of the cashier's window a scene came to his eyes and struck him smartly as a blow.

Framed in the slight mist which seemed to come between the writing cashier's form and itself a face stood out, clear as paper upon black; a face wrung at one by path and sacrifice and charged with what Stone unconsciously analyzed as a noble suffering. It was a woman's face, pale and gentle. The form beneath it the Adventure Hunter did not even see, with such a ghastly tragedy did the expression seem to strike him. The cashier, at the woman's front, bent a weak and voluptuous face upon the figures upon which he was engaged. The contrast between the two impressions was startling, the nobility of the one, the weak self-indulgence of the other, and Stone turned quickly to his friend to bring the picture before him. They both looked round again. The face and the form beneath it of the woman had disappeared.

At the sudden disappearance of the face Stone uttered an exclamation of disappointment. Trivial enough as the incident would have been to the ordinary mind, it had made an impression upon the Adventure Hunter. In the contrast and the position of those two faces, and of the drama of life, possibly of complication and of mystery, and therefore that which promised to feed the hunger for the unusual which was his most eager instinct. The woman's sudden disappearance, while natural enough, seemed to emphasize the vividness of the picture and sit forth.

"What a woman! You must be dreaming, Valentine," remarked the banker, laughing. "I've never seen a woman in the cashier's cage yet."

"Against the rules?" asked the Adventure Hunter. "No, not exactly—after hours, that is," returned the vice president, "but its unusual. It'll probably be his wife—these little domestic difficulties, you know. He probably doesn't want to go where she wishes this evening. I've experienced these expressions of the domestic drama myself."

He laughed and dragged the half resisting Stone to the entrance. "But, my boy," said he, "I refuse to allow you to become interested in some adventure with my cashier now—really. I'm going up to the club, and I want you to come too. We'll have just an hour for billiards."

They reached the entrance. The banker and Valentine Stone entered the former's machine, which stood waiting at the door. Stone grumbled audibly, for it was seldom that his desires for adventure were defeated by the zealousness of friendship. He suffered himself to be led to the club and to billiards—a fact that he consistently regretted for two days. For again and again, and recurring with a persistence which denied all attempts to overcome it, the picture and its possibilities recurred to the Adventure Hunter's mind.

He was, indeed, thinking of this and experiencing his thousandth reproach, when, standing on the elevated, he waited for a car. It stopped and a stream of people trickled forth—a stream that he watched mechanically—when suddenly his face and body tensed and became tense. Two faces of that stream marked themselves out—a weak and self-indulgent masculine one, a strained and tense feminine one, marked by tragedy. Again had come upon him, as if through some strange magnetism that he possessed, those figures at the bank.

This time, however, the face of the cashier was not unconscious of the presence of the other. It nodded resolute negative to some obvious plea. The couple separated themselves from the rest of the issuing little stream and stood a little apart, and Stone watched the little drama enacted before him—the woman pursuing with her every energy the quest for something that the man denied.

Her Husband in Trouble. The Adventure Hunter waited until the first transports were over, then with a touch so light and sympathetic that it might almost have been the touch of one of her own sex he attracted her attention, and she raised a face so turned by despair that all its traces of beauty seemed to have gone from it.

"You are in trouble," said he. "You desire something for another. Will you not confide in me? I can help you."

Stone then had one of his strange and instant intuitions. He knew the plea was not for herself. For turned with the shine of her wedding ring in his eye, speaking to herself, "I must come out, so why not with a certain note of the acceptance of her sorrow. 'Yes, it is my husband,' said she. 'He is the superior of the man to whom I spoke. My husband has been criminally weak, but is not of criminal intent. It was the mistake of a thousand dollars on a check paid out by him, and he found that mistake out too late. He attempted to cover it up in the books, but his superior—the man who has just left me—discovered the error and taxed my husband with a delinquency.'"

Appearing to believe my husband correct, the cashier consented to overlook it and to permit the repayment as repayment could be made. Suddenly, however, he seemed to change and informed my husband that the matter would have to come out. 'A sudden change' said Stone, thoughtfully. 'It was some letter that the cashier received. He told me this.'

"Then," said Stone, "that letter is the hinge upon which your relief turns. Did you see it?" "I do not know," the woman replied, doubtfully. "I fancied that a letter which fluttered to the floor as he spoke of it, and which he hurriedly picked up, was the one that he referred to, but I do not know. I do not know what it contained. I only caught one word, 'eighty,' and part of the signature at the end, 'with,' that is all."

But the hopelessness of the woman's voice seemed to contrast very strangely with the sudden light of satisfaction which had come to the Adventure Hunter's face.

For Martin H. Hewitt was a figure in the financial world quite unmistakable. Under the circumstances

As he spoke the woman started to a sudden alertness of expression and bearing. "If I could get the letter," she said slowly. She paused awhile, and then the dawning light of a resolve swelled into her eyes. "I'll get it," she said. "Your name?" "Stone, on a sudden as a loss as to the woman's expression and her means of obtaining the note, handed the card to her almost mechanically. In a moment she was away—had dashed down the elevated steps and lost herself among the streams of the crowded street. Then the Adventure Hunter, with a sudden exclamation of her resolve. He saw that the letter could be obtained but at a price, which, had he known it before, he could never have assented to. The face of the cashier was his answer. Stone felt troubled at the nobility of the sacrifice which, for her husband, the woman was prepared to make. Next day she came back, her face white and strained, but the glow of something approaching relief in her eyes. Silently she handed him the note.

"There is the letter," she said. In his chambers that night he thoughtfully went over

abys, would probably be enabled, in the least time, to trace the thugs and the letter. "Well," said "Blink," expectantly, "something do?" "I think so," replied Stone, smiling. He briefly recounted the circumstances of his quest. "Some one from down about this district took that letter," said he. "If it isn't Stanton you probably will think you could get any line on it?"

The astute "Blink" looked smilingly for a moment at the Adventure Hunter and then chuckled. "I've got it on you this time," he said. His hand dived down into a greasy pocket and brought something up. "Many happy returns of the day," said he, smiling. The Adventure Hunter was frankly astonished. "That overcoat looked too good to me," remarked the active "Blink." "To be left lying where it was, on the back of an automobile, with no one to attend to it."

Stone relegated his moral scruples and thankfully pocketed his letter. He recognized, now, however, as he was driven home, in company with "Blink" and one of his muscular friends, that even he, the Adventure Hunter, must watch himself if he would carry through safely the plan that he had conceived. That pose Stone knew. That he would be doubly ruthless gone awry the Adventure Hunter was certain. The very daring of the plan that had previously carried the letter away from him told him with what ingenuity the financier could act—and Stone was guarded against it.

With these objects in view he surrounded himself while in his room with a couple of men chosen from that great underworld with which Stone had such strange affiliations. They were desperate and courageous as any others that could be brought against him. Sleeping, the Adventure Hunter knew that he had not to fear. Next morning, to make assurance doubly sure, he deposited with an attorney on whose probity he knew he could rely that letter on which so much depended—and which he knew Hewitt would go to Stone's bodyguard remained for the Adventure Hunter did not intend to allow the impression to be gained that the letter had gone out of his keeping. Only at the public dining tables did he go alone, assured that there at least no desperate work could be accomplished, enough to the Adventure Hunter that he was obvious wherever he went, they kept up a ceaseless vigilance to find the least possible opportunity to recover what their compulsion had so stupidly lost. And it seemed that all their astuteness was necessary, for on the next day the stockholders' meeting was arranged, Stone's friend Chillingworth and his associates and that woman for whom Stone had so sincerely regretted his vow.

Though the conspirators did not know it, however, on that very evening Stone had arranged for a final conference, in which his attorney would receive his instructions as to the uses of the letter at the meeting

next day, and had arranged that both the legal representative and another friend of Stone's should be with the Adventure Hunter at dinner that night. This friend was one that Stone had tried and tested and many had been the time that they had together gone over plans of aptitude and adroitness to meet almost any possible contingency of danger or difficulty to which, separated, either might be subjected. And promptly to the occasion the two arrived in the vestibule of the hotel at which the dinner was arranged. Stone was waiting expectantly at his table in the dining room, gazing with curious interest at the moving groups within, at whose gait and coming he never ceased to stare. He could not, however, know that the two men, that approached and suddenly sat down at his table had come there to fulfill a plan as exactly executed as his own.

The leader of the two spoke abruptly, as he sat suddenly opposite Stone. He was a huge fellow, with an iron jaw and cold, gray eyes, one glance at which was sufficient to indicate the desperate man. The second, smaller, but if possible more muscular, seemed obviously capable of any daring.

"Valentine Stone," said the first, "you are our guest at dinner this evening."

Stone had an instant thrill of apprehension. What new move had the infinite expediency of Hewitt now turned upon him? The Adventure Hunter, however, turned a calm and unmoved eye upon the pair. "He started to rise, but sank back at the look of the huge fellow.

"Don't do that," said the man, "or you'll die." The fellow smiled across at Stone, who nodded his head thoughtfully. "Then your purpose is to—"

"Oh, just keep company with you like," said the smaller man, "till after four o'clock tomorrow. I guess, it's so you can't get to a certain place tomorrow," he added, shrewdly. "We've got orders not to hurt you unless we have to, but you mustn't speak to us on a case? If you try to you know what'll happen." He looked expressively toward the window.

In an instant Stone saw the ingenuity of the arrangement. The whole of his plans rested upon the production of one letter at the meeting next day, the method of which had not yet been decided upon. That that letter should be produced at all depended upon the conference which he had projected with his companions that evening. That, except under the circumstances of private arrangement with Hewitt, it should not be produced meant at once his helplessness to aid the wife of the unfortunate assistant cashier and the success of Hewitt's coup upon the bank. If in no way the directions to go ahead could be got to his friends his whole cause was lost, and for the first time the Adventure Hunter would have been proved unequal to his occasion.

As Valentine Stone thought of these things there was a movement at the entrance of the dining room and Stone's two associates appeared. The larger conspirator, eyeing Stone steadily, saw by the expression of his face the position by which Stone was faced.

"Oh, you got two friends, I see. I'll just go across and tell them that you don't wish to see them," said he. His voice broadened into the jovial tones before referred to as he added, "I'll tell 'em you'd like 'em to sit just there"—he pointed to a distant corner—"and see how you are enjoying yourself." He leaned over further. "I'll tell 'em what'll happen to you if they attempt to leave the room before it closes or if any of your friends attempt to approach this table."

Stone shrugged and smiled, while the man went to fulfill his instructions. The Adventure Hunter watched him and saw the surprised faces of his friends as the fellow did so. And Valentine Stone smiled with an appreciation of the ingenuity of the plot while he was conscious of a certain chagrin. Because the plot seemed in its way complete. Blanketed, as he undoubtedly was, he was defenceless. He pursued his dinner thoughtfully as he exchanged glances with his two friends in the corner of the room, though the test of examination through which those glances were rendered them innocuous so far as the purposes of vital communication went. How to get the message through—that was the problem that faced the Adventure Hunter. The plotters saw the conflicting expressions which crossed Stone's face and smiled grimly as they did so. They knew that it was not possible for the waiter to convey any message of any kind. Their eyes covered his every action like those of a hawk.

And so the dinner went on from the surrounding of this sleet play. From course to course it went, the two conspirators alert, vigilant, Stone, thoughtful, seeking to solve that silent problem of how to convey the words "go on" that would release the letter, that would resolve the various effects he wished to bring about. At dessert, however, he had not solved it, and the finger bowls which came in found him still at a placed one before each, and in one there seemed to be a slight flaw. The glass gloved with a tint of green, as the brilliant lights from the table gleamed upon it, Stone looked at the water in it curiously for a moment.

"Ugh! It feels greasy to my fingers," said he. "What is the matter with that water?" "The waiter, solicitous, failed to see anything the matter, but Stone insisted on a fresh bowl. It was brought, but Stone still seemed dissatisfied.

"It feels greasy, I tell you," said he impatiently, said he. "That will sharpen it up." The waiter bowed and departed.

And then it was that Stone showed his real brilliancy. "Come, gentlemen, for a night of it," said he gayly. He dashed to the piano and commenced to play. He showed a spirit at which the two captors opened their wide eyes of wonderment. At three o'clock he gave permission to retire—a permission which was, after breakfast and drove them in the forenoon in his Red Growler, of which he was so fond. The two men, enjoying themselves, were yet somewhat uneasy. These prisoners' spirits seemed too high. They eyed him doubtfully, when suddenly the Adventure Hunter burst out laughing.

"Well, gentlemen," said he, "I think our little play's finished. If you don't let me go now your boss won't thank you."

"What do you mean?" said the larger one briefly. "Simply that I won," said Stone. "I got my message over last night. I've just been with you since as safe enough now. I think you'd better communicate with your boss—he'd want to see me."

The two consulted for a moment and then one of them went to the telephone. There was some delay, and then he returned, saying that "a gentleman would come."

"But one thing I can't make out," said he. "I suppose you must have got that message over, but how the world did you do it?" "Well, it's just like this," said the Adventure Hunter. "A man can convey a message by print if he has a newspaper frequently in sight corners. I'm an adventure hunter if he hasn't planned upon the possibility of communicating with friends who may not be able to reach him. I'd early settled on a system of communication with my best friends. It might be helpful to you."

"What color's a lemon?" he suddenly asked. "Yellow," said the fellow, his jaw dropping. "Certainly," replied Stone. "That means go ahead, rushing a postroom when I was inside, but I didn't write a letter."



He Attracted Her Attention and She Raised a Face so Turned by Despair That All Its Traces of Beauty Seemed to Have Gone from It.

Valentine Stone was certain that he was the writer of the misadventure. Master of affairs and millions as the financier was, it had come to Stone through Chillingworth that Hewitt was reaching out to add the Continental Surety Bank to that chain of financial institutions which he already controlled. If this were so, the meaning of the word "eighty" was obvious. In one of those thousand ways in which the greatest secrets of moneyed institutions leak to those that are interested in knowing them, the assistant cashier's mistake and the cashier's knowledge of it had come to the financier. The mistake he intended to make the lever of his descent upon the bank.

The assistant cashier had been the appointment of the older blood and presently controlling element of the institution, and the mistake, properly exploited at the proper time, could be made to seem a culpability on the part of the present management at the next meeting of the stockholders. Withholding the information till then and then suddenly uncovering it could, with all the preparations which his crafty mind could devise, elect the ticket which Hewitt would absolutely control. This plan of action depended alone upon the discretion of the cashier. If he would agree to withhold his knowledge till the vital moment Hewitt's plan could undoubtedly go through. So the word "eighty" obviously became a bribe.

Dependent Upon a Letter. None knew better than the financier the Achilles' heel of the dissolute appearing cashier, whose vices were stamped upon his face. Such faces and such vices inevitably find, say, eighty thousand dollars to be a comfortable amount to turn to their uses. Stone saw all these things in a flash.

"Yes," he said slowly and almost unthinkingly, "it all depends upon the letter. If we could come by that letter I think I could promise that your husband's troubles would be over."

witness his departure into the upper atmosphere. His sole companions were a dog, a cat, and a pigeon. When he was nearing the earth in stands, five laborers declined to take hold of his mooring ropes, and the pioneer balloonist would have not effected a landing.

his whole plan of procedure as he gazed out of his window at the mountain lights which twinkled all about him from the great city. Suddenly a slight noise coming from behind him in the room attracted his attention. Hardly had he time to turn his head when he came, however, to him the blue of two faces was conspicuous. He was lying upon his sofa gagged and tied. The electric wires were lighted and the small clock on the mantel indicated midnight. Philosophically but with infinite care, he managed to roll from the sofa and squirm to the bell, which, by raising his feet, he pressed.

Relief came with the bell boy. He questioned the hotel authorities, but no light could be thrown on the mystery of the violence. The means, however, were obvious enough. Whatever men had come upon him had probably walked up the stairway. They were obviously acquainted with the number of his room and went in silent entry. And the reason for that entry was clear to Stone. The cashier had weakened after handing over the letter to the woman and had informed Hewitt. The woman, by some indiscreet utterance, had probably at her departure thrown the Adventure Hunter's name at the cashier as a parting shot.

Valentine Stone knew then the danger in which he had stood. With such interests at stake he knew what the instant course of the financier had been. Unscrupulous in all his deals, the matter of the recovery of the letter was a small affair. Every day in New York city things are lined to accomplish such purposes. And upon the leader of the notorious Stanton gang as the friend of the underworld with whom at times he had been engaged upon hazardous affairs, for in his hunt after adventure Valentine Stone found it necessary on occasions, "Blink" Hogan would be the one man who, thoroughly understanding all the intricacies of his

the "devil's horse," look to their heels. But for the lucky conduct of a young servant girl from an adjoining farm-house, who seized the rope and summoned assistance, the pioneer balloonist would have not effected a landing.

PASSER UP BY PRIOR GENERATIONS 1230 B. C. On May 8, 1787, first attempt was made to engrave on glass.

Philosophy was revived in Spain in 1180. First observatory was erected in 300 B. C. at Alexandria.

Monkeys were first kept as pets in 300 B. C. at Alexandria.

Magnifying glasses were invented by Alhazen, an Arabian, in 1050.

Astronomers in 945 used a sextant whose radius was fifty-nine feet nine inches.

"THE DEVIL'S HORSE," stands a remarkable monument, known as the Balloon Stone. Under a hinged metal flap is a bronze plate bearing an inscription chronicling the first balloon ascent. Lunardi's ascent created a tremendous sensation, all London turning out to witness his departure into the upper atmosphere. His sole companions were a dog, a cat, and a pigeon. When he was nearing the earth in stands, five laborers declined to take hold of his mooring ropes, and the pioneer balloonist would have not effected a landing.