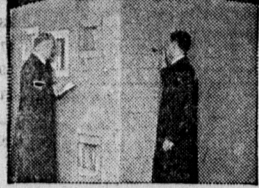


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What the Gray House Hid

The Mystery of a Haunted Mansion

by Wyndham Martyn

(Continued)

The first dinner was one of those happy functions at which every one talks vivaciously and no one troubles to listen. Exclamation points ended every sentence. Les smiled openly, and the house detective was off duty.

"My job's a sinecure," said Bill Pelham. "I really had no right to take it, after accepting the honor of being hoe man in chief to Dina." "Your work begins tomorrow," Mrs. Hanby told him. "I want you to survey a place for a sunken rose garden."

"I'll set the alarm for daybreak," he said. He was up very early next morning. Only Tim, rifle in hand, followed him. Tim was after the early rabbit and the unheeding squirrel. Pelham had decided on a location for the rose garden when Celia stopped before him.

"To labor that we love we rise betimes and go to it with delight," he quoted. Celia sat down on a grassy bank.

"Bill," she said, "you must be fond of the Hanby. To do this Poor old Bill!" she murmured softly.

"Why poor?" he demanded. "I know," she said wisely. "You can't fool me."

"I'm not poor," he retorted. "I'm rich. I have a family without the labor of supporting it. I'm much more sensible than you imagine. I adore your mother. She married the man she loved. Three things might have happened to me—I might have married another woman, and made her unhappy; I might have become one of those sour, cynical old devils who poison this earth; I might have drunk myself to death. I thought of doing all three at various times. I did try drinking for a year, but Dina made me feel like a d-d coward. I am now going to use some of your modern terms. I submitted my love into affection for everything that was dear to your mother. That's why I hear your superior airs with cheerfulness. That's why I talk baseball scores with Tim."

"You love baseball," said Celia. "I love you," retorted Pelham.

"About four years ago—the summer we had a house at Allenhurst—I cherished a hopeless passion for you," Celia confided. "It began when you used to do those fancy back divers at the Allenhurst pool, and was fanned to fury when you rescued that man from the surf. Did you ever suspect it?"

"Not a bit," he said. "Mine is an open, modest nature, shrinking and simple. You interest me strangely. Celia. Why did you drop me?"

"I went back to school," she said, "and there was an adorable being who taught us music. I wanted to practice Beethoven ten hours a day."

"Why did you drop him?" "He was sent away for kissing a teacher—or, rather, for being caught kissing a teacher. After that Les rather amused me. I was then an emotionally old woman of seventeen."

"Are you really fond of Les?" asked Pelham.

"I wish I knew!"

"I thought one always knew."

"Not in these times," said Celia. "One meets so many boys. Les is on probation this summer. What

about a swim before breakfast? There's a gorgeous high dive into twenty feet of water. I want to beat Junior at back diving. Please, Bill, give me a lesson!"

"You'll have to make it right with Dina," he said. "I'm hoe man in chief, and I want to keep my job."

"Dina and dad will be there before you, if you don't make haste."

"What? Taking advantage of me like that? I'll be in my bathing suit before you are!"

The two raced toward the house. The swimming party was not ready for breakfast until half past nine. The meal was hardly begun when a package of mail was brought in.

"I'm going to send a postboy on horseback for it, when things are in running order," Hanby commented, sorting it out. "Tradesmen's invitations, mainly. Here's one from a Poughkeepsie undertaker, with most attractive illustrations of the latest in caskets."

Next he held up a large square envelope, lavender-colored, and adorned with a black coat of arms.

"Bodleigh Salterton," he said. "I didn't tell you, Dina, that I wrote to Mr. Seymour weeks ago, asking if he had a chauffeur like the one Smucker described. Hanby frowned a little. "It's odd that his reply should come on our first breakfast here!"

"What does he say?" Dina asked. Hanby slit the envelope.

"In the center is a crest," he commented. "Underneath is a simple English address. Hasten! Seymour Manor, Bovey Tracey, Ottery St. Mary, Bodleigh Salterton, Devonshire. That makes the Gray house fade into nothing! On the top left-hand corner it says, 'Telegraph, Otterton.' On the top right-hand corner it says, 'Great Western station, four miles.'"

"This is the mistake that Hanby

made," he said. "He thought the man who wrote this letter was the same man who wrote the letter to me."

"But the man who wrote the letter to me is now in my service, Richard Salterton. He is five feet nine in height, weighs one hundred and forty pounds, is dark, pale of face, with an aquiline nose—in fact, as you see, in every respect differing from the impostor who claimed to have held this position."

"I am, my dear sir, Faithfully yours, STANFORD SEYMOUR."

"I resign as hoe man," Bill Pelham said. "I am now the house detective. I report for work here and now. I guessed wrong about the big-hearted chauffeur who blew Smucker to a feed!"

Hanby was worried. He had almost banished the affair from his mind. Now everything came back to him vividly, particularly the woman who threatened him with death.

"Well, we're dug in here now," he observed, "and it will take something more than vague threats to turn us out."

CHAPTER VI

There was a letter for Mrs. Hanby in the package of mail. "Who's been writing to you, Dina?" her husband inquired.

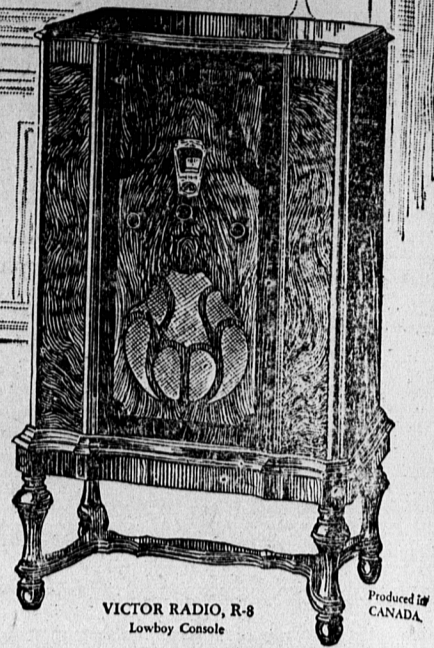
(To be Continued)

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