

# THE SILK ENIGMA

BY  
**J. R. WILMOT**

AUTHOR OF

"ZORA, THE INVISIBLE,"

"DEATH IN THE STALLS," &c.

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## CHAPTER XVII A YOUNG MAN IS IMPATIENT

Philip Slater was out of his bed much earlier than usual the morning following his interview with Superintendent Beck concerning Phyllis Varley's disappearance.

He had made it his business to call around at Moore Street only to find that a much agitated Mrs. Shapling had no news of the girl. He arrived at the store half an hour before his appointed time and hung around the staff entrance in the hope that Phyllis had made unexpected arrangements the previous night and that she would be coming straight to the shop.

But at nine o'clock there was no sign of Phyllis, and the young man's nerves were badly frayed. He was convinced now that something terrible must have happened to the girl—something associated with the mystery in which they were both involved.

The girl's absence, when it was learned that she had not arrived at her lodgings the previous night, was the subject of much comment among her colleagues. Miss Rich after her outburst the night before, was strangely chastened and refused resolutely to be drawn into the speculation.

As for Philip he felt that work was impossible for him until he had got in touch with Scotland Yard, and to that end he awaited the arrival of Mr. Peter Oxton with a patience that was only with difficulty controlled.

Hardly had the Managing Director gained the sanctuary of his office than Philip Slater entered.

"I have to inform you, sir," said Philip without preamble, "that Miss Varley has disappeared. I first had my suspicions last night and went to see Superintendent Beck at Scotland Yard. Don't you think, sir, that we ought to inform him that she hasn't turned in this morning?"

Peter Oxton looked the amazement he felt. He stared at the young man unbelievably.

"Are you sure of this?" he demanded.

"I'm certain, sir. Miss Varley never reached Moore Street last night. The girls say that she left the store at the usual hour, but her landlady told me two hours later that she had not arrived. Something happened to Miss Varley, sir, between her leaving here and her going home. Should I telephone, sir, or will you?"

Peter Oxton was bewildered. There was something dominant about Philip Slater that he had never noticed before. Of course, the fellow must be interested in the girl in a rather different relationship than that associated solely with business.

"I am interested in her, sir, and what's more I'm certain that it has something to do with all this mystery surrounding Mr. Nolescue's murder. Why, Phyllis hadn't an enemy in the world. No one would want deliberately to do her harm."

Peter Oxton's mind swung back to the threat of the Tartar in his own library—a threat that had, on that occasion, been directed against his own daughter. He was telling himself that it might have been Brenda and not Miss Varley. He shuddered at the

thought. Of course, there was always the possibility that Miss Varley had reasons of her own for disappearing and he suggested that to Slater.

"I can't believe that, sir. Why, she made an appointment with me for eight o'clock last night, and you may take it from me, sir, that had she been able to keep it she most certainly would have done so."

Peter Oxton could not resist a smile at the young man's earnestness and his implicit faith in Miss Varley.

"It's obvious to me, Slater," he said, "that your knowledge of the ways of women is no so complete as it probably will be when you grow older. The fact that a woman makes an appointment doesn't always mean that she intends keeping it. You see, Slater, it may have been that Miss Varley had a scheme of her own in mind and in order to throw you off the scent she deliberately made with you an appointment she had no intention of keeping. But by all means, if Superintendent Beck is interested, we shall inform him. For my part, young man, I'm heartily sick of the whole affair. I've been threatened myself, and I didn't like it. But what has Scotland Yard done? As far as I can see they've done nothing at all. Beck's a nice enough fellow, I admit, but he doesn't seem to have quite the right grip on the case. He's playing around with some fantastic theory of rival Chinese secret societies at war over a piece of silk. It's a wonder to me he hasn't commanded the whole of our stock and taken it to Scotland Yard."

### OXTON IS PERSUADED

Philip Slater started. "That's certainly an idea, sir. If I may I'd like to mention it to him."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Slater. Don't you think we've been inconvenienced enough already? However, I'm sure Miss Varley will be found safe and sound staying with an invalid aunt from whom she received a message last night too late to cancel your appointment. By the way, I'll phone Scotland Yard myself, if that will ease your suffering."

Philip Slater went back to his work with a tortured mind. He told himself it was just the least bit cruel of Mr. Oxton to put it the way he had done; but in fairness to Oxton perhaps that was his peculiar way of reliving his own feelings. Which was just what it was.

Peter Oxton got into touch with the Superintendent immediately and Beck informed him that he was coming around to the store immediately.

When the Superintendent arrived he appeared more perplexed than usual. He went straight to Oxton's private office.

"I'm sorry about Miss Varley," he told Oxton. "She's what I call a nice, intelligent girl. I had been hoping that some explanation of her disappearance would have been discovered by this morning. Since it hasn't I suppose we'd better start looking for her."

"I believe that Mr. Slater saw you last night, Mr. Beck?" questioned Oxton. "What precisely is Mr. Slater's position in relation to the case on hand?"

"Nothing more than that of an observer," Beck told him. "I found Mr.

Slater to be a young man of resource and ideas and I asked him to keep an eye on things here during my absence."

"Isn't that unusual, Mr. Beck? And don't you think I should have been apprised of that fact?"

"I suppose you should have been," the Superintendent apologized. "But when I asked him to do something for me I didn't want anyone else to know except Miss Varley. I rather wanted them to work together on the inside."

"I think I might have been told that you had recruited my staff, Superintendent," Peter Oxton appeared a trifle petulant, and Beck was beginning to lose his temper, a thing he rarely did.

"Mr. Oxton," he said, facing his man squarely, "I will recall to your mind that the other night you yourself were threatened from what I call the 'danger quarter.' A threat was made against the safety of your daughter if you didn't persuade me to withdraw my men from the store and its vicinity. To please you and to set your mind at rest, I did so. You must realize that I had to have someone here who was in a position to give me information. I took upon myself the responsibility of asking Miss Varley and Mr. Slater to report certain facts to me. Mr. Slater has done so with the co-operation of Miss Varley. I'll tell you, quite frankly, sir, that I don't like the attitude you are adopting this morning. Is it because you no longer fear that danger will come to your own daughter? If that is it, sir, I can't bring myself to admire you. I am just as disturbed at Miss Varley's disappearance as I would be had the girl been your daughter. I want you to understand that. I think I'll be getting along."

The colour had mounted to Oxton's face and he had to admit that the Superintendent had been right.

"I'm sorry, Superintendent; very sorry indeed. I can only attribute my recent attitude to a condition of nerves which has affected me since this business started. Of course, I see your point. It might have been Brenda. I insist that you take whatever steps you please in future to end this uncertainty. If you like you can fill the store with police. I don't mind—I don't mind anything if only we can get to the bottom of this distressing affair."

"Even the disappearance of your daughter?" Beck questioned, quietly.

The reply surprised the Superintendent. Nevertheless it gave him a new angle on Oxton's character.

"Even to that," he whispered hoarsely.

"I don't think you need fear that anything will happen to Miss Oxton," Beck assured him, with a grim smile. "But I think I can say that we appear to have got someone 'on the run' as we call it. Without doing anything practical in my investigation we have created a feeling of uneasiness in someone's mind—someone who doesn't seem to know how much we know, and I figure that Miss Varley has been taken for that very purpose. They want to know what Scotland Yard is doing and Miss Varley, they imagine, is the key."

"But does Miss Varley know?" asked Oxton.

Superintendent Beck shook his head. "She knows practically nothing at all. But one never knows but what she will be the means of leading us to the lair of the criminal we're after."

"IT IS ABOUT MR. NOLESCUE!"

With this Beck went in search of Philip Slater.

He found that young man very much upset and he greeted the Superintendent eagerly.

"Any news of her, Mr. Beck?" Beck shook his head. "Haven't started looking yet, my boy. You see I was hoping that your report last night might have proved to be a false alarm."

They were standing together talking in the deserted corridor outside the general office.

"What can we do?" asked Slater, desperately.

The Superintendent shook his head. "There are people disappearing almost every hour of the day somewhere. They just go out and don't come back. Some are discovered after a few hours' absence. Others are never heard of again. Don't think I'm being pessimistic," he added as he noted the startled expression on the young man's face. "I'm only trying to illustrate how difficult it is for the police to get on their trails. There's no clue . . . nothing at all except a description. I don't need the personal part of that. I've met Miss Varley, but if you could tell me what she was wearing when last she was seen I'll have the description circulated immediately."

"I couldn't tell you for certain, myself," Philip doubted, "but I'll soon get that information from some of the girls. I won't be a minute."

When Slater had raced towards the stairs leading to the store, Beck wandered along towards the stairs that led upwards towards the flat roof of the store where, when the weather permitted, the members of the staff spent some little time in their rest periods. He had a mind to go up there himself. At the foot of the stairs he paused as

he heard hurried footsteps behind him. He turned and saw a small, slightly-built girl coming towards him. He judged that she was no longer young—that is as young women go. Thirty-eight to forty at a guess.

"Excuse me," she began, nervously, "you are Superintendent Beck?" The Superintendent admitted the identity. "I want to speak to you. I must speak to you. It is about Mr. Nolescue!"

Beck regarded the girl shrewdly. "Weren't you interviewed the day before yesterday; or was it yesterday?" he asked, puzzled.

"It was yesterday morning. Yes, that's right. But I couldn't say anything then. That's why I want to see you now."

"You are Miss . . ."

"Miss Rich . . . Muriel Rich. I knew Mr. Nolescue well. He was the only man who's ever been really friendly. We talked a lot about things—outside the store, that is. No one knew. It was our secret. Some day we were going away . . . away to the East. But that's all over now isn't it, Mr. Beck? They've killed him just as he said they would."

Beck was staggered. "Do you mean to say that Nolescue knew he was going to die?"

"He seemed to sense it. He said you always did when a Chinaman was on your trail. I didn't quite understand, of course. He never told me that."

"He mentioned no names, Miss Rich?"

She shook her head. "He didn't seem to know, exactly."

"When did he tell you all this?"

"One night last week after we'd been to a cinema."

"You know Miss Varley is missing?" Beck put the question quietly.

"That's what is worrying me. I'm afraid I made a bit of a fool of myself last night in the staff room as we were going home. I blurted out something of my feelings for Mr. Nolescue. It seemed to surprise most of the girls; but I thought it surprised Phyllis Varley most of all. You see, Mr. Beck, Phyllis Varley seemed to think Mr. Nolescue was interested in her. He wasn't. I was his friend and he mine. I've been worried this morning . . . wondering whether Phyllis' disappearance has anything to do with what I said last night."

"But how could it do that, Miss Rich?"

"I'm sure I don't know. But Mr. Nolescue was always so sure that someone was following him . . . even when he was at work in the store. I thought perhaps someone had overheard what I had said."

"But how would that affect Miss Varley?" Beck could not quite understand the girl's attitude in telling him what she had done.

"I'm sure I don't know, Mr. Beck. But I wish I could catch the person who killed Mr. Nolescue."

"So do I, Miss Rich," said Beck bitterly. "I also hope that the person who did kill him isn't also responsible for Miss Varley's disappearance."

Miss Rich went back to the work she had left without permission, and Beck hurried down to the shop to look for Philip Slater. He felt that, despite the hysterical outburst from Miss Rich, he was little nearer in his quest.



**That Body of Yours**

Jas. W. Barton, M.D., Toronto

### Treating Goitre in Its Early Stage

When an individual has a heart that beats rapidly, has bulging eyes, and is extremely nervous, it is evident to the patient, to the family and to the family physician that these symptoms are due to a disturbance causing too much activity in the thyroid gland in the neck. It is called goitre.

To make sure that the trouble is really goitre, a metabolism test is made which measures the rate at which the body processes are working when the body is at complete rest with no digestion going on in the intestine. If the rate is about 20 per cent, or more above normal the usual treatment—to save time—is to remove all or nearly all of the thyroid gland by operation, thus slowing down all the body processes, the most important of which is the heart, thus preventing it from becoming exhausted by the very rapid rate at which it has been beating.

However, many patients now learn to suspect goitre in its very early stages—rapid heart beat, irritability, frequent upsettings of stomach and intestine, abnormal sweating and heat flushes.

While the cause of goitre, hyperthyroidism—is not known in all cases it is now agreed that many of them are due to infection, particularly of teeth and tonsils. Accordingly when symptoms of early goitre appear physicians now search first for infection before giving any treatment. The teeth, tonsils, sinuses, appendix, gall bladder, intestine, are carefully examined and if infection is present it is removed and the patient put on complete rest—mental and physical.

Treatment by rest has so greatly helped many early cases that operation has become unnecessary. The fact that rest has failed to help some early cases has been because the infection was not located, and the body processes had to work fast to help fight infection.

The reason that rest is so helpful is that the body gets complete rest, and as the patient is in bed there is nothing exciting to prevent mental rest. An iodine preparation (Lugol's solution) is sometimes given in early cases. It reduces the metabolism rate, and if operation should really be necessary, the patient is in better shape to undergo it.

Are you susceptible to colds? Do you worry about your heart? Are you overweight or underweight? Does your food

agree with you? Do you have to watch your calories, fats, starches, etc.? Do you believe you have an ailment that medical tests do not reveal? The following booklets by Dr. Barton will be helpful to many readers and can be secured by sending ten cents for each one desired, to cover handling and service to the Bell Library, 247 West 43rd Street, New York, N.Y.—"The Common Cold," "Why Worry About Your Heart?," "Overweight and Underweight," "Food Allergy," "Eating Your Way to Health," "Neurosis."

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## If You Like Books

(By A. H.)

There are so very many people who never take the time to study carefully the items in the newspapers—they just hurriedly dash through, reading the headings here and there—and that is where they make an unfortunate mistake. The Advance often carries comprehensive reports of outstanding events or lengthy articles on some timely topic—every part being worth reading. There may be something especially valuable almost hidden or overshadowed by other items of importance.

In the issue of The Advance published on Thursday, May 20th, there was an account of the Father and Son banquet where Rev. Bruce Millar was a guest of honour. Rev. Mr. Millar spoke about his life and the manner in which fathers might help their sons. He mentioned that by setting a good example, a father could do the most for his son, and he said, "Introduce your boys to Charles Dickens and authors like him, and in the years to come your children will remember your wisdom with gratitude and affection, for out of such books they will get so much more of interest, as well as of inspiration."

Is there any better way of conveying that thought to parents? Ever since this column was begun, I have endeavoured to bring to the attention of the readers the merits of the better class of book. This is not an attempt to stop people from reading anything, but to persuade them to read more of the best, and less of the poorer. Even if this at-

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tempt has not been successful there is always "Try, try, and try again." If the parents encourage their children to read good works, this is a step further up the ladder.

Globe and Mail:—Foreign observers who were amazed by the fervor of the Coronation celebrations in London must have received another impressive demonstration of Empire spirit and might when they saw the King reviewing his fleet.

### Proper Cultivation is Essential in Gardens

Proper cultivation, the preparation of a fine seed bed, weeding, fertilizing and watering are operations that are essential in the gardening programme which is about to take place from one end of Canada to the other, says B. Leslie Emslie, soil expert, writing on "How Does Your Garden Grow" in the April issue of C-I-L Oval. The spade in the garden corresponds to the plough in the field, and both must be used with discretion. It is a mistake to dig so deeply as to bring to the surface the raw, cold subsoil. The top soil is the richer and contains the bacterial life responsible for the decomposition and release of plant food substances. Garden soils of a clayey nature should not be worked when wet. Coal ashes, while contributing no fertility, will improve the physical structure of clay soils. No matter what its origin and despite the greatest care devoted to its cultivation, no garden can be a complete success unless the nutritional needs of the plants are satisfied. Fortunately the average soil is capable of supplying most of them in quantities sufficient for plant needs. The exceptions are nitrogen, phosphate and potash so that a fertilizer embodying these three ingredients should be used.

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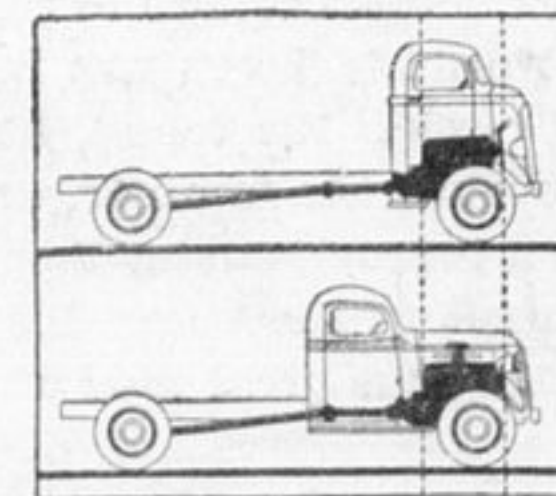
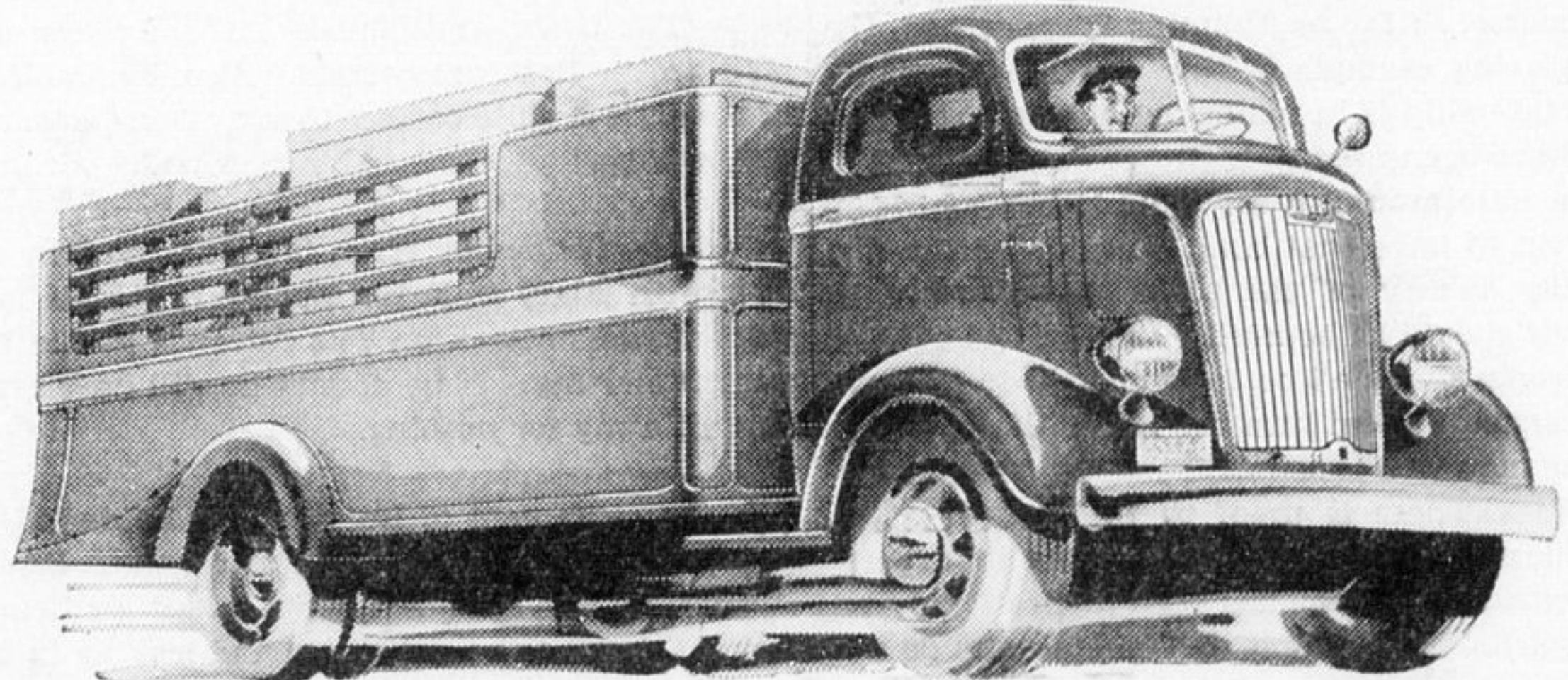
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