

THE SILK ENIGMA

BY
J.R. WILMOT

AUTHOR OF

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

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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 later discovers that the man has been particularly interested in Suchow silk.

PROFESSOR KARMEN, at the British Museum tells Beck that he had met the man in China, where he found him inquiring the whereabouts of TAO LI, a silk weaver of Suchow. The Professor tells the Superintendent that it is believed that TAO LI has been tortured and since died because he knew the secret of the whereabouts of "The Five Eyes of Medichus," a jewel which has been pillaged from a temple in the mountains and which is sought by members of the Tong, a Chinese secret society. Beck forms the opinion that the weaver committed the crime to the silk he was weaving at the time he became aware that the Tong were on his heels.

Beck goes out that night to dine with PETER OXTON, managing director of the silk store, and after he has left Oxtan receives a visit from a Tartar who threatens evil to his daughter unless he instructs the police to cease their vigil at the store.

(Now Read On)

CHAPTER IX THE HIDDEN MENACE

Superintendent Beck had just arrived back at Scotland Yard when he was informed that he was wanted on the telephone.

He was surprised, on lifting the ear-piece, to hear Peter Oxtan's almost frantic voice.

"Mr. Beck I demand that you withdraw your men from the store immediately. I mean that. If you don't do it, I shall get into touch with the Home Secretary.

Beck could scarcely believe his ears. "But my dear Mr. Oxtan you know as well as I do it's impossible. I've a nasty job of work to do, and I'm intent on doing it in my own way. But tell me, why the sudden change of front? Only a few hours ago, you remember, you promised to give me all the help you could."

There was a perceptible pause at the other end of the line.

"I've been threatened, Mr. Beck. I've been told to instruct you to withdraw your men."

"Now that's what I call really interesting," cooed the Superintendent, in a singularly satisfied tone. "You've been threatened, have you, and by whom?"

"By a yellow-skinned little dago who broke into the library a few minutes ago and threatened to stick me with a knife unless I did as he said."

"That's fine, Mr. Oxtan. He didn't

do any sticking, I suppose? You're not damaged in any way." There was more than a hint of amusement in the detective's tone as he made the observation.

But Peter Oxtan was in no mood for banter, and Beck could visualize his exasperated features as he spoke.

"Look here, Beck, this doesn't happen to be as funny as you appear to imagine it to be. I'm dead serious in asking you to do this. I don't care a damn for myself, but when I think of Brenda's danger—"

"Ah!" broke in the Superintendent. "So they're trying that old dodge, are they? Just exactly what did this yellow heathen say about Miss Brenda?"

Peter Oxtan was calmer, now. "He threatened that if the police didn't remove themselves from the vicinity of the store, something particularly nasty would happen to Brenda. That's all I can tell you."

"I don't think you need worry overmuch about Miss Brenda," came back Beck's assurance. "I'll attend to that. And now, Mr. Oxtan, my advice to you is to go to bed and forget all about it."

"But you must withdraw your men," insisted Oxtan. "The fact that this man met his death in my shop—and even that's not definite, is it?—means nothing to me compared with the safety of my daughter."

"We'll talk about that first thing in the morning," Beck compromised, and Peter Oxtan had to be content with that.

Beck turned away from the instrument and smiled over at Inspector Graves.

"Somebody's got the 'wind up,' he said. 'Oxtan's had a visit from one of our Suchow friends and told to tell us to quit. If we don't something's going to happen to Brenda Oxtan. You'd better get into touch with the County people and ask them to double the men on the beat around the house and to arrest instantly anyone acting suspiciously and particularly any of our yellow friends.'"

The Inspector left the room to carry out his Superintendent's instructions and when he had gone Beck tried hard to get the case into some kind of perspective. It was almost kaleidoscopic and when he considered that twenty-four hours had not yet elapsed since he had taken over the investigation, it was surprising how the affair had changed in his mind.

Why had Peter Oxtan been warned? Why were the people obviously at the back of the crime so anxious to divert police surveillance from the premises where the body of Nolescue had been found? The Superintendent drummed impatiently with the square tips of his fingers on the desk in front of him. The more he thought about it the more he became convinced that the theory he had evolved as a result of his visit to Professor Karmen at the British Museum was the correct one. If it were not so; if the secret did not centre around Peter Oxtan's premises, why were the police warned off in this rather crude and equally melodramatic manner?

OXTAN had said that the intruder after midnight at his house had been a Chinaman; a dago he had said, and when Beck remembered that Peter Oxtan himself had spent some years in China he would recognize the type of man more readily than anyone unaccustomed to noticing the difference between one Chinaman and the next.

Beck's difficulty, as he well appreciated, was to look for the right Chinaman in the whole of London with its teeming cosmopolitan population. The task was well nigh impossible. However, when Graves returned from his mission he sent him down to the Alien Branch to inquire whether the roll of Oriental aliens had materially increased in the past month or more, and whether he could be supplied with a list of those who had landed here within that time.

This done, he decided that, like Peter

Oxtan, he would lie him home to his bed and that for no other reason than he felt tired.

Next morning the bacon was not cold and there was no plaster on the Superintendent's chin. He arose in ample time; performed a few contortions that someone had once prescribed for middle-aged men and called them physical "jerks," inhaled deeply half-a-dozen times before an open window; smelt the smoke of London through the sweetness of the morning and went down to breakfast.

He was down at The Yard at his appointed time and found Inspector Graves waiting for him.

"There's been no report from the County people and none from the Night Inspector in Oxtan's division. Everything seems quiet on the silk front, sir."

Beck announced that they would proceed immediately to Oxtan's and, for some hours at least, they would make the shop their headquarters.

Peter Oxtan had not arrived when they entered and looked around. There seemed to be more customers than there had been yesterday morning. Many of them were standing staring and nodding in the direction of the counter, where the body of Nikolas Nolescue had been discovered and which, for the time being, was closed.

"Business seems brisk," Beck commented to the floor-walker who came up to them.

"I certainly is, sir. Murder seems to be a good advertisement."

Beck grinned. "I hope it won't become too popular," he commented. "I've got my hands full with this one. By the way, I shall want a room somewhere so that I can have a chat with every member of your staff. There will be no difficulty about that, I hope."

"I will ask the under-manager to see that one is placed at your disposal, sir," the floor-walker told him and hurried away.

In the interim of waiting Beck and Graves spent a few moments behind the counter where the crime had been discovered. The place looked incredibly bare.

"I sometimes wish that inanimate objects could speak," philosophized the Superintendent, with a reluctant shake of his head. "For instance the counter, when questioned by Superintendent Beck of Scotland Yard said: 'At ten-thirty-five last night Mr. Nolescue was examining a piece of silk close beside me when he heard a noise from the far side of the shop. Hurriedly he switched off the electric torch he was using and crept forward stealthily in the direction from which the sound had come. He dare not flash his torch for fear of revealing his position. Suddenly and without warning a slim shadow launched itself from the darkness of the shop in the direction of Mr. Nolescue who, having been knocked off his balance was helpless to resist so savage an attack. The attacker realizing that it was to be a fight to the death decided that if any death-dealing had to be done it would be done by himself. He thereupon stretched out his hands and gripped his victim's throat. The fingers tightened so quickly that Nolescue had scarcely time to organize a resistance. He was helpless, and those thin, cruel talons did their devastating work.' How's that, Inspector mine?"

Graves had been listening to Beck almost open-mouthed. Then his thin features relaxed into a smile.

"If ever you lose your job, sir, you can always take up journalism."

"Thanks," murmured Beck. "Seriously, though, I shouldn't be at all surprised if that wasn't how it was done."

"It sounds all right to me," agreed Graves. "But how did the killed gain admittance to the shop. From the D.I.'s report there were no signs of breaking and entering."

"That's something of a puzzle," admitted Beck. "Of course, he might have provided himself with a duplicate key, though how he'd come to get hold of one to make an impression I don't know. Still, it's an idea. We'll find out who has the keys."

TROUBLE ABOUT ALIBIS

At that instant the under-manager arrived to say that he had accommodated the Superintendent in a small room adjacent to the cash office where, he hoped, it would be found convenient for his purpose. Beck thanked him, and the two officers followed the man up to the first floor.

"This will do nicely," commented the Superintendent looking around the room appraisingly. "Will you tell Mr. Oxtan when he comes in that I'm installed here for the time being and, in the meantime, I'd like to see Miss Varley."

A moment later Phyllis Varley knocked timidly at the door and entered.

"Good morning, Miss Varley, how are you? Got over your nasty fright, I hope?"

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Beck. I'm quite all right now. You wanted to see me?"

"I always want to see a charming girl," smiled the Superintendent, pulling out a chair for her. "The sight of you this morning makes me wish I were twenty years younger. Oh, and

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GIN PILLS FOR THE KIDNEYS

this is Inspector Graves. He's really r.c.; such a bad fellow at heart, and I shouldn't be at all surprised if he hasn't already 'fallen' for you. How's that, Inspector?"

The Inspector grinned and felt foolish. It was all very well Beck having his little joke, but he didn't like being made a fool of in front of a pretty girl.

"I agree with you, sir, that Miss Varley is very beautiful."

"Gallant fellow," agreed Beck. "And now, Miss Varley I wonder whether that errant memory of yours has since last we met thought of anything else that might help us?"

Phyllis Varley felt that these two were the most extraordinary policemen she had ever met. Not, of course, that she had met any before in a professional capacity, but if they were all like these two she felt that she need never have any qualms.

"I'm afraid I haven't," she smiled. "I discussed the affair fairly thoroughly last night with Mr. Slater and we agreed that it's a perfect puzzle."

The Superintendent's eyebrows elevated slightly.

"Mr. Slater? A particular friend of yours, Miss Varley?"

The girl's cheeks coloured. "He is, rather, but I didn't know until last night."

Superintendent Beck looked somewhat bewildered.

"Won't you explain? I mean about Mr. Slater?"

"But I thought you knew about him. He was with me when I found Mr. Nolescue."

"Of course of course. Stupid of me," laughed Beck. "He will be the young man I didn't have time to see yesterday. The Divisional Inspector spoke quite highly of him. I must have a word or two with Mr. Slater."

A look of alarm flashed into the girl's face. "Mr. Slater doesn't know anything about it, really he doesn't. He went for a walk last night."

Beck regarded the girl shrewdly. "Now just what do you mean by that remark, young lady? Do I gather that you and Mr. Slater have been talking things over?"

"Naturally. We're both bound to be interested since it affects us both."

"I'm afraid I'm being awfully stupid this morning, Graves," he announced, turning to the Inspector. "Would you say that both Miss Varley and Mr. Slater have been looking to their alibis?"

Inspector Graves nodded. "That's what it sounds like to me, sir."

Beck nodded in agreement. "Then I'm not so stupid after all." He turned back again to the girl who realized that somehow she had said something she shouldn't.

"I'm sure you're wrong, Superintendent. Philip didn't hate him as much as all that."

Beck had grown suddenly serious. "Listen to me, Miss Varley. What you're trying to tell me is this: Mr. Slater saw you last night. We discussed the case. That was quite natural. I'll admit. You considered it from both your viewpoints—from the point of the interest shown in you by Nolescue and the effect of that interest on the behaviour of Mr. Slater. I can see now the reason for your embarrassment yesterday morning when I put a similar question to you regarding your friendship with the man who is now dead. I take it that Mr. Slater suggested that both of you, in the circumstances, would need alibis and you decided that you'd have to find one—one for each of you. Am I right?"

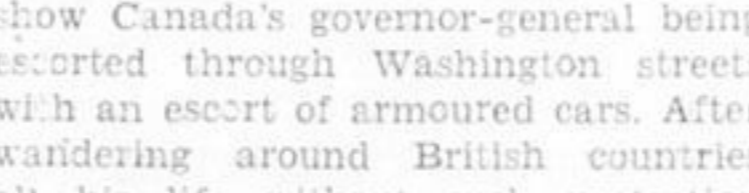
The girl had risen to her feet. Beck saw that her face was white and that she was trembling.

"No! You're all wrong," she cried. "We found that neither of us had alibis for that night!"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Peterboro Examiner:—News pictures show Canada's governor-general being escorted through Washington streets with an escort of armoured cars. After wandering around British countries all his life without such protection Lord Tweedsmuir must have found that a strange experience.

LOOK!
it's a better shine and easier tool!



ZEBRA LIQUID or PASTE STOVE POLISH

And now that we are really and truly friends—for you have accepted me as such, have you not?—I will be just like a friend, and ask you to do me a special favour. This column having appeared now for some weeks, I should like you to tell me if you like it and why, and if you don't, you can tell me that too—and why! Perhaps you would like something else to be talked about? Tell me that as well. Address your letters to "Your Friend Kip" in care of "The Porcupine Advance."

Blismore Enterprise:—There used to be an old saying: "The further out (or the further west) the better the men. North Battleford must have been very far west."

The Children's Corner

(By "Your Friend Kip")

You will notice that your author has a new name — changing around for variety. You see, a pen-name doesn't necessarily have to be kept, and since I much prefer to be "Your Friend Kip" you'll know me as that. And what is a pen-name you will ask? Well, it's something like "Honourable" only for that you have to be worthy, and it is yours always, whereas a pen-name is just a name you pick up out of the air when you are tired of your own name. Wouldn't it be funny if you all adopted new names—how would anyone ever find you?

Since it will soon be berry-picking time, the new friends you made last week will tell you "Something About Cranberries" because, although we do not have cranberries near Timmins, I am sure you would like to know about them.

"This sauce is just delicious," said Tommy, passing his dish for more. "Why can't we grow cranberries, Father?"

"Principally because we have no land suitable for the purpose," smiled Mr. Dayton. "The land upon which the cranberry is cultivated is reclaimed swamps and bogs, which have formerly been considered of but little value. The right kind of soil is low, moist land, suitably drained, consisting of peat, muck and mold. Clay soil is unfit for the cranberry, and loam will grow weeds too readily. Brush bog is best, because less labour is required to bring it to a state of cultivation, and this kind of bog-land is usually free from grass roots. A good piece of bog, properly cared for, will give an average yield of sixty to seventy-five barrels of cranberries per acre."

"My word!" breathed Tommy. "I would be glad if we could raise just one barrel. These cranberries are pointed; those we bought last week were pear-shaped. I suppose there are several varieties of cranberries."

"There must be," Alice asserted. "We had some lovely bugle-shaped ones not long ago. And Mother said she had seen cranberries that were perfectly round."

"Cranberries vary in shape, as well as in the time of ripening, and in keeping qualities," said Uncle John. "Some berries will colour well after they are picked, while others will not change from white to red unless left upon the vines to ripen. The cranberry is first green then white, then it turns to pink, and then to red. Some varieties when ripe are so dark a red as to be almost black."

"I wonder if they are hard to gather," speculated Max.

"They are no worse than strawberries," observed Father slyly, and every one smiled, for all knew Max's sentiments toward picking the fruit of the vine.

"Care is necessary in picking and packing to keep the cranberries cool and dry," said Uncle John. "The berries are poured from the picking or storage boxes into the hopper or separator which blows out the vines and separates the greater part of the poor from the good berries. From the separator the berries go to the screens, and are carefully picked over by women four or five usually working at a screen. Formerly cranberries were shipped in one hundred quart barrels. Now the favourite package is a two-compartment crate holding thirty-two quarts, dry measure. This package keeps the berries in the best possible condition, is easily handled, and requires less storage room than a barrel."

"Where are cranberries grown?" inquired Mabel. She had taken a notebook from the pocket of her middie and was busily making entries. Cranberries would do just well as anything for her part of the general information exercises at school!

"Cranberries have been known to northern Europe for centuries, and are grown in Russia, Sweden, and Great Britain," observed Uncle John. "Our cranberry is superior to any known varieties, and is highly cultivated in the New England States, New York, New Jersey, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the Pacific Coast States. Cranberries in our country were first cultivated on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, nearly a century ago. Of late years the crop has netted the growers of the Commonwealth from one million to one and a half million dollars per annum. All in all there are more than 20,000 acres of cranberries in the United States. The chief districts are located in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Wisconsin, but the northwest coast line of Oregon and Washington promises to become a great field for this agricultural industry."

"Who knows where the cranberry got its name?" Mabel then wanted to know.

"I was reading about that just the other day," said Auntie. "It seems that just before the bud is ready to expand into a perfect flower, the stem, calyx and petals look very much like the neck, head and bill of the crane. Hence the name 'cranberry' which usage has shortened into 'cranberry.'"

And now that we are really and truly friends—for you have accepted me as such, have you not?—I will be just like a friend, and ask you to do me a special favour. This column having appeared now for some weeks, I should like you to tell me if you like it and why, and if you don't, you can tell me that too—and why! Perhaps you would like something else to be talked about? Tell me that as well. Address your letters to "Your Friend Kip" in care of "The Porcupine Advance."

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Contracts Let for Roads in the North

Details of Programme for \$2,000,000 Worth of New Roads in the North.

Expenditure of approximately \$2,000,000 is involved in road construction contracts for Northern Ontario which were announced at the week-end by the Ontario Department of Highways. Details of the various work approved are as follows:

Concrete Pavement
Blind River west, four miles, including grading four miles, Malvern Construction Company, Essex York.

Mixed Macadam
Ferry Sound north, 5 1/2 miles, George Grant Construction Company, Gt. Lakes.

Grading and Culverts
Revisions of Ferguson highway between Bracebridge and Huntsville, 4.5 miles, Angus & Taylor, North Bay.

Bayville, three miles, Quinlan Construction Company, Leaside.

From eight miles north of North Bay, north seven miles, Chambers, McQuig & McCaffrey, Toronto.

Ferry Sound north, 4.5 miles, Angus & Taylor, North Bay.

Chalk River west, curve revisions and graveling, Angus & Taylor, North Bay.

Englehart to Dan, four miles, Hennessy & Hennessy, Halleybury.

Falconbridge road, 14 miles, W. A. Mackay, Toronto.

Beardmore to Jellison, 16 miles, Tomlinson Construction Company, Toronto.

Shebandawan road, Fort William, Long Lac Construction Company, Fort William.

Sioux Lookout to Duncow, 8.3 miles, R. H. Bond, Kenora.

Nester Falls south—Heenan highway, four miles, R. H. Bond, Kenora.

Kinmount to Grederham, Industrial Construction Company, Windsor.

Near Haliburton, 17.5 miles, F. R. Wilford, Lindsay.

Faudash Lake road, F. R. Wilford, Lindsay.

Between Madawaska and Whitney, Angus & Taylor, North Bay.

Between Maynooth and Comberne, Holdcroft Construction Company, Kingston.

Bridges and Culverts
Mattawisquis bridge and approaches, Ontario Construction Company, St.

FINANCIAL TRAGEDY AVERTED BY POLICY

A Flagstone, B.C. woman recently faced what she feared was a financial tragedy. Her husband was killed in an automobile accident, and she was apparently left without funds with which to maintain her children. Her husband had insured with The Mutual Life of Canada in 1923 under Policy No. 172,035, but premiums for the past nine years had not been paid.

Investigation by the Mutual Life agent revealed that the policy contained a valuable automatic "non-forfeiture" provision, the effect of which was to continue the insurance in force. There was also provision for double protection in case of the assured's accidental death, so that twice the amount of the policy was payable to the widow, who received a net amount of \$3,468, acknowledged as a veritable "Godsend."

If interested in obtaining the maximum amount of insurance protection at minimum cost, you are invited to consult the representatives of this "mutual" company or to write the Head Office direct for information.

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Northern Ontario Roads

Protection During Spring 1937
Northern Division Department of Highways

Frost action in April and May causes road beds to get soft and readily subject to damage from traffic.

All trucks are limited to half loads and speed of 20 miles per hour. Horse drawn vehicles capacity one ton, 250 lbs per inch of tires.

The weight of loads and speed will be constantly checked. Penalty for overloading is a fine, or imprisonment, or both. Permits may also be suspended. Co-operation from truck and car owners is earnestly requested to prevent unlawful and unnecessary abuse of roads.

Northern Division Dept. of Highways
H. R. PHIPPS,
Division Engineer.

DON'T SUFFER FROM RHEUMATISM

No sensible person should continue to suffer from rheumatic pains and miss the pleasures of life because of stiff joints. Before resorting to operations, injections or other drastic measures try a bottle of Curtis Rheumatism and Arthritis Treatment.

This powerful, yet harmless internal remedy is easy to take and in numerous cases very effective. Get a bottle at Curtis Drug Store, 14 Pine Street North and start to-day. In a short time note the improvement. Then continue until your condition is entirely relieved. Money returned if not satisfied. Adv.

Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Railway
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Will Operate

BARGAIN COACH EXCURSION Friday, April 30th

to

Pembroke Jet, Ottawa Montreal and Quebec via
North Bay and Canadian National

Excursion travel will be handled on train 46 connecting at North Bay with C.N. train 2. On the return journey tickets will be valid for travel on C.N. train 1 from Montreal 7.55 p.m. Sunday, May 2nd, and Monday May 3rd, 1937.

BARGAIN COACH EXCURSION Thursday, April 29th

to

Points in the Maritimes via North Bay and C.N.
Tickets will be valid to leave destination point Wednesday, May 5th, 1937.

For further particulars apply to Local Agent