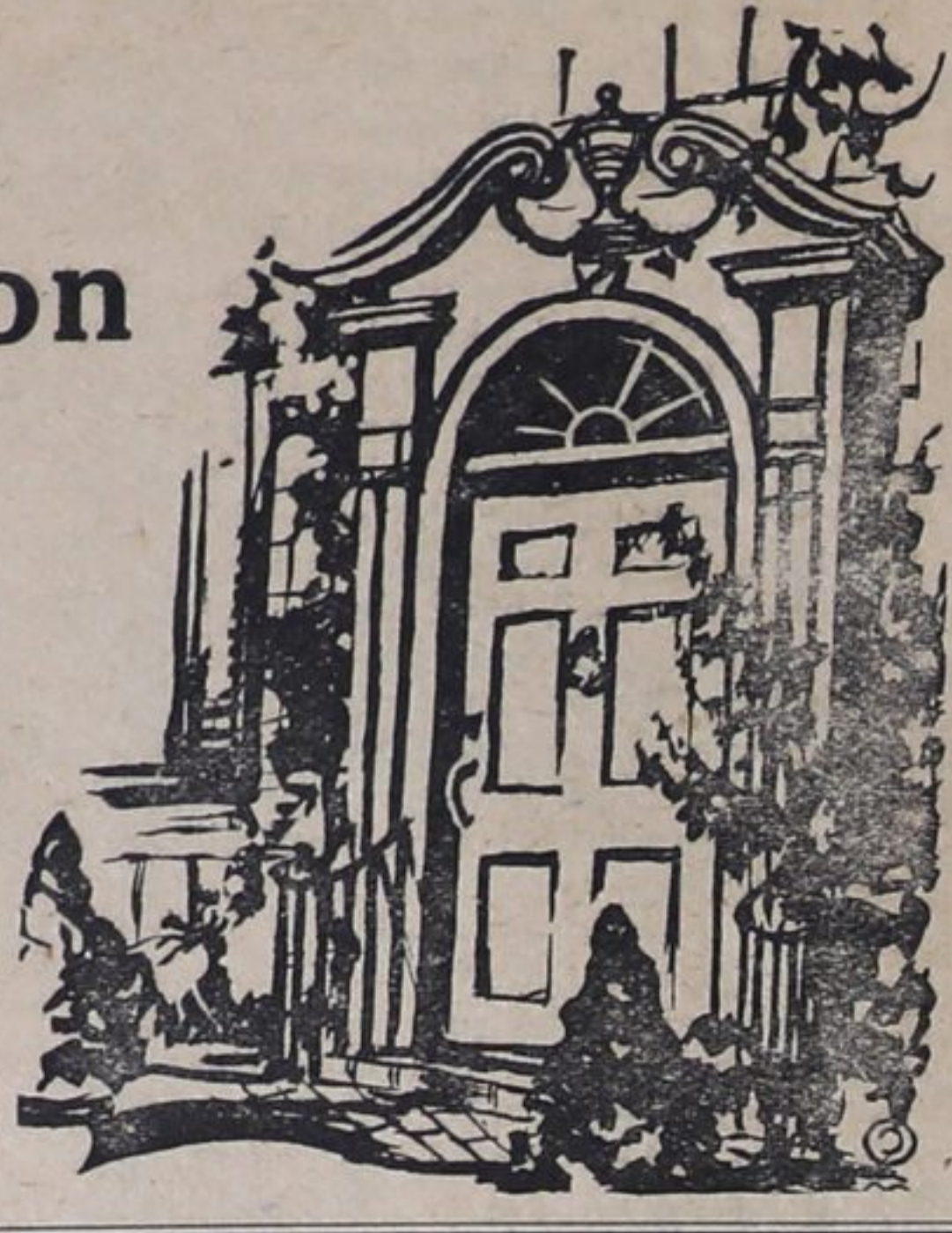


The Black Mansion Murder

By

Leslie McFarlane



Chapter X
(Continued from Last Week)
THE TRAP DOOR

He could distinguish nothing of what was said for the voices were at that moment almost completely drowned out by a dull, subdued roaring. It persisted for a few minutes, died for a while, then broke out afresh.

Kelvey slipped down the remaining steps and silently crossed the basement floor. He crouched down in the shelter of the heap of stones and dirt beside the tunnel entrance.

The roaring sound died away again. He heard a scraping sound and a sharp tearing noise. Then a suppressed shout.

"We're in!"
"Be quiet, you fool!" This was the same suave voice that had puzzled him at the house by the river. "The job is done, but keep your head."

There was another voice. "All right, chief. That's some torch. It cuts through steel like cheese. Who goes into the vault?"

"We all go. Get those bags, Goldy. There's a fortune ahead of us and we must work quickly."
"Just a minute," said Goldy. "Now that everything's set, we got a few things to talk over."

"What? This is no time for talk. Pick up that bag."

"Not yet," returned Goldy. "Spike, here, is with me and so is Doc. It's us three against you so you've got to listen. We ain't satisfied with the split, see? We want to get that clear before we start. You've planned this whole job, and it's a big one, but we can't see why you ought to get half of the haul. Equal shares all round, we figger."

"Trying to hold me up, eh?" snapped the other man, grimly. "I might have known it. Once and for all, I say no. It goes as I said, and as you agreed. There's a fortune in that vault and if you try to double-cross me on the split I'll queer you with every fence in the country. Think of that! There's only one fence who can handle this for us and he's with me."

"We know that, chief," returned Goldy. "For a while we kinda thought it wouldn't do no good to argue. But now Moreno is gone, I've been able to tell the boys something I know. It was you bumped off that cashier. Moreno told me. He planted young Gale's gun there and spread the word that Gale was the guy that done it, but it was you, see? I got all the dope. Now, if you want to play with us, we'll forget what we know. If you don't—the police will get the tip."

"That's right, Goldy," broke in another voice, "tell it to him."
"I see," said the suave voice, deceptively. "You've got me. I didn't figure Moreno would give me away. All right—it's equal shares and forget about that night-club business."

"I thought you'd listen to reason, chief," said Goldy, the tension gone from his voice.
"No use arguing. All right, Spike. Go into the vault and grab what you can get. Doc, you're next." There was a scrambling sound. Then: "Go ahead, Goldy."

"You first, chief."
"Afraid I'll plug you in the back. Don't be a fool! It's all the same to me." Then the suave voice took on a new note, low and ferocious. "Get your hands up, you double-crosser! Get 'em up or I'll drop you. There! Give me that gun! Quick! Now, get into that vault and if any of you make any kick about splitting up

the way I say I'll fill him full of lead so fast that he won't know sap, completely? Moreno tried those bags and pass them out to me. I'm staying right here and when I get what's coming to me I'm going to make my getaway. You guys can do as you please. If you want to chase me, try it. If you'd rather stay here and collect the rest of the stuff you'll be better off!"

"Well, you ———!"
"Shut up! Do you think I'm a sap, completely? Moreno tried the same gag on me last night, trying to hold that night-club killing over me, and you know what happened to him. I dropped him, see? It was a break that Gale and the girl blew in here."

"You—killed—Moreno?"
"You heard me. And I won't think twice of giving you the same medicine. Get into that vault and fill up the bags. Pass 'em out to me."

Goldy burst into a torrent of profanity. He was at the mercy of the leader he had tried to double-cross, and he knew it. There were threatening murmurs, presumably from the two men in the vault, but evidently the suave voiced man held the whip hand.

Then Kelvey emerged from the shelter of the rocks and peered into the tunnel. It was illuminated by an electric flashlight on a ledge. The tunnel led through the foundation of the Black Mansion, through a wall of earth, through the foundation of the jewelry store building and terminated at a brick wall which had been torn partly away revealing a solid sheet of steel. And in this steel was an irregular opening cut through by an electric torch.

He was just in time to see Goldy, cursing with rage, disappear into the vault. Before the opening stood a man, tall and commanding, a revolver in each hand. He turned slightly to get a better view of movements within the vault, and as he turned the light shone on his face.

Kelvey almost exclaimed aloud. The suave-voiced man, the man who had engineered this gigantic coup the man who had slain the night-club cashier and who, by his own confession, had murdered the gangster Moreno, the man who now held Goldy Marinoff and his fellow-crooks at his mercy was none other than Old Ned!

Old Ned, no longer a feeble, deaf, well-nigh helpless cripple, dependent on a wheel chair, but a vicious, white-haired, white-bearded master of crime, standing erect and watchful, ready for the slightest sign of revolt on the part of the man he now covered.

"Here, hang you!"
A heavy leather bag hurtled through the opening. Old Ned kicked it aside with his foot.
"Thanks!" he said, mockingly.
"Now you're going to be sensible. I won't be able to carry more than three. You're welcome to what you can put in your pockets."

He put one of the revolvers into his pocket and, still keeping the other levelled toward the vault, knelt down and snapped open the bag. He drew it to one side until he was out of range of the opening, examined the contents and then straightened up, apparently satisfied.

"Good!" he called. "Fill 'em all up that way and I may leave you a bag to carry your own."
Kelvey, leaning against the side of the tunnel, slowly raised his revolver and took careful aim. He was just about to utter a sharp command when, without warning, apparently sensing his danger, the old man swung around, ducked and fired point-blank.

Kelvey pressed the trigger but

he knew he had missed. Old Ned sprang across to the electric lamp and the tunnel was plunged into darkness. A terrific uproar followed, a medley of shouts, curses and revolver shots.

The detective leaped away from the tunnel entrance. He was opposed by four desperate men and in the inky blackness he knew he could not hope to hold the tunnel against them. He sprang across the basement and fell headlong over the foot of the stairs just as two revolver shots stabbed the darkness behind him.

He scrambled up the steps, sprang through the opening and fell sprawling on the floor above. He reached over and seized the trap door. It fell with a crash. He scrambled back toward the door of the kitchen.

The uproar in the basement was indescribable. The thieves were in utter panic. Heavy footsteps thudded on the stairs. The trap-door was raised. Kelvey fired. There was a splintering of wood, a yell, and the door crashed shut.

He reached behind him, found the knob of the kitchen door and wrenched it open.
"The whistle, Parkes! The whistle!" he shouted.

The shrill blast of the police whistle sounded in the night air. Again and again it trilled, urgently, fiercely.

The trap-door was flung up again and a revolver spat through the opening. The bullet shattered the glass of the kitchen window and fragments fell tinkling to the floor. Kelvey fired twice in rapid succession, directly at the trap-door. Crash! It fell shut again.

"Rush him!" Old Ned was shouting. "There's only one. Rush him!"

Goldy and his two companions were yelling with fright and panic. The door shot up again. Kelvey flung himself flat on the floor as the revolvers barked wildly. He emptied the chambers of his own weapon and had the satisfaction of hearing a shriek of pain, a succession of thuds as a body tumbled down the stairs, and a crash as the trap-door fell shut again.

Outside, the whistle was shrilling incessantly. Far down the street came an answering whistle—then another, from the block to the left.

The police were on their way. Suddenly, the trap-door shot violently open. No one emerged. Kelvey fired instinctively but the hammer clicked on an empty chamber. There was a yell of triumph. A head emerged from the opening just as Kelvey flung himself across the floor and slammed the trap-door back with all his strength. He lay across the door, holding it down with his weight.

An automatic clattered. Splinters flew into his face. They were firing through the door. The bullets missed him by mere inches.

Kelvey scrambled back. The trap-door flew open. He had a glimpse of Old Ned scrambling out, revolver raised, and then he sprang at him. The revolver crashed down on his head, half-stunning him, but he had the old man by the throat and they went to the floor, rolling over and over. It was a fierce, bitter struggle. He had a confused impression of two other figures scrambling out of the hole and racing for the door.

Old Ned, for his apparent age, was surprisingly strong. He fought with the strength and ferocity of utter desperation, with all the furious vigor of a man in the prime of life. The revolver came down against Kelvey's head

again, blinding him with pain, but he clung to his senses, stabbed his antagonist with vicious blows to the face and body. They rolled crashing against the wall; Old Ned squirmed free for a second, struck out with his revolver once more; Kelvey saw the blow coming and twisted his head aside. As the weapon slammed viciously on the floor he lunged in, his hands closing about the other's throat.

Old Ned tore himself free; they went rolling back into the middle of the kitchen. Kelvey felt one foot dangling abruptly in mid-air. He was on the verge of the trap-door. His antagonist was quick to sense the advantage. A hard blow in the face, and Kelvey felt himself weakening, slinking. All he could do now was cling to the other man. Desperately, Old Ned tried to wrench himself free, tried to raise the revolver for a finishing blow. But Kelvey clung doggedly to his wrist. The detective was being forced slowly over the side of the opening in the floor.

His antagonist suddenly tore his wrist free of Kelvey's weakening grasp. The revolver went up. Blow after blow rained on Kelvey's head and shoulders. By some superhuman effort he clung to his enemy's arm, weakening the force of the brutal attack and then—just as he felt himself slipping into darkness there was a heavy thudding of footsteps nearby, a strong arm seized him and drew him back to safety, a lithe figure plumed at Old Ned, and the struggle was over.
(To be concluded)

Here and There

(666)
Canada looms more important than ever in the trans-Pacific carrying trade, since the Empress of Japan sailed from Vancouver recently with a total of 998 passengers for Honolulu and the Far East, setting a record for the Canadian Pacific white Empresses for the year and amply justifying the company's expenditure of \$8,000,000 in a ship which is the largest and fastest on the Pacific.

Emergency work in the west on Canadian Pacific Railway construction this fall and winter represents expenditure of more than half a million dollars in alleviation of unemployment. The work is being undertaken in the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta. Similar relief in the East is seen in the fact that 550 former employees are now being taken on at the Angus Shops, Montreal, where they will work on repairs to passenger cars.

Bound on her 30,000-mile annual Canadian Pacific cruise around the world which will last four and a half months, the S.S. Empress of Australia sailed on the first lap of her voyage from New York December 2. She will touch at 81 ports and places in 24 countries during the trip and will be at sea 78 days and in port 59 days. She sailed with a capacity passenger list.

Patrons of the Royal York Hotel, Toronto, will enjoy the finest beef at the coming Christmas and New Year festivities possible to procure as a result of the purchase by the hotel management of 60 prize animals at the Royal Winter Fair held at Toronto recently.

A tablet has been erected at Windsor, N. S., by the Canadian Government commemorating the founding of King's College in 1789, the first university in Canada and the oldest in the British overseas dominions.

Total production of honey this year in Saskatchewan will be over 700,000 pounds, an increase of about 300,000 pounds over the output in 1929. Since 1927 the number of bee colonies in Saskatchewan has increased 213 per cent.

At the Ideal Homes Exhibition recently held in Edinburgh, Scotland, the Canadian exhibit was awarded the gold medal for general excellence. This award was made in the face of keen competition from more than 100 exhibitors from all parts of the British Empire.

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