



THE SILK ENIGMA

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"ZORA, THE INVISIBLE,"
"DEATH IN THE STALLS," &c.

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START THE STORY HERE
NIKOLAS NOLESCUE, a departmental silk manager at Oxtons, a big London silk emporium, is discovered by PHYLLIS VARLEY, first assistant in the Chinese Silk Department, lying dead, his body wrapped in a roll of Chinese silk beneath her counter.

SUPERINTENDENT JAMES BECK, of Scotland Yard, finds that Nolescue has been strangled, and after interviewing PETER OXTON, the managing director, and Miss Varley, discovers that Nolescue appeared particularly interested in Suchow silk.

Learning that the man had been in China, he seeks the co-operation of PROFESSOR KARMEN, of the British Museum, and finds that the Professor had met Nolescue in Suchow less than a year ago. The Professor tells Beck that Nolescue was seeking the whereabouts of TAO LI, a silk weaver.

He also tells him that Tao Li had been tortured and put to death because one of the Chinese secret societies was trying to discover the whereabouts of a famous jewel, the Five Eyes of Medichus, which had been pillaged from a temple and since disappeared. It was believed that Tao Li had information and that before his death he had committed the secret to the silk he had been weaving.

Beck believes that Nolescue came to London in order to locate that particular roll of silk.

(Now Read On)

**CHAPTER V
WARNED!**

Philip Slater had been at Oxtons for four years—energetic years they had been, too. His job was mainly in the office but his work made numerous visits to the shop essential.

It had been during one of these visits that he had first seen Phyllis Varley, and being a young man by no means insensible to the seductive allurements of feminine charm, the sight of Phyllis had rather knocked him sideways. Philip believed that he knew a pretty girl when he saw one, but the young woman who presided behind the Chinese silks counter was more than pretty. She was enchanting.

He remembered having stood staring at her in mute disbelief. She seemed incredible, unbelievable, unreal; the kind of girl that the romantic novelists write about that one is supposed to meet in railway trains, and on seaside promenades when the moon is high and every ripple on the beach is a serenade. He remembered, too, that in an embarrassing moment, the girl had looked up from the task that was occupying her fingers and their eyes had met. It had been an important moment in the life of Philip Slater; one of those moments when the world seems poised on the brink of decision, and it had not taken Philip long to decide that there was a girl worthy of his devotion.

Before a week had gone by, Philip Slater had made Phyllis Varley's acquaintance and if he had found her subtly unresponsive he was not discouraged. After all he was content, for the moment, to bask in the aura of her enchanting personality.

So the months had gone by and young Slater (if 28 can be termed young in these quickly-moving days) had discovered himself becoming more and more infatuated with the girl with the hair that smouldered rather than flamed.

Phyllis Varley's reactions to Mr.

Slater were not nearly so obvious as the young man might reasonably have desired. She was friendly in a way, but no more friendly than she might have been with anyone else inside Oxtons or out of it.

And curiously enough, Philip Slater was more than usually embarrassed. With any other girl he would possibly have made all the running; but with Phyllis he was singularly shy and it was this very shyness that gave the girl the impression that Slater was a victim of an introspective mind. She found him quiet and somewhat studious; an omnivorous reader.

She discovered, too, that he was clever in his way. He could argue things cut logically when it pleased him to do so, but though she had known him for twelve months he had never once told her that he liked her hair with the sun shining on it, even when they had been out on the Thames at Richmond; neither had he mentioned her eyes which were intensely blue and very interesting when you looked at them long enough.

Oddly enough, Phyllis Varley never regarded Philip as even a potential lover. Not that she wasn't romantic at times, but in those moments she never pictured the young man as a hero in love, although from the gossip she had heard in the staffroom more than one of the girls would have given a great deal to attract his attention.

If Philip had ever had time to analyse himself he would have agreed that he was conscientious concerning his work; had a passion for the mysterious and occasionally for the metaphysical, and that one of his ideas of happiness was a newly-built villa on the outskirts of London presided over by Phyllis Varley.

In the store he was inclined to be somewhat self-effacing; an unfortunate trait in his character he had been fighting ever since the day he first realized it. The books he had read described it as an "inferiority complex," a characteristic which, apparently, was as fatal to the mind as having no mind at all. He realized, too, that this shortcoming must be almost blatantly apparent to Miss Varley and again the text-books mentioned that no woman likes a man with a mind subservient to other minds stronger than itself. Which was all just a bit confusing but he had little doubt the writers knew what they were writing about.

So that Philip Slater rather surprised himself when he chanced to be passing through the store on the morning on which this chronicle opens and was actually in the act of coming upon Phyllis from the open end of the counter and found the girl falling backwards into his arms.

It was a moment later that he had seen precisely what Phyllis had seen below the counter—the hand and arm of a man protruding from between the folds of a roll of silk, and Philip, too, had recognized that ring on the little finger.

The situation flashed through his brain with the rapidity of a Morse signal. Nolescue was dead. Quickly he beckoned to Miss Martram and told her to help get Phyllis to the staffroom. This accomplished he returned to take charge of his first mystery.

It had been Philip who had instructed that the police should be notified and that no one should touch the body—not so much as one of the silken folds—until they arrived. It had amazed him, too, how most of the people he had always regarded as pinnacles of efficiency and calm should have found these attributes deserting them in that moment of crisis. He alone had remained calm—outwardly calm, that is—and it had given him a sense of infinite satisfaction to send one of the under-managers to the staff-room to inquire how Miss Varley was. The man had acted on his instructions without question.

And Philip had still been standing guard over the body of Nikolas Nolescue when the Divisional-Inspector had arrived on the scene and had given such preliminary information as he was requested. When once the police had taken charge, Philip Slater had gone back to his work.

During the hours that followed, Philip Slater felt that his newly-gained confidence was rather frightening. He felt that he had gained an altogether new personality, and that the stranger beneath the skin would need a new understanding. Mortlake had noticed the change, too. Mortlake was an under-manager—the man whom Philip had instructed to phone the police. And Mortlake had gone to the telephone without demur. There had been, he recollected, something rather terrifyingly compelling about Slater in that moment of crisis, and no matter how he regarded the affair he knew that he would have acted similarly if Slater had told him to go and do anything at all.

The new man emerged from the chrysalis of indecision and doubt was feeling his feet. In the first place, he was glad Nolescue was dead. Yet he realized that under the circumstances he had no right to allow his own per-

sonal prejudice to obscure the case. What he wanted to know was how Nolescue had died and the reason for his death.

And thinking of Nolescue caused him simultaneously to think of Phyllis. He had not been utterly blind to the fact that Phyllis and Nolescue had been somewhat friendly. They had every right to be friendly, of course, but that fact did not apply a layer of salve to the young man's emotions.

Nolescue, however, had interested him. For a foreigner he had always appeared to Philip to be extraordinarily sophisticated. He had scarcely a trace of an accent and his manners had invariably been punctilious.

By a process of adroit inquiry Philip learned that the Superintendent from Scotland Yard had interviewed Mr. Oxton and forthwith taken his departure, a proceeding that struck Philip as being rather odd. He had always understood that police investigations on the site of a crime were meticulously thorough, and while he appreciated that the intensely obvious magnifying glass of Sherlock Holmes was now considered to be rather redundant, he had expected the Superintendent to make more inquiries at the store than he appeared to have done. For instance he had been confident that the Superintendent would have wanted to question him. After all, he had taken charge from the moment Phyllis had fainted. He it was who had instructed Mortlake to telephone for the police. It was all rather a blow to the young man's understanding of police formalities.

All the same he was anxious about

Phyllis. He wondered whether the police had been to see her, so far that and for other reasons he made his way round to Moore street immediately the store had closed.

Phyllis greeted him in her usual friendly way.

"Hello, Philip, any news from the shop?"

"Mrs. Shapling was there and her ears were tingling."

"That's right Mr. Slater! What's the news? Have they arrested anyone?"

Philip accepted a chair and smiled.

"I'm afraid the police haven't done anything," he complained, lightly.

"They haven't even interviewed me, and I reckon I'm an important witness."

"Not so important as Miss Varley," cooed Mrs. Shapling. "The police have been here already, haven't they, dearie?"

Phyllis smiled and nodded. "Superintendent Beck from Scotland Yard came around to ask a few questions," she explained.

Philip looked serious. "I wish I'd known he was coming to see you," he said. "I might have given you a few tips. It's dangerous when you're not used to them."

"That's just what I said myself, Mr. Slater. The police can make you say just whatever they want you to say. My sister's husband was once—Mrs. Shapling's personal rhetoric began to grow extensive, and Phyllis realized that once Mrs. Shapling got going she was a difficult person to interrupt. So she spoke.

"Superintendent Beck was very nice," she assured him. "He wasn't a bit like a policeman—not even a stage policeman."

"What did he want to know?" asked Philip, intently.

Mrs. Shapling, prevented from unburdening herself concerning her brother-in-law's ordeal, and deciding, in her wisdom, that the two young people would probably like to be left alone for a few moments, withdrew to her own room with a remark that if Mr. Slater would like a cup of tea, there was some still "on the pot."

Phyllis Varley had sensed something different about Philip almost from the moment he had entered the house and she was, for the moment, perplexed to know just what it was. It was something indefinable, rather like an atmosphere. There was nothing shy or retiring about him; nothing apologetic.

She had almost forgotten his question and he repeated it, more forcibly this time.

"Oh, just a few things about Mr. No-

lescue," she replied vaguely; so vaguely, in fact, that Philip immediately concluded that the girl was bent on pursuing a policy of evasion.

"And I suppose you told him?" There was a brusquerie about the question that annoyed her.

"Really, Philip, I've been asked enough questions for one day. I'm tired."

Immediately his mood softened. "I'm sorry, Phyllis, I didn't mean to cross-question you like this, but we'll have to be very careful."

The girl's brows elevated. "Why, what have we got to be careful of?"

Philip grew more confidential as he leaned forward towards her. "If the police have no idea who it was killed Nolescue they probably suspect all of us. They might even suspect me."

Alarm showed in the girl's face. "Suspect you, Philip? But that's nonsense. It was someone in the shop late last night."

"That's just it," he went on, "it might have been me, and it might have been you. It might; have been both of us."

"L'Envoi"

(After Kipling)

When earth's last kettle is spottiest,
And the dish-cloths all twisted and dried;

When the oddest grease spot has faded
And the youngest dust germ has died,
We shall rest, and faith we shall need

it;
Lie down for an aeon or two,
With never a shrill alarm clock
To set us to work anew.

And those who were neat shall be happy;
They shall sit on a cushioned chair,
Each weary and separate Martha
So cumbered about with care,
They shall have real leisure to draw

from,
With never a store-man's call
And feet shall have done with aching,
And never be tired at all.

With never a caller to gossip
And never a neighbour to blame,
And no one need scribble on pennies
Or care for her housewife's fame,
But each for ever and ever
In a separate star alone

Shall do the things she has longed to,
In time that is all her own.
—Martha Haskell Clark.

Ottawa Journal:—The harder a man works the more he earns for others.

'SALADA' TEA

is delicious

Little Friend Delighted with Music of Paderewski

(From Children's Newspaper)
Paderewski's spider may not take its place in history with that of Robert Bruce, but at least it deserves honourable mention.

It was a friend of his student days, of which he has lately been telling the tale, and it was musical. One day in his humble room in Vienna, while he was practising an exercise of Chopin, the spider let itself down from the ceiling by its silver thread till it came on to the piano desk.

Paderewski looked at it and went on playing. His exercise was in what musicians know as "thirds," and while he continued the spider stayed, seemingly an enthralled listener. At the end of the exercise the pianist turned to another one, this time in "sixths." But this had no charms for the spider, which immediately rolled up its cable and went back to the ceiling.

Was it a coincidence? Paderewski wondered, and began the exercise in thirds again. Down came the spider.

This performance was repeated for weeks. Every time the pianist played in thirds the spider took an orchestra seat on the piano desk to listen, and Paderewski got to know his musical admirer so well that he used to watch the tiny creature's eyes while he played.

The odd friendship came to an end when Paderewski left Vienna for the summer. When he returned in the autumn and opened his piano again he sounded the call in musical thirds, but no spider came to hear.

Acton Free Press: Can you imagine Chief McPherson and Reeve McCutcheon creating such a public fuss over Sunday selling as has been done in Toronto recently between the Mayor and Chief of Police? And Acton is a small town.

India Lotus Wreath to Be on Gown of New Queen

The Queen has further approved the design of the robes she will wear at her Coronation in Westminster Abbey on May 12.

The dress of ivory-tinted satin, in "princess" shape, with a full train, will be richly embroidered in gold, with gold beads, sequins and diamonds. Twelve girls are now working in a New Bond Street dressmaking establishment completing the elaborate hand embroidery.

Two complete sample designs have been approved by the Queen. Each had taken a week to embroider. There are eight scrolls, combining the floral emblems of the British Isles and the Dominions. Realistic effects had been obtained on the sample designs by the use of different gold threads, lames and cords.

The robe will have a square décolletage and small sleeves, slashed on top, with a flounce of fine gold lace. All the material to be used in the dress is English. Even the cocoons from which the silk was obtained were bred in England. At the front, along the foot of the dress, large gold lotus flowers will "float" in an embroidered "lake" of silver. These emblems of the Indian Empire are given a prominent place, as the dress is also to be worn at the Delhi Durbar. English oak leaves and acorns will be used as the border design.



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